

ARCHITECTURAL INTIMACY | AN URBAN RETREAT

where there is no vision, the people perish [The Bible, Hebrews]

ARCHITECTURAL INTIMACY - AN URBAN RETREAT

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Summary

The purpose of this study is to investigate ritual in order to establish an intimacy between architecture and its users. The liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church is used as a point of departure, but the study is especially concerned with personal secular ritual.

Intervention

The intervention will function as an urban retreat. It consists of a series of contemplative spaces that facilitate a spiritual journey. The Retreat is based on ideas surrounding the traditional Roman Catholic Convent, which informed the accommodation schedule to a great extent. The study recognizes the new approach of the Roman Catholic Religion, which entails a holistic ministry that plays an increasingly critical and social role. The Retreat will therefore function as a base for religious and social organizations to work from in the inner-city of Pretoria. The retreat will also offer limited social facilities such as counselling and seminar rooms.

Site

The site is situated in the inner-city of Pretoria, in the block directly north-east of Church Square. The site consists of two properties: the northern consists of the National Library of South Africa (NLSA), with the southern being a pan-handle erf that functions as a service courtyard for commercial ventures on Church Street. The Noordvaal Thoroughfare runs parallel to the site on its western edge, linking Church and Vermeulen Streets. The site exists unnoticed by pedestrians using the arcade, because of a boundary wall. Of further importance is the 2,8 m slope of the site from south to north over a distance of 140 m.

Design

The project directly addresses urban issues as well as spatial and emotional ones. The intervention is seen as part of a process of architectural proliferation. It takes the existing fabric and current conditions and rather than replacing them, creates a synthesis of elements so as to evolve a new urban condition; i.e. how to grow a piece of city rather than how you build it. Design decisions were influenced by Pallasmaa's ideas on fragile architecture: it is concerned with real sensory interaction instead of conceptual manifestations. Problems and opportunities are identified on a small scale and the response is focussed on these: it is an architecture that grows and opens up.

Contents

List of figures	ii
Prologue	1
Context Study	5
Precedents	41
Baseline	57
Design Discourse	79
Technical Report	95
References	113

List of figures

1. Corporate mass in the Church.
Henze, A; Moosbrugger, B. 1966. La Tourette, The Le Corbusier Monastery. Germany. Josef Keller Josef Keller Verlag Starnberg, pg52.
2. Reception of the Great Eastern Hotel.
Bullivant, L; McCorquodale, D. 2002. From Milton Keynes to Manhattan. London. Black Dog Publishing, pg110.
3. Raadsaal and Transvaal Provincial Administration, View form Church Street looking west; photograph by author.
4. Images of the Church Street and Sterland bomb explosions.
Puren, S. 1998. Mondig Wording. In De Kat, 1998, pg80.
5. Informal trading along Church Street; photograph by author.
6. Historic photographs of Pollies Arcade, Koedoe Arcade and the Noord Vaal Thoroughfare.
Collection of the University of Pretoria. Pretoria.
7. Diagram of the existing arcade and open plan system in the CBD Core; image by author.
8. Figure ground study of CBD Core; image by author.
9. First National bank, Burlington House, SA National Library, Old Mutual building; photograph by author.
10. Noord Vaal Thoroughfare; photograph by author.
11. Old Reserve Bank Offices, Prudential Assurance, Cathedral of the Sacred Heart; photograph by author.
12. Plan of study area, ground floor plan of proposed design.
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13. Axonometric view of intervention, Passageway surrounding the auditorium.
Savi, V. 2003. Siena's Modern Tradition. In Domus, 2003/01 pg76,82,84.
14. Queen Street Mosque, Opera Plaza; photograph by author.
15. Boundary wall Old Mutual Building, Facade SA National Library Building, Noord Vaal Thoroughfare; photograph by author.
16. Vehicular access, informal traders, Noord Vaal Thoroughfare; photograph by author.
17. Entrance Noord Vaal Thoroughfare, Church Street, Burlington Arcade; photograph by author.
18. Aerial photograph of site; photograph by author.
19. Position of site in the city-block; image by author.
20. Section AA; image by author.
21. Section BB; image by author.
22. Structures to be demolished, position of site in the city-block, relation of site to the Noord Vaal Thoroughfare; image by author.
23. Shadows on summer solstice; image by author.
24. Shadows on winter solstice; image by author.
25. Second Vatican council.
Purvis, A. 2003. The Roman Catholic Church. In Time, 2003/04/31, pg 34.
26. Numbers of users of the Retreat; table by author.

