

# Nobel Center Architectural Competition

Statement of the Jury  
Stage 1

*On November 1, 2013 the first stage of the Nobel Center Architectural Competition was completed. The jury then issued the following statement.*

## Overall conclusions

The eleven proposals that were submitted show great breadth. Some competition entrants presented proposals that are more detailed than stipulated in the rules for this first stage, while others presented a more schematic solution. All proposals were approved and then assessed by the jury on the assumption that the proposals shall be capable of further refinement in Stage 2.

In keeping with the stated assessment criteria for architectural design, functionality and feasibility, the jury paid particularly great attention to:

- Adaptation to the surrounding cityscape and cultural environment
- How the external design fits together with the Nobel Prize and the identity of Nobel activities

In this stage, the jury also took into consideration which features of the proposals can reasonably be changed in the next stage and which must be regarded as more fundamental. In several cases, the question of feasibility was of decisive importance. This refers both to technical and environmental aspects, as well as the potential for fitting the various proposals within the budgetary limits of the project.

## External environment

The designated site is centrally located in Stockholm. Because of its setting and the adjacent Nationalmuseum art and design museum building and the Museiparken park, it has all the potential to become both beautiful and attractive to the general public. Its importance can be further underscored by a Nobel Center. However, the site is limited in size for a building with all the functions that the future Nobel Center should accommodate.

A number of the proposals demonstrate a good understanding of the nature and requirements of the site. Several also present interesting suggestions on how the external environment around the Nobel Center can be used. Despite the limited area, it seems possible to create a beautiful, attractive waterside open space next to the Nobel Center, accessible to the general public and situated in a sunny direction. It is also possible to create an open space on Hovslagargatan street that is well designed in relation to its surroundings, while accommodating vehicle traffic to and from the Nobel Center.

Most frequently suggested are entrances facing the walkways through Museiparken and facing Hovslagargatan. All proposals suggest that incoming vehicles unload from Hovslagargatan.

The jury wishes to emphasise that during Stage 2 of the competition, it is important to ensure that the outdoor public spaces are designed in such a way that they provide a good, safe, easily accessible environment. In several proposals there are examples of outdoor public areas that are shaded during much of the year. In the jury's assessment, these are not so suitable at Stockholm's latitude.

The site designated for the Nobel Center can be designed in a way that offers good potential to create a new, attractive pedestrian walkway from Nybroplan square and from Kungsträdgården metro station, to the isle of Skeppsholmen. Generally speaking, the area along the quay is of great importance both to visitors and those who are passing by.

### **Size and location of the building**

Before the competition, the promoter had a three-dimensional model made in order to estimate the size of the completed building, given the existing room programme. With a single exception, the design proposals that were submitted are larger than the model proposal. Some of them present buildings with a gross above-ground area more than 6,000 m<sup>2</sup> larger, while most are a few thousand square metres larger than the model proposal.

The jury believes that the volumes of several of the buildings that were presented are excessive for the site. In light of this, during Stage 2 of the competition there may be reason to reduce the programme area and call for more efficient solutions that can reduce the size of the proposed buildings, especially above ground.

Building placements vary from a solitary location on the eastern corner of the site, towards the water, and a location next to Hovslagargatan. The jury's assessment is that the site hardly allows for a completely free placement of a building of this size. Those proposals that do not utilise the entire site, but that present a distinctively compact building located close to Hovslagargatan and neighbouring buildings, are more convincing and naturally leave room for an attractive park / public space facing south and south-east.

Most proposals call for demolition of the Customs House, and in only one of the proposals does this building assume functions from the room programme. None of the proposals managed to combine a preserved Customs House with a public walkway along the quay and park space without major filling and extension of the quay area.

The competition brief was open to the possibility of proposing modifications in the existing line of the quay, provided this would lead to substantial qualitative improvements for the project, the site and its visitors. Although the jury believes that some of the proposals help create very attractive outdoor public areas, it has been difficult to envisage extensive modifications of this type being possible within the framework of the Nobel Center project.

