



By Mark Sommer  
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**Visiting visionary architect calls Buffalo's treasures 'astonishing'**  
Libeskind, at lecture in Albright-Knox, says city is "an unknown mecca"

The architect who redesigned the World Trade Center site spoke reverently about Buffalo's architecture on Thursday and hailed a global "renaissance" now under way.

Daniel Libeskind came to Buffalo to deliver a lecture in the Albright- Knox Art Gallery Auditorium.

"This is a city that is truly a mecca, and it's an unknown mecca," Libeskind, dressed in black with his trademark designer glasses, said in a meeting with Buffalo News editors and reporters. "The quality of architecture, and the diversity of architecture, is so astonishing, really."

He was glad to hear of plans to put an architectural center into the H.H. Richardson Complex.

"The site should be reused and transformed to be a gateway for people to get to know the architecture of Richardson, Buffalo and America," Libeskind said.

The 61-year-old Polish-born architect predicted the World Trade Center site he designed with five skyscrapers in a torchlike configuration, including the 1,776-foot-tall Freedom Tower, will balance the needs for remembrance and community revitalization. A memorial is planned in the center.

"What will be developed will be, I think, very inspiring. I'm totally committed to it," said Libeskind, who dismissed claims he had had a falling out over the project. The tower has since been redesigned by architect David Childs.

Libeskind's work has been shown in museums and galleries throughout the world, earning numerous prestigious awards. It wasn't until last year, however, that he had his first major U.S. commission — the Denver Art Museum.

Another new addition, at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, also was recently completed. He's currently working on projects in Dublin, Milan, Copenhagen, Singapore and Boston.

"He's one of the most dynamic and most talked-about architects today, and it's exciting for Buffalo [to have him here]," said Louis Grachos, the gallery's executive director.

"His plan for the World Trade Center redevelopment was visionary."

Libeskind praised the Albright-Knox's glass addition designed by Gordon Bunshaft, where he spoke in the evening, as "a great example of a piece of modern architecture — very bold, uncompromising, with that incredible classical building. You appreciate each because of the other, because of the contrast."

The architect is dismissive of resurrecting unrealized Frank Lloyd Wright designs, of which two projects in Buffalo have been completed and a third is on the drawing board.

"It's absurd. Even the Holy Ghost would not dare to do that . . . Buildings should be in their time and in their context, both socially and architecturally. Otherwise they have lost all of their cultural meaning, all of their identity."

Libeskind, who came to Buffalo years ago to see the architecture, emphasized that cities are not static. There is no contradiction, he said, between preserving one's heritage while at the same time pursuing bold, original architecture.

"I don't think you have to put a skyline in formaldehyde and freeze it at some historical moment," Libeskind said. "Buildings can be renovated and brought back to life. But in and of itself, it's not enough to bring a city back to its glorious days."

He paraphrased the late architectural historian and critic Reyner Banham, saying "anybody working in Buffalo better be good, because there are ghosts looking at you."

The biggest change Libeskind said he's seen in his field has been a global "rediscovery of architecture, of cities, of design."

"Everyone is competing architecturally, and this phenomena is new, but it's global. People are realizing architecture brings value to a place. That's what's driving it," he said.

Libeskind's appearance coincided with the exhibition "Drawing Architecture: The L.J. Cella Collection," which features four of his pencil-and-ink sketches collaged on a scrolllike sheet of paper on view in the museum through January 2008.

It was sponsored by the gallery and the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning.