

Contemporary Jewish Museum

San Francisco, USA

In 1994, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency invited The Contemporary Jewish Museum to develop the historic Jessie Street Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) Power Substation, a 1907 landmark designed by architect Willis Polk. The museum selected architect Daniel Libeskind to design its new home, which was to be an adaptive reuse of the original substation. In his design Libeskind responded to The Museum's mission to be a lively center that fosters community among people of diverse backgrounds through shared experiences with the arts by focusing on the celebratory nature of the Jewish experience. The Museum's building embodies a number of symbolic references to Jewish concepts. Libeskind was notably inspired by the Hebrew phrase L'Chaim (To Life), because of its connection to the role the substation played in restoring energy to the city after the 1906 earthquake and the Museum's mission to be a lively center for engaging audiences with Jewish culture. To extend the old Jessie Street Power Substation beyond its original walls, Libeskind created a design based on the two Hebrew letters that spell the word life, the chet and the yud. From the outside, the extension is remarkable for its unique shape, as well as its skin: a vibrant blue consisting of over 3,000 luminous blue stainless steel panels,

which change colour depending on the time of day, weather, or one's vantage point, creating a dynamic, "living" surface. Several theories abound about why blue was chosen, but Libeskind leaves it open to interpretation. Some think that blue was chosen because it connects to the idea of life, water as a life source, and is often a colour associated with Judaism. The blue colour is achieved through a procedure called interference-coating. The stainless steel was treated with a chemical bath to create a blue colour that will not fade. This process involves shooting electricity through the stainless steel in a bath of a certain chemical mix, which causes the stainless steel to oxidize. Since there are no dyes or pigments to decay, the color will never fade. This building was the first to feature this unique cross-hatching surface finish, which helps to diffuse and soften the reflection of light off the blue stainless steel.

Environment:	Marine-urban
Materials:	Blue coloured stainless steel
Architect:	Daniel Libeskind
More information:	thecjm.org



