The Odd Fellows Lodge

INTERSPACES

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The Odd Fellows Lodge

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The existing building is the Odd Fellows Lodge built by simple frame construction around the turn of the century. The structure is older than other buildings in the immediate area, and it has an aura of solitude since newer construction has not responded to its presence. Conceived as a structure for a variety of uses, it was a place for community meetings, wakes and dances. Although it often stood idle over the years, these celebratory events made the building a special place within the community. In addition to the historical and experiential significance the geometry of the frame follows the proportional system of 1:2, and in doing so it established the precedent for further interventions.

The new stone construction provides an additional seventy-five percent to the volume of the frame. While the foundation responds to the frame, it does not exist solely to support it. The complexity of the foundation comes from the introduction of the new material and its influence on the structure. The foundation continues the original proportions of the frame by maintaining it in plan but changing it in section. The interspace between the foundation space and the upper space is the midsection where the dialogue between the two is most eloquent.
ABSTRACT

A discussion concerning the frame, foundation, midsection and stair of the Odd Fellows Lodge. Influenced by the precedents of rural Virginia’s pragmatic building techniques and the personal and poetic work of architect Carlo Scarpa, the interventions to the Lodge maintain its gentle existence while asserting a new presence as an introduction to downtown Blacksburg.
TRADITION

Since rural Virginia remains mostly farmland, economical and functional considerations rank among the most important factors in building. The simple charm of these structures is the result of necessity and practicality. They maintain a strong relationship between the ground and sky and distinguish the differences between above and below ground through appropriate form and material. Fixed forms on the landscape, their appearance alters daily with the interaction of light and reflection, the weathering that comes with time, and how each material’s color and texture interacts differently within these conditions.

VIRGINIA ARCHITECTURE

The characteristics of Virginia architecture can be summarized by the local tradition, availability of materials and methods of construction.

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PROPORTION

Early Virginia architecture followed a system of proportion introduced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries based on English country houses. Initially, timber construction was used. Later, masonry was considered more frequently for permanence. Proportion derived from geometry was visually pleasing and determined rules for construction.

The Odd Fellows Lodge continues this system of proportion based on the square, or more specifically two squares, so the ratio is 1:2. It is the guiding ratio throughout the original structure and exists in the doors, windows, and plan. It also influenced the stone foundation. There are exceptions regarding the guiding ratio of 1:2. This happens when there is an opportunity to make something better through juxtaposition and contradiction.

CONSTRUCTION

Determined by pragmatic considerations, there is a strong hierarchic order in the form and construction of details. A prominent room or joint that has importance or needs permanence receives special attention. Often, the solutions to the structure are simple and express the clarity of thought behind them.

MATERIAL

To fulfill the economic and pragmatic considerations in building, site specific materials are the first option for these structures. Stone and wood are the dominant materials. Brick, steel and glass are used when resources permit. The particular aesthetic of noble restraint in the Odd Fellows Lodge is determined by these conditions.
CARLO SCARPA

The work of architect Carlo Scarpa helped shape my thoughts on the Odd Fellows Lodge. Direct involvement with his architecture is crucial because of its highly personal nature and that it does not depend solely on the visual aspects of design. In his work, the senses experience material and site specific elements. The following six precedents are derived from his philosophy of design instead of employing motifs directly.

Establishing rules helps to regulate design. Often the design becomes better by breaking the rule using intuition. The best reason for interfering is simply to achieve a greater purpose. A broken rule becomes intriguing and begins the search for an answer. Often the logic used for breaking the rule will remain elusive, but these things somehow become better because of their deviations.

