

Henning Larsen Presents Design for Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library

Our design is inspired by the rich landscapes of the North Dakotan Badlands, united by Theodore Roosevelt's legacy, and rooted in the community of Medora.

17 August 2020

In a single, dark February day in 1884, Theodore Roosevelt's mother and wife passed within hours of each other – an event he commemorated in his diary: "The light has gone out of my life." Deep in grief, he journeyed from New York City to Medora, North Dakota, where his time in the Badlands would come to transform and define him as the man, conservationist, and American civic icon we remember today.

The Henning Larsen + Nelson Byrd Woltz design team made the same journey across the United States in early June 2020 to visit the site for the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library. Our vision for the project is rooted in the landscape and community that Roosevelt came to love – a landscape and community as rich and resilient today as it was when Roosevelt lived in it nearly 150 years ago.

"There is a unique and awe-inspiring beauty to everything about the Badlands that you simply cannot experience anywhere else," says Michael Sørensen, design lead and Partner at Henning Larsen. "The landscape only fully unfolds once you are already within it; once you are, the hills, buttes, fields, and streams stretch as far as you can see."

Our vision is deeply tied to this landscape. Thomas Woltz, Principal and founder of Nelson Byrd Woltz remarks, "The design fuses the landscape and building into one living system emerging from the site's geology. The buildings frame powerful landscape views to the surrounding buttes and the visitor experience is seamlessly connected to the rivers, trails, and grazing lands surrounding the Library."

The building is comprised of four volumes that peek up from the butte, each a formal reference to the geography of the Badlands. With the tower (the Legacy Beacon) a visible landmark, the library becomes a hub for community and fluid threshold over which visitors can cross into the sprawling majesty of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The four volumes link underground along a continuous narrative trail where Roosevelt's legacy – the roots of the project – is exhibited and experienced.

"Our team's first design steps for the Roosevelt Presidential Library reveals the deep cultural and ecological history of the Badlands to educate a national and international audience, to spark conversation, and to create the next generation of stewards of this treasured land in the spirit of T.R." says Woltz.

From the lobby, visitors follow a sloping spiral path down to the exhibition level, where they encounter seats that encircle a hearth. It is here that the journey begins, gathered together around the fire as Roosevelt himself would have done. The path, entitled The Hero's Journey, is not just an exhibition of his life, work, and legacy, but is also a showcase for the landscape. Each phase of the exhibition is punctuated by a space that overlooks a different aspect of the surroundings, showing off the changing nature of the Badlands from every vista and vantage. Where the exhibition spaces at the start are dark, lit by soft daylight that streams in from above, the final stop bathes them in full daylight as they are

presented with a panoramic view onto the Library and landscape from the Legacy Beacon (whose form echoes the iconic markers on the Maah Daah Hey trail).

“Theodore Roosevelt famously stated ‘*I never would have been President if it had not been for my experiences in North Dakota.*’ After just the small amount of time we’ve been able to spend in Medora, it’s clear to us what he meant. The landscape, the people – and the spirit they are both imbued with – is unique, rich, and indomitable,” says Sørensen. “We’re honoured to be a part of Medora’s story and hope to help realize this part of its future.”

The Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation is a prestigious and historic commission; presidential libraries in recent years have been elevated from simple archives into complex community hubs and local landmarks. The competition, run by the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation, selected three finalists to further develop designs in late May, 2020. The three finalists, Henning Larsen, Snøhetta, and Studio Gang, will present their design in Medora, North Dakota on 17 August, 2020 to the Foundation, community, and press in a combination of in-person and virtual events. The winning design will be selected in late September 2020.

“The world needs T.R. now more than ever,” said Edward F. O’Keefe, Chief Executive Officer of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation. “I have been asked frequently what Theodore Roosevelt might do were he with us during these challenging times; my answer is simple: T.R. endures. He would persevere, and so that’s what we are going to do.”

Henning Larsen is an internationally recognized architecture studio whose goal is to create vibrant, sustainable buildings that reach beyond themselves and provide durable value to the users, the society, culture, and landscapes they reside in. Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects is an internationally recognized design practice whose research-based process generates designs that are anchored in the cultures and ecologies that shape landscapes. The team is completed by Sherwood Engineers and Integral Group.

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