

AV

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PHOTOS: JIN LEE

Storytelling at its best: America's finest

One of the most evocative and important examples of just how powerful AV can be opened to the public on 21 May. *Clive Couldwell* reports on how New York is remembering its darkest event of modern times.



Grappler claw (Jin Lee)

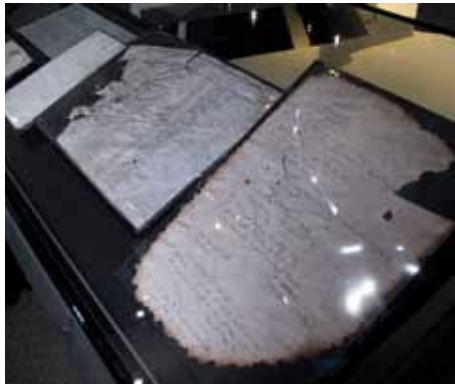
» The National September 11 Memorial and Museum sit on eight of the 16 acres of the World Trade Center site. The Museum itself lies about 70 feet underground. You enter it via a pavilion designed by Norwegian architectural firm, Snøhetta.

“As a reflection of the present, the pavilion we designed serves as a bridge between the memory of past events embraced by the Memorial design and a trust in the future, signified by the neighbouring office towers,” says Snøhetta founding partner, Craig Dykers. “Visitors are connected by the many reflections of themselves, of others, and the surrounding architectural features which emphasise the value of the present moment in time.”

The magnitude of the site's historic importance and its symbolism made it essential for lead Museum architect, Davis Brody Bond, to find a balance between the collective and the individual experience: “We relied on four principles to guide our work - memory, authenticity, scale and emotion, hoping to provide the most sensitive, respectful and »



Timescape



Handwritten notes: Historical Exhibition (Jin Lee)



Trident projection steel (Jin Lee)

informative experience for visitors," says the company's founding partner, Steven Davis.

Around 110,000 square feet of exhibition space tells the story of 9/11 through multimedia displays, personal narratives and artifacts. This space includes two core exhibitions at the archeological heart of the site: the memorial exhibition - *In Memoriam* - and a three-part historical exhibition that explores the day of the attacks, what led to them and their aftermath.

The Museum's lead designer is Thinc Design. "It was clear that the central design challenge was not, as it is in so many museums, to bring the material to life. The material of 9/11 was so powerful that we realised we needed to find ways to make it bearable for people in the museum to witness it," says the company's principal, Tom Hennes. "The exhibition would not only honour the history of what happened, it would also provide the means for people to relate more deeply and personally to 9/11 and gain greater empathy for others' experience and views."

It was planned that the exhibits would interact with the site's architecture and create a strong sense of place for visitors, anchoring them in the here and now of a museum on the site of the collapsed World Trade Center. The design would reflect the intricacies of the many narratives of 9/11, and the fact that there is no simple way of understanding the events or their aftermath.

It was the task of media partner Local Projects to work with the massive quantity of the Museum's digital documentation. "Throughout the space, visitors will find opportunities to engage with the exhibit through interactive technology tools that bring stories to the fore - from remembrances of victims by their families and those of the first responders - and provide opportunities to leave their personal 9/11 story behind and make it a permanent part of the Museum," says Jake Barton, Local Projects' media designer and principal.

Integrator Electrosonic supplied a traditional museum system for the exhibition space where approximately 100 media experiences are available for visitors. These range from touch screen interactives and small theatres to displays playing media and recording booths that enable visitors to record their own 9/11 stories.

"This was a very large museum project located several stories underground which made it a bit of a logistical challenge," says Electrosonic account executive, Bryan Abelowitz. "The site is spread out over nearly eight acres, so just getting from one side to the other took a long time."

The project spanned a number of years so Electrosonic also had to stay on top of evolving technology and equipment advances as gear was specified and installed. The company provided a full AV system for the multi-purpose Pavilion Auditorium, a 300-seat theatre used to show videos throughout the day and available for hosting events from standard presentations to video conferences.

PPI Consulting's Bob Haroutunian was the AV systems designer for the museum and education centres. Arup designed the Pavilion Auditorium. The majority of the content was provided by Local Projects which designed and produced 90+ media pieces, with additional content provided by Infusion and Project Rebirth.





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Principal, Thinc Design



Reflecting on 9/11

The Museum has four education centres equipped by Electrosonic with digital whiteboards, document cameras, video conferencing systems plus other standard features. Key equipment components in the Museum include Sharp, Christie and Digital Projection projectors, Alcorn McBride audio playback, Vista Group SoundStik audio stations, Dataton Watchout display and playback, Adtec signage players, Boland, Sharp and Samsung LCD displays and Extron extenders.

Three control rooms service different areas of the museum and use 26 equipment racks. Signals are extended via a mix of fibre optic and twisted pair extenders. "The fibre and copper backbone we used allows the museum to expand with higher resolution video or new monitors and projectors as they become available," notes Abelowitz.

According to Local Projects' Jake Barton the Museum is designed to both be a definitive statement about 9/11's history, but it's also a platform that captures the meaning of the event and its impact on the world.

"I heard about the planes from a random New Yorker in a small shop in Harlem. I eventually made my way downtown by bicycle to see the events with my own eyes. Like all New Yorkers it was traumatic, and for me the event really signalled a

change in my city," he says.

Barton's biggest challenge was trying to create the right visitor experience, to balance telling the full truth with the need to engage and make things relevant. "We started with the audience. What were they to feel? How could our work change or provoke them to think differently about something? Most of all how could we engage people and make the exhibit a productive part of their experience and world view?"

The most important thing about this project for Barton was discovering that a Museum doesn't need to be finished. "It can be a platform that evolves, framing how the world looks and understands the impact of 9/11 each and every day," he says, referring to the Timescape exhibit that defines the post 9/11 world algorithmically by scraping and assembling different news articles every night.

"I loved working on the 9/11 Museum for the sense of impact that the event and therefore the Museum has. It's estimated that a third of the world watched the event live, making it one of the most documented events in human history. The weight of all those personal connections to the event made for a challenging but deeply rewarding project.

"I'd say the 9/11 Museum has tried hard to make exhibition experiences that allow people to tell their

own story, leaning into the controversy by allowing people to speak their mind. It's a cathartic and important part of the exhibition, inviting people with multiple viewpoints to comment on controversial topics," he concludes. ■

ARCHITECTS

» Davis Brody Bond: Museum
www.davisbrody.com

» Snøhetta AS, LLC: Museum Pavilion
www.snoarc.no

EXHIBITION DESIGNERS

» Thinc Design with Local Projects, LLC: Lead Exhibition Design for the Memorial Museum - www.thincdesign.com

» Thinc Design: Introductory Exhibits, Memorial Exhibition, and Exhibition Level Design

» Local Projects, LLC: Media Production
www.localprojects.net

» Layman Design: Historical Exhibition Design - www.laymandesign.com






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