

Here is an audio descriptive guide through the building of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and its closest neighbourhood. Due to the limited time only selected objects and facilities have been included in this presentation.

1. The Bus Stop

Buses heading towards John Paul II Avenue stop at Anielewicz Street at a bus stop marked “Nalewki-Muzeum dwa”. A busy bicycle path separates the pavement of the bus stop from the property on which the Museum is located. The path is paved with setts. It is three metres wide. Behind the bicycle path - diagonally to the left from the bus stop post - Irena Sendler Alley begins. This promenade was paved with uneven cracked stones. Acting with due caution, let's cross the bicycle path. Let's stop at the beginning of the alley on the right-hand side.

2. The Museum Neighbourhood

The building of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is situated in the Muranów District of Warsaw. It is located in the centre of a rectangular property surrounded by: Mordechaja Anielewicz Street behind our back, Karmelicka Street on our left, Józefa Lewartowskiego Street, straight ahead, and Ludwika Zamenhofa Street on the right. The building is a cuboid and its elevations run parallel to the above-mentioned streets.

The plot is intersected by Irena Sendler walking alley delineated along the Museum's facade parallel to Zamenhofa Street. The main entrance is located at that alley while the side entrance at Anielewicz Street.

Between the Museum and Zamenhofa Street, there is a paved plot. The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes unveiled in 1948 is located there. A carefully designed square spreads along the sides of the plot. Two monuments are located in its part facing Anielewicz Street: the first one is the memorial tablet from 1946 and the second one - the Jan Karski bench. Jan Karski was an emissary of the authorities of the Polish Underground State and was one of the first people to inform the Allies of the tragic situation of the Jewish population in the occupied Poland. Eight blocks of the Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle running up to the Umschlagplatz were also put up in the square and on the plot. The Route commemorates places, events and people connected with the history of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The area between the Museum and Karmelicka Street is occupied by a local community park with an outdoor fitness facility at Anielewicz Street. In the centre of the park, there is a small hill at the glazed wall of the Museum. A tall, wide-stretching linden is growing there. In the park, at the junction of Karmelicka and Lewartowskiego Streets, a square dedicated to German Chancellor, Willy Brandt,

was delineated. A monument commemorating the 1970 ceremony of laying wreath by the Chancellor at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes is located in the square.

A paved car park surrounded with a lawn adjoins the Museum at Anielewicza Street.

3. The Location of the Museum - Historical Background

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is located in the area of the former barracks of the Crown Artillery built at the end of the 18th century. This part of Warsaw was situated in the heart of the Northern District, in which Jews were settling down. Under the Tsarist rule, the barracks were dubbed the Volhynian Barracks due to the Volhynian Infantry Regiment which stationed there. In the second half of the 19th century, a military jail was located there.

At the beginning of the 20th century, it was a crowded housing district with a large number of shops, workshops and warehouses. The main commercial passage of the district and one of the major communication routes of Warsaw was Nalewki Street running north of the Arsenal.

In November 1940, this part of the city was surrounded by the walls of the ghetto. The former military barracks situated at the junction of Zamenhofa and Gęsia Streets became the central ghetto jail dubbed "Gęsiówka".

In summer 1942, the Nazis began a mass extermination of the Warsaw Jews. As a result of a huge deportation, about eighty percent of the Ghetto inhabitants were deported and murdered at the Treblinka death camp. Germans liquidated then the so-called small ghetto and the headquarters of the Warsaw Judenrat was moved from the Main Building of the Jewish Community at 26/28 Grzybowska Street to the building of the military barracks.

In spring 1943, the Uprising fighting was going on in the northern part of the Ghetto. Then, the military barracks had been partially devoured by flames.

After putting down the Uprising, the Nazis decided to totally destroy the Ghetto. They subsequently set the houses in its central and northern parts on fire and blew them up. The rubble covering a significant area of the Ghetto was several metres high. On the burnt out squares along Gęsia Street from the military barracks up to Okopowa Street, Germans had erected barracks and set up a concentration camp Gęsiówka II. They detained several thousand Jews from various parts of Europe in the camp. Their principal task was to demolish the destroyed houses and prepare the Ghetto area for a new urban development. On the fifth day of the Warsaw Uprising, the camp was liberated by the Home Army company "Giewont" of the scouts battalion "Zośka".

Almost nothing has been preserved from the pre-war housing area of the ghetto apart from several buildings, including St. Augustine's Church on Nowolipki Street. After the war, Bohdan Lachert designed a residential district Muranów Południowy in the spirit of modernism. The buildings were to

have a modest ornamentation and their forms were to be best adapted to the needs of new residents. In accordance with the designer's conception, the buildings were constructed of the rubble concrete that is the aggregate of which were ground bricks and other remnants of the destroyed ghetto. The houses were erected on the so-called rubble escarpment. Muranów was meant to be a district-monument constructed from rubble and on rubble, a symbol of the absence of the Warsaw Jews and the memory of them. The Muranów II (at Andersa Street) and Prezydenckie (at the junction of today's Andersa, Anielewicza and Świętojerska Streets) Housing Estates were designed by other architects. They were built after the rubble had been removed. The burnt-out walls of the military barracks were demolished in 1965 and a park was organised in the area thus regained.

Only a part of the pre-war network of streets and their names have been preserved. The north-eastern corner of the Museum is situated on the spot where once Zamenhofa Street was running. A part of the Core Exhibition coincides with the former axis of that street, namely the "In the Jewish Street" Gallery presenting the pre-war times.

4. Irena Sendler Alley

The alley is seven metres wide and one hundred and seventy five metres long. Its first - fifty metres long - fragment runs between the parking lot on the left and the square on the right.

On the lawn, on the left-hand side, there is a post with a plate reading "Irena Sendler Alley" and beside it - a low concrete wall in the shape of the letter "L" with the inscription: "The Museum of the History of Polish Jews".

