

PROJECT WATCH

New York Yankees Break Ground on Stadium



by *Russell Boniface*
Associate Editor

Iconic Yankee Stadium will live on in a new incarnation that combines modern with tradition—thanks to one of AIA's own. "But don't call it New Yankee Stadium," says Earl Santee, AIA, principal-in-charge and senior principal at HOK Sport. "It's Yankee Stadium." Located in New York City's Bronx borough, Yankee Stadium has a storied baseball history. An asymmetrical, open-air ballpark originally built in 1923 and reconstructed in the '70s, "The Stadium" has hosted 37 World Series and many great players. But the time has come to continue that legacy in a new, more functional ballpark. Kansas-City based HOK Sport + Venue + Event designed the new \$800 million Yankee Stadium, financed by the Yankees. It will replicate design characteristics of the 1923 struc-

ture while adding today's amenities. Groundbreaking was held on August 16. The stadium will open in 2009.

The legacy continues—just across the street

Yankee Stadium, both the original and existing structure, has had tremendous success. It is nicknamed "The House that Ruth Built" because it was christened with a Babe Ruth home run on opening day, 1923. The original three-tiered structure stood for 50 years and was demolished in 1973 to make way for the existing structure, opened in 1976 on the same parcel of land. While modern for its day, it lacked the original design elements that had become symbols of Yankees tradition.

The new stadium will replicate design characteris-

tics of the 1923 structure while adding today's amenities.

But now a new Yankee Stadium will more closely continue the tradition and symbolism that began in 1923 at the original "House." And, even though the geography will shift slightly, Yankees history and pride will continue. The new, asymmetrical, open-air, 51,000-seat Yankee Stadium will be located on a South Bronx site adjacent to the existing stadium. Design elements of the original 1923 structure that will be replicated with modern interpretation are:

- The four-story brown limestone and granite façade and entry
- A roof overhang jutting out above the upper deck
- The traditional arch frieze hanging from the roof
- The right-field bullpen
- Traditional auxiliary scoreboards.



DESIGN

Elements of the current Yankee Stadium that will be retained are:

- The geometric dimensions, including the renowned “short porch” right-field fence—which is a modified version of the original stadium’s “porch”—where the distance from home plate to the right-field fence is unusually short
- Monument Park, an area in the existing stadium that contains Yankees’ plaques and retired jersey numbers.

New features will include:

- A double façade element that combines the traditional Yankee limestone and granite façade with a secondary modern façade of glass and steel
- A Great Hall concourse in between the two facades illuminated by natural and artificial light
- Better sightlines in the seating bowl
- A different seating layout
- Modern bleachers with a café in center field
- Increased wayfinding, parking, and access
- Twenty-first century technology.

The new Yankee Stadium is also the impetus of a large-scale South Bronx redevelopment plan.

AIA architect melds modern with tradition

Earl Santee, principal-in-charge, is one of the most experienced ball-park architects in the world, having worked on more than 18 parks for Major League Baseball. “The Yankee Stadium project took 10-11 years to culminate in the groundbreaking that we had in August,” explains Santee. “We looked at various sites, and, at the end of the day, from a site selection standpoint, the best site for the Yankees was to stay in the Bronx and



build the stadium across the street. From a planning perspective, it’s a tight, urban site. But to house the Yankees for the next 50 years in the Bronx was an important factor because it really talks to the legacy of the Yankees in New York City.”

Preserving the Yankee legacy was paramount to Santee. “The original building was built in 1923. In some ways, that legacy will continue—just across the street. The architecture is really about trying to continue the legacy of the Yankees in the Bronx through the original symbolic elements. For example, the limestone and granite facade from 1923 will be the basis for the skin of the new building but feature interpretation with modern materials.”

Santee describes how a modern façade of glass and steel will be beyond the limestone façade. Santee defines the meaning of the double façade: “The double façade says that we appreciate the great history of the Yankees in such a great way, but we also want the new stadium to be a modern building about today’s fan and

tomorrow’s fan. What we will have, then, is an interesting interplay for the fans of the legacy of the Yankees’ tradition while looking at the Yankees of today and tomorrow.”

