

TWIN SPIRES

Since their construction in 1894-95, the Twin Spires of Churchill Downs have stood watch over the famous racetrack and each passing Kentucky Derby. Over the years, they have become one of the most recognized structures in all of sports. Designed by 24-year-old Joseph D. Baldez, the Twin Spires were created basically for ornamental purposes as part of the grandstand. The Spires now serve as an icon for all of Thoroughbred racing.

The Twin Spires have been referred to as towers, cupolas, and even, steeples, and stand atop the oldest section of the complex. They top out at 120 feet high.

In the Spring of 2002, the Spires underwent a comprehensive restoration project as the Downs began its \$26 million Phase I construction of 64 luxury suites built atop the existing grandstand just north of the Spires. The project marked the first time in history of the Spires that the structures had undergone such an overhaul. Scaffolding was constructed around each of the Spires with a metal catwalk built along the apex of the roof so crews could access the structures. The interior walls of the Spires were removed so engineers could fully investigate the structural supports and determine how well they had aged. Amazingly, after 107 years, the wind and weather had not taken much of a toll and only minor work was done to better stabilize the existing supports. The main work turned out to be cosmetic as nearly a quarter-inch of paint was removed from the Spires' exterior. Additionally, stainless steel thimbles were developed to secure the kingpoles, the 15-foot tall poles that rise from the top of each spire. The thimbles replaced an antiquated anchoring system of shims that were held in place around the poles by metal bands. Each kingpole now rests in the thimbles similar to a candle being held in place by a candleholder. The cost of the restoration totaled \$209,000, a sum that was five times the original \$40,000 it cost to build the entire grandstand upon which the Spires sit.

Baldez designed several structures in Louisville, but the Spires remain as an everlasting monument to the former architect.

Former Churchill Downs President Col. Matt J. Winn is reported to have told Baldez, "Joe, when you die, there's one monument that will never be taken down: the Twin Spires."