Along the alley, on its left-hand side, five rowan trees are growing at a distance of six metres each. Between the third and the fifth tree, metal bicycle parking racks have been put up. Behind them, there is a high, cuboidal poster pillar.

On the right-hand side of the alley, there is a foot wide stone street gutter. Along the gutter, there are seven street lamps situated at a distance of seven metres each. At the fourth lamp, on the left-hand side, the gutter bypasses a rectangular cover of a drain. Let's go over there and stop.

There is a glass board in a metal frame on the lawn between the fourth and the fifth street lamp. The board reads: "Irena Sendlerowa (1910-2008) - the Honorary Citizen of the Capital City of Warsaw, the Honorary Citizen of the State of Israel, a detainee of the Pawiak Prison, the Righteous Among the Nations, a patron of numerous schools in Poland and abroad. As an employee of the Social Care Department of the Administration of the City of Warsaw, nominated in 1942 by the Council to Aid Jews "Żegota" the head of the children department contributed to save many".

Eight metres further, there is a rectangular drain grate. Let's go over there and stop.

On the left-hand side, there is a paved path. It is running between the parking lot and the Museum. On the left-hand side, it is confined by a stone wall. Four flag poles have been placed there with the flags of Poland, Warsaw and two flags with the Museum's logo. The path leads to the side entrance to the building. It is located in a lowering of the ground in the middle of the elevation. It serves the Museum's employees, participants of some of the workshops and disabled people. Two cashier's windows are located on the left-hand side of the entrance. You can buy tickets also in the Main Hall.

In the square, on the right-hand side of the drain, there is a small plot with two monuments. The Memorial Tablet of 1946 is located five metres away from the alley and the Jan Karski Bench - eight metres further.

We are ten metres away from the end of the first fragment of Irena Sendler Alley where the square and the gutter end and a paved lot begins. Let's go over there and stop.

5. The Plot in Front of the Museum

The seventy metres long section of the alley runs along the Museum's facade. It is separated from the paved plot by a long, narrow drain grate. It begins twenty centimetres to the right of the gutter.

On the left-hand side, fifteen metres away, there is the main entrance to the Museum.

Forty five metres across the plot to the right, there is the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes unveiled in 1948. It is located along Zamenhofa Street opposite the Museum's facade.

Half way to the Monument, on the right hand-side, a high pyramidal oak is growing. The characteristic feature of this species are branches growing from the tree trunk low above the ground. It is the Tree of the Joint Memory of Poles and Jews planted in 1988 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It commemorated Jews murdered by the Nazis in the years 1939-1945 and Poles who died while providing aid to Jews. On the right-hand side of the tree, there are two blocks of the Memorial Route of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle. One of the blocks has been devoted to Żegota and another one to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Let us approach the wide pedestal of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes.

6. The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes

Natan Rapaport, a Warsaw-born sculptor was commissioned by the Committee for the Erection of New Monument to the Ghetto Heroes to make a design of the project. The monument was unveiled on 19 April 1948, on the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The stone pedestal of the monument is thirty metres wide, fifteen metres long and seventy centimetres high. In the middle of its longer side located at the closest vicinity of the Museum, there are five wide steps. Let us stop here.

On the sides of the steps, there are two menorahs i.e., seven-branched lampstands.

A wide, rectangular, stone slab is on top of the pedestal and in the centre of it there is another slightly smaller slab. A high, stone, prism-like block emerges from the slabs with a rectangular base slightly narrowing upwards. Its base is nine metres wide and three metres long, and it is eight metres high. At the front and at the back, it is ornamented with sculptures.

The pedestal and the block are covered with rectangular plates made of a thickly-cut, grey labradorite. This stone comes from Sweden. It was commissioned in 1942 by Albert Speer, a minister of the Third Reich as a material for monuments to Hitler's victory. After the war, it was re-purchased by Jewish organisations.

Let us climb the steps up to the pedestal and stop facing the monument.

The central part of the monument is a bronze sculpture titled "Struggle", placed in the middle of the front wall. It covers one third of its width and two thirds of its height. It is supported on the put forward plinth. The sculpture depicts seven Jewish insurgents. Their figures are twice as tall as an average man and they look like if emerging out of the monument's block. In the middle of the group, there is a grown up man in trousers torn on the left knee and a cloak put on his naked body. He is looking ahead. He is holding a hand granade in his left hand. His right wrist is bandaged. On the right-hand side of the man, a short-haired girl in a skirt is standing on the pedestal. She has her head turned right. She presses a rifle to her breast with both of her hands. Below the girl, there is a naked torso of a young man lying on a rock. His left, bent arm is reclining on the stone and he rests his forehead on it. His right hand is numbly hanging from the stone. In the left bottom corner of the sculpture, an older bearded man with a moustache is kneeling on his one knee. His naked torso is visible from under his torn shirt with a torn-away sleeve. He looks up and has his head turned right. He placed his both hands on a large stone. At his feet, there is a knobby stick. A young man in an undershirt is standing over the kneeling man with his head turned left. He is holding a dagger in his right hand. There is a young woman with a wind-blown hair and bare breasts above the young man. She rose her right hand up to her forehead. She is carrying an infant on her left arm. The group is surrounded by flames symbolising the Ghetto set afire by Germans. The sculpture is supported by a two level plinth. On the three front plates of the upper level, an inscription in Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew has been engraved reading: "The Jewish nation to its fighters and martyrs."

The rear wall of the monument is ornamented with a stone relief of two and half metres by six metres, and its lower edge sticks two metres above the ground. The relief titled "The Death March" depicts twelve barefooted Jews led, one by one, by Germans. The column is headed by a man with a short beard and a moustache, a naked torso and a cap on his bent down head. He supports himself with his right hand on the knobbed stick. He has a mantle on his right arm and a sack on his left arm.