Duality, the Great Hall, and wayfinding

Santee points out that the goal in designing the new Yankee Stadium is to recreate the intimate experience that fans have always enjoyed at “The Stadium.”

Fans will arrive at the new stadium and see what Santee calls the tripod arch façade of the old days, albeit with modern interpretation. “The idea of it in the old days, and will be again, is that the façade is the quintessential Yankees symbol.” Fans will come through a series of gates, portals, and entryways in the limestone and granite facade. Once inside, there will be the 30,000-square-foot Great Hall.

The façade is the quintessential Yankees symbol.

DESIGN

Santee describes the Great Hall as 75 feet tall and 60-100 feet wide, running from the right field to home plate and featuring much transparency. "It will be a space to allow everyone to gather inside the building, collect themselves, and understand the symbolism of the Yankees while looking at a modern façade of glass and metal. It will have this duality of building skins, and the Great Hall in between will establish that duality—the interplay of Yankees past with the Yankees of today and tomorrow. In some ways, the Great Hall will also be the Grand

you once you enter." The Great Hall will also offer more than game-time concessions by featuring year-round destination restaurants, retail, and a Hall of Fame Museum.

Wayfinding will not be difficult, unlike at today's stadium. "From the Great Hall, fans will proceed into the wide main concourse," Santee continues. "They will be able to see the field and walk to their seats, unlike today where fans come through the gates and go up a series of ramps and escalators. The new design will be purely in and out. And I think it is important to the

explains. "Two-thirds of the seats will be in the lower deck and one-third is in the upper deck. We also made minor adjustments to how the seating bowl works so fans will be closer to the game." Santee adds that there will be 57 luxury suites, which will be on their own level. "They are very much integrated into the seating bowl," says Santee. "When you look at the building, it is about providing the best possible seats for everybody."

The seats will remain Yankee blue as they are now. The blue seats became popular after the original green seats were painted in 1966. Monument Park will be relocated to the new stadium but shift location to behind the center-field wall instead of its existing left-centerfield position. The Yankees wanted to make sure that the fans in the bleachers had an improved experience, so they created a café for them, situated in the vacant black "batter's eye" section of the center-field stands. "We have created a club that will go behind Monument Park and called it the Grandstand Café. It overlooks Monument Park. Fans watching from the cafe will have a reminder of the legacy of the Yankees as they watch the game."



EXTERIOR PERSPECTIVE
View from Southwest looking at Main Entry

YANKEE STADIUM

Central station of today, because the façade transparency will allow fans to see people moving all around in the main concourse and the spacious concourses above."

Natural and artificial light will illuminate the duality of the Great Hall. "The space will have a skylight over the top of it with apertures at three big gate spaces that will take fans from a light space to a dark space to a light space. It is the thing that attracts

overall experience that fans have an unobstructed view of the field from the main concourse. Concourses in the upper level will also be spacious."

The seating bowl, bleachers, and field dimensions

The organization of the existing stadium's seating will be flipped from the existing Yankee stadium, where two-thirds of the seating capacity is now in the upper deck and a third is downstairs. "This is different," Santee

The seats will remain Yankee blue as they are now.

Santee explains that the existing stadium's home-run fence dimensions will be retained to keep the record books alive and recreate the ambience of the existing experience of Yankee Stadium. "We wanted to keep the homerun dimensions alive, especially having a right-field porch like the current one."

The frieze returns

The most distinguishing characteristic

DESIGN

of the original Yankee Stadium was its frieze—a series of copper green arches that hung from the perimeter of the upper deck roof. The frieze was painted white in the 1960s, but the renovation in the mid-70s eliminated it due to cost considerations. Only a white, pre-cast concrete replica remains along the bleacher billboards and scoreboard in the current stadium.

