

THE PARACHUTE PAVILION

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“Coney Island is the fetal Manhattan”

~ Rem Koolhaus

Coney Island has been the most famous seaside resort in the world. The shorefront has been through several different stages through out its lifetime. (McCullough, Pg. 3) In 1897, George Tilyou created Steeplechase Park, a fantasy land. Half of the park burned down in 1907 and he started to rebuild again. (Denson, Pg. 32) Tilyou designed Steeplechase once more starting with a giant “two-acre, enclosed, weatherproof steel-and-glass pavilion as the centerpiece, enabling the park to remain open rainy days” (Denson, Pg. 34). (See illustration 1)



Illustration 1

The idea of a pavilion housing different activities, allowing for year-round use is not a new concept. The Parachute Pavilion is of lesser scale than Tilyou’s Pavilion of Fun. However, it will operate in the same manner. “The Parachute Pavilion is planned to be an all-season generator of activity, drawing the public onto the boardwalk, the beach and Surf Avenue, and to a new recreational destination” (<http://www.vanalen.org/competitions/ConeyIsland/>). The Pavilion will attempt to aid in generating the millions of locals and tourists that once made Coney Island their final destination when it first began.

The site for the Parachute Pavilion is located beside the most famous landmark in Coney Island; the Parachute Jump. The Jump was developed for military training. Then it moved to the 1939-'40 New York World’s Fair as a thrill ride for the general public and then Tilyou finally bought the Jump for his

amusement park. (<http://history.amusement-parks.com/steplechase.htm>) The yellow-and red steel tower rose from a six sided art deco base and gradually tapered to a narrow stem topped with twelve cantilevered steel arms, spreading out like petals on a flower, each arm lifting one parachute. The riders were seated in a harness, carried up by a lift rope and guided by steel cables. When they reached the top, a release mechanism was tripped and the riders would free fall for a few seconds until the parachute would open up and slide gracefully down the cables. (Denson, Pg. 123) (See illustration 2)



Illustration 2

The Parachute Pavilion has a height restriction of 30 feet above grade and the structure is to stay within the site parameters with the exception of extending the boardwalk or landscaping the left over space. The program for the Pavilion includes a restaurant, retail space and exhibition space. The Pavilion should converse with the Parachute Jump, as well as compliment the surrounding buildings. When designing the Pavilion, precedents were used for the following areas: the parking lot entrance, the structure and skin, and the overall appearance. All areas contribute to the final image of the Parachute Pavilion.

The Pavilion has two major access points: the boardwalk and the parking lot. Both entrance points need to be prominent, visible and have their own uniqueness to visually mark their functions. Parking lots are not normally the best looking developments but they can help emphasize the attractiveness of an entrance by being the exact opposite: bland. The parking lot entrance needs

to be different from the rest of the building because it is special in the fact that it is the only entrance at grade level and it faces a sea of asphalt. The design of the parking lot entrance was inspired by the Birmingham Museum of Art. (See illustration 3)

The parking lot entrance is made of glass and steel, essentially a glass box that has been corked. It proceeds to the maximum height of thirty feet sticking up above the rest of the pavilion. The rigidity is a response to the stiffness of the parking lot. The glass does not extend to the boardwalk to symbolize that it has a different function and that it is unique to the building's appearance. Inside there is a staircase that takes on similar angles to its encasement that leads up to the restaurant. It is also the entrance to the lower exhibition space.



Illustration 3

The idea is to encapsulate the sense of awe when staring at the entrance from the parking lot. This sense of awe is fulfilled in the entrance to the sculpture garden at the Birmingham Museum of Art (BMA). The BMA also uses curtain wall to perform this affect. BMA's curtain wall is slightly curved and

encases a grand winding staircase, opposite of our angular approach but using the same concept.

