



Art and architecture

The pyramid at the Louvre

I M Pei, Architect

I think the entrance to a great museum has to be appropriate to, to Louvre. And we simply couldn't do anything that is above ground; this is grand enough to do justice to that requirement. By excavating Napoleon Court we put the Reception Hall, quite far down, nine meters below ground. And so therefore with the pyramid we have a tremendous volume. That volume gives Napoleon Hall the kind of importance that it deserves.

The pyramid was a very controversial subject back then in 1984/85. But the form of the pyramid, people tend to confuse that with Egypt. I think that's actually inaccurate. It's not true. The Egyptian pyramid is enormous, number one. Secondly, it's solid, it's a stone. It's a place for the dead. The pyramid at Louvre is just the opposite. It's glass, it's transparent. I think the transparency is very important here, Not only for the functional reason of bringing light into the Reception hall, but also to be able to see through, so that you can see the entire complex of the Louvre.

Tim Benton, OU

The pyramid is an exceptionally discreet external expression of an enormous transformation inside and under ground where thousands of cubic metres were excavated to make space for the new museum.

I M Pei

I remember when I went to the Louvre back in 1951, was my first experience with the Louvre. There were only two little toilets in that huge museum. And you don't find it. One simply did not find those things, so it didn't function as a museum. So the museum brief was a very very important one and in order to make it work as a museum a very major intervention has to take place.

When I met Mr Mitterrand, President Mitterrand at that time, I told him 'Yes'. I said something could be done, to make it function well as a museum, but we have to dig under Napoleon Court. And that was the first step. Now if he at that time told me Mr Pei I don't think that is possible. And then I would have said then I am sorry, there is nothing could be done. But he was very understanding. He said 'I can understand what you meant. Very well. That's fine'.