A new steel, arched frieze will hang from a new upper deck roof throughout the perimeter of the main seating bowl. The frieze will also have a structural purpose by serving as a truss to support the canopy for the upper deck. Santee says they and the Yankees are currently looking at paint schemes to determine if the frieze once again will be white, but maintains the important thing is that it has returned and will once again hang from its proper place. “We did historical research on the old frieze. We are taking that symbol of the Yankees legacy, recreating it, and putting back from left field to right field prior to the 1970 renovation,” enthuses Santee.

“It will be something of an interpretative piece, but something that will be symbolically familiar to Yankees fans. The frieze is the crown of this jewel of this ballpark.”

The frieze is the crown of this jewel of this ballpark.

Impetus for a Bronx redevelopment plan

The new stadium is part of an overall public-private redevelopment of the Bronx riverfront at the Harlem River. The plan calls for 24 acres of new parks, which will include baseball and soccer fields, a river esplanade, a running track, three new parking garages, a hotel and conference center, a high school for sports-related careers, and a second subway station. The old stadium may be cut down to its lower tier for use as an amateur baseball field, and the site between the new and old stadiums will become Babe Ruth Plaza.

New York City will contribute \$205 million to the redevelopment plan,

making the total budget for the project more than \$1 billion. “The decision of the New York Yankees to rebuild their home in the South Bronx is a vote of confidence for a neighborhood that is undergoing an incredible renaissance,” said New York City Mayor Bloomberg at the groundbreaking ceremony. “The new Yankee Stadium is part of a major economic redevelopment plan that residents of the South Bronx will benefit from for generations to come.” Added New York Governor George Pataki: “I am proud to say that with this glorious new stadium design, the Yankees have not only stepped up to the plate, they’ve hit a grand slam.”

With this glorious new stadium design, the Yankees have not only stepped up to the plate, they’ve hit a grand slam.

Building of memories

Santee has high praise for the New York Yankees organization and its commitment to the project. “I think the New York Yankees have been very focused in making sure that everyone who comes into the new building has the best experience of any baseball park in America.”

For Santee, designing the new stadium for New York Yankees was a fulfilling challenge. “The challenge was understanding the symbolic elements of the most prestigious sports franchise in history and applying that to a new building and be mindful of the compact, urban characteristics of the site as they exist today,” he explains. “Could we have designed this building in two or three years? I don’t know. I think having 10, 11 years gave us the chance to understand the details of Yankees symbols and how to apply them in a meaningful way to Yankees



AERIAL PERSPECTIVE
View from Southwest

YANKEE STADIUM

DESIGN

fans and the community.

"It has been a fun project. I've learned so much about what this stadium means to the fans, and we have tried to come up with the most creative ideas that we could so everyone has their own personal moment in the building. I think it will be a building of memories—the old one was, and this one will be too."

Did you know ...

- Earl Santee's list of major league ballparks includes PNC Park in San Francisco, Minute Maid Park in Houston, the New Busch Stadium in St. Louis, and Angel Stadium of Anaheim, California. Santee recently received the top honor on Sports Business Journal's list of Most Influential People in Sports Facility Design, Architecture, and Development. He is also currently serving as principal-in-charge of the new Washington Nationals Ballpark in Washington, D.C., and the new Florida Marlins Ballpark in Miami.
- The big changes from the 1923 stadium made for the 1976 remake are the removal of the overhanging roof and the removal of numerous, obstructive steel columns that supported the second and third decks as well as the roof (the new upper decks were cantilevered over the lower deck.)
- The original "short porch" was a mere 295 feet from home plate. The existing stadium pushed it back to 314 feet, still shorter than the norm. Only Fenway Park in Boston has a "shorter porch"—302 feet.
- Yankee Stadium's asymmetrical shape is due to it being built on a five-sided, irregular plot of land.
- Lights were added in 1946.
- In 1966, a \$1.5-million "modernization" was spent mostly on 90 tons of paint. The brown concrete facade and green copper facade were painted white, and seats went from green to blue.
- The frieze is commonly mistakenly referred to by the media as the façade.