He is followed by two women with lowered, bare heads. The first woman is pregnant and she has put her hands around her belly. She embraces a several years old girl with her left arm. A bearded old man is walking in the middle of the group. He presses the scrolls of the Torah to his breast with his left hand. His head and back are covered with a mantle. He looks upwards and he has put his right arm up. The bent down woman who follows him is leading a few years old child in a short-sleeved shirt by her hand. The figure in the second row, partly visible behind the bent down woman has risen her face to the sky and covered it with her hands. The woman is followed by a young, bare headed man. He carries out a sleeping infant on his back. He covered himself and the infant with a mantle. He supports the child with his right hand protruding from under the cloth. He supports his right arm with his left arm. A woman that follows him has lowered her bare head down and covered her face with her hands. The last person in the column is touching the woman's back with her hand. She wears a mantle and has turned her head backwards. In the centre of the relief, over the raised arm of the old man, one can see a German helmet and bayonette. Other two helmets and bayonettes have been sculpted in the upper top corner of the relief. They signal the presence of the armed German soldiers surrounding the column of Jews.

Let us go down the steps and stop for a while at one of the two menorahs.

The one and a half metre bronze lampstand is placed on a square, stone slab. At its base, there is a massive, lathed shaft which broadly widens in its lower part and gradually narrows upwards. It is topped with a cup-like holder.

Massive, oval arms, three of them at each side, are running symmetrically from both sides of the shaft. They run in an arch and create three semi-circles one over the other. The lowest semi-circle is the largest, and these above it gradually diminish in size. The branches are topped with holders. All seven holders are located at the same height.

Two lions are sitting on the sides of the menorah and they support the branches of the lampstand. Their bellies are pressed to the lampstand's shaft. Their rear paws recline on the plinth and the front ones on the base of the lampstand. Muscles and ribs can be seen under the animals' skin. The tails of each of the lions encircle the rear paw placed at the edge of the plinth facing the Museum. The head of each of the animals is turned backwards and slightly lowered. The heads are surrounded by thick manes falling down the animal's backs. The menorahs are lit during ceremonies.

Let us turn our backs to the monument.

7. The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and the Museum

The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes faces the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The Museum has been built on the plan of a square with sixty seven metres long sides. The building's foundations are of the same size as the plot in front of the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes.

The building is twenty one metres high. It was so designed as not to overshadow the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and the nearby residential buildings. The simple silhouette of the Museum refers to the character of the post-war development of the Muranów District of Warsaw.

The building also reflects, in a way, the shape of the Monument. The Monument is a modest, stone block with a dynamic sculpture in the middle. The Museum is a cuboidal building, modest from the outside, with a complicated architecture inside and the hall surrounded by curvy-lined walls.

The museum devoted to the history of Polish Jews "enters into a dialogue" with the Monument standing opposite and facing it. The monument commemorates the murdered people and those who died fighting. The Museum complements the space of commemoration with a historical context and shows how Jews had been living throughout a thousand years of their history in Poland.

The designers tried to break the symmetry and did not place the main entrance to the Museum opposite the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes but closer to the building's corner at Anielewicz Street. Therefore, the Tree of the Common Memory of Poles and Jews is growing opposite the entrance.

Let us move forty metres ahead across the square, let's pass the drain grate and go six metres further across Irena Sendler Alley to approach the Museum's facade. Be careful since the building is surrounded by a one metre wide ground lowering filled with small stones.

8. The Museum's Elevation

The building has a "zig-zag elevation" on the outside. It is composed of plates of greenish glass fixed at an angle to the building's walls and alternating with the sheets of perforated, patinated copper. The glass panels of the sizes of forty five by one hundred and ninety centimetres are suspended vertically in eleven rows.

"The zig-zag elevation" covers nearly the entire external walls of the Museum, even the windows of the offices. The exceptions include huge glazings of the elevation - one facing Zamenhofa Street and another one Karmelicka Street as well as the glazed corner to the left of the main entrance, the glazed wall and terrace of the Museum's restaurant facing Lewartowskiego Street and a panorama window several metres above the side entrance.

The architects wanted the glass and copper elevations of the Museum - like surfaces of the lake calm waters - to make a contrast with the beige Muranów blocks of flats and to merge with the greenness of the park. On the other hand, the sand colour and ellipsoidal shape of the internal walls, partly visible from the outside through the glazings refer to deserts and gorges of Israel. The cool and moderate body of the building and soft and warm space of the Main Hall complement and underline each other.

The glass panels are densely covered with a white, repeatable ornament made by a screen printing method. The ornament is composed of multiplied Hebrew and Latin letters forming the word "Polin". The ornament has been designed by Klementyna Jankiewicz. In her design, she referred to the first Jewish settlers in Poland.

9. The Polin Legend

"Polin" means in Hebrew "you will find a place to rest here". It is also used as a name of Poland. Both these meanings are combined in the legend on the arrival of Jews in Poland.

It tells a story of Jews who - in the Middle Ages - fled from German lands to avoid persecution. They were fasting and implored God to save them from the hands of oppressors. Then, a piece of paper dropped from the sky with an instruction: "Go to Poland. You will find peace there." So, they began their journey eastward. When they heard chirping: "Po-lin! Po-lin" in the forests, they understood that birds wanted to tell them: "Take a rest here!" When they looked at the trees, it seemed to them that pages of the Gemarah - the book containing supplementary comments to the code of the customary law were attached to every branch. Then, they realised that they had reached Poland and found the place in which they could settle down and develop their spirituality and science. We quote the legend after Gershom Bader who described it in his book "Thirty Generations of Jews in Poland", published in Yiddish in 1927 in New York. The translation has been commissioned by the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute.

The Polin legend is referred to in many places at the Museum. Even the name of the Museum refers to it too. The Hebrew and Latin letters on the glass panels of the elevation are forming the word "Polin". Visitors learn the legend in the "Forest" Gallery, the first one they enter at the Core Exhibition. Also grey and green logotype of the Museum refers to that legend. It was designed by Przybor Zaniewski Ltd. Agency. It has a shape of a green letter "p" with the lower half of its leg in grey. The green part of the logotype resembles the Hebrew letter "pej". The intertwining "p" as "Poland" and "pej" as Polin form a simple geometrical sign clear both to people using the Latin alphabet and those using the Hebrew alphabet. It symbolises the Polish and Jewish histories intertwining for a thousand years and at the same time, refers to a rich offer and a modern, international character of the Museum.

