



Metropolitan Museum's New David H. Koch Plaza Opens to the Public September 10

Two-year Renovation Project Transforms Plaza along Fifth Avenue Into Welcoming Entry for the Museum's More than Six Million Annual Visitors

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's new, completely redesigned David H. Koch Plaza will officially open to the public on Wednesday, September 10, after a major two-year reconstruction effort. The massive outdoor space—which runs along Fifth Avenue for four city blocks, the entire length of the Museum's landmark façade—now features completely new fountains, paving, lighting, allées and bosques of trees leading to the Museum's entrances from north and south, and seating areas for visitors.

The plaza is named for David H. Koch, a Museum Trustee, who contributed the entire \$65 million cost of the project.

"This project is a new public space of great importance, one that will benefit and delight not only the more than six million visitors who come to see the Met's magnificent collection and galleries each year, but also the entire community of New Yorkers and visitors to the City," said Daniel Brodsky, the Museum's Chairman. "We are immensely grateful to David Koch for his vision and generosity—in one philanthropic gesture, he made this transformative project possible."

Thomas P. Campbell, Director and CEO of the Museum, said: "Finally, more than a century after the completion of the Met's grand Fifth Avenue façade, and more than 40 years after its last plaza renovation, the Museum has created a truly welcoming point of entry. Here now is a cityscape that is environmentally friendly and will please our visitors as they come to experience the unparalleled breadth of masterpieces on display inside. Rather than

finding the complexity of the project daunting—from the hauling of granite for new fountains and paving stones, to the planting of trees and the installation of hundreds of LED lights, on an area roughly the equivalent size of three football fields—David Koch recognized its significance, embraced it, and made it happen.”

Emily K. Rafferty, President of the Museum, commented: “This project is a great demonstration of philanthropic spirit and we are tremendously grateful to David Koch for what we have been able to accomplish as the result of his generosity. We are also grateful to the many City agencies whose support was vital to the project’s completion, including the Department of Cultural Affairs, Department of Parks and Recreation, New York City Landmarks Commission, Public Design Commission, Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Buildings, City Law Department, Metropolitan Transit Authority, and our local Community Board #8. We also acknowledge with gratitude the design work of OLIN and the many consulting firms who developed designs and plans for the various elements of this project. And we thank the Museum’s neighbors for their patience and understanding during this two-year reconstruction process. Now that the project is complete, we are thrilled to open the plaza to the public for their use and enjoyment.”

David H. Koch said: “The new plaza is something that will not only beautify the Metropolitan Museum, but also Fifth Avenue and the entire neighborhood, by creating a welcoming, warm, and vibrant open space that the public can enjoy. Although the Met is best known for its magnificent art collections, inspiring architecture, and interior grand spaces, the OLIN-designed plaza will also make the exterior of the Met a masterpiece.”

The Renovation Project

OLIN, the landscape architecture, planning, and urban design practice, was the lead design consultant for the project.

The renovation encompasses the entire 1,021-foot-long, 70,706-square foot plaza. The majority of the granite for the fountains and pavements was quarried in Le Granit, Canada. In all, 62,935 cubic feet of soil were installed and 106 trees planted, doubling the number of trees on the plaza and providing 17,600 square feet of shade. Forty percent of the total area will now be shaded by the trees

and by two rows of large parasols that have been installed parallel to the allées of trees. Each of the two new fountains holds 21,000 gallons of water and boasts 48 jets that can be programmed for varying water displays. The equivalent of 2,130 linear feet of LED fixtures have been mounted to light the façade, with each LED bulb expected to last for 50,000 hours.

