

Press release

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Smithsonian Selects Norman Foster to Design New Atrium for Historic Home of Two Museums

The Smithsonian Institution announced today (March 15) that renowned architect Norman Foster of Foster and Partners in London has been selected to design the courtyard enclosure of the Patent Office Building at 8th and F Streets, N.W. This building was the third federal building erected in Washington D.C., after the Capitol and the White House. Today the building houses both the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery.

Foster and Partners was selected for the quality of its proposed concept which displayed innovation while allowing for the multi-use program requirements. To meet the advanced engineering requirements for the extraordinary glass enclosure design, Foster will establish partnerships with consultants and technical specialists in the United States. This will be the firms first cultural project in the Washington metropolitan area.

The courtyard enclosure signals the Smithsonians commitment to innovative design in this renovation project. It will set a new standard for architecture in Washington, said Smithsonian Deputy Secretary Sheila Burke.

The construction of a glass enclosure over the landmark Greek Revival buildings 28,000-square-foot courtyard will provide a dynamic year-round ceremonial setting that will be a central focus for the museums. The new atrium space, the signature element of the renovation, will become a major gathering point within one of the citys liveliest and fastest-growing neighborhoods. It will be one of the largest event spaces in Washington.

The courtyard enclosure will be flexible to accommodate a variety of functions, such as performances, receptions, art installations and special events.

It was important to us that the renovation include a contemporary addition to this 19th century landmark building, said Marc Pachter, director of the National Portrait Gallery. The covered courtyard is the Smithsonians 21st-century contribution to the buildings exuberance.

Innovation and creativity, quintessential American qualities, have been showcased in this building since its doors opened, said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Fosters visionary proposal embraces these qualities and creates a distinctive feature that will inspire visitors for the next century.

The selection process began with an international search. Twenty-seven firms were invited to submit preliminary proposals. From this group, seven finalists were invited to submit a concept, which included

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a narrative description and a 3-dimensional model. A panel reviewed proposals from Ian Ritchie Architects; Toshiko Mori Architect with James Carpenter Design Associates; Eric Owen Moss Architects; Hellmuth Obata + Kassabaum (HOK); Guy Nordenson & Associates with Pei Cobb Freed Partners, and Fentress Bradburn Architect. The five jurors were: Aaron Betsky, director of the Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam; Elizabeth Broun; Paul Byard, a principal at Platt Byard Dovell White Architects in New York City; Sheryl Kolasinski, director of the Smithsonian's Office of Project Management; and Marc Pachter.

Foster and Partners has designed numerous innovative award-winning projects such as the Great Court at the British Museum in London and the Reichstag, the New German Parliament in Berlin. Currently, the firm is working on the master plan for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City.

The courtyard enclosure design will be fully developed this summer, and all construction will be complete by early 2006, allowing the two museums to re-open to the public as scheduled on July 4, 2006. When the design is developed, it will be presented to the Commission on Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission for review and approval.

Funds for the enclosure, estimated to cost \$30 million, are being raised from private contributors. The renovation of the building was a federal project totaling \$166 million. The cost of the entire renovation design, infrastructure, construction, collections storage, and moving is expected to total \$216 million.

The Smithsonian began an extensive renovation of the Patent Office Building in 2001, following a roof-replacement project in the late 1990s. The renovation plans include replacing key mechanical systems and providing additional gallery space for collections; visitor amenities, including an underground 346-seat auditorium with lobby; conservation lab and art storage area, both visible to the public; and café and shared museum store.

The building is located in the center of a revitalized downtown arts district. Praised by Walt Whitman as the noblest of Washington buildings, this landmark is, in the eyes of many, the finest example of Greek Revival architecture in the United States. Begun in 1836 and completed in 1867, it was constructed to serve as the U.S. Patent Office throughout the 19th century. Several important early American architects were involved in the original design of the building including Robert Mills (1781-1855) and Thomas U. Walter (1804-1887). A National Historic Landmark, the building was saved from the wrecking ball in 1958, and Congress transferred it to the Smithsonian in 1962. It has been home to the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery and the Smithsonian American Art Museum since 1968.

Note to Editors

Additional information about the Patent Office Building renovation is available at <http://newsdesk.si.edu>. Images for publicity only may be downloaded from <ftp://160.111.16.40/opa/>.

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