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Memorial in the making: Five Flight 93 designs evolve in subtle ways

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By Patricia Lowry, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The jury spoke, but were the finalists listening?

In the first stage of the design competition for the Flight 93 memorial, the 10-member jury winnowed 1,011 entries to five. Those five teams were given pointed, detailed feedback from the jury, a panel that included design professionals and relatives of the passengers.

The finalists were awarded \$25,000 each to refine their designs to a level that fully communicates their spatial, material and symbolic aspects. For the second round of the competition, they were asked to submit two three-dimensional models, a PowerPoint presentation and up to six 30-by-40-inch boards.

The competitors had the benefit of two site visits: one during a blinding winter snowstorm and the other on a sunny spring day when they could roam the site. The brutal-to-beautiful weather is a big player in Somerset County and sometimes the one that holds the trump card. It was important for the finalists to understand not only the lay of the land but the range of sky, ground and temperature conditions, as well.

The changes to their designs were supposed to be evolutionary and subtle ones, not complete makeovers, and the jury came back for another look to make sure that was the case; still, there seems to have been some healthy cross-pollination among the revisions.



In "Disturbed Harmony," a granite "Bravery Wall" runs for 2.5 miles through the park, telling the flight's story through phone calls made by passengers.

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[Flight 93 Memorial Gallery](#)

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From the beginning, planning for the Flight 93 memorial has been an exemplary process, involving families, design and National Park Service professionals and the local community in an open, anonymous competition evaluated by a savvy, tough, fair-minded jury -- all the right moves. This is the first time an entire national park has been designed through a juried competition.



"(F)Light" interprets the path of Flight 93 as a healing scar on the landscape, with a timeline of events inscribed on a luminous spiraling roofscape.

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To the degree that the finalists took the jury's specific comments to heart, they improved their entries and, it would seem, their chances. But not all of them did. Some may be pinning their hopes on the Stage II jury -- a different group of professionals, family members and Somerset County residents that may see things differently.

The plane came down at 10:03 a.m. Sept. 11, 2001 on private land near Shanksville, in a field being reclaimed after deep and surface

mining. The impact area was compact, forming a circle now known as the sacred ground. The memorial park will be much larger, 2,200 acres owned and operated by the National Park Service, with parking for 200 vehicles. There will be a visitor information and interpretive center, archival storage and maintenance buildings, roads and trails.

For the first round of the competition, entrants were required to submit a memorial expression that could be a singular work, such as a sculpture or structure, or a holistic treatment of about 1,300 acres. (The perimeter of the site will form a buffer to the surrounding countryside.) The park service has a \$20 million budget for the memorial expression alone, with a budget for the entire project dependent on the design.

For the second round, "We wanted them to look at how the entire site would be managed over time," project manager Jeff Reinbold said on a tour of the finalists' entries last week. "We asked them to consider what kind of experience you want to create for visitors and what plantings, what movement of people through the site and what feelings you want to engender."

For identification purposes, the site has been organized into five areas: the gateway (along Route 30), the approach (south through reclaimed and natural landscapes), the bowl, the ridge that frames the bowl, and the sacred ground, at the bowl's southern edge with a



backdrop of hemlocks. The five finalists were chosen because they represent a range of expression, but each in its own way integrates the memorial with the land.

Four of the finalists invited other consultants to join their teams for Stage II; new team members are shown in parentheses. Entries are given in order of preference (mine), but any of the first three, in very different ways, would make a memorable, evocative and emotionally satisfying memorial.

(F)Light

Ken Lum, graduate architect, Toronto (with Dennis Fanti, Yvonne Lam and Ivan Ilic)

"(F)Light" interprets the route of Flight 93 as a healing scar on the landscape, a horizontal structure that traces the plane's flight path from Newark, N.J., to Somerset County, rising to a turning point before descending to a memorial courtyard. The revised version pinpoints the location of the structure, which terminates to overlook the sacred ground, and refines its materials. "Composed of an outer layer of textured cast glass and an inner laminated glass on quartzite skin, fastened to a structural steel space frame, the roofscape gracefully folds in a clockwise spiral, weaving earth and sky, darkness and light into a collective whole," Lum writes.

With the sequence of events etched on the spiraling glass roof, "(F)Light" interprets the drama and violence of the event in a powerful and eloquent way, and also provides intermittent shelter from the harsh winter weather. Rocks quarried on the site will form a partial edge to the structure, better integrating its contemporary design with the rugged ground. Addressing another jury concern, Lum eliminated ponds he had added, as well as 40 proposed memorial tables in the courtyard near the sacred ground. The site is managed through plantings and natural succession, and its two draglines -- large dredging machines used in surface mining -- are retained. An outstanding model and an articulate description go a long way in communicating this team's intention.

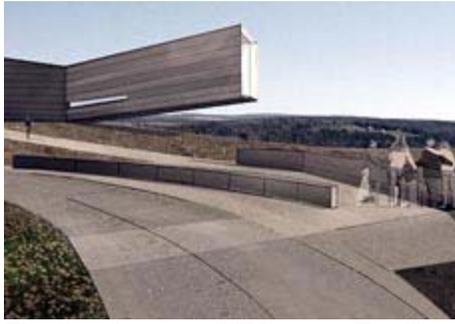
An arcing grove of red and sugar maples frames the site's bowl and puts a protective arm around the crash site and visitors' center in "Crescent of Embrace."

