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like to respond.

Benepe wants to force permits upon artists, but artists have permits already. They are called "copyrights." A simple check of the signature on the artwork and the artist's own photo ID is enough to prove copyright, and thereby prove who is

To the Editor:

I sympathize with those in Manhattan Valley who are seeing an increasing number of vacant storefronts due to landlords charging outrageous rents [West Side Spirit, April 10].

For quite some time, even the supposedly

ironic thing is that every time landlords raise rents to unconscionable levels, commercial real estate brokers pat themselves on the back for their ingenuity when they lease one or two spots - ignoring the reality of the situation.

IAN ALTERMAN
UPPER WEST SIDE

THE LIGHTER SIDE

The Pit Is the Pits

Libeskind design: inappropriate, ugly, unwise

By Rich Herschlag

Though Baghdad has fallen like Sonny Liston in his 1965 bout with Muhammad Ali, and Chemical Ali has been reduced to protons and neutrons, we are losing a different yet very important, highly symbolic war on the home front. I recently combed through a pile of newspapers headed for the recycling bin and took a long, hard look at the winning design for the new World Trade Center. The last time I was this disappointed as a New Yorker, John Starks was launching fourth-quarter airballs in game seven of the 1994 NBA finals.

Submitted by architect Daniel Libeskind, the winner is a collection of mangled and sliced obelisks circling a vast open pit. I wouldn't want this thing as a set of salt and pepper shakers. In fact, back in the late '80s, my wife and I returned a wedding gift just like it to Hammacher Schlemmer.

Proponents of the Libeskind entry emphasize the pit, the depth of which has varied from 70 feet to 30 feet, depending on the day of the week. I was never crazy about

open caskets to begin with, but this is downright macabre. Apparently, a simple, accessible memorial was just too tasteful, appropriate and straightforward for Frank Lloyd Wright and friends.

The pit is the pits and is basically a gimmick masking the fact that in the war between real estate interests and respect for the deceased, the real estate interests have come out on top. The whole affair has an eerie "Planet of the Apes" feel to it, except Taylor at least got to see the top half of the original.

The crowning jewel of this monstrosity is the 1,776-foot vertical garden. The height signifies both the birth of a nation and the death of modern architecture. The vertical garden is basically the junkie's version of Seattle's Space Needle. The top doesn't rotate, but the price will make your head spin.

The upper portion of the structure features a steel- and glass-enclosed botanical garden. Like most gardens, it's about 10 feet wide and 40 stories tall. Perfect for a friendly game of badminton.

And what better way to top a series of

botanical displays than a classically designed 200-foot TV tower? Is this the price we have to pay for better VHF reception?

Advocates of the Libeskind vertical garden harp on the ecological meaning of the structure. You want ecology? Try not building this building.

Before you read the incestuous reviews in the architecture section of the New York Times pondering the structure's "functionality," let us ponder another lofty architectural concept we like to call "vulnerability." In this age of terrorist attacks, raging fires in public places, and widespread panic, what we really need is a third-of-a-mile-high building you have to evacuate single file. Rarely has anything so pointy so thoroughly begged the question "What's the point?" Its real legacy will be to make Donald Trump's ego appear tame. The big question, of course, remains: Where are they putting the driving range?

To add insult to injury, they had to pick a German design. You guys already ruined the 20th century. Now you have to ruin the 21st century too? Next they'll get a Japanese landscape architect to do the garden. For good measure, let's get a team of Saudis to do the interior decorating. □

Rich Herschlag is a free-lance writer whose Web site is www.richsrant.com.