### **External design of the building**

The design and appearance of the Nobel Center are important. The building will naturally be perceived as a symbol of the Nobel Prize and other Nobel activities. Important key words in this context are quality and dignity. At the same time, the building should attract the curious, be inviting and represent openness.

The jury believes that those proposals that employ subtlety, scale, proportioning and refinement rather than strong gestures or external manifestations are more convincing, both for the site and as a symbol of Nobel activities. External restraint can be nicely combined with inner vitality.

The building's ability to attract visits – spontaneous or planned – is of crucial importance to the project.

### **Aspects of the building's interior design**

A few proposals present innovative new solutions to the key issue of how to design the large auditorium. As the competition brief indicates, it is essential to be able to actively utilise the large space the auditorium will occupy by dividing it into smaller rooms, using it for multiple purposes and the like. It is also important for other conference rooms to be connected to the auditorium in a natural way. In addition, it should be possible to integrate the Award Ceremony venue with the movements of museum visitors through the building.

The proposals present various degrees of connections between the auditorium, foyers and other spaces for conferences and large events. Placement of the auditorium high up in the building is associated with benefits from the standpoint of museum activities. At the same time, such a placement makes it important to ensure that the transport capacity of escalators and lifts will be large enough to allow events for up to 1,400 participants, who can all be expected to arrive at the building within a relatively limited period. In preparation for Stage 2, the competition brief should thus be supplemented with more detailed requirements for the auditorium and its connections mainly to other conference rooms, foyers and other ancillary spaces.

### **Environment, sustainability and finances**

In the jury's assessment, most of the proposals can be refined to meet the high environment standards imposed. Several proposals present environmental technology solutions that are generally practicable. Environmental aspects have thus not been so decisive in this stage of the competition.

After carrying out preliminary cost assessments, the jury noted that several of the proposals exceed the cost levels that were specified and that the stipulated budget allows. In many cases, however, it appears possible to adapt the future buildings to the established budget in the next stage.

A significant expansion of the quay and its surroundings does not fit within the limits that were established for the project.

## The jury's decision on proposals that will continue to Stage 2

The jury has decided to propose that the architects behind the following three proposals be invited to participate in the second stage of the competition. These proposals are not ranked in any particular order:

- Nobelhuset
- A P(a)lace to Enjoy
- A Room and a Half

Stockholm, November 1, 2013

Lars Heikensten (Chairman of the Jury)

Olov Amelin

Lars Drangel

Elizabeth Hatz

Gunnar von Heijne

Marika Hedin

Karolina Keyzer

Anders Nylander

Inga Varg

Harriet Wallberg

Per Wästberg

## Individual reviews of the selected proposals

### Nobelhuset

**Architect: David Chipperfield and Christoph Felger,  
David Chipperfield Architects Berlin (Germany)**



The proposal was designed on the basis of a good analysis of the site and its surroundings. The proposed building conveys dignity and has an identity that feels well balanced for the Nobel Center. The location of the building adjacent to the existing neighbourhood structures works nicely in this urban setting. The limited footprint of the building allows room for a valuable park facing the eastern portions of the site, with plenty of space for a waterfront promenade along the quay. It should be possible to give the open space in front of the entrance facing the corner of Nybrokajen and Hovslagargatan streets a more beautiful design, also with respect to nearby buildings. It is also important to ensure that the building is open and inviting where it encounters the surrounding park and walkways.

Exhibition spaces are divided in a traditional way, featuring small rooms with good communication between them. The placement of the auditorium on a separate storey makes it an attraction of its own on the top floor of the building, but the venue for the Prize Award Ceremony should also be accessible to museum visitors.

The straight lines of the auditorium are not ideal for creating contact between the audience and the stage. The potential for efficiently dividing up the auditorium into several smaller rooms for conference activities must be studied further.

In its current form, the building is one storey higher than its surroundings. The top floor should be able to rise above nearby buildings and – in light of its function – become an embellishment to the urban scene, but it can perhaps be designed with greater openness and transparency. The shape of the surrounding spaces, both facing vehicle traffic areas towards the north-west and facing the park and walkways, are not presented in much detail and can be further developed.

