



Groundbreaking Ceremony for the new House of Sweden in Washington D.C.

Speech by Peter Ohrstedt, chief architect, Swedish National Property Board

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Constructing a new embassy building is of course more about diplomacy and politics than just about architecture.

- But architecture is an international language that makes this building work as a Bridge between cultures, as a Symbol for Sweden and also basically as a Framework for the embassy's planned functions and activities.

Planning for-and later constructing-a Swedish building in the heart of a foreign country is indeed like constructing a bridge from two sides. Before you ever start the design work, you have to listen and learn a lot from all kinds of local expertise. During this process, we have always been met not only with respect but also enthusiasm and great support and help from federal and local authorities and from our neighbors. I want to thank all of you for your support on this side of the bridge. We have learned so much from all of you and we have tried to adapt and meet the requirements as a foundation for the bridge from our side.

Our partner in the project, Lano Armada Harbourside, will also literally construct the foundations. We have already exchanged many ideas on how to make this building become a reality through construction methods, installation works and choice of materials. We have found many similarities in our different experiences, but also many fields where we can learn a lot from each other how to construct buildings.

When completed, this building will continue to work as a bridge between American and Swedish Architecture and building design.

The design of the building, created by Swedish architects Gert Wingardh and Tomas Hansen, was chosen following a design competition for its strong symbolic character, among other criteria.

We had thorough discussions in the jury about the characteristics of Swedish architecture. One of the jury members was former Dean of the school of Architecture at Catholic University in D.C., Greg Hunt. With the help of Greg, the jury chose the Wingardh design that has an elegant and refined simplicity, uses glass and light wood in the facades and is shaped as a transparent glass box, as an adequate symbol for Sweden.

Finally, the building will serve as a framework and ambience for its primary functions as an embassy chancery, exhibition space and a conference centre. We have a long tradition in Sweden of paying strong attention to functionality and efficiency when designing buildings. The House of Sweden will be a complex machinery, well adapted to serve all kinds of practical needs for its users.

I hope this building will act as a bridge that enhances the exchange of ideas in architecture, design and construction between Sweden and the U.S.

I hope the building will also stand as a strong symbol for Sweden. A landmark in Washington, D.C. in the long row of important architecture along the Potomac.

And I hope it will serve as a well working framework for the embassy chancery and for thousands of events open to the public that will take place here in the future.

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