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CHARLES HILTON

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It was the chance to bring healing to a community greatly affected by the events of 9/11 that inspired architect Chuck Hilton to design the Greenwich September 11th Memorial.

“I was asked to design the memorial by Mary Ann Morrison five years ago, when she was head of the Greenwich Chamber of Commerce and the Greenwich Community Projects Fund,” explained Hilton, who is also the acclaimed lead architect of his eponymous firm. “With this site, we wanted to honor the 32 families who lost loved ones. Not only will it be a place of comfort, but the memorial will be a place to educate future generations so that the lessons will not be forgotten.”

Initially after the September 11 attack, a small memorial was established on Great Captain’s Island. But it proved to be largely inaccessible for many people due to the need for boat access or a beach pass. So this new site was created in the heart of Cos Cob Park to provide a more accessible spot on the mainland.

Planning of the site was a collaborative effort between Hilton’s



team and the talented landscape architects at Doyle Herman Design Associates. The original design was focused on establishing a setting that would provide privacy for visitors seeking quiet reflection. After reviewing several possible layouts, Hilton along with Doyle Herman’s Kathryn Herman and Cheryl Brown settled on a location that offered two wheelchair-accessible paths made to mimic the Fibonacci spiral.

“We chose the geometric shape because it represents the connection of animals, humans and plant life both here on Earth and in the galaxies,” Hilton explained. “Along the paths, we chose pin oak trees for their eventual scale and because they symbolize strength.”

Kousa dogwoods were planted for their long-lasting flowers that bloom throughout the summer, as well as a low hedge of bayberry to line the walkway. Even more impressive was the planned inclusion of an oak tree seedling taken directly from Ground Zero. “The plant palette was intentionally kept simple so that it would accent the memorial structure without competing with it.”

Among the landscape is a granite terrace paved from an abstraction of the original World Trade Center plaza. At the center are three pavement markers: one points towards New York City, one to Washington, DC, and the third to Sharpville, PA. The NYC marker also contains a piece of steel indefinitely on loan from the Glenville, CT, Fire Department and the Port Authority of NY & NJ.

The memorial’s most significant focal points, however, are the two large glass towers that were crafted to be in proportion and scale to the fallen World Trade Center. The creation of these was heavily influenced by a trip Hilton made to Venice five years ago. “I was there as part of the 2010 Leaders of Design summit, where I had a chance to visit an exhibition of etched and edge lit glass in Murano,” he said. “In addition, I toured the Seguso Glass Factory, where we witnessed the amazing array of glassworks.”

Hilton found himself so moved by the experiences that he used them as a key creative force behind the memorial’s design. And with the solid professional contacts he made throughout his journeys, he was able to bring to fruition his final vision of a lasting tribute.

“We really wanted to build a place within our hometown where the family members and friends of those lost could find solace—right here in Greenwich,” Hilton concluded. “It’s a place that will educate all, so that day is never forgotten.”