The proposed shiny brass façades might be suitable for a Nobel Center. The façade surfaces will also reflect light from the sky down into the street or open space on Hovslagargatan.

## A P(a)lace to Enjoy

**Architect: Gert Wingårdh,  
Wingårdh Arkitektkontor (Sweden)**



One of the foremost qualities of the building is the openness of its entrance level. Its glass façade is inviting and creates close contact between outdoors and indoors and between urban life and the activities in the Nobel Center. The grand stairway is a classic element that can give the building a dignity that fits the identity of the Nobel Center.

The placement of the restaurant and entrance towards Blasieholmsgatan street feels convincing and creates a natural contact with Nationalmuseum.

The building's geometric form relate to the surrounding urban spaces, but its many overhanging blocks perhaps provide an unsettled impression and the protruding top floor facing the Nybroviken bay might be perceived as overly dramatic. The exterior of the building may be associated more with a commercial environment than a centre for the Nobel Foundation's various activities related to science and research.

The placement of exhibition areas on the top floor and the auditorium at the bottom is probably not ideal, considering how spontaneous visitors will move around the building, but at the same time this makes it easier to enter the building to attend major events. Nor is the division into an auditorium and other conference spaces the best from the standpoint of utilisation. It is important that exhibitions be perceived as nearby and easy for all visitors to reach. Visitors to the auditorium are probably well aware of their destination and can be allowed to transport themselves higher up in the building. The exhibition level also appears to have rather low ceilings. In Stage 2, these facts can be studied further and possibly be changed, given the simple block-like structure of the building.

The proposal includes an impressive and attractive square towards the south, surrounded by water on several sides. In its current design, the square hardly fits within the financial limits of the Nobel Center project, but the proposed extension of the site over the water is actually not essential in order to give the building a good placement.

## A Room and a Half

**Architect: Johan Celsing,  
Johan Celsing Arkitektkontor (Sweden)**



The proposal is a coherent, classically proportioned building that connects to the surrounding cityscape. Because the building is placed at an angle to Hovslagargatan, this creates an attractive open space near the entrance. The proposal also leaves ample room for a waterside promenade and outdoor public areas.

The jury agrees with the proposal author's own observation that the size of the building should be re-worked, and continued studies of its placement may enable improvements in its connection to surrounding outdoor areas on different sides and perhaps avoid the proposed extension of the quay.

The proposed façades demonstrate an awareness of the importance of proportioning. Its materials and appearance are well adapted to the purposes of the building, but perhaps they exude more authority than the desirable dignity and could be made somewhat more accessible. As part of the continued re-working process, the low entrance level probably needs to be raised and the large window openings need to be enriched with detailing. It is important that the building should be open and inviting when viewed from the park and walkways.

The superstructure known as the Lighthouse contributes to the height of the building and may possibly be perceived as extraneous and disruptive of the strict architectural look. As part of the continued re-working process, the superstructure can be refined in a way that is better integrated with the building, both in terms of design and functionality.

The internal organisation of the building and the room design are well thought-out and attractive. For even better lighting, space and utilisation of evening light, the placement of various functions can be further studied. The horseshoe shape of the auditorium seems appropriate. The jury has reflected on the possibility that a terrace or other solution could possibly be placed next to the foyer of the auditorium, making it possible to step outside the building.

## Individual reviews of proposals that were not selected

### Butterfly

**Architect: Kim Herforth Nielsen, Jan Ammundsen and Bo Boje Larsen, 3XN (Denmark)**

This undulating structure has an attractive and coherent form, with the ambition of expressing lightness. Its design language diverges clearly from the surrounding urban landscape. The view from inside the building through its large glass façade facing north and towards the waterside boulevard Strandvägen is magnificent.



The building occupies almost the entire site and leaves little room for walkways and a park. Instead it offers a large rooftop landscape with good connections to both the restaurant and exhibition spaces. This undoubtedly has its quality, but in the opinion of the jury it is not a fully satisfactory substitute for public areas at ground level.

