

Press release

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The Smithsonian Institution tops out

Foster and Partners design to enclose and landscape the Smithsonian's Robert and Arlene Kogod Courtyard tops out today with the placement of the highest beam and is set to complete in late Fall 2007. The courtyard, which includes landscape designed by Gustafson Guthrie Nichol and a sensuous, fully glazed roof canopy, will transform the public's experience of the Smithsonian's galleries and provide the Institution with one of the largest event spaces in Washington.

The enclosed courtyard will be the centrepiece of the building's long-term renovation programme for the Patent Office Building, home to the National Portrait Gallery and The Smithsonian American Art Museum. The courtyard, accessed from the two museums, will be a flexible space to accommodate a variety of functions, such as performances, receptions, art installations and special events.

The new roof canopy is designed to maximise the potential of the courtyard bathing it in natural light - and developing structural and environmental themes first explored by Foster and Partners in the design of the Great Court at the British Museum. Structurally, the roof is composed of three interconnected vaults that flow into one another through softly curved valleys. The double-glazed panels are set within a diagrid of fins, clad in an acoustic material, which together form a rigid shell that is supported by only eight columns. Visually, the roof is raised above the walls of the existing building, clearly articulating the new from the old. The canopy will bring new life to a revitalized downtown arts district.

The 170 year old Patent Office Building is designated as a National Historic Landmark.

For further information

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