



Winging It

The style of the United States Institute of Peace dovetails dramatically with its substance. | By *Tiffany Jow* |

No one can claim that the National Mall has a particular set of aesthetic mores. Sure, there are plenty of neoclassical limestone buildings reflecting Pierre L'Enfant's dream of a European-esque Grand Avenue, but the last four decades of development have brought the prime real estate a disparity of designs from the stark Hirshhorn Museum to the organic National Museum of the American Indian. And while each new commission marked its moment in history, none will stand for the era in which it was opened more than the United States Institute of Peace.

The national institution, funded by Congress, opened its first permanent home this spring. While the \$186 million, LEED-certified project was 26 years in the making, the übermodern flagship nonetheless bears all the markings of the early 21st century, when large-scale panes of glass are en vogue, and contemporary design throughout the world is marked by geodesic domes and undulating rooftops. And, perhaps, that's the point. A pastiche of current global viewpoints, the sleek structure is poised to carry out one of the most vital missions of this moment: international conflict management.

Israeli-born, Canadian-raised and Boston-based architect Moshe Safdie won USIP's design competition in 2001 with his vision for a wing-like roof of vaulted spaces connected by sheets of glass, evoking the Jefferson Memorial's dome by day, while glowing from within at night to reveal its lattice steel structure. "We wanted to reflect the organization's mission of resolving conflict with diplomacy and act as a symbol for America's aspiration of achieving peace," Safdie says.

Along with the Global Peacebuilding Center, housed within, the tech-focused HQ hosts exhibition spaces, a museum

of conflict resolution, a 230-seat auditorium and a library. "Its openness signifies the transparency of our work and accessibility, and evokes the substance of America as a leader in peacemaking," says USIP Executive Vice President Tara Sonenshine.

Not everyone is as ecstatic over the dove-inspired aesthetics, which also hybridize an airy glass-box look with that of bunker-like government offices. "It looks incomplete conceptually," says local architect Travis Price. "I suppose you could say that it represents the peace process in its own way." Davis Buckley, who advised on the NMAI, understands the rigors of building by the Mall. "Aesthetically, it's a significant contribution to the iconography and symbolism of peace in Washington," he says. "The National Mall is a dynamic plan that is always determined by the aesthetic constraints established by the Commission of Fine Arts, which reviews projects like this."

International policy heavyweights, such as Madeleine Albright, George Shultz, William Cohen and Frank Carlucci, are part of USIP's giant mosaic of advisors who will help the institute live up to both its style and substance. "The building is the symbol of peace for the nation," Safdie says. "A more sublime and significant challenge, I could not think of." ■

CONVERSATION PEACE
Moshe Safdie's newly completed headquarters for the United States Institute of Peace reflects the most contemporary message and structure currently on the National Mall.