10. The Main Entrance

On the left-hand side, we have an alcove of the facade and the main entrance to the Museum. The alcove is thirteen and a half metres wide. Three metres before the alcove, the grey pavement of the alley turns into a smooth, sandy coloured stone. Let us approach the left wall of that alcove.

The side walls of the alcove are the slightly bent inside, coarse, curve-lined walls in a sandy colour which surround a hall inside the building.

The alcove was created by moving a fragment of the facade eight metres inside the building. This withdrawn fragment of the wall has a shape of a rhomboid bent to the left and additionally widening at the bottom on the left-hand side. Its upper edge almost reaches the ceiling of the building. The contour of the alcove resembles the Hebrew letter “tav” which looks like a little “n” with left leg raised upwards to the outside. In his album “The Polish Alef-bet”, Konstanty Gebert placed the Museum under the “tav” letter with which such words as “toldot” (history), “teva” (Ark) and “tarbut” (culture) begin.

The withdrawn fragment of the elevation is fully glazed. The glass panels are embedded in a frame made of a black metal with green dots. The side edges of the frame match the curvy-lined walls and its middle has been divided into rectangles with horizontal and vertical battens. The doors of the main entrance are located in the bottom part of the glazing. Let us refrain for the time being from entering the Museum.

11. The Information Board at the Main Entrance

On the left wall of the alcove, one and a half metre away from its edge, on the height of sixty centimetres, a rectangular board of the black polished stone is suspended. Its sharp edges are protruding from the curvy-lined wall. Please watch your head when approaching the board.

An inscription has been cut on the stone reading: “Polin - Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Founders: the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Capital City of Warsaw and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland, the originator of the project. The building of the Museum was funded by the State Treasury and the Capital City of Warsaw in the years 2009-2012. The general designer: Arkkitehtitoimisto Lahdelma & Mahlamäki OY in cooperation with Kuryłowicz & Associates sp. z o.o. The substitute investor: The Board of the Urban Development of the Capital City of Warsaw. General constructor: Polimex-Mostostal SA. The Core Exhibition of the

Museum has been implemented and financed by the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland thanks to the support of benefactors.”

12. How the Museum Was Created

The idea of creating the Museum of the History of Polish Jews was conceived in 1993 in the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland. Then, the International Honorary Committee of the Museum was established. It was composed of outstanding personalities from many countries, including, among others, Jan Karski, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański and Zbigniew Brzeziński. In 1995, the supporting associations and committees were established in the United States, Israel, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Austria, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia and Poland. Thanks to such a great support it was possible to collect donations from many private people and foundations from all over the world. In 1998, the patronage over the project of the Museum was assumed by President Aleksander Kwaśniewski. Also the works on documenting the Polish Judaic artefacts had commenced. In the years 1999–2000, the draft of the Core Exhibition’s design had been developed. In 2001, Pope John Paul II welcomed the idea of the Museum. In the years 2000–2003, the collecting of funds and works on the programme of the Core Exhibition were underway.

On 25 January 2005, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, the Mayor of the Capital City of Warsaw and the President of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland concluded the agreement establishing the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. It is the first private and public institution of this kind in Poland created by the government, local authorities and non-government organisation. Pursuant to that tri-lateral agreement, the public side financed the erection of the Museum’s building. Its cost amounted to eighty million zlotys. In a notary deed, the Capital City of Warsaw granted the JHI Association the right of perpetual usufruct of land for the construction of the Museum opposite the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. The JHI Association was responsible for financing and creating the Core Exhibition worth forty million zlotys.

In February 2005, an international architectural contest was called for a design of the Museum’s building. The task of the participants of the contest was to adapt the architecture of the building to the needs of the already designed Core Exhibition. One of the contest requirements was to create a relation between the building and the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes.

Two hundred forty five works from thirty six countries were submitted. The contest was adjudicated in June 2005. The winners were architects from Finland: Ilmari Lahdelma and Rainer Mahlamäki. Then, the works on construction and technical documentation began.

On 26 June 2007, the official ceremony of laying the foundation act for the Museum was held. In 2008, the tender for constructing the Museum was adjudicated. The construction works had been carried out in the years 2009–2013. The Museum launched its activities on 19 April 2013, on the seventieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

13. The Mezuzah

Let us approach the opposite, right wall of the alcove. Twenty centimetres from its right edge and one hundred and fifty centimetres above the pavement the mezuzah has been affixed. It is the only protruding element on this wall. It can be touched. One has to take care, however, not to damage the container's safety device on the bottom of a brick since it will activate the alarm.

The mezuzah for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews was made of a half of an orange brick extracted from the no longer existing tenement house at the former 10/12 Nalewki Street. In the top right corner, the "shin" bent to the right was cut on the surface of the brick. A groove was made alongside the sectioned brick. The protection cover of stainless steel was fixed in the groove. On 15 April 2013, Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland placed a glass, hermetically closed container with the parchment in it and unveiled the mezuzah.

The word "mezuzah" means in Hebrew a door frame. The mezuzah is a flat, ornamented case, usually metal or wooden, suspended on the right, external door frame and directed towards the entrance. A "klaf" that is a scroll of parchment with a fragment of the Book of the Repeated Law in Hebrew - the Shema Israel prayer: "Hear O Israel!" is inserted into the mezuzah. "Hashem the Lord our God, Hashem the Lord is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them thoroughly to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for a reminder between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates." While entering the house or leaving it, Jews touch the mezuzah with their fingers to express their respect for the symbol of God's presence.

Every mezuzah is ornamented with the Hebrew letter "shin". It resembles the Latin letter "w". "Shin" is a reference to the biblical name of God - "El Shaddai" (Almighty) being also an acronym of the Hebrew expression "Guardian of the Doors of Israel".

