An URBAN Detail
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What defines the architectural character of a space?

What defines the architectural character of a Detail?

What defines the relationship between space and details as Architecture?

These questions lead the study of space as a Whole through the investigation of its parts – shape, material, assembly and its surroundings.

The investigation examined how the detail influences the space it assembles, how space conforms the structure embracing it and how a structure affects its surroundings. Observing how the Whole evolved through the process was an additional task of the study.

The design intended to create among every element a vocabulary apprehensible throughout the entirety of the project. The manipulation of each material, detail and edifice to share this vocabulary developed a cohesion among them. This relationship allowed the inhabitant to have a complete perception of the element and Whole’s character.
Scale:
Defining three levels of perception

The urban scale of Barcelona’s Olympic City development involved the reshaping of the urban fabric. The project interlaces multiple types of activities with existing urban conditions such as the beach area, the old city fabric, commercial spaces and residential developments. It is a Joint/Detail at an urban scale.

The proportions of the series of paths and simple edifices of Cesar Portela’s Fisterra Cemetery convey a proper scale for dwelling. The careful arrangement of the edifices, minimal use of elements and tangible boundaries define space and harmoniously integrate the inhabitant with the context by framing images of the surroundings. With these means the project becomes a Joint/Detail between the dweller and the site.

In the Brion Family Cemetery, Carlo Scarpa applies one tectonic vocabulary on space, materials, and details. The project’s Form expresses the character of a Joint/Detail. It is revealed cohesively on several scales and each space’s assembly relates directly to the inhabitants presence. The project acts as a Joint/Detail between dweller and space.
Identifying the character of the site became a determinant factor to establish the nature of the proposed intervention, the Whole. Defining this Whole as a derivative of the site’s character allowed them both to be intrinsically part of each other. The Whole had the task to integrate and complement the site.

A thorough analysis made clear the need to identify the precise points of intervention along the site. These points became essential to mark the presence of the Whole and how would it be tangibly perceived. Establishing this, set the grounds for the design process to elaborate on scale, proportion and tectonic issues, and develop the cohesion among the elements of the project.

The study consisted of a series of sections through the identified points along the site. They captured the pattern, typology, scale and density of the context. Three typologies surfaced: Institutional, residential and recreational. Each typological area, structure and activity existed isolated from the other. This showed the lack of connection and interaction throughout the urban fabric. This became an evident problem to be addressed by the design.

It was determined that the project would hold the program for a recreational area. It would provide a tower for cultural and social activities, an entrance area to formally define the project’s access, multi-use concession spaces, piers and paths to connect the existing urban fabric to the beach area. Each of these areas were located in accordance with the site’s typology pattern.
The Whole

GATE
TOWER
PIER
CONCESION A
CONCESION B
CONCESION C

the parts
Process:
Calibrating scale and developing cohesion

The initial stages of the design process explored the extents of the intervention in the site. The site’s proportion and geometry could be associated with a linear shape. One outcome of the process was to have this line tangibly perceptible without being too literal in its construction. Careful calibration of the dwelling areas, paths and structures successfully materialized this Line.

This design process could be characterized as being diachronic as well as synchronic. It gradually defined the Whole by constantly circulating each finding among earlier and later phases of the design. Applying these findings on urban, dwelling and detail elements of the project, and consequently the Whole, created the cohesion among them sought by the design. Thus, details began to assemble spaces, spaces to construct edifices, edifices to define the Whole and the Whole to relate with the surroundings.
Perception:
Aprehending the elements comprising the project

The project is gradually presented to the inhabitant on his approach to the area. Construing the image of the project, the Whole, involves perceiving the character and Form of the elements comprising it. These elements are embodied by three different materials. Aside from their inherent purposes for construction these materials indicate the location, outline space and provide enclosure for the interventions.

Initially, at a urban scale - being outside the project - the elements are perceived through the use of Concrete. The massive quality of the material illustrates the location of points of intervention and provides a sense of their shape. The perception at this distance defines the extents of the Whole.

