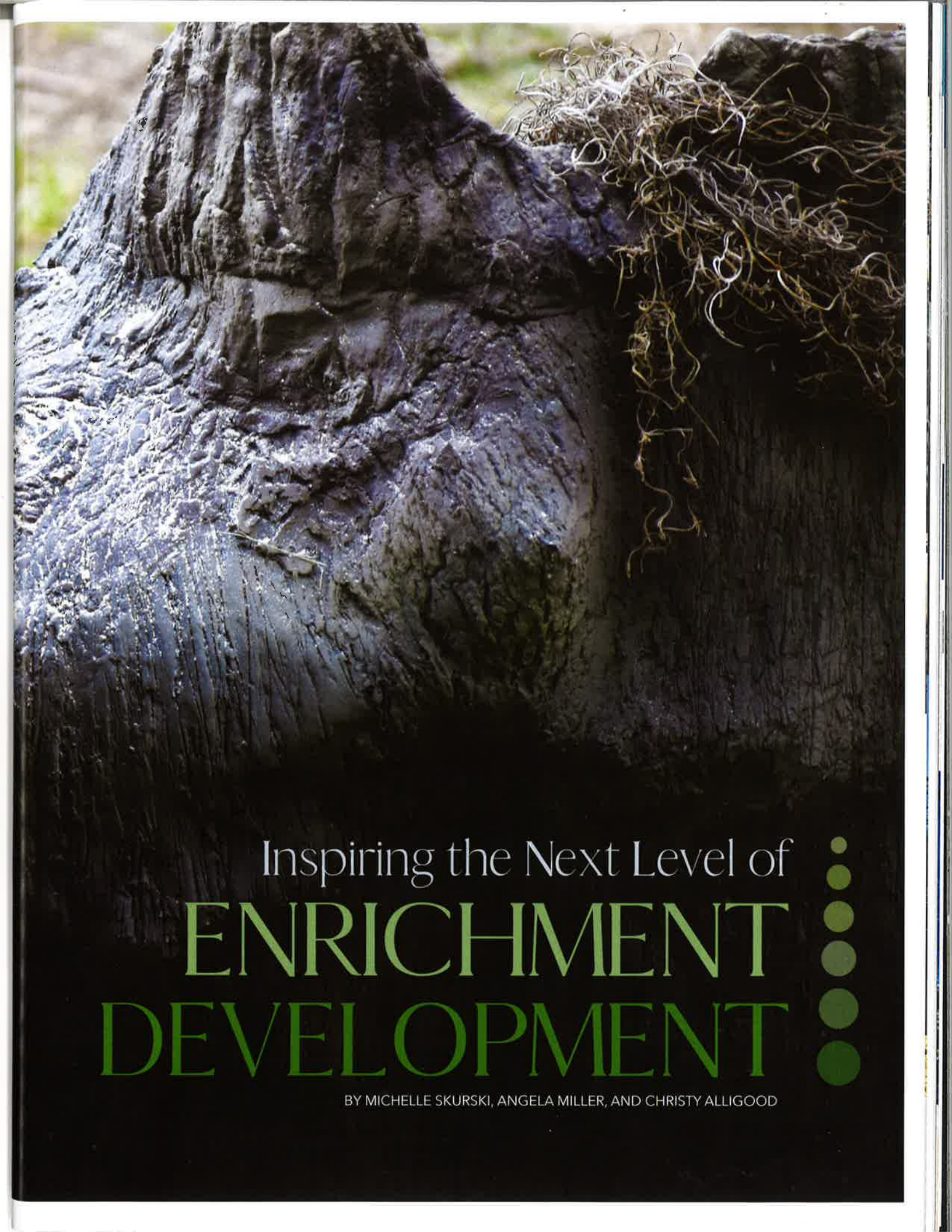


On the Arusha Savannah at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge, a hornbill has retrieved a fabricated pinecone and deposits it into a fabricated log. The pinecone triggers the feeder to release a clay turtle for the hornbill to smash and obtain the reinforcer hidden inside.