Ninety works had been submitted to the international contest for a mezuzah design for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The authors of the winning design are: Andrzej Bulanda, an architect and his son, Maciej Bulanda, a historian. They have been inspired by the words of a Jewish historian,

Hilel Seidman who, looking at the sea of the ruins of the ghetto said: “A friend of mine who emigrated to America (Benjamin Wolf Hendeles) wrote to me before World War II: ‘There are such minutes, particularly during the Shabbat and holidays when I would like to kiss the pavement of the Nalewki Street.’ And I recall what Albert Londres, the author of ‘Le Juif errant est arrivé’ once told me: ‘When prophet Elisha will be about to announce the arrival of the Messiah, where will he stand to blow the ram horn?’ And he answered: ‘Just here, at the junction of Gęsia and Nalewki Streets. Because it is here where there is the greatest concentration of the Jewish masses in the world, of Jewish power and *idyszkejt*. [...] Of all Jewish communities the largest and the most traditional is in Poland, in Warsaw, and in Warsaw at this here junction of Nalewki and Gęsia Streets. It turns out that it is here and nowhere else where there is the very Jewish centre of the world.” The quotation comes from Hilel Seidman’s book “Togbuch fun warszewer geto” published in 1947 in Buenos Aires. The translation by Anna Ciałowicz was taken from the www.warsze.org.pl website.

This centre of the Jewish world was in the middle of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes are situated just two hundred and seventy metres away from that place. Therefore, the authors of the design decided to extract the brick from the Nalewki ground which Seidman’s friend “pushed” to America wanted to kiss. A brick from Nalewki Street, that silent witness to history reminds us of the history of this sacred place and underlines the continuity of the Jewish culture and tradition in Warsaw.

14. The Vestibule and the Slopy Bridge

Let us make a turn so that we will have the mezuzah on our right-hand side. In front of us we have three doors of the main entrance. They cover almost the entire width of the alcove. In the middle, there are sliding doors and at the sides - the rotating doors. The sliding doors are opened by the security guards, for example for people in invalid carts. The rotating doors do not rotate automatically, they have to be pushed.

Let us enter the vestibule through the rotating right doors and stop at their left-hand side.

The vestibule is a very high, bright space. It is eleven metres long and twelve and a half metres wide at the doors. It narrows by two metres inside the building. The side, wavy walls of the vestibule are tilted towards each other and meet high under the ceiling.

On the left-hand side of the vestibule, there are glass, pendular entrance doors. Two check in gates are located three metres ahead of us with metal detectors and on the right-hand side, there is an X-ray baggage conveyor.

Let us place our possessions on the conveyor and cross the gate.

After collecting our luggage, let us move five metres forward straight to the glass balustrade located at our waist's height. Let us turn to the right.

Bigger bags and knapsacks have to be left at the left luggage office. It is located at a slight angle to the left, behind the left wall of the vestibule.

The glass balustrades - the one at which we are standing and another one placed symmetrically to it on the left-hand side of the vestibule - are protecting the edges of the bridge. It starts in the middle of the vestibule's width and runs opposite the sliding doors. The bridge is three metres wide and eighteen metres long. It leads slightly upward to the main hall.

Under the bridge, there is the first gallery of the Core Exhibition titled "Forest". Above the bridge, on the Plus One level, there is another bridge, the crosswise Bridge of Memory.

Let us go along the balustrade turning right and enter the main hall through the bridge. At the end of the slope, the balustrade turns right again. Let us stop here.

15. The Main Hall

At both sides of the Main Hall, there are twenty metres high, irregularly angled walls. They meet somewhere at the top, at the place invisible from the Hall. We have an impression that we are standing in the middle of a high, bright canyon with softly waved walls in a sandy colour.

The vestibule and the glazed main entrance are behind us.

On the left, there is a corridor leading to the Place of the Family Education, lifts for employees, the spiral staircase and toilets.

On the left-hand side, at a certain angle, a long counter begins. There are cash desks and the Information Desk. Ten metres further, the counter turns left and moves away from the Hall. Next seven metres further, it disappears behind a curvy-lined wall. The cloakroom has been located there.

At the curvy-lined wall obscuring the cloakroom from the Hall's side, there are steep stairs leading down to the Core Exhibition. They are separated from the Hall by a balustrade of glass plates.

In front of us, there is the glazing of the elevation facing the local community park at Karmelicka Street. It is the biggest suspended glass wall in Poland. It is sixteen metres high. Its shape resembles the crown of a widespread tree - similar to that of the linden visible behind the glass which grows on a slope beside the Museum. From the outside, the glass is toughened and stabilised with a metal construction and glass panels perpendicular to the glazing.

The curvy-lined wall on the right-hand side of the Hall bends sharply over it. In case we would like to approach it, we should take care of our heads. On our right-hand side, there is a passage leading to the lounge.

The space between the walls of the Hall is like a crack running along the entire body of the building. The architect Rainer Mahlamäki compared the walls of the Hall to the waters of the Red Sea which parted to let Moses pass when he was leading Israelites away from Egypt.

The Hall symbolises also the great rift in the history of Polish Jews caused by the Holocaust. On one side, the Hall faces the plot dedicated to the memory of Jewish fighters and on the other side, it leads to the local community park. It links two worlds - the world of death and the world of life.

16. The Museum Layout

The Main Hall is the place which enables getting oriented what the layout of the Museum is. It is a six-storey building: two underground floors and four storeys over the ground.

On the Minus Two level, there is the Core Exhibition, on the Minus One level - the side entrance and on the Zero level - the main entrance.

The Hall divides the entire height of the building into two parts.

On the left-hand side, on Zero and Plus One levels, there are educational and workshop rooms, and on the right-hand side - the exhibition and screening rooms as well as the Auditorium, catering utility rooms and the commercial space. However, the layout of the storeys is not symmetrical and the Plus One level on the left -hand side is not equivalent to Plus One level on the right-hand side.

