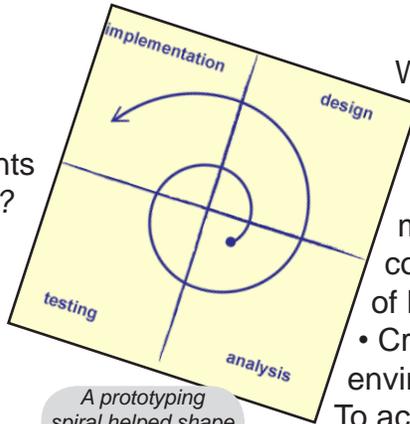


# How <sup>What</sup> about WHALES?

**How does an idea become an exhibit?**  
**With teamwork, research and a lot of experimentation! When we reimagined *What about Whales?* for 2011, we used a development process that included input from staff in many departments and from visitors like you! Read on for a peek at this process.**

## Setting Goals

We gathered a team of staff members from exhibits, operations, education, development and marketing departments to review the “old” *What about Whales?* exhibit. We asked ourselves some tough questions:  
 What did we want to teach people about whales? Did we succeed?  
 What are our educational goals now?  
 How can we teach these topics in a way that is effective, age-appropriate, hands-on, and (of course) fun?



*A prototyping spiral helped shape our development process.*

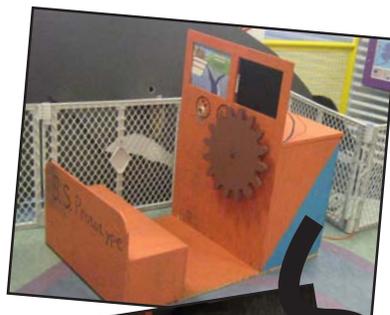
We knew what we wanted to do:

- Inspire interest in humpback whales by communicating facts about their lives (like migration, size, fluke patterns, communication and life in the Gulf of Maine)
- Create a fun, interactive environment for young children

To accomplish our goals, we adopted a process that encourages experimentation and revision.

## Prototyping

While playing in the Museum this winter, did your family come across any exhibit pieces that looked a little... unconventional? Did you know that by playing with them, you helped us create this exhibit? Before building new exhibit components, we first experimented with several rounds of exhibit prototypes - small, rough models we used for testing. Staff members observed and guided children to find out what they were learning, what questions they asked and how long they wanted to play. We used these observations to refine and revise individual components and the overall exhibit plan.



*Prototypes helped us find the most engaging ways to demonstrate a whale's throat size (left), how whales swim (above), and whales' migration patterns and obstacles (right).*



## Research and Partnership

A still image from one of Hardy's whale watching videos.

The information we share in an exhibit has to be accessible, interesting and accurate! To get the most current research available, we reached out to experts in the field of **cetology** (the study of whales). Scientists from Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and the Bar Harbor Whale Museum helped our educators and exhibit designers develop content. We also got a helping hand from Hardy Jones, a Florida-based ocean activist who donated his original footage of breaching humpbacks for our new whale watching boat!



## Putting it all Together!

Once the research and prototyping were complete, we decided to create FIVE new exhibit components to enhance the visitor's *What about Whales?* experience:

- A ball-toss game with a life-size whale throat to illustrate feeding
- A whale-watching dock to observe the exhibit from above
- An "underwater" room where visitors can listen to whale songs
- A whale watching boat with footage of humpbacks breaching
- A "mini-Gulf" game to illustrate Istar's voyage from the Gulf of Maine to the Caribbean

When we fabricate new exhibit pieces, we need to be sure that they're safe, engaging and durable enough to withstand tens of thousands of active, curious visitors! This exhibit presents a special challenge, in that every piece also needs to be modular so it can be easily moved aside when it's time to lower Istar. Our exhibits team creates detailed plans for each component, then builds most of them right here in the Big Gallery. Some work is contracted to local artists and designers.

Our exhibits and operations staff work together to create thorough, easy-to-read signs so visitors can quickly assess how to use each piece and learn key facts that they can share with their families.

Once installation is complete, our whole staff gathers for a final walk-through to learn all about the exhibit. We all need to be prepared to help every visitor have as much fun experiencing *What about Whales?* as we had creating it!

