

## Critical reflection

The heritage value of the site demands it to be respected, conserved and protected, but pure preservation or restoration was never the project's intention. Throughout the dissertation process, consisting of continuous research and experimentation, it became evident (repeatedly) that a contemporary design for the Union Building should not lie with constant preservation, nor should it be completely restored to an earlier glory. However, it also became clear that the site should be transformed for the contemporary society and that the design should honour the multiple narratives of the place.

Reflecting on my original normative position, I hold fast to the opinion that there is no single aesthetic approach and solution to heritage projects and that each project, site, and even specific area on the site should be dealt with individually, with respect and appropriately. I still believe that both a vernacular and aesthetic solution could work in such a project as long as every design method is underpinned by, and every decision is based on respecting the site's heritage. Throughout the dissertation process, it became more and more clear that it would be impossible to fit the Union Buildings site into one single binary heritage approach "box" with a single heritage approach such as preservation or restoration. The site is far too rich in vast layers of heritage and a collection of cultures and events that played a role in the shaping of the site over time. Some areas call for restoration, others for preservation, and some for adaptive reuse whilst those areas with no significant heritage value can be re-imagined for contemporary use. I concluded that if one single solution should be applied across the site, it would most likely lead to the site's stagnation, or at least that of portions of the site would over time lose their value to the public and become deserted. Thus a post-modernist approach of pluralities is indeed, in my opinion, the best solution to deal with the different areas of existing heritage with different heritage approaches. It can also allow for the design to embrace and include the multiple forgotten narratives and histories on-site whilst accommodating diverse layers of uses in a contemporary way.

Reflecting on the design process and iterations: Although the original intention of the project was to re-imagine the Union Building gardens as a mere robust, public park and possible indigenous garden, this soon changed with the progressive research and repetitive design. As the research of the site progressed, and by studying and attempting to understand the significant history of the site, more and more layers of forgotten heritage were uncovered. So this theme of the lost and forgotten heritage influenced the main aim of the project, to articulate and celebrate these forgotten layers. This theme and aim influenced the program, design form, materiality, and planting slowly revealing the contemporary design.

It was difficult to attempt at unique and interesting form making that could elevate the site to an exciting "modern" park, because this approach and experiments of manipulating the topography and landscaping, too often treated the site somewhat as tabula rasa (a clean slate) disrespecting or ignoring the heritage. So it was concluded that these approaches were not appropriate for a heritage site and thus the design was dealt with in a more respectful manner that would not only preserve and restore the terraces and heritage sculptures, but also the Southern lawn with its heritage trees.

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Future recommendations: The development of the design for this project was primarily driven by the site's history and physical heritage structures, but it can be very beneficial in the future to have interviews with community members or site visitors. On every site visit, I found that both the staff of the landscape maintenance team and also visitors were very unwilling to speak about the site or their work. Staff members stated that they were not allowed to speak to anyone as if fearing they will be in trouble, or that they would be quoted. It would be beneficial, if a future project is undertaken at the Union Buildings, to attempt such a community engagement project in collaboration with the Department of Public works to assist in easing the process and putting staff and visitors at ease that the interviews will have no repercussions.

Conclusion: Throughout my studies, I have always had a bit of a reluctance to work with heritage sites, as I was taught throughout my youth to be respectful of heritage and heritage sites, to the extent of only being an onlooker within the space, which prevented one from interacting with it. My opinion of architectural heritage sites has changed where my original opinion leaned more to the side of preservation, careful restoration, and respectful and passive use. I have seen how this could possibly lead to the disuse and possible abandonment or ruin of these sites and how the contemporary approach to the design of their landscapes can possibly positively influence their continued future use and value in the urban landscape. I have learned how one can treat the heritage structures with respect by preserving and restoring them, but still allowing and designing for contemporary uses within the landscape. In my career going forward, I will retain this newfound knowledge that perhaps our initial opinion of and approach to a site and project is not necessarily the best for its users or for its continued existence, particularly when dealing with heritage sites. I will also, in the future be less reluctant to accept and deal with a project that includes heritage aspects as it no longer necessarily means a hands-off approach to the site. I have come to believe that our heritage sites should not only be preserved and restored for future generations to see and learn about but that the future lies in the revival of our stagnant and abandoned heritage sites in our urban environments.

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