In the left part of the building, on Plus Two and Plus Three levels, there are offices.

Let us move five metres to the right, up to the passage in the curvy-lined wall. Let us touch the wall to feel its texture and grooves.

17. The Curvy-Lined Walls

The left curvy-line wall is almost parallel to Anielewicza Street. The right one is longer - it measures as much as eighty metres. It runs almost parallel to the left wall from the main entrance through the greater part of the Hall. Only before the glazing on the side of the local community park, it sharply turns right and twenty metres further it reaches the elevation.

The two walls flexible in many elements are not a pure decoration. These are the only curvy-lined load-bearing walls of this size in Europe which support ceilings and partly the roof. Their internal construction is composed of pipes of stainless steel to which bent hardboards and reinforcing mesh were attached. Then, the injection of the concrete mix was manually carried out. The external layer of the concrete was dyed in a sandy colour.

The coarse walls of the Hall are covered with a dense net of groovies since it is impossible to inject concrete into large spaces at one time. The groovies also prevent cracking of the all the time working walls.

In each wall, there is a narrow, long window facing the Hall on the Plus One level. The window in the left wall provides light to the office space while the one in the right wall to the foyer in front of the Auditorium.

The curvy-lined walls also mark the border between the stone floor in the high, bright Hall and the oil parquet in the low, darker rooms on the right and left-hand sides of the Hall.

Let us stop in the passage leading to the lounge at the right turning towards the curvy-lined wall.

On the right, we have a twenty seven metres long corridor. On the right-hand side, it is limited by a curvy-lined wall. On the left-hand side, there are: entrances to two lifts, the lower stairs, the Museum store and the Information Centre. The lower stairs are leading from the level of the Core Exhibition to the Zero level.

Almost straight ahead, slightly to the right-hand side, there are: the side wall of the lifts at a distance of five metres, upper stairs at a distance of eleven metres and the bridge at a distance of seventeen metres. The upper stairs are leading to the Plus One level where there are: the Auditorium, a small room of temporary exhibitions and two screening rooms. The bridge links the lounge with the big room of temporary exhibitions.

Further, on the left hand side, there is the catering space of the Museum.

Closer to us, on the left-hand side, there is the lounge.

18. The Lounge

It is a low, artificially lit space of irregular shape and the size of, more or less, twenty by twenty metres. On the left-hand side, it is surrounded by the curvy-lined wall forming an arch.

The main element of the lounge is the reconstructed roof of the Gwoździec Synagogue. The roof is protruding through a square opening in the floor which has been protected with glass panels. They are nine metres wide and extend from the floor to the lounge ceiling. The glass, half a metre wide desktop was affixed at an angle around them at the height of eighty centimetres. The texts and photographs on the desktop depict the history of wooden synagogues in the old Republic of Poland.

Let us move twelve metres forward, at a slight angle to the left from the desktop, so that we are facing the desktop and have the Main Hall on our left-hand side.

19. The Replica of the Roof of the Gwoździec Synagogue

Laura and Rick Brown from the American non-government organisation Handhouse Studio initiated the educational project “Gwoździec Re!construction”, co-financed by Ms Irene Pletka from Australia. The project aimed at recreating the wooden roof and the ceiling of the cupola ornamented with polychrome of the no longer existing synagogue in Gwoździec erected in the middle of the 17th century and rebuilt in the 18th century. Collection and development of the documentation concerning the synagogue had lasted for almost eight years. In 2011 and 2012, the Handhouse Studio, the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews organised workshops at historical synagogues in eight Polish cities. The joiner’s and painter’s works had been done by young volunteers mostly from Poland, the USA, France, Germany and Israel under the guidance of the international team of historians, architects and artists. They used traditional tools and techniques applied several hundred years earlier.

At the beginning of 2013, the replica of the synagogue’s roof was installed at the Museum. The upper part of the tall, gabled roof extends over the level of the lounge. Only one fourth of its surface has been covered with shingles. Due to it, the roof construction, including twelve rafters is revealed. The skeleton of the roof is made of a raw wood marked with cracks and traces of the use of an axe.

The roof covers the replica of the wooden vault of the synagogue. It has a pointed top like Turkish tents. At the bottom, it is ornamented with rich paintings: the signs of the Zodiak, animals, flowers, fruit and Hebrew inscriptions. They can be admired from the level of the Core Exhibition in the “Shtetl” Gallery.

Let us turn right and move along the desktop to its corner and stop there.

20. The Catering Section

On the left-hand side, behind the replica of the roof of the synagogue, the chairs of the cafe have been placed.

Behind them, there are two passages in the curvy-lined wall. They lead from the lounge to the glazed elevation facing the local community park.

To the left, there is a self-serving restaurant “Besamim” serving dishes of the Jewish cuisine. The front wall of the restaurant is nine metres long and is made of glass panels. You have to be careful since they open inside and outside thus creating one to four entrances.

In the corner of the lounge, between the curvy-lined wall and the wall of the restaurant, there are toilets. They are accessible both from the lounge and the restaurant.

On the right from the restaurant, there is a cafe. It is a rectangular window opening where a counter has been placed. The cafe offers kosher dishes, drinks and desserts which you can consume at one of the cafe tables.

21. The Bridge at the Lounge

On the right, there is a concrete bridge running from the lounge to the big room of temporary exhibitions. It is secured with glass balustrades at the sides. Let us move six metres to the right and stop at the bridge.

It is eleven metres long and two and a half metres wide. It has a parquet floor.

Over and under the bridge, there is an open space from Minus Two level up to the ceiling.

On the left-hand side, the names of the benefactors who contributed to the establishment of the Museum have been written on the lighted wall five storeys high.

On the right-hand side, there are two glazed panels of the lift shafts and a staircase.

The bridge reaches the automatically sliding glass doors of the big room of temporary exhibitions. Let us enter it and hand out our ticket to a Museum employee.

