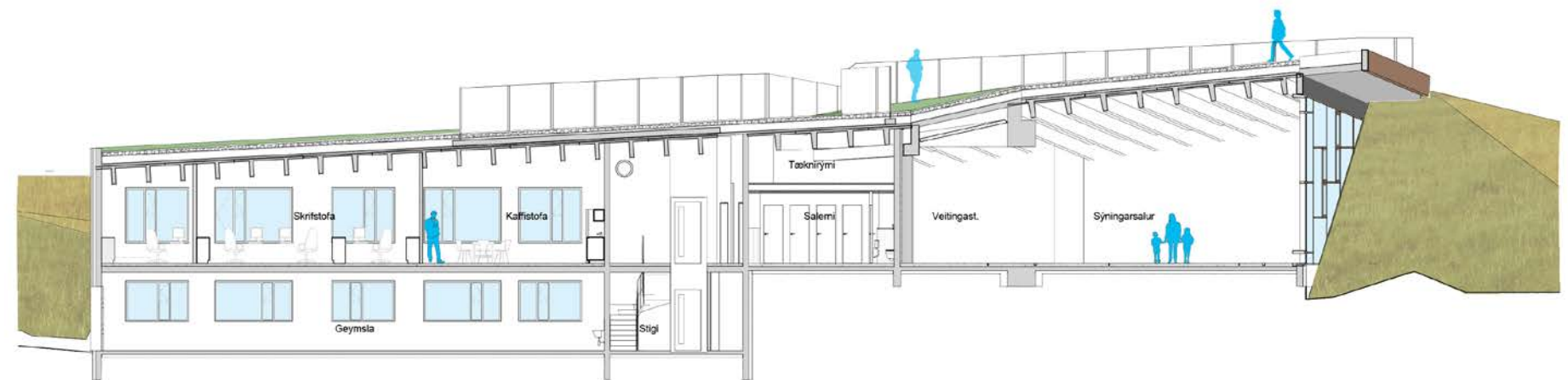


Cross-section



Cross-section

Visitor Center in Kirkjubæjarklaustur, Iceland

The building

The Vatnajökull National Park Visitor Centre is located in South of Iceland near the village Kirkjubæjarklaustur.

The building's design and integration with the landscape draw on the architectural heritage of the Skaftárhreppur region, where land was traditionally shaped and integrated into man-made structures, allowing architecture and landscape to merge into a unified whole through form and materiality.

Rooftop walkway and viewing platform form part of the exhibition area, offering visitors the opportunity to engage with the geology of the site while enjoying views towards Örfajökull glacier and Hvannadalshnúkur, Iceland's highest peak, located within Vatnajökull National Park.

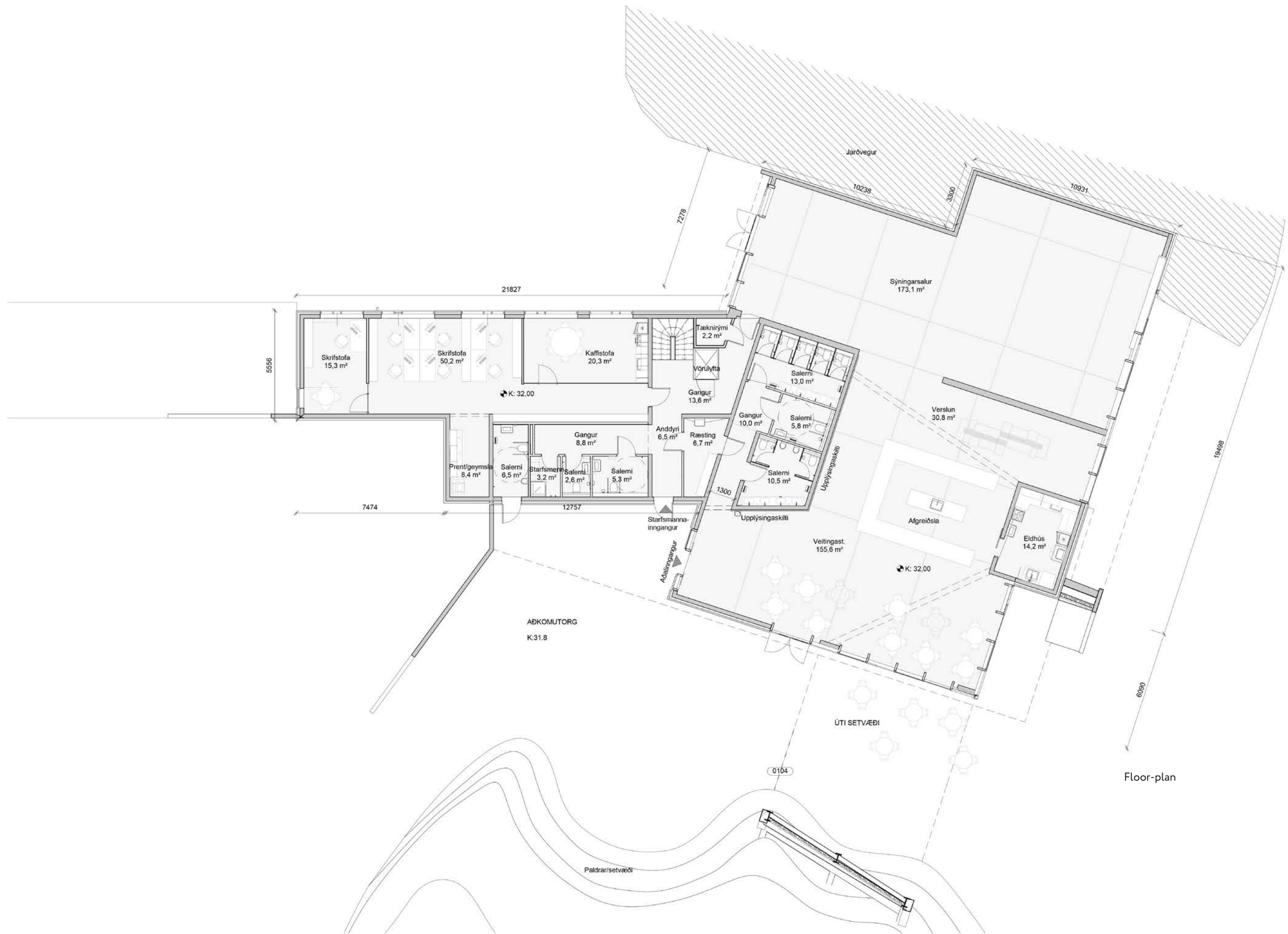
The Visitor Centre was officially opened to visitors in early 2024 and serves as a vibrant center of culture and nature, connecting to nearby walking paths and a viewing platform. But also functioning as an information center for the entire Skaftárhreppur district.