Inspiring the Next Level of
**ENRICHMENT
DEVELOPMENT**



BY MICHELLE SKURSKI, ANGELA MILLER, AND CHRISTY ALLIGOOD



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Providing enrichment to our animals is often a favorite activity for keepers, or in some cases, a chore to check off the day's list. One step in inspiring our keepers to the next level in our enrichment programs was re-imagining their involvement. We created an opportunity to provide excellence in animal care, new skills, leadership development, and input into enrichment initiatives across Disney's Animal Kingdom®.

We created the Enrichment Development Group. Many times, zoo animal care staff members have skill sets beyond their immediate job description. For the Enrichment Development Group, we looked for people with special skills, passion, and creativity in a variety of areas. The founding members included one curator, three managers, nine keepers, and one educator. Skills ranged from welding and wood working to art and design, with all members extremely passionate about enrichment.

Accountability to a time commitment, active participation, and producing enrichment made this group different than past enrichment groups. Rather than recruiting a representative from each area or someone assigned by their leader to sit in on once-a-month meetings, this group brought together skilled and passionate individuals to work on specific enrichment initiatives.

We partnered internally with the Walt Disney Imagineering staff to learn design

principles that have been invaluable in creating enrichment that blends into exhibits. Over the last year, we developed animal enrichment visual design principles to assist keepers in their planning and implementation of enrichment. We give the keepers nine questions to ask while planning.

- What does the exhibit look like?
- What's the story? (cultural background)
- What kind of environment is it representing?
- What are the stylistic requirements?
- How big is the space?
- What is the dominant color palette in the exhibit?
- Where will the enrichment be installed?
- How close/far will the enrichment be from the guests view?
- Will the enrichment be permanent or temporary?

Answers to these questions provide a guide to the visual requirements of the initiative, how the initiative may fit into a story, and in some cases how it may help tell a story. We often



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"Inspiration came from a variety of places, including internet videos, new technologies, and areas of opportunity in animal habitats. To move away from a focus on items and toward a focus on behavior, we developed a new goal-setting method and brainstorming tool."

camouflage items, allowing them to blend or disappear within the environment. When looking closely at a camouflaged item, it is not difficult to differentiate it from a real object. An example of a camouflaged item might be a rope hammock that matches the colors and shapes of the space around it and blends in to be unnoticeable, but once you do notice it, it looks like a rope hammock. When guests might be in close proximity to an enrichment item we may 'theme' the item, mimicking an existing object, making it difficult to distinguish the 'themed' object and the real object. An example of a 'themed' item might be a feeder that looks like a real log.