22. The Big Room of Temporary Exhibitions at the Zero Level

The room measures six metres by thirty three metres. The doors through which we have just passed are located on the shorter wall in its right corner. The room is quite high. There is one window just opposite the doors facing the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. On the left-hand side, there are eight pillars in two rows. The setting of the interior, including the layout of cases and partition walls, changes according to the exposition.

At an angle to the left, thirteen metres away from the entrance, there are spiral stairs with two small platforms. They lead to the rear doors of the small room of temporary exhibitions on the Plus One level. Let it go up the stairs.

23. The Small Room of Temporary Exhibitions on Plus One Level

The rear, sliding doors of this room are open. Let us go inside and stop for a while.

The small room of temporary exhibitions is a space of nine metres wide and thirteen metres long. On the left-hand side, there are two pillars. In the front wall, just ahead of us, at the level of our waists, there is a longitudinal niche and a horizontal window in it. In case of some exhibitions, the window is blackened. On the right-hand side of the window, there are front doors of the room leading to the Foyer.

The narration of the exhibition displayed in the big room downstairs is continued here or an independent exhibition is on display.

24. The Collections of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews

The POLIN Museum's offer is not limited to temporary exhibitions and the Core Exhibition but it includes diversified cultural and educational activities. It also has a rich and diversified collection of over three thousand exhibits connected with the Jewish heritage. It includes works of art, from drawings by Jan Piotr Norblin from the 18th century up to works by contemporary artists like Ewa Kuryluk, Ryszard Horowitz and Tadeusz Rolke. The collection of artistic craftsmanship includes, first of all, artefacts from synagogues like, for example, Hannukah lamps and cups with two handles for ritual washing of hands. The most numerous exhibits include historical artefacts like photographs, postcards, prints, personal and historical documents, gramophone records and utilitarian items like a needle set and wedding cap which are often connected with unusual, moving histories of their donors. The Museum has also a rich collection of books and, among others, historical editions of the Talmud, the 19th century prayer books or pre-war editions of the classical writers of the Polish literature. Some of the exhibits are displayed at the Core Exhibition and some are used during temporary exhibitions or other undertakings organised by the Museum.

The museum items have been acquired by purchase or from donors within the Programmes of Collecting Memorabilia in Poland and Israel and during archaeological excavations. Archaeologists found lumps of carbonised announcements issued by the Judenrat in summer 1942 as well as cutlery, glass and metal objects, fragments of china, door locks and buttons.

Information on items from the Museum's collection have been made available in the online catalogue called the Judaica Central Database [Centralna Baza Judaików].

Let us leave the room of temporary exhibitions and enter the Foyer and stop here.

25. The Foyer

The Foyer is a low, irregular corridor about sixty metres long. Its plan resembles the shape of big letter "B". There is a straight wall behind our backs and on the opposite side - the curvy-lined wall creating loops of the letter "B".

A little further, on the left-hand side, the corridor ends with a bright, glazed space opening the view upon the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. One of its walls consists exclusively of glass panels covering the entire building. Therefore, the conditions here are similar to those outside. It is the place where sometimes, particularly in spring and summer, presentations and workshops are held.

Two small screening rooms adjoin the straight wall of the Foyer as well as the small room of temporary exhibitions (behind us), technical room, stairs leading down, two glass panels, toilets, the Auditorium and the cloakroom.

Opposite the stairs, in the narrowing of the corridor, there is the entrance to the Bridge of Memory.

In the middle of the corridor's length, there are pillars placed every nine metres.

The Foyer in front of the Auditorium lights a narrow, long, horizontal window in the curvy-lined wall. It faces the Main Hall.

Let us move nine metres ahead from the doors of the small room of temporary exhibitions to the curvy-lined wall. Then, let us move right along the wall as far as to the concrete door frame of the entrance to the bridge. Let us turn left to the bridge and stop on the bridge.

26. The Bridge of Memory on the Plus One level

The bridge which links both curvy-lined walls is nine metres long and two metres wide. Its opposite end is closed by the doors leading to the offices. According to the original conception of the architect, the bridge and balustrades were to be made of glass but due to security reasons they have been made of white painted concrete. The bridge is paved with parquet.

On the left from the bridge, there is a view of the vestibule and glazing of the main entrance as well as the Tree of the Common Memory of Poles and Jews. Below, there is a slopy bridge and under the bridge - the "Forest" Gallery. On the right-hand side, there is the Main Hall which ends with the glazing facing the local community park.

The bridges linking spaces of the Museum in several places refer to the idea of building bridges in space and time - linking times, histories, people and continents.

Let us leave the bridge and stop on the left-hand side. Let us stop at the corner near the door frame.

At an angle to the left, fifteen metres away, there is a pillar. Two metres behind it to the right, there is the Auditorium. Let us go there.

27. The Auditorium

Behind the external doors of the Auditorium, there are internal doors and three metres further - broad stairs leading up. Let's go inside.

The staircase ends in the middle of the Auditorium's width in the passage running across the room between the eleventh and the twelfth rows of chairs. The passage leads to the left and to the right to the stairs placed along the side walls.

The Auditorium accommodates four hundred and seventy nine seats. Grey, folding chairs are arranged in twenty rows. On the bottom of the room, there is a stage with red curtains at the sides and a descending cinema screen. Copper, colour lighted screens have been affixed on the side walls. The angle of their positioning can be regulated which greatly improves the acoustics of the room. The Auditorium serves as a cinema and a concert, conference and theatrical hall.

Let's leave the Auditorium.

28. From Plus One Level to Zero Level

In order to return to the Zero level from the Foyer, we can use a lift or the stairs.

On the left of the exit from the Auditorium, there are two entrances to toilets - the first one at a distance of four metres and the other one of the next five metres. Three metres after the second entrance to the toilets, there are glazed doors of two lifts. Two buttons have been installed on the panel between the doors at a waist height. The lower one is used when you want to go down, and the upper one when you want to go up. In order to get to the Zero level you have to press the third button from the top. The buttons are marked with Braille alphabet. Using the lift we will get out in the corridor leading to the Resource Centre.