The new fountains replace the deteriorating ones that had been in use since they were built in the 1970s along with the previous plaza. The fountains are now positioned closer to the Museum's front steps, in order to improve access to the street-level public entrances at 81st and 83rd Streets. The renovated plaza also features tree-shaded allées, permanent and temporary seating areas, some featuring parasols for shade, and entirely new, energy-efficient, and diffused nighttime lighting. Seasonal plantings have been added along the base of the building to provide color and visual interest throughout the year. The pavement was entirely replaced with new North American granite paving. All of these new features respect and complement the architectural highlights of the landmark façade and the monumental, recently refurbished central stairs, which are the most iconic element of the prior design and have become a popular area for Museum visitors. (The stairs have not been changed in this renovation.)

Since the Museum's founding in 1870, its rich architectural history has included many major renovations, several of them including work on the Fifth Avenue plaza. The central Museum façade on Fifth Avenue, known as the East Wing, was designed by Richard Morris Hunt and Richard Howland Hunt in 1896, and opened officially in 1902. The imposing and sculptural main entrance is the central portion of the composition and is flanked by low wings set back from the central façade. On each side of the original East Wing are newer wings designed by the firm of McKim, Mead and White. The grand stairs in front of the main entrance were designed by Roche Dinkeloo and Associates in 1968. The new design for the plaza by OLIN balances the grand stairs with a pair of fountains and bosques of London Plane trees, and two aerial hedges of Little Leaf Linden trees to its north and south.

Fountains

The new granite fountains, designed by the award-winning firm Fluidity Design Consultants, will be

operational year-round, bracketing the grand stairs to create an energized connection between people sitting on the steps and those at the fountains, while punctuating the long plaza with attractive water elements. Each fountain is a quiet square form inset with a circle that provides seating on long stone benches along the north and south edges of the pools. A circular basin is subtracted from the square stone form to reveal a shallow stone dome occupying the basin's negative space and generating a lens effect in the pool's water volume. Evenly spaced bronze nozzles, mounted around the edge of the circular basin, orient glassy streams toward the center of the feature. The streams will be individually size-controlled to display geometrical figures and innovative, self-generating motion patterns conceived to connect with the Museum's historic architecture and the City's contemporary spirit. In winter, the water will be warmed by recycled steam for year-round use.

Landscaping

At the far north and south ends of the wings designed in the early 20th century by McKim, Mead, and White, where the architecture steps forward toward the street, two allées of large Little Leaf Linden trees have been planted, one on each margin of the sidewalk, continuing the shaded route along the Central Park wall and aligned to the rhythm of the windows along the Museum's façade facing Fifth Avenue. As they grow, the trees will be pruned in the form of two aerial hedges, similar to the trees at the Palais Royal in Paris. Flagpoles rise above the trees at the ends of each allée, responding to the architectural arches of the façade. The presence of the trees is intended to create a pleasant experience along the street. Hedging the row of trees reinforces the central plaza's volume and ensures the trees do not detract from the monumentality of the Museum's façade.

Within the central plaza, pairs of bosques of London Plane trees have been planted, flanking the 81st and 83rd Street entrances. Planted on a square grid turned at a 45-degree angle to the street, the lines of these tree trunks will guide pedestrians toward the doorways.

The London Plane trees are pollarded, a historic pruning technique that allows for maximum sun penetration in the winter to warm the plaza and maximum shade in the summer for cooling. The pollarding also limits the height of the trees so they will not grow to block the view of the imposing façade. Along the base of the building on either side of the central stairway, ornamental beds of mixed

shrubs and herbaceous flowers have been planted, referencing plantings seen in early- to mid-20th-century photographs and drawings of the Museum, including original concepts developed by McKim, Mead and White.

The 106 trees planted by the Museum in the renovation more than double the former number of trees on the plaza. The 44 London Plane trees previously on the site were planted in inadequate soil conditions, which impeded their health and limited their environmental benefits. The Museum transplanted as many trees as were deemed viable for relocation to other areas of the City chosen by the Department of Parks & Recreation. The Museum also made tree restitution payments to the Parks Department to support tree plantings citywide. The new London Plane and linden trees are planted in large continuous tree pits that collect rainwater run-off and allow for healthy root growth, thereby maximizing their life spans and environmental benefits.

