

**The SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM
REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR EXHIBITION DESIGN SERVICES
FOR A NEW PERMANENT COLLECTION EXHIBITION**

Introduction

The South Street Seaport Museum located in the South Street Seaport Historic District, as designated by the New York Landmarks Preservation Committee, was founded in 1967. Its mission is to tell the story of how New York City's great natural harbor became the gateway to America. The Museum utilizes its assets – the historic district's restored Schermerhorn Row, the tall ship Wavertree and other vessels and its collection of arts and artifacts to capture the unique story of the port's role in the development of the City, State and nation as economic, cultural and political powers.

The Museum includes over 30,000 square feet of exhibition space and educational facilities. Within that space is a working 19th century print shop, an urban archeology museum, a maritime library, a craft center, and marine life conservation lab, and the largest privately owned fleet of historic merchant ships in the country. These ships are listed in The International Register of Historic Ships. Two of the ships are designated National Historic Landmarks and four others are designated National Historic Places.

The Museum undertook a major renovation and construction project in 1999 to convert a row of Federal-era brick building on Fulton Street, know as Schermerhorn Row, into the Museum's main galleries. At that time the Museum was located in a much smaller space one block away, still within the Historic Seaport District. Work on the project had to be halted after September 11, 2001, initially due to the Museum's proximity to Ground Zero and later, because of loss of Funding. Work was resumed in 2003 and the Museum moved into the new space in 2005. While the new space beautifully incorporates many of the building original architectural features, the presentational and interpretive styles of the exhibitions did not fundamentally change.

Lower Manhattan, where the Museum is located abounds in rich historical and humanities assets, both in the natural and built environments. Over the past 40 years, the South Street Seaport District, where the Museum is situated, has evolved from a gritty industrial and commercial zone into a gentrified residential neighborhood. The departure of the Fulton Fish Market in 2005 accelerated the transition, transforming the Museum's relationship to its surroundings. As the Museum redefines itself and its future, it will continue to identify and attract diverse new audiences. While the Museum's core audience comprised of die hard members and dedicated volunteers is aging, there is a huge influx of young families with small children into an area that previously had almost none. At the same time, New York City has begun to implement a large-scale redevelopment plan along the East River in Lower Manhattan which will enormously expand public access to the waterfront and bring thousands of additional people to the neighborhood on a daily basis. The opportunity exists for the Museum to reach out to and engage thousands of new visitors with revitalized and re-imagined exhibitions and programming.

During the past couple of years, the Museum has engaged in an active education and temporary exhibition program. Current program offerings include walking tours, professional development for teachers, educational programs for grades 3-12, public sails on the Pioneer, tugboat tours on the Decker and adult education classes on the Lettie G. Howard. Temporary exhibits have included *Treasures of a President: FDR and the Sea*, and *New Amsterdam: The Island at the Center of the World*. Upcoming exhibits include the art deco style of the *Normandie* and the photographs of Alfred Steglitz.

Project Background

The South Street Seaport Museum is seeking qualifications from exhibition design firms to design the permanent collection exhibition. The main sites for the new exhibition will be the 4th and 5th floors of Schermerhorn Row and the square-rigged tall ship *Wavertree*. The block-long row was built in the conservative late Georgian Federal tradition then standard for New York commercial architecture. The Museum's main galleries on Schermerhorn Row were originally counting houses and warehouses which held the cargo off-loaded from the packets and clipper ships sitting at anchor literally outside their windows. Construction began on Schermerhorn Row in 1910 and was completed in 1912. While there are three floors of galleries available (with 7 galleries per floor), the 3rd floor will remain a temporary exhibition space. The 4th and 5th floors are each approximately 7,500 square feet.

The 4th floor gallery space also includes remains from the Fulton Ferry Hotel. Opened in 1860, the hotel provided accommodations to prosperous ship captains, merchants, businessmen and travelers passing through the port. With the advent of steam travel and the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge, the hotel's cachet gradually declined and in its later years, laborers, immigrants and various transients occupied its rooms. The hotel finally closed its doors in 1939. With conservation funds from the city and the state, the Museum intends to stabilize some of the hotel's public spaces and to incorporate those rooms into the permanent exhibition.

The tall ship *Wavertree*, built in 1885, is a 293-foot square-rigger and represents a type of cargo ship that was once a mainstay of world trade. One of the last large sailing ships built of wrought iron, she traveled the globe from Liverpool to India, from Australia to New York. She has two decks available for exhibits, totaling over 10,000 square feet. Funds have been received from the city to restore the ship and this work is scheduled to be completed in 2011.

Other gallery spaces and assets that are part of the Museum cover nearly 200,000 square feet. These include

Melville Gallery and Library - 213 Water Street – houses temporary exhibits and library collections

Bowne & Co. Stationers – 211 Water Street – a working 19th century printing shop

Walter Lord Gallery – 209 Water Street – houses a permanent exhibition of ocean liner models and memorabilia

Aside from the *Wavertree*, the other vessels docked at Pier 16 and owned by the Museum are:

Peking, a 1911 four-masted rigged cargo ship

Pioneer, an 1885 schooner

Lettie G Howard, an 1893 schooner

Ambroise, a 1908 lightship

Helen McAllister, a 1900 tugboat

W.O. Decker, a 1930 tugboat

Marion M., a 1932 chandlery lighter

While these spaces and assets are not considered part of the permanent exhibition, a strategy needs to be devised to integrate them into the overall vision and messaging of the Museum.