Site plan

Project title:	Visitor center in Kirkjubæjarklaustur
Address:	Sönghóll, 880 Kirkjubæjarklaustur, Iceland
Competition:	1st. prize in an open competition
Building size:	710 m ²
Function:	Visitor center in Vatnajökull National Park
Architects:	Arkís arkitektar, Vesturvör 7, 200 Kópavogur Iceland
Owner/client:	The State Construction Agency
Location:	N63° 47' 5.523" W18° 3' 0.094"
Photographer:	Karl Vilhjálmsson



Visitor center designed to blends in with the nature



Floor-plan

Skaftárstofa

The building, named Skaftárstofa, is a single-story structure with a basement beneath part of it with work facilities for the national park staff and a storage room. Access paths and parking areas are integrated into the landscape, making them less visible from the building, neighboring farms, and the village. The building was designed with the surrounding landscape in mind, intended to blend seamlessly into the hilly terrain of Sönghóll. The roof is covered with turf sourced directly from the site itself. It is possible to walk onto the roof and enjoy views over the area, creating a visual connection with Vatnajökull National Park. The entrance plaza connects to a covered terrace for the outdoor dining area, offering views over the Skaftá river all the way east to Örfajökull which is part of Vatnajökull and Vatnajökull National Park.

Main access from the parking areas



The main entrance and arrival plaza.



Splended view over the Skaftá to Örfajökull



The landscape design is shaped with built-up terraces “pöldrur” where visitors can sit and rest.



Sönghóll hill

The building is designed with the surrounding landscape in mind, intended to blend seamlessly into the hilly terrain of Sönghóll. Large windows with solar control glass connect visitors to the natural surroundings and the scenic view to Örfajökull.





The pathway

A pathway runs through the rooftop of the center, allowing visitors to walk directly from one side to the other, with amazing view over the area.

BREEAM certification

The National Park Visitor Center was fully designed and constructed according to the international BREEAM certification standard, which emphasizes sustainability and environmental responsibility. Environmentally friendly materials were used throughout, and all construction waste was carefully minimized, measured, and monitored. Strict environmental requirements were also enforced on the contractor for the duration of the project. All interior and exterior timber cladding is Icelandic, sourced from a nearby forest, ensuring responsible sourcing and full traceability throughout the production process.