The pavilion is primarily a steel frame structure with overlapping, sheet metal skin. The tilted arc frame is to give the building an organic look like the natural surroundings: beach and ocean. The curve creates a framed view of the beach and leads the eye up the Parachute Jump. The sleekness of the curve is comparable to many of the bridges designed by Santiago Calatrava. Calatrava's bridges have a certain appeal to the eye due to the sexy curve, especially his Orleans Bridge. The curve is aesthetically pleasing as well as performs as a structural member in both the bridge and the pavilion. (See illustration 4)



Illustration 4

The skin for the roof is overlapping, sheet metal panels. Instead of draping a canvas material over the structure, which would seem fitting, it was modernized with a metal panel system. The metal panels are similar to the exterior walls of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao. (See illustration 5)

The frame and skin work as a tensile structure and the metal panels slope in between steel cables. The use of a tensile structure is to connect the pavilion to the Parachute Jump as well as tented buildings. The skin acts similar to that of an actual parachute rider but instead of the roof expanding and bubbling out, it depresses inwards. (See illustration 6)



Illustration 5

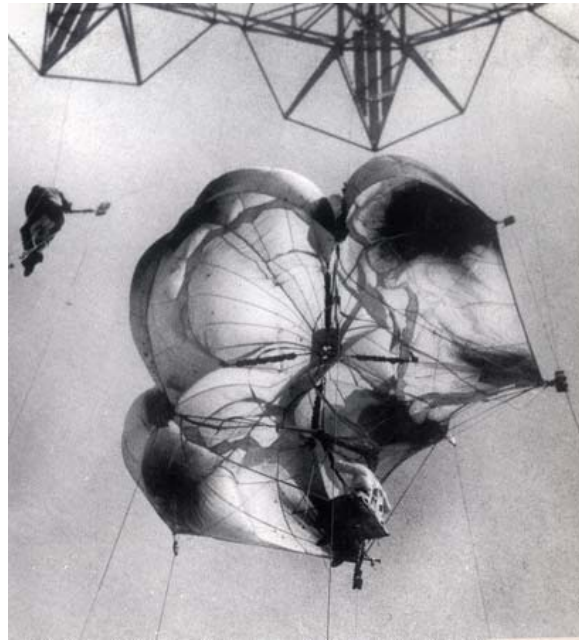


Illustration 6

The overall appearance of the pavilion is to connect the past and the present to create the future of the new Coney Island. The past pavilions that once stood on Coney Island from the amusement parks and the new New York Aquarium have influenced the appearance and image of the pavilion. The design incorporates similar characteristics and activities to that of the Pavilion of Fun and the concepts to which it takes to operate a successful pavilion. These ideas combined with the appearance of the New York Aquarium complete the design. (See illustration 7)

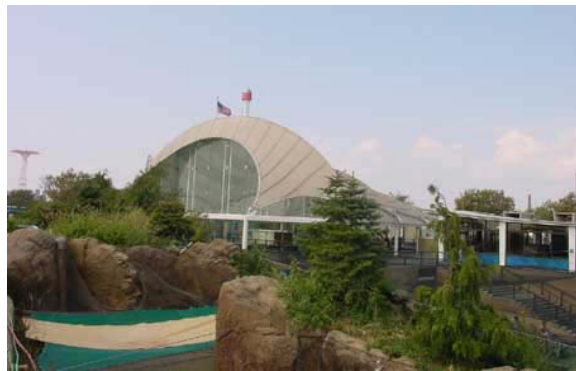


Illustration 7

The New York Aquarium's whale pool enclosure is a tensile structure with a canvas-like material for the skin. From observation, the canvas-like material is hard to maintain and hard to keep it looking clean. Therefore, choosing metal panels will improve the appearance after time.

The New York Aquarium flanks the east side of the existing amusement parks while the Parachute Pavilion terminates the west side. With similar structures enclosing the activities along the shores of Coney Island, there is a common language across the shoreline. This conscious decision will make a stronger visual connection amongst the existing development and is an important setup for the future growth.

Having precedents for the parking lot entrance, the structure and skin, and the overall appearance contributed to the oneness of the final design for the Parachute Pavilion. Many architects and buildings such as the Pavilion of Fun, the Parachute Jump, Birmingham Museum of Art, Santiago Calatrava, Frank Gehry and the New York Aquarium influenced these different components. The final design shares a common language with the existing built and natural surroundings and has an immediate conversation with the Parachute Jump.

The Parachute Pavilion will be an all-season generator of people to Coney Island creating nostalgia of what it once used to be. The future development can only make Coney Island a better place and further continue the reputation of being the most famous seaside resort in the world.

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Illustration 2 - <http://naid.sppsr.ucla.edu/coneyisland/articles/steeplechase2.htm>

Illustration 3 - <http://www.artsbma.org/>

Illustration 4 - <http://www.spitia.gr/greek/themata/kalatrava.htm>

Illustration 5 - Friedman, Pg. 184

Illustration 6 - Denson, Pg. 71

Illustration 7 - <http://www.denardis.com/specialimage/whale.html>