On the Plus One level, to the left behind the lifts, there are triple speed stairs turning left. At the end of them, there is a platform with its sides four metres long. Opposite the stairs, there is a rear, glass wall of the lift shaft. Let's come up to it and move along it to the right and then to the left until we enter the corridor leading to the Resource Centre.

The corridor to the left of the lift doors is twenty seven metres long. On its left-hand side, just behind the lifts, there are the stairs leading to the Core Exhibition. Further on, there are the Museum store and the Information Centre. Their front walls are made of glass, opening panes. On the right-hand side the corridor ends with a curvy-lined wall.

In the middle of the corridor's width, there are pillars every ten metres; one at the beginning of the corridor, the second one between the stairs and the store, the third one between the store and the Resource Centre, the fourth one at the end of the corridor just after the entrance to the Centre.

Let's enter the Resource Centre.

29. The Resource Centre

It is a room about eight metres wide and eleven metres long with modern furniture in the white colour. The front doors are situated at the right-hand side wall. Behind them, there is an electronic check gate.

On the left, there is a multimedia stand. It enables looking through the topical presentations on the history of Polish Jews. On the left-hand side of its desktop, there is the card reader and on its right-hand side - a dial. On both sides of the panel, the white plastic strips are running upwards like spread wings. They form a screen to display the selected presentation. The card on which the presentation has been recorded is available at the low cabinet with six drawers which is situated on the left-hand side of the desktop.

The middle of the room is encircled with three partitions forming the letter “U” with its outlet on the right-hand side. Between the partitions, there is a reading room for visitors. There is a chair there and the furniture inspired by forms of old file cases with alphabetically marked drawers.

Behind the left partition, there are computer stations. They provide access to the rich sources of information on the history of the Jewish communities all over the world, among others, to the largest in the world collection of oral history interviews - the Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archive of the University of Southern California and to the MyHeritage database used for genealogical quests. The Centre also provides access to the websites prepared by the POLIN Museum such as the Polish Righteous – Recalling Forgotten History and the Virtual Shtetl.

Deep inside the room, there is a bookshelf covering the entire wall. The shelves contain a rich, specialist collection of books and in the drawers - the historical maps of Poland.

In the right part of the room, there are three tables for four persons each.

The interior setting enables individual and workshop works as well as casual talks with the qualified personnel as well as a convenient use of all the content of the Centre.

The personnel of the Centre helps visitors to obtain information on the history of the Jewish community in Poland, the Museum collections and location of the materials unavailable on the spot. It is possible to expand here one’s knowledge of the Core Exhibition getting acquainted with the tactile graphic reproductions of the selected exhibits displayed at the Core Exhibition. You have to ask the personnel of the Centre to make them accessible. The offer includes also assistance at genealogical research.

30. The Family Education Centre

Let’s leave the Resource Centre and turn right. Paying attention to pillars, let’s cover the distance of twenty seven metres. Let us turn left to the passage in the curvy-lined wall.

Let’s cross the hall and stop at the wall located on our left-hand side.

There is a short corridor straight ahead of us. On its left-hand side, there is a side four-metre high wall of the staff lift and on its right-hand side - the counter of the Information Desk. There is a pillar near the corner of the lift. Let's approach it and turn left.

In front of us, there is a nine metres long corridor. On its left-hand side, there are: the entrance to the staff lift and the spiral staircase which leads up to the Education Centre and down to the vestibule of the side entrance of the Museum. On the right-hand side of the corridor, there is a partition obscuring the toilet doors. At the end of the corridor, there are doors of the Family Education Centre. Let's approach them turning right.

To the right of the doors, there is a glazed wall. This wall is a shorter side of the room measuring ten by thirty metres. In the right corner of the room, at the entrance and in the left corner of the room, the office area has been marked.

The corner inside the room at its right hand-side is glazed. It is composed of two triangle, metal frames which meet along the corner edge of the building. The surfaces of the triangles have been irregularly divided by vertical and horizontal battens painted black with green dots. From the corner, one can see the square with the 1946 Memorial Tablet dedicated to the Ghetto Heroes.

The Family Education Centre is the venue of individual and group educational and artistic workshops for children as well as paid for activities. The room can also be rented, for instance, for a birthday party. Children can come with their guardians or be left under care of the Museum staff.

Let us return from the Family Education Centre via the corridor to the pillar. Then, let's turn right and stop just behind the pillar. Two storeys below us, there is the Core Exhibition.

31. Information on the Core Exhibition

The central element of the Museum is the Core Exhibition devoted to a thousand-year history of Polish Jews. Its conception has been developed by an international team of over one hundred and twenty historians and museum experts headed by Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

The exhibition is a story of Jews who inhabited Poland, their heritage and its importance for Poland and the world. This is a journey - from the Middle Ages to modern times - throughout eight galleries. The Exhibition's creators wanted to present historical events from the perspective of their participants. Hence, numerous quotations from chronicles and diaries provided in original, for instance, in Arabic, Latin or Russian as well as their translations into Polish and English. They are supplemented with longer comments in Polish and English as well as historical items, documents, replicas, models, drawings and materials displayed at the multimedia posts.

You can expand your knowledge using the content of the Resource Centre and participating in educational projects.

The graphic design of the Exhibition was created by the Event Communications company. Its implementation was assigned to Nizio Design company.

If we wish to tour the Core Exhibition let's move four metres forward to the left and come up to the Information Desk. We will obtain information on the Core Exhibition and ticket purchase there. We can also borrow an audio-guide there with the recorded audio-description of the Core Exhibition. The duration of the recording is one hundred and fifty minutes.

32. Exit from the Museum

Moving away from the pillar, let's go nine metres straight ahead along the right wall and then, along the glass balustrade of the bridge. Turn right onto the slopy bridge and go down to the vestibule. The pendular entrance doors are located three metres from the end of the bridge at an angle to the right and the rotating doors - seven metres further in the same direction.

Thank you for your visit and do come again!

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