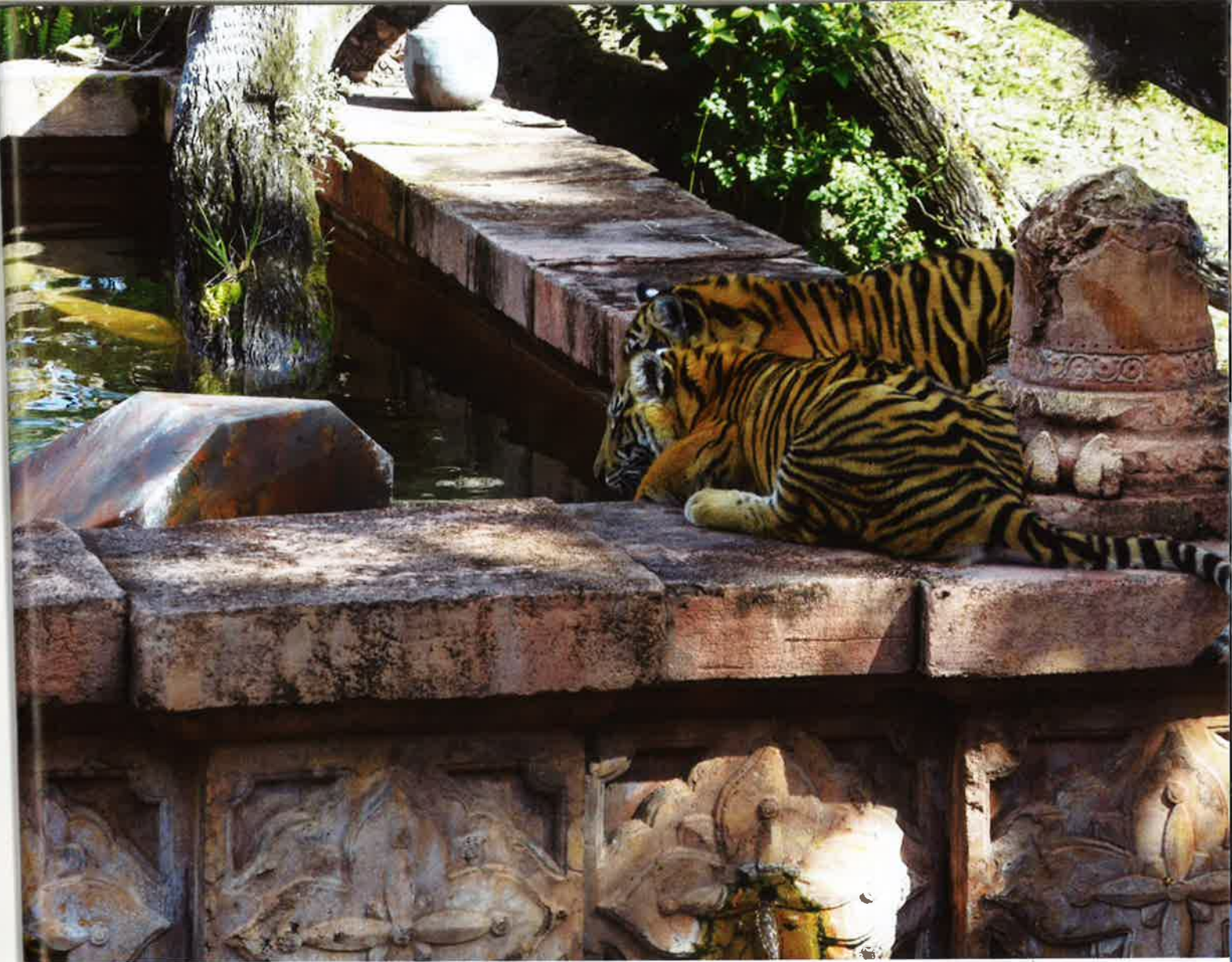
Utilizing the design principles when installing enrichment in habitats can be crucial to successful camouflaging or theming. In most cases we try to avoid the following: straight lines, mechanical or geometric shapes, symmetrical shapes/composition, and contrasting colors. These all can create an unwanted focal point for guests. Instead, we focus on curved lines, organic shapes,

asymmetrical shapes/composition, and similar colors as the environment. These techniques allow the guests to stay immersed in the environment.

The enrichment group now looks at exhibits through new lenses. We want guests to see animals, notice behaviors, and listen to the story we are telling about the environment, culture, species, and conservation.

We partnered with a vendor who taught the group about animal-safe products for designing enrichment. The group also developed skills in gaining buy in from peers and leadership. Pitching their ideas to leaders to gain approval and resources to complete the project has helped them deliver their ideas in an influential presentation.

We want group members to pass along the skills they have learned, not only to their teams, but to the zoo and aquarium community. Group members have conducted workshops at Central Florida Zoo in Sanford, Fla., the American Association of Zoo Keepers' national conference, and the Association of Zoos and



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Aquariums' Mid-Year Meeting. This spring we hosted a new AZA Professional Development Course: Environmental Enrichment in Zoos and Aquariums. In partnership with instructors from other facilities, we were able to share the design principles we learned and other tools that we developed.

Inspiration came from a variety of places, including internet videos, new technologies, and areas of opportunity in animal habitats. To move away from a focus on items and toward a focus on behavior, we developed a new goal-setting method and brainstorming tool. This requires keepers to understand the function of a behavior (why it happens) and what the behavior looks like in their species of interest. Just selecting a behavior like foraging is not enough. We look into what specific behaviors make up that category. For example, in an Abyssinian ground hornbill, foraging may include pecking, stabbing, walking, running, carrying items in beak, and crushing items.

Once we understand the desired behavior, the brainstorming process begins.

We surveyed the group during the first year, and members reported that participation has led them to feel more fulfilled in their jobs. Membership in the group has led to professional development opportunities including partnering, presenting, publishing, facilitating, and leadership. The expectation for results from group members is high, but the rewards have been extraordinary for both the animals we care for and the animal care staff involved.

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