

# monumental significance

**Daniel Libeskind**, IIDA's keynote speaker at NeoCon, incorporates the past, present and future into his design to achieve an enduring testament to his great love: architecture. BY ROSS FOTI

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**Daniel Libeskind is a time traveler.** Throughout his space and time to find a deeper meaning for the human World Trade Center site, seeks to integrate emotion and When explaining his own past, present and future, discipline of architecture, and the evolving relationship

architectural career, he has sought to transcend experience. His work, including his memorial at the remembrance with purpose and function. Libeskind elaborates on his creative inspiration, the between architect, interior designer and the public.

**PERSPECTIVE: YOU LEFT A CAREER AS A VIRTUOSO MUSICIAN TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT. WHAT DREW YOU TOWARD ARCHITECTURE?**

**LIBESKIND:** I haven't completely abandoned music even though I've stopped performing. It wasn't a conscious choice to abandon something and start something else. Architecture is like music in its acoustical qualities. It's just oriented in the eye instead of the ear. It's equilibrium. They both share the same domain of numbers and proportions and mathematics. It's a different field but not radically different in my mind.

**PERSPECTIVE: WHO ARE YOUR HEROES, THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE INSPIRED YOUR DIRECTION AND CREATIVE VOICE?**

**LIBESKIND:** They cut across all disciplines and all history. It's vertical intersections of time. Something eternal in

time. Heroes like Dante and Bernini and Lao Tsu in China. Heroes are not necessarily professionally oriented but spiritual and creative voices.

**PERSPECTIVE: YOU HAVE STATED YOUR "ABHORRENCE TO CONVENTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OFFICES." WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "CONVENTIONAL," AND HOW DO THESE OFFICES IMPEDE PROGRESS?**

**LIBESKIND:** I mean those oriented toward the business of architecture. Offices that don't really care about architecture, just profit margins. They treat architecture as a production of consumer goods. But architecture is a cultural entity, not a consumer item like a hair dryer, washing machine or car. Architecture belongs to the mind, spirit, soul and heart.

You couldn't really have a job writing poetry – you do it because you love it. For me, architecture is not really a job. It's a lifetime

of commitment. It's there even when you don't have commissions, through drawing, writing, making models and thinking.

**PERSPECTIVE: HOW DO YOU SEPARATE BUSINESS — ITS EMPHASIS ON CONSISTENCY AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT — FROM PERSONAL, IDEALISTIC DESIGN GOALS?**

**LIBESKIND:** You can't. You have to live. I don't care how small a project is or how low a budget I have. That's the challenge of architecture – to produce something with a minimum budget but a maximum of architectural integrity that is spiritually uplifting.

**PERSPECTIVE: WHY DO YOU STRESS COLLABORATION AND INTEGRATION IN YOUR DANIEL LIBESKIND LLC DESIGN TEAM?**

**LIBESKIND:** I don't believe in hierarchy, the assembly-line method of producing

architecture, which is how many offices operate. The principal makes a sketch, and it goes on down the line until it's built on the site. It's about a completely intellectual, emotional and technical experience. You have to be involved in all phases so everyone on the team is there from the first line on paper to the last bolt on site.

**PERSPECTIVE: HOW DO YOU DRAW THE LINE BETWEEN YOUR PROJECT RESPONSIBILITIES AND THOSE OF YOUR TEAM — IN OTHER WORDS, AT WHAT POINT DOES A DESIGN BECOME A COMPROMISE VERSUS A COLLABORATION?**

**LIBESKIND:** There is a responsibility – the team doesn't blend into a gray haze. If there's an idea that can be communicated through drawings and architectural language, the team really can be creative by taking it like a musical score and interpreting in creative ways

the new possibilities. I never consider what I do a compromise that I did not intend, but rather a tapping of the creative abilities of all who are involved. The construction workers must have something interesting to do, otherwise it's just an alienating labor to construct a building.

**PERSPECTIVE: DESIGN TOOLS SPEED THE PROCESS FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY. DOES TECHNOLOGY HELP OR HINDER THE CREATIVE SPIRIT?**

**LIBESKIND:** Helps tremendously. We use the most sophisticated computers. It's a tool like a pencil. But you have to be able to control it and not let the tool dominate your efforts. It's a humanistic view, not technology, driving architecture. The architect can use technology for aims that have to do with human experiences. The tools have to expand. The design should not be

generated from a linear perspective. Tools must connect the synesthetic complex parameters of what humans need. Nobody really needed Michelangelo's last judgment – it's not necessary – but once it's there, it becomes a necessity. That's the kind of tool we need.

**Designed as a complex of angular buildings and a 1,776-foot spire, Daniel Libeskind's vision is planned to be taller than the World Trade Center towers.**



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# Master of Two Worlds

While Daniel Libeskind is best known for his prowess with the slide rule and the compass, his creative career actually started with a very different tool: the accordion. Born in Poland to a Jewish family that did not want to attract the attention a piano would bring, Libeskind became a virtuoso on what he's described as "a piano in a box." In Israel, after winning a prestigious music scholarship — Daniel Barenboim and Itzhak Perlman are other notable recipients — his family moved to New York.

At one point, he supported his family by playing concerts. Even though Isaac Stern advised him to play the piano, he resisted and worked his way to Carnegie Hall. In his teens, Libeskind discovered his true love, architecture, and refocused his creative energies there. In a way, he still is composing but just in a different medium.