Piet Mondrian is an artist whose work exemplifies this precedent and may have influenced the work of Carlo Scarpa. In a series of later works Mondrian developed a rule in painting that involved intersecting black lines filled with color. Consequently all of the corners would meet precisely. In the last paintings of the series, the black lines became lines made up of color segments. The first established rule was altered by an outside influence. The fixed pattern of intersecting black lines becomes infinitely more complex with its transformation into irregular colored pieces. The corners no longer meet exactly which produces an unpredictable and fascinating pattern.
Traditional Materials, Modern Applications:

Carlo Scarpa used typical Venetian building materials, wood, stone, metal, plaster, glass, water, and clay tile. However, he did not copy the design of previous builders but relied on his own understanding of Venetian tradition. The origin of the architecture comes from the maker and not just the use of provincial materials.

Thoughts about introducing or mixing materials in an existing structure:

- gives strength and durability
- increases function
- draws attention to a detail
- adds complexity
- ornamentation
- concealment
Throughout the history of an old building there are usually several layers of construction spanning its life. In Scarpa’s work, restoration is less a concern than the introduction of a new element or series of elements that can help clarify an otherwise hazy history. His work interacts with the original structure without detracting from its qualities. There is no contradiction or competition between the old and the new. They interact, dependent on each other for clarity and context. Together they become great as the old gives the historical context and the new reveals or enhances this context through an additional layer. The new does not add importance, it clarifies.
A threshold builds expectations of what is to come. It does not necessarily delay the experience but enhances it. It is the meeting point of two realms, divided not by a line but by their overlapping boundaries. Thresholds can compliment or contradict, heighten an experience or cause disappointment. Ultimately, what characterizes a threshold is anticipation. By introducing new elements, Scarpa heightens one's awareness of what is already there.
Walking through a door frame, the first step of a stair, and turning a corner are everyday occurrences. They are also joints between two spaces. These are opportunities to make a small interaction into a big event and to make ourselves more aware of our senses. Kahn calls it the celebration of necessity.
The space between two things is an interstice for dialogue. Since Scarpa’s interventions did not always physically merge with the original, the break between the two materials became the joint. When two finished edges meet, the in-between space is the validation of their intrinsic differences and necessary union.

Void as Dialogue
Carlo Scarpa Precedent
Steps at the Brion Tomb

Architecture must make you think.
-Marco Frascari
Poetic Expression

By Gaston Bachelard

In architecture, there is no such thing as a good idea. There is only expression. - Carlo Scarpa

An architect’s language is developed to present or re-present how one perceives and understands circumstances: historical, cultural and natural. Everything is a reaction to an external stimulus, a personal response at expression. It is a statement or answer to what is already there. To have an idea in architecture implies the design process is one of creation or invention. It is non-a deductive process dialogue between the designer and the object and this is how architects discover what cannot be imagined.

Expression comes from intuition. Carlo Scarpa’s design process remains unknown to us, and while he said “I do not know what design is,” he used his intuition with site specific elements to guide design decisions instead of designing ideas. These personal solutions of expressions reinforce and clarify the existing structures, whether a wall or a water source.

Poetic Expression

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Lodge Facade

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SITE

The Odd Fellows Lodge is older than most of the buildings in the immediate area. It sits on a tertiary road between Prices Fork and Main Street in Blacksburg. As other structures were erected around it, the lodge remained distinctly separate and solitary. This is an important component of the enduring strength of the Lodge since it sits at the northern entrance of town. When elevated it will dominate its surroundings and will be the introduction to downtown Blacksburg.
...absolute boredom, the boredom that is not the equivalent of the absence of playmates. There are children who will leave a game to go and be bored in a corner of the garden.

-Gaston Bachelard
The height of the frame is twenty feet to the eave, the same as the width of the structure. It has a proportional system of 1:1 in the short direction and follows a 1:2 ratio in the long, which is the guiding ratio for further details throughout the frame. The historical, proportional, and experiential significance contributes to the new interventions.

FRAME

To elevate the frame it will be temporarily carried off the site while supported by two steel I-beams. The beams later become the permanent joint where the stone and the wood frame meet. The frame reaches towards the sky when elevated ten feet above ground but maintains a connection to the ground through the massive stone foundation. In the process of elevating the frame, the interior floors do not rise with the rest of the body. Instead, new levels are introduced in response to the stone addition.

