



out of the region in the end. The actual graph has been simplified, of course, and the power traded for accuracy is more than worth the normalization of the graph.

Shortly after the monument was chosen as the winning design, the names were summarily reordered alphabetically because the jury felt that the chronological order would make it impossible for visitors to find loved ones—and they were correct. However, the power of the design—and the whole reason for its form—was suddenly diminished. In addition, the names themselves became less important as each of the 16 James Jones became indistinct. As originally conceived, the names of servicemen and women often would appear in relation to the others with whom they had died. Like any great work of art, the more one knows about the piece and its context (such as the names of soldiers from a battalion that suffered heavy losses at a particular battle), the more meaningful it becomes.

The answer was a multiplicity of organization that reordered the names as originally intended. Two podiums also were added at each side of the entrance to the monument that encased alphabetical directories of the names and locator panels. The addition not only restored the monument's original power and emotional potential, but the experience was made feasible in light of the needs of its visitors. The two organizations were essential in creating the necessary experiences.

designer: Maya Lin

**Vietnam War Memorial**

experience design 1.1



Most design works on many levels, often on levels that the viewer, participant, or user isn't even aware of throughout the experience. Some of these manifest themselves in emotional reactions that even unknowing bystanders don't understand. Maya Lin's Memorial to the Vietnam War in Washington, D.C., ensures that no one becomes an innocent bystander—everyone is affected.

How this is done is subtly but wonderfully perfected. By combining simple forms of organization with an understated, yet haunting, presentation, she has personalized what is normally impersonal about war memorials.

The monument is a seemingly simple nexus of two black granite walls, inscribed with the names of the 58,183 US men and women who officially died during the Vietnam War. The fact that the names are there is unusual enough, but their organization is critical to the shape, form, and evocative nature of the memorial.

In essence, the wall is a statistical chart of deaths over time during the period from 1959 to 1975. Instead of a flat base (like a normal chart would have), the diagram is inverted, sloping into the earth, like a grave, and looming 10 feet high at its apex.

What gives the monument its structure is the organization of names (deaths) over time as the deaths gradually build from the early years, and then decrease as the US pulled

## Vietnam War Memorial

[www.virtualwall.org](http://www.virtualwall.org)  
Washington, D.C.