

Snøhetta Museum Pavilion Architectural Intentions

The Museum Pavilion is the primary structure above ground at the Memorial site, serving to guide foot traffic and to provide a visual point of reference within a large area surrounded by several high towers. Its low, horizontal form can be seen easily from all directions and provides a sense of intimacy in an otherwise capacious urban space. Its materials and gestures are designed to create a transitional architectural link between the urban surroundings and the Memorial grounds, similar to the unifying architectural features of many other parks and squares in Manhattan.

A significant aspect of the Pavilion's identity is formed around a large glazed atrium situated over the Museum's Memorial Hall and near the center of the Memorial Plaza. The atrium allows visitors to see into the Museum where two large steel columns from the original World Trade Center buildings are on display. These columns, often referred to as "tridents" because of their trunk-like split shapes, form a harmonious visual link to the surrounding shrub oak trees of the Memorial Plaza. As authentic structural elements recovered from the former towers, the two tridents placed side by side will create an immediate visual reference to the distinctive "gothic arch" motif of the Twin Towers and, in their re-erection at the site, will convey strength, fortitude, resilience, survival, and hope.

At night, the atrium lighting will provide a distinctive glowing lantern for the Memorial Plaza, helping to create an inviting and safe environment for evening visitors.

The unique structural design of the atrium accommodates its asymmetrical loading atop a complex network of structures below the ground. The web-like form of the structural solution has varying diagonal orientations providing an uncommon sculptural identity that complements the sheer verticality of the trident columns of the former World Trade Center towers on display in the atrium.

The exterior of the building is clad primarily in metal that is composed of a simple striated mosaic of varying reflective surfaces, the subtle design of which is reminiscent of the façade of the former World Trade Center towers. Photographs and narratives of the original towers describe a linear pattern sometimes broken by the shadows of passing clouds or the changing patterns of the sun throughout the day and the seasons. These images allow for the often harshly described Twin Towers to be seen in a more nuanced light. Through the changing reflections of the new Pavilion's exterior, the design rekindles a suggestion of this endearing and ephemeral character of the former towers.

As the sun filters through the surrounding grove of oaks, the changing reflectivity of the building also will contribute to the glittering character of the nearby Memorial pools. The overall effect is intended to provide a gem-like form, suggesting a sense of brightness and optimism within the Memorial glade.

The tilted metal surfaces of the Pavilion appear to move upward from the Memorial Plaza on the north side of the building, adjacent to September 11 Plaza at the northeast corner of the Memorial. This dynamic movement creates an exciting and unique relationship to the horizontal ground plane of the plaza design and occurs at the place where the glazed atrium is formed above the Museum's Memorial Hall below the ground. At this location the glass of the atrium is printed with a soft silvery pattern, providing both fluidity and a graceful integration between the two different materials and places.

As the metal façade reaches upward from the ground it wraps around the building, lifting the mass of the structure off the surface of the Plaza. As it rises, it passes above Greenwich Street and is punctuated by a glass marquis at the top of the southeast corner of the building. This feature is intended to help pedestrians on the street better orient themselves to the Memorial site day or night.

Along the south side of the building, facing the southern Memorial pool, the metal façade lifts high off the ground and tilts dramatically toward the center of the site. The distinct geometry and dynamic form provides an asymmetrical backdrop for the Memorial pool and helps to define a more intimate setting in this part of the Memorial grounds.

The metal panels that form the exterior façades also clad the roof of the building, creating a fifth façade atop the Pavilion; when seen from above, the Pavilion will appear integrated with the overall Memorial design.

Both the exhibition and the Museum Pavilion follow a processional circulation sequence with the main entrance doors at the northeast corner of the building near to Greenwich Street. After their tour, visitors will exit the building to the southwest, in a different location than the entry. This will serve to draw visitors toward the center of the site so that, after completing the circuit of the exhibition spaces in the Museum, they may view the exterior surroundings easily.

From the center of the Memorial Plaza, visitors will have a view of both Memorial pools located above the footprints of the former towers. In addition, visitors can easily access the newly formed Memorial glade at the southwest and September 11 Plaza at the northeast of the new Memorial. Finally, visitors can experience the impressive panorama of surrounding commercial buildings, including the new Freedom Tower, from this relatively unobstructed central location.

In summary, the architectural design of the Museum Pavilion is simple in its overall gesture. Its complexity is revealed in its detail structure and the subtleties of the cladding. There are paradoxes and anomalies inherent in the site and in the design that must work together while coexisting within a single place. The success of the building should be judged both by its functional interpretations and by its ability to promote a sense of balance within an exceptional and diverse context. The building is at once dynamic and tranquil, delicate and rugged, clear and indirect. The architecture is meant to challenge us to accept those often-indefinable dualities and conflicting traits that make all societies human and that also keep us all searching for an enviable, though not inevitable, future.

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