**PERSPECTIVE: HOW DO YOU TAP INTO WHAT YOU DESCRIBE AS THE "MAGIC, ADVENTURE AND MYSTERY" OF ARCHITECTURE ON A DAILY BASIS?**

**LIBESKIND:** You have to be open-minded to reality, what's happening around you. You have to be ready for the unexpected. Have a sense of patience and a sense that every second something extraordinary could happen. It's a spiritual search. You have to be intentioned with the unknown and beyond the obvious. See yourself in that perspective, with humanity and good grace. That's how you don't fall into a routine or habits that obscure or eclipse reality.

Do what Alice in Wonderland says: Have at least seven new ideas before breakfast. Be willing to change everything.

Complete your thoughts and look to new horizons. That's the spirit of creativity.

**PERSPECTIVE: DO YOU APPROACH DESIGN AS CATHARSIS, A MONUMENT TO THE PAST, A TRIBUTE TO SURVIVORS — A COMBINATION OF THE THREE?**

**LIBESKIND:** You approach it from a very real way. You're suddenly in touch with inorganic materials, animals, human souls and psyches, and the beyond to which the heart and mind are always oriented. Once you're appreciative of the layered complexity of memory, you remember what's important. You don't have to try to research or bring up an emotion; you have it by being embodied.

You have to think of the past as alive. It's not just inert; it drives and determines what we are. You

have to take care of it and be responsible for giving the past the proper home. You have to make the connection between the future, the past and present.

**PERSPECTIVE: WHEN YOU BEGIN A DESIGN, WHAT IS YOUR THOUGHT PROCESS FOR PORTRAYING THE INTENSELY PERSONAL IN A PUBLIC CONTEXT?**

**LIBESKIND:** I try to look at all the different strata of the project. It's like archaeology. There are so many layers that are supporting you, some obscure. It's the depths of emotion to which one goes. Designing is not all process; you have to get in touch emotionally with the voices that are not always apparent or audible, and you have to make an effort to get there. You have to be attracted to them. You have to follow the magnetic field of meaning.

It's a full process bodily and intellectually. It's like playing music or singing a song — it's not approximating a melody. You either sing it or you don't.

**PERSPECTIVE: HOW DO YOU COME UP WITH DESIGNS THAT WILL ENDURE AND STILL HAVE THE SAME DEEP MEANING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION?**

**LIBESKIND:** If truth, beauty and goodness are there — slightly embarrassing in the contemporary context to say — then the project will have the resonance and robustness to survive the fashion and pressures. It's the realization that we'll always work under a pressure — history, public response, budget — it's not always a bad thing. Pressure allows us to be refined. The dregs get washed out. I'm not utopian.

Architecture has an ancient tradition. It allows us to see the world in a certain way because it's stable. The sun still rises despite the fact that we have Copernicus. It allows us to appreciate the world for what it is and to see that we're all on a common

journey on a common planet. It's a realization of what we are and something more comprehensive than just a few clever ideas or a few clever forms.

**PERSPECTIVE: HOW DID YOU INCORPORATE THE HALLOWED, SACRED MEMORIAL AND THE RESURGENCE OF LIFE INTO YOUR DESIGN FOR THE WORLD TRADE CENTER SITE?**

**LIBESKIND:** They are part of the continuity of the site, and you have to be aware of the nuances. It's like a melody that goes from pianissimo to fortissimo, and you never know at what point, but it works. Architecture tells a story, not just an abstraction. It's a story moving through space and time to something beyond it all — the good that we have to fight for. That's how I see the connection of

Libeskind's plan will leave large portions of the 70-foot-deep Ground Zero pit open, exposing the concrete foundation walls that survived the towers' collapse.

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## Renderings for the World Trade Center Site

top: View from Church Street  
bottom: Cortland Galleria



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tragedy and the resurgence of a living optimistic site.


As an architect, you have to be sensitive to all the complexity. There is a memory present and an absence of those who were there. They're all a part of the site. That's how you incorporate silence into music. You couldn't write a text without the white space between the letters.

### **PERSPECTIVE:** WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR THE INTERIOR DESIGNERS AND ARCHITECTS OF TOMORROW?

**LIBESKIND:** The biggest challenge is amid all the development to maintain centrality and spirit of humans and the cultural legacy, which is universal because people all over

the world have the desire to live in a meaningful way. To maintain that flame and to design that way shows that we're not just cogs in a big machine or a simulation. To have the freedom to the public through design, so people can think for themselves. Emancipate people through design. Help the public become co-creators.

There is a greater realization that design is so important for people. It's not just something to be taken for granted. It may become part of mental health legislation; if you grow up in a bad environment, it will have a bad influence on how you think about the world.

Design is not just an aesthetic or an accoutrement, but part of an ethical evolution of how a sustainable world can be created – and we know the pressures on the world as far as resources and capacity in terms of offering meaningful spaces to the public. 

## Project **Résumé**

- Jewish Museum | Berlin
- Felix Nussbaum Haus, Museum of Cultural History | Osnabrück, Germany
- Spiral Extension to the Victoria & Albert Museum | London
- Bremen Philharmonic Hall | Bremen, Germany
- Jewish Museum | San Francisco
- JVC University, Colleges of Public Administration, Education and Art & Architecture | Guadalajara, Mexico
- Maurice Wohl Convention Centre, Bar Ilan University | Tel Aviv
- Atelier Weil, a private atelier/gallery | Mallorca, Spain
- Department store for developer Wohnbau NordWest | Dresden, Germany
- Graduate Centre for London Metropolitan University | London
- Extension to the Denver Art Museum | Denver

DANIEL LIBESKIND WILL DELIVER THE IIDA KEYNOTE ADDRESS SPONSORED BY ALLSTEEL AT 3 P.M. MONDAY, JUNE 14, DURING NEOCON. FOR INFORMATION, VISIT [WWW.MERCHANDISEMART.COM/NEOCON](http://WWW.MERCHANDISEMART.COM/NEOCON).