The new museum replaces the cramped existing space the museum has shared with Congregation Mikveh Israel on Fifth Street, just north of the new site, since 1976.

This 100,000 square-foot facility will spread exhibits and interactive displays about American Jewish history over three permanent exhibit floors.

“This museum is about Jews, but by no means exclusively for Jews. The story of the American Jewish Experience is in many ways a very particular and unique story,” says Michael Rosenzweig, the museum’s president and CEO.

“On the other hand, it is quintessentially the American immigrant experience that we’re describing in this museum, and in that respect, the lessons to be derived are truly universal.”

The museum’s exterior terra cotta and glass design, by Polshek Partnership Architects, attempts to symbolize the fact that “the American Jewish community is fully part of American society and there is a transparency between the two,” says Rosenzweig.

According to architect James S. Polshek “There have been few design challenges over the past 45 years of practice that equal those posed by the NMAJH.

“Two aspects of the commission account for this. The first is the incomparably important public location on Independence Mall. The other is the central theme of the Museum: that although freedom must be incontrovertible, its guarantees are fragile. We believe we have met this dual challenge by expressing both place and mission in a way that honors American Judaism and the City of Brotherly Love.”

The museum has an open, 85-foot high atrium with skylights illuminating the entrance, and open staircases from the ground floor to upper floors. The fifth floor of the museum will be used for special events and temporary exhibits.

Visitors will begin their main tour on the museum’s fourth floor, where the story of American Jewish life begins with the arrival of the first Sephardic Jews in Nieuw Amsterdam (New York) in 1654. The permanent exhibits will take up 25,000 square feet of space on three floors, with examples from the museum’s collection of more than 20,000 objects ranging from Colonial times to the present.

The museum will also include a Center for Jewish Education to serve school children, a 200-seat theater space, an event space overlooking Independence Mall (bar/bat mitzvah planners, start your engines!) and a gift shop.

The fourth floor exhibits will explore Jewish history through the beginning of the great surge of Eastern European immigration in the 1880s.

From there, the tour winds downward to the third floor’s artifacts from the period 1880

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