

British architect Norman Foster to design new Hebrew U. brain center

Design of new center, to be built at university's Givat Ram campus, reflects Foster's well-known commitment to environmental sustainability, including energy conservation.

By Noam Dvir

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The British architectural firm of Foster and Partners has been selected to plan the Hebrew University's new Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Brain Sciences at its Givat Ram campus, the university has announced. The complex is the first to be designed in Israel by Lord Norman Foster, who is a Pritzker Architecture Prize laureate.

The design of the new center, to be built at the university's Givat Ram campus on a 10,500 square meter space near the Life Sciences building, reflects Foster's well-known commitment to environmental sustainability, including energy conservation.

The building will be divided into two elliptical curved sections that will surround a courtyard. Its location along the main axis of the campus will mean people will be able to pass through it and see various displays involving the center's research.

Foster's firm was selected to design the building because of his experience designing other brain research centers elsewhere in the world, including at Stanford University and the Imperial College in London. But Hebrew University vice president and director general Billy Shapira says that Foster's reputation is also expected to help raise money for the building.

"He is an extraordinary architect who also knows how to create interesting architecture as well as to relate impressively to the environment," Shapira said. Among the other architects the university approached were Frank Gehry and leading Israeli architects Ada Karmi-Melamede and Bracha and Michael Hayutin.

Foster will be assisted by two local firms: Baer Shifman-Natan, which will supervise permitting and be in charge of project oversight, and the firm of Zadok Sherman, which will design the center's laboratories.

Among Foster's other projects is the new Reichstag building in Berlin, the Hong Kong airport and Wembley Stadium.

Foster visited Israel and the Givat Ram campus about 18 months ago.

The Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Brain Research, which was established in 2009, is the largest center of its kind in Israel.