Highlights of the Permanent Collection

In addition to the assets listed above, the Museum's collection contains over 30,000 items and the Museum is in the process of completing an inventory of its collection. Categories of objects include: 500 paintings and 5,000 prints of maritime art; 9,000 objects of ocean liner memorabilia (including menus, ship plans, souvenirs, commemorative items, *Normandie* wheel, *Queen Mary* life preserver); 700

examples of scrimshaw; 2,500 ship models; and architectural elements from neighborhood shops and businesses. The Archives and Library collections include documents pertaining to harbor activities, business documents, trade cards, banking records, the Seaman's Bank for Savings archive collection, scrapbooks and journals, ship plans, photographs and ship logs.

Permanent Exhibition Goals

One of the Museum's main challenges has been to integrate its disparate architectural elements and sites – that are original artifacts themselves – into a continuous, thematic narrative that creates a holistic experience for visitors. The museum has in the past tried the "museum without walls" concept but this led to great confusion on the part of the visitors, as elements of the Museum are spread over an approximate 5 block area that includes commercial shops, Museum sites and Pier 16 in lower Manhattan. The goal for the permanent collection exhibition is to link the ships and buildings together into an interpretive and technologically sophisticated presentation that creates a cohesive story of the history of the port into the present day. While not all of the Museum's sites are part of the permanent exhibition, a narrative thread to include them in the story is desirable.

To date, the Museum has conducted a brainstorm session with a variety of scholars in diverse areas of expertise to devise a draft structure for the narrative. The *Wavertree* offers the most flexible and continuous exhibition space, and therefore, it is important that it be well integrated into the story. It has been determined that a thematic approach (rather than a chronological one) offers the greatest opportunity for storytelling. The most important themes to tell the story of the Port identified to date include: Transportation, Politics, Finance, Culture, Architecture and City Planning, Ecology, and Technology and Innovation. These topics will be told through the filter of Culture, Commerce and Characters – the distinctive attributes of the Seaport that made Manhattan and greater New York what it is today. As more in-depth research is conducted these topics and ideas will get further refined.

Attributes of the permanent exhibition:

- Use the objects in the collections, wherever possible to tell the stories in the Museum.
- Personal stories from the variety of characters who lived and worked at the Seaport should be utilized and visitors should feel as though they are learning "inside information" about the development of the Seaport
- While the Museum is not children's museum, it should contain aspects that appeal to and engage children on a variety of levels.
- The design of the exhibitions should reflect a contemporary approach to museum design and interpretation (visually stimulating and highly interactive) that does not eclipse the educational and humanistic aspects of the exhibition.
- The exhibitions must appeal to a wide range of audiences, and it must be accessible (both physically and intellectually) to visitors of varying ages, educational backgrounds, and interests.

- The exhibits aboard the Wavertree should be technologically sophisticated and offer a variety of interactivity for visitors.
- The exhibits should embrace and reflect the uniqueness, boldness, creativity and diversity of New York

Scope of Work

The selected firm's scope of work will include the following services:

1. Work with the Museum team to conceptualize the overall content and design strategies for the permanent exhibition.
2. Develop all phases of exhibition design: concept design, schematic design, design development, and construction documentation. Interface with fabricator for quality control and provide periodic oversight for installation. Provide client with appropriate documentation relevant to each phase. It is anticipated that during concept design, presentation materials will be needed for fundraising purposes. It is further anticipated that a fabrication firm will do fabrication cost estimating either at the completion of concept design and/or as part of the schematic design phase.
2. Manage all specialty consultants that are contracted by the design firm.
3. Coordinate work on Wavertree with structural and conservation consultants

Schedule

The exhibits aboard the Wavertree will be developed first and open in 2012. The work on the 4th and 5th floor exhibits will be completed by 2013-2014. However it is very important to conceptualize an approach to the entire project before work on the Wavertree commences.

Proposal Contents

Please include the following information:

1. A letter of interest which includes an overview of your company
2. A description of all design services provided by your firm
3. This project contains many different disciplines and areas of expertise. It is highly likely that one firm will not have all the competencies required. Therefore, please provide a description of any services that you would outsource to specialty consultants and provide their qualifications
4. A description of your firm's work in historic buildings (and/or ships)
5. Outline your general approach to this project
6. Samples of relevant work
7. References from two or three similar projects (from owner and/or key personnel)

8. The exhibit design of this project is funded in part by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). If your firm has familiarity with filing requirement for federal grants and community block grants please include this in your qualification submission.

Questions and Inquiries

For project-related questions or specific questions regarding this RFQ, please contact:

Ileen Gallagher
ISG Productions
212-675-6970
isgallagher@att.net

Location and Address to Which Responses Should be Submitted

A total of 3 hard copies and an electronic copy of your qualifications should be submitted to:

Mary Pelzer
Executive Director
South Street Seaport Museum
12 Fulton Street
New York, NY 10038
mpelzer@southstseaport.org

Qualifications must be submitted by 5:00PM on December 21, 2009

Firms who have been selected for an interview will be notified no later than January 4, 2010 and subsequently be asked to submit a full proposal.

Thank you for your interest.