

New Statue of Liberty Museum Set to Open May 16

By Miriam Sitz • May 14, 2019



Starting May 16, the masses of tourists huddled on the decks of Statue Cruise boats, yearning to take photos of New York landmarks, will have another reason to visit Liberty Island—and a new vantage point for their Lower Manhattan skyline selfies.

Two and a half years after breaking ground, the new Statue of Liberty Museum is now complete. Conceived by FXCollaborative, with exhibition design by ESI Design, the 26,000-square-foot building—which contains permanent and rotating displays of statue-related artifacts, a three-room immersive theater, and Lady Liberty’s original 1886 torch—blends into the natural landscape of the island while complementing the formal mall setting of the park that surrounds the neoclassical sculpture.

The new facility enriches the Liberty Island visitor’s experience, which has been a frustrating one for many: with the most popular (and easiest to obtain) ticket, sight-seers are only able to walk the grounds, not ascend to the crown nor enter the old museum (which will be converted into offices for the National Park Service) in the podium of the statue—activities for which tickets are limited. Now, anyone with a ferry ticket to the island can take in the exhibitions and view the original torch, even if they can’t climb to the top of the statue.

The project’s origins go back to 2012, when FXCollaborative interviewed with the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation and presented the initial concept design. Over time, the scheme evolved as new factors came into play. For example, after Hurricane Sandy hit New York, the architects raised the museum to 19 feet above sea level, accounting for 500-year-flood water levels. And building on an island always comes with its challenges; shipping materials meant that “a \$1-million dock showed up on our budget sheet,” FX-Collaborative partner and project designer Nicholas Garrison told RECORD. (He added that the temporary structure has remained in place longer than expected, as fish have made it their spawning grounds.)

The New York-based firm also navigated a lengthy approvals and design process. Though the site is under federal jurisdiction, the team conferred with historic preservation organizations in New York and New Jersey, as well as with the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians and the Delaware Tribe of Indians, which have heritage sites on the land.

Embedded into a waterfront-facing berm, the glass and concrete building looks out at the back of the statue and the New York City skyline beyond. The museum’s prism-like form is bisected by a wide stone stair, leading to a prow-like viewing platform that sits adjacent to a green roof of native grasses. (Both the stair and plaza are made of Stony Creek granite, also used in the Richard Morris Hunt–designed statue pedestal.) Unifying the meadow above and landscape below, a triangular section of the green roof folds down toward the ground. Between the berm and the sharply angled forms, the structure gives the appearance of pushing up from the earth. “It’s as if a tectonic shift created the museum,” says Garrison.

