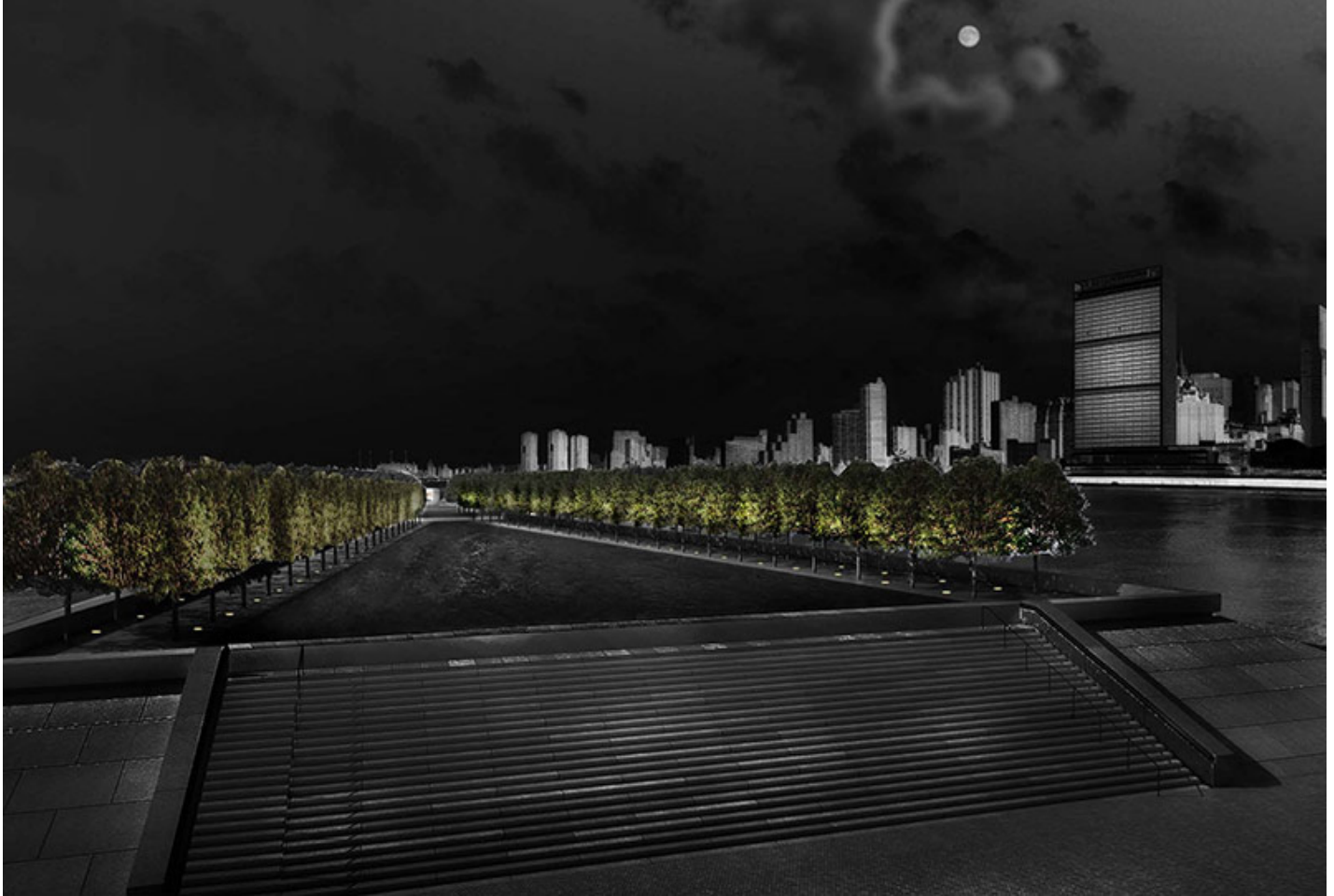


# Lighting the Way to Freedom

By ALAN G. BRAKE • October 17, 2012



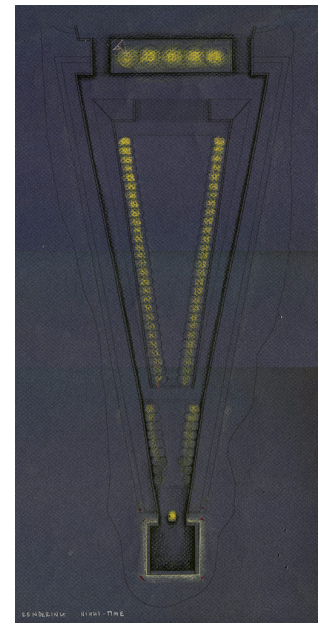
Tillett's design uses the smallest number of fixtures in the landscape.

Courtesy Tillett Lighting Design

After languishing for nearly 40 years as paper architecture, the monumental slabs and stunning views of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park will open to the public on October 24. For lighting designer Linnaea Tillett, who is currently implementing a nighttime lighting scheme at the park, layering the most appropriate illumination on Louis Kahn's stark design is a process of careful calibration.

Tillett is approaching the task from the landscape rather than from the architecture, choosing to carefully highlight the memorial's linden trees and copper beeches. She and her team tested spot and flood fixtures in LEDs and metal halide at the nursery

where the memorial's trees were grown. "You have to listen to the tree—the leaves, the branches, the branching patterns," Tillett said. After numerous tests, Tillett and her team settled on a multi-head iGuzzini LED fixture, which casts light in two directions. The design allows each tree to be illuminated from two sides: half the fixture is pointed at one tree and the other half is pointed at the next. Tillett further modified the fixture with tiny custom louvers, which allow the light to hit more of the lindens' tiny leaves. She and her team meticulously adjusted the fixtures to make sure the light hit the trees as evenly as possible, making the most with the smallest number of fixtures. "That's my definition of sustainability," she said. The result is remarkably delicate.



For the much larger cooper beeches, Tillett opted to focus on the branches and the trunks as well as the leaves, placing four similar iGuzzini fixtures around each tree and two closer to the trunks. The trees become an emphatic threshold to the wedge-shaped monument (which was built by Sciame construction).

On the other end of the memorial a sculpture of Roosevelt's head, based on a model by the American artist Jo Davidson, appears to float in a giant alcove (it is actually held from behind by a metal armature). Tillett and her team also exhaustively tested lighting schemes for the sculpture. "You can change the expression with the light. Acute angles make a frown or a sneer," she said. Using techniques similar to stage design, Tillett is aiming for a calm and serene expression with uplighting from the sides, filled in with more gentle light in the center.

The goal, for now, is to leave Kahn's monumental planes to be lit only by the city's ambient glow. The city is significantly brighter now than it was when Kahn designed

the project. The granite reflects a lot of light from Manhattan and Queens, so on site little additional illumination is needed to navigate the memorial. Visibility of the memorial from the other sides of the East River, however, is a concern. Tillett, again, favors a less is more approach. “Part of the way something becomes visible is that people need to know what they are looking for. They need to know that something exists,” she said. Given New Yorkers’ thirst for public space and waterfront views, Four Freedoms Park will likely be a prominent site in the city’s collective consciousness very soon.