Click photo for larger image.

Jury changes for next phase

The Stage II jury comprises landscape architects Julie Bargmann and Laurie Olin; Boston Globe architecture critic Robert Campbell; G. Henry Cook, president of Somerset Trust Bank; urban planner and University of Minnesota graduate school dean Gail Dubrow; Charles Fox, administrator of Somerset Historical Center; Shanksville High School principal Connie Hummel; Jon Jarvis, director of the National Park Service's Pacific West Region; Andy Warhol Museum director Tom Sokolowski; and seven Flight 93 family members: Gerald Bingham, Thomas Burnett Sr., Barbara Catuzzi, Sandra Felt, Dorothy Garcia, Ilsa Homer and Edwin Root.

Disturbed Harmony



The focal point of "Memory Trail" is a zinc-clad visitors' center that also acts as an overlook to the crash site.

[Click illustration for larger image.](#)

Leor and Gilat Lovinger, landscape architects, Berkeley, Calif. (with the Office of Lawrence Halprin)

The Lovingers' entry is defined by a 2.5-mile granite "Bravery Wall" that begins at the entrance and serves as a guide to the crash site, where it becomes a ha-ha that wraps and isolates the sacred ground. The wall is inscribed with a timeline of events drawn from the phone calls that passengers

made to family and friends. The jury suggested the wall also could interpret the history of the site. In the revised version, the visitors' center and parking are near the crash site, and visitors can turn right and take a short walk along the wall to the sacred ground, reading the timeline of events leading up to the crash. To the left of the visitors' center, the wall records another kind of timeline, the birth years of passengers and crew. An annual Sept. 11 walk along the wall would "transform this line in the landscape into a ribbon of life."

The wall now culminates in the "Circle of Heroes," in which 40 large rough-hewn stone steles commemorate the passengers and crew. The jury had indicated that the Lovingers' initial way of recognizing the dead through wall inscriptions was too subtle and understated. As symbolic burial markers overlooking a common grave, the stone steles are a dramatic improvement and a fitting terminus to the wall.

The Crescent of Embrace

Paul Murdoch Architects, Los Angeles (with Nelson Byrd Woltz, RBA Partners, Sato & Boppana, Davis Langdon, George Saxton Associates, Clayton Lee Rugh, Paulynn Cue, Aleksander Norak-Zemplinski, Design Models, Inc., and Steve Payne)

This is the only plan that puts the site's mighty winds to work, ringing 40 silver metal chimes in a tall tower at the gateway, and the only one that engages the sense of sound. Its other signature element is the "Crescent of Embrace," an arc of 40 red maple trees shading a curved walkway along the ridge overlooking the bowl and the sacred ground. In the revised version, the chime tower, called the "Tower of Voices," has been simplified, and the single line of

maples has been expanded into a crescent-shaped grove. A thicket of mountain laurel proposed for the sacred ground has been replaced with grasses, bulbs, black-eyed Susans and blanket flowers. Formal and efficiently organized, this scheme would create a crisp, tidy space, but one that eradicates too many of the site's ghosts, including the draglines of the mining era.

Fields, Forests, Fences

Laurel McSherry, landscape architect, Columbus, Ohio; Terry Surjan, architect and urban designer, Phoenix and Los Angeles (with Luke Kautz, Jason Ploszaj, Anson Chen, Marita Roos, Teresa Durkin, Randall Mason, Charles Cartwright, Lisa Cutshaw and Peter Marsh)



"Fields, Forests, Fences" invites visitors to inscribe their thoughts on aluminum forestry tags and attach them to wire and cedar-post fences.

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This entry treats the entire site as a memorial that evolves as its introduced forests, grasses and wildflowers grow, continuing the land's reclamation and making time a co-designer. New with the revision is a cairn field, with sandstone plinths covering concrete vaults holding rendered hemlock mulch, symbolic of human remains found in the hemlock grove near the crash site. The plinths encourage the accumulation of stones as cairns, an improvement over the cast urn reliquaries of the original scheme. Within the sacred ground and accessible only to family members, 40 sandstone markers commemorate the dead. The jury felt the original monuments and markers were too subtle, and that seems not to have been adequately addressed in the revision. With its minimal models, rendered as topographic lines on flat planes, the team forfeited its chance to tell its story in three dimensions.

Memory Trail

Frederick Steiner, architect and urban planner, Austin, Texas (with Karen Lewis, Jason Kentner and E. Lynn Miller)

This plan offers a series of overlooks along the entrance road, here called "Memory Trail," which traces on the landscape Flight 93's path in the sky. Groups of plantings throughout the park, including 3,021 white oaks established in the bowl as seedlings and representing the casualties of Sept. 11, are meant to heal the landscape over time. In the revision there have been changes to the road and planting plans as well as to the visitors' center, which doubles as an overlook. But despite the jury's

admonition that the center is too tied to a specific design moment, it remains a long, extruded tube with a sleek, zinc skin, an alien object imposed on a rural landscape.

The entries are on view at Georgian Place in Somerset, along with a bird's-eye-view model of the site, through Sept. 25, and online at www.flight93memorialproject.org. Feedback is welcome and will be read by the jury. The National Park Service is expected to announce a winner in early September.

(Architecture critic Patricia Lowry can be reached at plowry@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1590.)

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