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Improving the environment

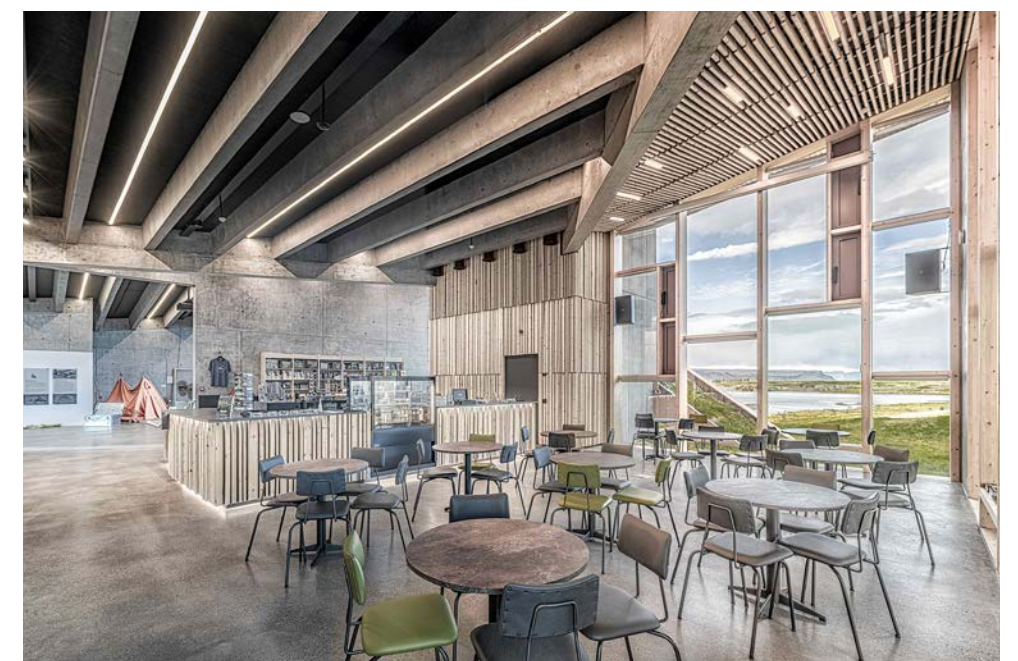
BREEAM also addresses the connection between buildings and broader social factors, including the local environment, transportation, and innovative solutions that enhance building quality and sustainability. The National Park Visitor Center reflects these principles with well-developed walking and cycling paths that connect the center to the surrounding park. Skaftárstofa serves not only as a visitor center, but also houses an information center for the Skaftárhreppur district, an exhibition hall, dining facilities, and offices.



The exhibition space and information desk.



The exhibition space .



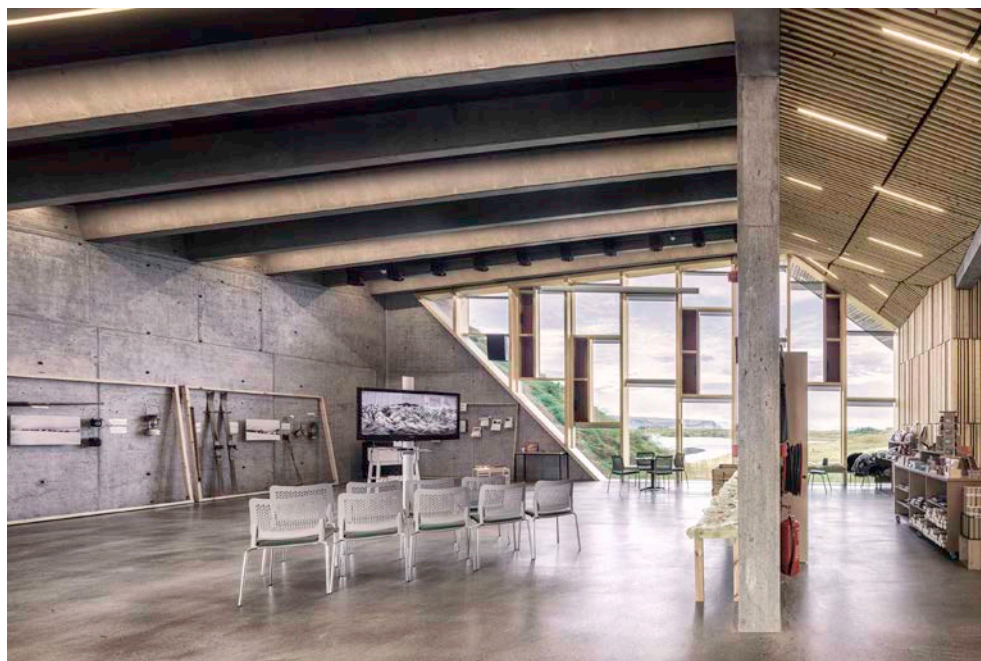
Information desk and coffee shop.



Timber from South of Iceland

The exterior timber walls of the building are all sourced from the forests of South Iceland, Kirkjubæjarklaustur and the eaves are clad in corten steel.





Enviromentally friendly methods

The main structure of the building consists of precast concrete panels with a corrugated exterior finish. The exhibition space floors are polished concrete, divided into sections, each featuring river gravel from the largest glacial rivers of the western area of Vatnajökull National Park. These elements are part of the exhibition itself, integrated into the building. The roof is covered with turf sourced directly from the site itself and all surface water from the roof is directed into landscape ponds. All materials were carefully selected for their low maintenance requirements—eliminating the need for outdoor paint and allowing for natural weathering without compromising durability.



The design allows the building to merge naturally with its environment.