The interior parts of the building have great qualities. The exhibition spaces are handled nicely, but are located high up in the building. The small exhibition area that is prescribed close to the auditorium/conference centre is beneficial and would certainly be heavily used.

According to the jury, the main problem with the building is its volume and large overhangs that cast shadows and create an inhospitable environment on the ground. The volume and placement of the proposal require a large-scale extension of the quay. This can hardly be justified within the financial limits of the project.

### Landing Seagulls

**Architect: Marcel Meili and Markus Peter, Marcel Meili, Markus Peter Architekten (Switzerland)**

The building exhibits a grandiose volume and shape, reminiscent of the railway stations of a bygone era or perhaps the Sydney Opera House. Large glass walls open towards the water, giving the building a clear front side. The division into three barrel structures offers passageways illuminated from above between



Museiparken and the water. At the same time, this solution leads to an unfortunate separation between some of the Center's most important functions.

The jury is of the opinion that this flamboyant look is out of place and not very sensitive to the adjacent environment. Its connection to the identity of Nobel activities is also

weak. The large vaulted shapes presuppose larger open areas around them than this central city site can offer. In front of the large overhanging structures that face north-east, only a very narrow strip of the waterfront promenade remains. There is a risk of a windy, unpleasant outdoor environment under these large, shading structures and in the narrow alleys.

The proposal involves a number of technical and economic challenges. In particular, the jury's preliminary cost analysis indicates a construction cost that exceeds the budget established for the project.

## Nobel Sphere

**Architect: Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa,  
SANAA (Japan)**

The proposal is a poetic and beautiful conceptual statement with associations to large mid-19<sup>th</sup> century greenhouses in urban environments. A greenhouse, or rather a group of large glass spheres on the Blasieholmen peninsula, might naturally be an attraction in central Stockholm.



However, the jury is not convinced that this design would serve as an appropriate symbol or identity for the activities in the Nobel Center.

The design of exhibition spaces, conference rooms and workspaces in the proposal's rectangular building structures is carefully thought-out and well organised, but the fundamental concept of large spherical structures appears difficult to utilise. It would most likely be problematic to regulate incoming light and indoor climate in the auditorium. Half of the proposed spheres would contain indoor gardens – not a self-evident function in a Nobel Center.

The proposal can only be regarded as conceptual and impossible to implement in its current form. Its large structures – provided outside the required program – are difficult to argue for, both in terms of the urban setting and from a financial standpoint.

The jury also believes it would be difficult to develop the proposal into a building with acceptable environmental performance, since the enclosing outer walls largely consist only of glass structures. The proposal is estimated to cost significantly more than other proposals and would result in high operating expenses.

## Prism

**Architect: Bjarke Ingels,  
BIG Copenhagen / New York (Denmark)**

The building has a segmented, exciting façade on a scale that enables it to relate to the adjacent urban environment, despite its angled shape. Its placement creates three distinct surrounding outdoor spaces with different characters. However, in certain perspectives the structure may feel large and compact. Its upturned corners give the building a dramatic look, with sharp points that may possibly be perceived as aggressive.



The proposal presents large, open exhibition spaces and has one of the most innovative solutions for including exhibition visitors in the Center's function as the venue of the Prize Award Ceremony.

The proposal as submitted is carefully conceived, and despite its limiting triangular shape, manages to incorporate all the functions requested in the competition brief into the building. However, to some extent this has occurred at the expense of good connections between the different parts of the building. For example, communications between the office spaces on the second and third stories are complicated. Due to the strict geometry of the building, its functionality and flexibility are also constrained.

The value of the three inner courtyards is limited by the reduced light intake achieved at Stockholm's latitude and is questionable considering the beautiful location and the view this site can otherwise offer. Given the size and placement of the building, there is less space for park areas and outdoor activities on the site. Instead, the proposal suggests a re-working of the quay line that may be difficult to justify.

**“We believe in the capability of a structure to engage activities and beings: to create society”**

**Architect: Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal,  
Lacaton & Vassal Architectes (France)**

The proposal is a conceptual statement aimed at clarifying the programmes and functions of the building. The building is an open, robust steel and glass structure that can be changed and adapted to the requirements of Nobel activities. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this type of building reappeared in various guises for many large public institutions, where successive expansions and changes may occur in several different directions.



