

New York giant

Alex Garvin has the toughest job in New York – finding a vision for Ground Ze satisfies survivors, businesses and politicians. If he can pull it off, he will become it among the companion of th

At one extreme are the victims' families, many of whom would like to see Ground Zero remain vacant. At the other are people who want to see the twin towers rebuilt. Alex Garvin, the urban planner in whose hands the future of Lower Manhattan rests, can't give either group exactly what it wants.

'Can you imagine Churchill, in 1945, announcing that any site where people died during the blitz wouldn't be built on?' Garvin asks during an interview in his Upper East Side apartment. But he adds: 'I had a very moving letter the other day from a boy who said he couldn't be happy until the World Trade Center rose again.'

Garvin, whose official title is vice-president for planning, design and development at the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, is determined to find a middle ground. 'I'm pretty sure we're going to do something with this site that's much better than what was here before,' he says, even before he knows what that something is.

An author (his 480-page The American City: What Works, What Doesn't is clear-headed and cogent) and teacher (his urban planning course has been a favourite of Yale students for 37 years), Garvin takes the view that any urban renewal scheme must stimulate market forces to succeed. He asks: 'Can you think of one memorial in the world that has really changed the way people think about and used a city?' The answer – his answer – isn't Washington DC but Milan, where Giuseppe Mengoni's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (a monument to the Battle of Magenta, an 1859 rout of Austria) turned a grimy medieval neighbourhood into a bustling commercial centre. The 1867 project spurred the construction of covered shopping arcades in cities from London to Cleveland.

Garvin's goal is nothing less: a memorial that changes the way people 'think about and use New York'. It may not be a galleria. But it may well be in the shape of Milan's galleria, which is an X. Garvin, who is 61, has a thing for cruciforms. One clue is the bowtie that invariably crosses the placket of his crisply tailored shirt – a portable transept and nave under his chin. Another is his approach to what, before 11 September, was the biggest project of his career: New York City's bid to host the summer Olympics in 2012.

Hired by the non-profit organisation NYC2012 as director of planning, Garvin realised that his biggest challenge was finding a way to move athletes between venues spread out over all five boroughs, plus part of New Jersey. The city's famous gridlock ruled out cars and buses and security concerns nixed public transport.

In a 'eureka' moment, Garvin sketched two arteries over a map of the city; one an east-west train line on existing tracks, the other a north-south ferry line on the East River from the Bronx to Staten Island. The two lines would meet at a new Olympic Village in Queens, just across the river from the United Nations complex. There is a lot more to the plan – Garvin chose

more than a dozen up-and-coming archite (archery), Deborah Berke (badminton), and turn little-used recreation facilities in ou striking Olympic venues. But if the details ar the cruciform – that makes an impre www.nyc2012.com). Whether it makes t International Olympic Committee won't bookmakers gave New York a good chance vote engendered by 11 September.

To Garvin, a strong concept is everythin make sense, symbolically, to revise the Olysone venue at Ground Zero, Garvin doesn't 'No. Ground Zero isn't on the X.' Single-min considerable political skills to create conspublic and private groups that have stakes i 'I have to come up with something,' he conceperiod, when people are still willing to work

Why not just use the X? After all, almost to restore Greenwich Street, which had bee artery before the World Trade Center's plinth success, less than a month after taking Silverstein, the owner of Seven World Trac David Childs of Skidmore, Owings and Merr building without blocking the street. As fo says it might make sense to restore Fulton S Battery Park City on the west side of Mar seaport on the east.

Arrayed near the crossing of Fulton and stores, housing, office towers (Garvin do problem getting people to work at Ground theatre for the New York City Opera is being a memorial.But Garvin is not even sure the monument has to be at the World Trade Centhat the memorial has to be big. 'We're goi people coming to New York to see this forev receive them in an appropriate way.'

Of course, Garvin is not a free agent. He turn answers to New York's governor and a comes up with a concept as strong as his Ol position to affect the city in a way nobody city's fabled mid 20th-century power broker Moses, Philadelphia's Ed Bacon and Chica 'great figures,' he says, who made indelible 'If I succeed here, I will have done the same