in search of architecture
IN SEARCH OF ARCHITECTURE

by Bill Gibson

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Abstract:

A view. A path. These are the areas of investigation for this thesis. A residential structure is incorporated to analyze the impact that these two concepts have on the design process. The building project uses openings and structural direction to further emphasize the connection between building and site. The ability to continually connect with the site as one progresses through the structure, was an important aspect in this study. By the use of internal and external paths one can enjoy the site through covered openings. These openings are exposed to the natural elements, as well as those that are controlled by artificial systems. The direction in which the building is placed also intends for each resident to experience an outdoor view. As residents travel from one point to another, they can stop along a path and connect with the site and its surroundings.
Site:

The site is an open field, which is located on the outskirts of Blacksburg, VA. The site was picked for two reasons: the view of the range that surrounds the town and the ability for the residents to be linked to the town along with Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). The site has direct access to the city bus line and a sidewalk that leads directly to the center of town and commerce. This will allow residents to continue their independence as they grow older. The residents can achieve this through involvement with the University and community service organizations. Also, adjacent to the site is a walking path that leads to the University campus and town. This could be used by the residents for exercise as well as the enjoyment of the back parcels of property.
The topography of this site allowed for a central circular object merged with three rectangular wings. The wings radiate out at equal angles forming a hexagon at the center. The center court is composed of steel columns, with glass curtain walls, to allow all of the residents to enjoy the view of the mountain range. This goal was obtained by placing all of the private balconies in the western direction. To the west lies the main view, which captures all of the everyday living experiences, from waking up in the morning, to sitting and enjoying the view throughout the day. All levels of private living occur at a point that is fourteen feet above the ground floor, which reinforces a sense of privacy and security.

These views can be enjoyed from the comfort of the resident’s apartment, to interacting with other residents on the main floor. The view of the range is maintained through a series of openings located on the main floor. These areas are the public program of this village, and include the storage areas.

Glass block is placed in the front wall of each unit. These units are located along the kitchen wall and above the entry door. The glass block allows for natural light to enter the unit early in the morning and still maintain the privacy and security needed by its residents.

The sunset can be viewed and enjoyed in the warm months, from an outside terrace that is situated in a southwest direction.

To further enjoy the outdoor view from each living unit, the dining room is located at the rear of the structure along the northwest axis. In consideration for future possible development, the structure is located near a plateau which drops off down a steep slope to the floor below, aiding in keeping the view of the range maintained. At the midpoint of each wing one can continue their view of the range through a ten foot-wide opening in the structure, in an area that allows for small group interaction. From this point to the end of each wing is a covered area which can be used for relaxation, shielded from the elements. This is obtained as a result of the living spaces being elevated fourteen feet above this area. This area is supported by a series of columns.

The front facade of each wing is composed of precast concrete, stone, and brick with openings that allow the natural light through during the day. Just behind this is a 10-foot walkway, which allows residents easy access to the center court.
“All matter is spent light...It is light when finished being light becomes material. In silence is the will to be to express, and in light the will to be to make: the two aspects of the spirit, one non-luminous and the other luminous.

The luminous turns to a prevalence of luminous, and this prevalence turns to flame, and flame deteriorates into material, and material becomes means, the possibilities, the evidence. So therefore mountains are spent light, the streams are spent light, the air is spent light. you are spent light...and the will to express and the will to make meet in a kind of threshold which you say are the inspirations.”

Louis I. Kahn

Light Studies
Conclusion:

This thesis began with a particular intent: to design a structure that addresses how one travels along a path and how they interact, or continue to relate, to the outside. The thesis also concentrated on how one can enjoy a specific view that can be framed. The conclusion of the thesis is almost a beginning on how one can arrange and manipulate space to be enjoyed by all. The end result was the ability to create a visual connection to the building through drawings incorporated on the preceding pages.

The ability for one to progress along internal and external paths and have a view of nature from almost any venue were the primary issues investigated through the building site and structure. The project also implied the importance of private vs. public spaces. These issues are important segments when it comes to residents living in the structure.

The conclusion of this thesis gives light to the importance of view and path. The struggle will be to incorporate these two elements into all buildings of this nature.