However, the design that was selected will easily become characterless and perhaps difficult to combine with the unique identity of Nobel activities. Nor is the jury convinced that the building functions well in the historical urban context of Blasieholmen.

There is a good allocation of areas, with the solution of putting exhibition space underground avoids the problem of daylight, while deliveries to the museum are easy to arrange. It is also positive that the first thing that visitors encounter is temporary exhibitions.

The footprint of the building on the site is offset by park areas that are allowed to climb up on the building, but they may be perceived as artificial and too small to form an attractive park landscape. In addition, they risk causing technical problems and high operating expenses. The sharply sloping ground cover leaves little space for activities at the level of the surrounding urban space and thus prevents contact between urban life and the Nobel Center.

## The Space Between

**Architect: Kjetil Thorsen,  
Snøhetta (Norway)**

The proposal consists of a beautiful building that is distinctively different from the surrounding urban landscape. The building exudes quality and has an impressive image. At the same time, one can ask whether or not it occupies too much space in the sensitive environment of Blasieholmen, especially when viewed across the water from Strandvägen. The entrance is generous and inviting, in a bright south-ward position facing a park and walkways.



The large extension over the water is probably not feasible because it involves a large intrusion in the waterway. The integration of the building with the quayside promenade is attractive, but at the same time in practice it creates an obstacle to people with reduced mobility and pedestrians with prams and the like.

The horizontality of the building allows all functions to be located accessibly, without visitors having to move around on high floors, but dividing the building into two structures is not so suitable, since it causes important functions to be separated. For example, transport distances from loading areas to exhibition rooms are long and complicated.

The proposal is one of those requiring the largest area and volume, and even after significant downsizing it is expected to entail a construction cost that exceeds the budget set for the project.

## Beyond 1210

**Architect: Rem Koolhaas and Reinier de Graaf,  
OMA (The Netherlands)**

The foremost qualities of this proposal are its pragmatic approach and the building's free additive volume structure. It also occupies a comparatively small area of the site, leaving room to preserve and use the Customs House. However, it seems complicated to preserve the old brick building and meanwhile construct two underground levels beneath it.



Because the building is placed directly on the water, only a narrow walkway along the quay remains. To handle vehicle traffic to the main entrance, construction of a roadway over the water is proposed. It is probably difficult to gain acceptance for utilising open water to build costly vehicle lanes. The outdoor spaces that are created will be shaded and are not involved in the interior functions of the building. Nor is it easy to regard the appearance of the building as suitable for the Nobel Center.

The exciting possibility of being able to use the large central room for different functions on different occasions unfortunately leads to a design of the auditorium that is less than elegant, in which the audience must also be seated both in front of and behind the stage when the auditorium is fully utilised for 1,400 spectators.

## Archipelago

**Architect: Lene Tranberg,  
Lundgaard & Tranberg Arkitekter (Denmark)**

The conceptual basis of the proposal is predicated on creating an artificial landscape that separates the site from the urban mass of Blasieholmen and instead relates to the city's park landscapes and the nearby archipelago. This new steep landscape is envisioned as inviting visitors and strollers next to the quayside promenade.



However, the jury believes that the proposal is hardly possible to implement, given the extensive construction work to reshape nature and the cultural landscape. Despite the low height of the building, it dominates the site in a less sensitive way. The jury has also found it difficult to see why this motif was chosen as a symbol of Nobel activities. How the external environment would function during the autumn and winter also raises questions.

The building contains well-planned, beautiful, organically designed spaces and exhibition areas with good communication. It also includes the competition's most pioneering auditorium design, with innovative solutions for dividing the auditorium into different rooms for different size requirements, but the site and its surrounding environments can hardly be regarded as justifying the placement of all functions underground.

The proposal is associated with numerous technical difficulties, for example connected to the need for daylight. It has only been possible to make a rough cost estimate for the proposal, but it appears to be one of the most expensive proposals, thereby exceeding the specified budget.