On a closer approach, Corten Steel delineates the space marked by the concrete mass. This material, while providing structural support, frames the dwelling area of each element. Its capability to withstand corrosion makes it ideal for the area.

The spatial character of each edifice is further defined through the use of Wood. This material articulates and encloses the dwelling area. Its warm and noble qualities mediate between the inhabitant and the additional parts conforming space. At this level of interaction with the project all elements comply with their pragmatic purpose and transmit the tectonic qualities bestowed upon them to define space. The details, apprehensible to the dweller, present how each element is combined, thus, revealing the cohesive relationship among spaces and edifices.
Project

The Path

The Gate

The Tower

The Pier

The Concession
The path serves as a physical connection between the existing urban fabric and the elements comprising the Whole. It is embodied by wood planks which is the material constantly interacting with the dweller.
The Gate

The Gate, located at the west end of the site, serves as the formal access to the project. It attaches to the Path and connects to the Tower.
The Tower

The Tower serves as a focal point in the area and denotes the west outskirts of the existing urban fabric. While providing an observation deck, it holds the program for cultural and social activities.
Corten steel frames further define the extent of the places already distinguished by the concrete shapes.
The Tower:
Plan, section & elevation
The Pier

The Piers works as an extension of the roads that penetrate the urban fabric. They strengthen the road’s perpendicular axis to the site and connect the beach area and the project to the existing area.
The Pier: Axonometric & model
The Pier: Plan, section & elevation
The Concessions - Type A -

The concessions are multi-use spaces that extend along the entire site. Intentionally they were arranged repeatedly through the project to sustain the tangible presence of the project. In addition, they activate the zone by complimenting the existing recreational and institutional areas adjacent to the project.

There are three types of concessions, varying on their degree enclosure. Type A offers the least enclosed alternative. The wood panels enclose one of its lateral and top sides. The retractable wood screen, a movable element articulating space, creates a sun shade when drawn to the top.
concrete wall
metal (corten steel) structure
wood floor
wood closure
adjustable wood closure
The Concession - Type A - : Plan, section & elevation
The Concessions - Type B -
The Type B offers a multi-use space, a balanced amount of openness and enclosure. The wood panels enclose two of its lateral sides.
The Concession - Type B ::
Axonometric & model

- Concrete wall
- Metal (Corten steel) structure
- Wood floor
- Wood closure
- Adjustable wood closure

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The Concession - Type B -
Plan, section & elevation
The Concessions - Type C -
This alternative has the highest degree of enclosure among the three concessions. The wood paneling encloses three of its lateral sides.
The Concession - Type C -
Axonometric & model
The Concession - Type C -:
Plan, section & elevation
The Whole
Having an image of all the elements together make clear and percivable the character of the whole.
Conclusion

The findings of this thesis are about architecture and its design process. Defining the nature of each element, concept, even decisions, led to the roots of what defines Architecture. These inquiries rendered the project with a deep search of the factors that initiate an architectural project. Through this research it was acknowledged that the design process could have a starting and an ending point but its findings inform every stage of its development.

The Urban Detail is an area that engages totally with the needs of the surroundings. The intention was, more than fixing a problem or implanting a new object, to extend from, complement, and become a part of the existing fabric. The elements introduced in the area, like the tower, became visually strong and made it visually apprehensible from a distance. The presence of these elements made tangible what previously was an invisible remnant of the urban fabric. They bring together institutional, recreational and residential areas by means of one common element, the Whole, that borders and connects the entire area.

Analogous to having parts defining a Whole, this design endured constant redefinition resulting from the detailed study of the elements comprising the project. Thus, the remark of it being both diachronic and synchronic. The most influential decisions came together halfway through the design process. Understanding this process gave a wider perspective of the definition of space; the factors that define it and how it becomes Architecture.
Vita
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Education

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