27. Accommodation Schedule; table by author.
28. Patterns of movement; diagram by author.
29. Architects' early conceptual diagrams.
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30. Explanatory axonometric.
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31. The Cathedral seen from Longmarket Street.
Wale, L. 1983. The Cathedral of the Holy Nativity: Pietermaritzburg. In *Architect and Builder*, pg8.
32. Main entrance and gathering space.
Wale, L. 1983. The Cathedral of the Holy Nativity: Pietermaritzburg. In *Architect and Builder*, pg5.
33. Spire of St Peters showing above rampart.
Wale, L. 1983. The Cathedral of the Holy Nativity: Pietermaritzburg. In *Architect and Builder*, pg3.
34. Longitudinal section through the site; image by author.
35. Ground floor plan of La Tourette.
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36. The Cloister of La Tourette.
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37. The Lower Church.
Henze, A; Moosbrugger, B. 1966. *La Tourette, The Le Corbusier Monastery*. Germany. Josef Keller Verlag Starnberg, pg49.
38. Ground floor plan.
Nuttall, J.C. 1993. Roelof Uytendogaardt. In *TIA Journal*, Volume 6, pg14.
39. Interior view of pulpit and main seating area; photograph by author.
40. Light filtering in through clerestory; photograph by author.
41. Church surrounded by veld.
Nuttall, J.C. 1993. Roelof Uytendogaardt. In *TIA Journal*, Volume 6, pg1.
42. Section on primary east-west axis; sketch by author.
43. Detailing of connections; photograph by author.
44. Main horizontal circulation space; photograph by author.
45. Site plan; diagram by author.
46. Section through void; diagram by author.
47. Exterior view of entrance, main exhibition space.
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48. Clara-Clara.
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49. Delineator.
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50. SBAT diagram.
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51. Oval water garden in the centre of the Annex at the Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum.
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52. Courtyard in the Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail in Meknes, Morocco.
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53. Two chimney-like courtyard allow daylight into the back part of the deep property.
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54. Sunken courtyard and roof garden as extension to villa.
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55. Diagram and photographs indicating important elements in the surrounding fabric.
56. Marrakesh's Medina.
Metalsi, M; Treal, C; Ruiz, J. 2000. The Imperial Cities of Morocco. Paris; Pierre Terrail, pg13.
57. Typical plan of the Ghoya house and contemporary structures in Guinea.
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59. The Great Court at the British Museum forms a contemporary sun space.
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60. Images of contextual influences regarding material choice.
61. Interior view of the Ibarak Church of the Light in Osaka.
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62. Interior view of the 'hot' room in the hamman el Kachacine.
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63. Concept sketches of the masses and voids, and the intervention in the pan-handle.
64. Concept image of the Retreat within the city block.
65. Concept model indicating the main public open space.
66. Concept model indicating the positioning of the courtyards adjacent to the existing boundary wall.
67. View of the Retreat as seen from the Noordvaal Thoroughfare.
68. Image of the library situated against the Old Mutual boundary wall.

69. Image of the courtyard situated between the Audience and Chapter Rooms.
70. Concept image of a courtyard indicating the response to the existing fabric.
71. Image of model indicating a courtyard surrounded by the accommodation area.
72. Interior view of the cloister.
73. Entrance to the Chapel.
74. Interior view of the Chapel.
75. Concept sketches of the detail connection between the new and the existing.
76. Pivoting door forming a shading device.
77. Concept sketch of detail of pivoting door.
78. Concept sketches of the western facade of the Common Room and sliding shading devices.
79. Isometric view of the Chapel and multi-use hall seen from the cloister.
80. Concept sketches of connection details.
81. Images of a concept model indicating the insertion of the Chapel and multi-use hall into the National Library of South Africa Building.
82. Concept sketch of cell layouts and fold-open handwash basin.
83. Diagram of a section through a cell indicating first the summer and then the winter functioning of the sun porches.
84. Images of off-shutter concrete.
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