

On Hallowed Ground

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Memorials are defined as something designed to honor the memory of a person, persons, place or event. Nearly five years after the tragic events of September 11th, 2001, Ground Zero has begun to become something a little bit more sacred. On August 17th, ground was broken where the World Trade Center towers once stood, paving the way for an elaborate reconstruction of land that has stood undeterred. The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation will oversee the construction of numerous buildings and the eventual memorial on 16 acres of land.

Launched in the spring of 2003, the LMDC promoted an international competition to find a suiting design for a memorial. Governor George Pataki chose architect Daniel Libeskind to plan the site which would set guidelines for contestants. In an immaculate showing, 5,201 designs were entered from 49 states and 63 countries. The designs were then sent before a jury compiled of architects and local dignitaries, which narrowed the designs down.

In January of 2004, the LMDC chose the refined designs of Michael Amad and Peter Walker to move forward with further planning and construction of the centerpiece on Ground Zero. The design was changed to fulfill certain shortcomings of the original.

Arad's design, "Reflecting Absence", places two recessed pools of water in the footprints where the World Trade Center towers once stood. The pools are recessed 30 feet below street level and feature waterfalls falling along the four walls. Two ramps will lead from street level to areas below both pools where names will be displayed of the victims on a wall in front of a flow of water from the pool's waterfalls. The two pools will be linked by a walkway where visitors are encouraged to leave candles and tributes of their own.

"Reflecting Absence" was originally designed without any plants or trees. However, after much controversy over how the memorial would represent itself, the LMDC decided to soften the original design. To do so, Amad chose Walker, a landscape architect from California, to oversee the inclusion of a variety of trees to the memorial grounds. Walker chose oak trees to grace the grounds, but said that there would be a variety of oaks present to manipulate the seasons.

Adjoining "Reflecting Absence" will be the World Trade Center Memorial Museum. The museum was designed with the specification of Libeskind and will contain a wide variety of artifacts from the day's attacks. As with the memorial, the museum will be located underground and will follow a chronological story of the day's events. Libeskind's centerpiece will be one of the only artifacts preserved from the building. The "slurry wall" which was constructed to fend off the waters of the Hudson River will likely be displayed at street level.

On the remaining area of the 16 acre site, many buildings have been slated for construction alongside the memorial and museum. The World Trade Center Performing Arts Theatre will be located on site, with two local theatre companies as occupants. The World Trade Center Station, a subway station, will also be reconstructed.

One of the highlights of the site will be Freedom Tower designed by internationally-renowned Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. It will occupy the address One World Trade Center. The tower will be used mainly for office space and other business-related amenities. The building will be 82 floors of reflecting prism glass and topped by a towering antenna. Skidmore, Owings and Merrill said the design was to play off the effects of light and motion and will represent a "glowing beam" on the New York skyline. The stated height of the tower will make it the tallest building in the United States, reaching 1,776 feet tall, a tribute to the year the Declaration of Independence was signed.

The memorial and museum are slated to open on the eighth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2009. The Freedom Tower will take longer to construct with a projected completion date sometime in 2012. The remaining buildings' completion dates were not known.

All projects hope to be constructed smoothly, though designing was done with much controversy. The Freedom Tower was originally designed in 2002, and due to problems dealing with security and safety specifications, designs were released in 2005, and again this past June. The memorial's waterfalls are under scrutiny with many wondering how the water will keep from freezing during the cold winter months. The memorial has also seen criticisms with funding, as dollar amounts are scattered and changing as time goes by.

Creating a memorial to these standards is quite a daunting task, and one that has and will not be easy in the future. Memorializing that dark day is something that is important to Americans and people abroad. In a Zogby poll released two years ago, 81% of Americans felt that the memorials would serve as a testament to honor those who died that day and help heal the nation's pain. Funding for the memorial was through the launch of The World Trade Center

Memorial Foundation, a non-profit entity. The foundation's sole purpose is to act as a fundraising and awareness body to the public, in hopes of easing the dollar strain on the project. You can donate to the foundation via their website: www.buildthememorial.org.