Beneath the bosques, shaded seating is provided, using lightweight movable chairs that allow users to arrange them as they please. These casual seating areas, which include 30 tables and 120 chairs, are similar in concept to others installed in public areas around the City, and offer clear views of the plantings and water features of the plaza, with the activity of Fifth Avenue in the background. Additional benches adjacent to the allées of trees provide further options for seating with shade provided by a series of cantilevered parasols.

At the public parking entry at 80th Street, the guard booth along the access drive has been rebuilt and the plantings replaced to make the entrance more welcoming, as well as to provide better conditions for a sculpture by Isamu Noguchi from the Museum's collection, *Unidentified Object* (1979), which is installed there. The new booth is clad in a concrete board with an environmentally sustainable sedum green roof; trees and significant understory plantings have been added to blend it more harmoniously with the overall park landscape and minimize visibility from Fifth Avenue.

Lighting

The evening ambiance of the Museum plaza will be enhanced by the hierarchy of light on the landscape, water features, grand stairs, and façade. The previous lighting—which illuminated the façade unevenly by light poles across the street from the building—has been removed. The new elements, designed by the renowned

lighting design practice L'Observatoire International led by Hervé Descottes, are mounted on the Museum's façade and the plaza itself. This treats the building like a work of art, highlighting the shape and form of its cornices, molding, decorative statues, and pillars.

Come twilight, the warmth of the façade's light contracts with the cool luminance of the fountains and surrounding landscape, enhancing the architectural components of the grand stairs and façade to create a visual hierarchy ensuring safe and secure passage through the plaza at night. All of the lights are on dimmers, which can be used to control the light levels and are much more energy-efficient than the former lighting design.

Environmental Sustainability

The plaza design attempts to reconcile the physical need for a significant area of paved plaza with the desire to employ sustainable strategies regarding stormwater management and the urban heat island effect, two goals that are often at odds with each other. To accomplish this, the trees and parasols that have been installed significantly increase the square footage of shade in the plaza, thereby reducing the surface temperature of the paving by as much as 25 degrees Fahrenheit. Additionally, a suspended paving system allows for extensive subsurface tree pits that now collect and utilize onsite stormwater that would otherwise have drained into the City's sewer system. Excess stormwater that is not captured by the subsurface tree pits or the ornamental planting areas will be collected and directed into underground detention areas that hold and slowly release water into the City's stormwater system. This gives significant relief to the extreme demand put on the City's aging system.

Project Oversight and Consultants

OLIN served as the project's lead design firm.

Dennis McGlade, Partner at OLIN, commented: "Designing a civic open space of such a scale, in the middle of Manhattan, in front of one of the premiere art institutions in the world—The Metropolitan Museum of Art—has been a great privilege and responsibility. We thank David Koch not only for his great generosity, but also for his enthusiasm and interest in all aspects of the project. To quote from Jane Jacobs: 'The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any once place is always replete with new

improvisations.”

The OLIN team, led by Mr. McGlade with Associate Scott Dismukes, managed and collaborated with a number of consultants for the project. In addition to the aforementioned Fluidity Design Consultants for water feature design and L’Observatoire International for lighting design, OLIN partnered with Spatial Affairs Bureau, formerly Rick Mather USA, for the design of the parasols, stone benches, and new guard booths. Additional team members contributed to the areas of civil engineering, MEP engineering, transportation engineering, site surveying, irrigation, arboriculture, and other fields. The Museum also retained Gorton & Associates for project and cost management; and Sam Schwartz Engineering for the vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow plan.

* * *

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, founded in 1870, is one of the world’s largest and finest museums. Its collections span more than 5,000 years of world culture, from prehistory to the present and from every part of the globe. The Museum’s 2.4 million-square-foot building has vast holdings represented by a series of collections, each of which ranks in its category among the best in the world. Last year the Metropolitan Museum was visited by more than six million people.

#

September 8, 2014

Print

Press resources