Since the windows are to be eight feet above the floor they will allow only glimpses to the outside. An exception is where the stair passes briefly by a window. The roof, exposed and structurally visible, completes the top of the frame's construction. In the same manner as the frame, distribution of the roof's load continues through its long walls down to the tapered walls of the foundation. The roof acts as a cap to the frame much the same way that the concrete does to the top of the stone. These caps finish the end of one material and help receive and distribute elements above them.
There was a certain endurance and humble nobility established when the frame was first built, and this idea continues throughout the project. Specifically, the ordinary becomes elevated physically and metaphorically. The foundation enhances the frame by elevating it to an exalted level. It does not extend the frame’s life, but it does disrupt it. It memorializes the past and celebrates the future.

Geometry answers questions concerning the new construction within the existing building. The foundation, which supports the frame, roof, and floors, is visible from all levels of the interior. At the entrance level one passes through the foundation, instead of over it. This establishes an important condition for the midsection.

When stone is placed upon stone its form resides in the joint.

-Sverre Fehn

FOUNDATION

The foundation has a hierarchy in its stone walls. The two walls that taper towards the top reinforce the idea established during the move of the lodge. These are the walls that carry most of the loads of the building. The frame is supported by two large I-beams on the long walls during the move. Then the beams become part of the permanent construction on top of the two tapered foundation walls. Most of the weight of the structure is carried back to the ground by the two main walls. The indigenous stone holds back the ground and emerges from it to support the frame. Within it, concrete acts as a brace to carry the floor joists and a cap to the stone wall to accept the steel which supports the frame.
The midsection is the space where the frame and the foundation come together. Much like a threshold, it is not a distinct line between the two, rather a realm that involves space belonging to the frame and the foundation. This space is the connection for the entire building, but it is not limited to the physical joint of the beam. It is an interstice. This new space does all the “speaking” between the old and the new. It is a seam for multiple conditions, attic and cellar, interior and exterior, sky and ground.

The exterior layer of the frame and foundation meets in the middle by way of the I-beam that runs the length of the building. A variety of reasons exist for such a distinct separation between the stone and frame. First, the frame needs support to assist in its temporary move for the construction of the stone foundation. Second, the frame needs protection from the stone to allow air to pass between surfaces and keep the wood from deteriorating. Last, it carries compressive forces to the stone from the frame and the roof.

Elements that enter both rooms are generated from this interspace, but the construction is influenced by the particular surroundings. The properties change at various levels of the stair, allowing the spaces to maintain their separate identity. The midsection is not limited to the horizontal section of the building, but also occurs vertically in the stair.
STAIR

It is here that layers merge, and the two worlds of stone and wood come together. The stair does not separate the two spaces, but joins them vertically and spatially. It connects the two realms while allowing them to retain their individual character at equal values. The stair has different properties at different places within the structure. It relates to its immediate surroundings and adds additional layers between the exterior and interior of the building. It is the stair that creates the synergy between the two rooms above and below. The stair is carved out of the stone on the lower level. As it emerges, wood and steel become increasingly exposed. The wood easily makes this transition since it acts in compression and tension. The stone, on the other hand, only acts in compression. Steel is the intermediary between the wood and stone on all levels. Metal brackets separate the wood and stone on the lower level and carry the wood on the upper levels.

The vertical supports that run the entire height of the building are kept secondary to the steps. These suspended rods also provide the final layer from the exterior to the interior. The stair occurs on the side of the building where the ground is at its greatest force with the wall, and it keeps a measured ascent and descent between one realm and the next. It is the only thing that determines scale in the two rooms.

Pleasant Hill
Shaker Village

The stair is a path through the building. Like the sidewalk through a small community, it has a constant long view or axis with welcome distractions between the beginning and the end. The interactions with light and shadow, texture, material, form, gaps and narrow openings that turn to wide expansions, all encourage an awareness of one’s surroundings.

Architecture retains the complexities of life.
-Rinaldo Giurgola
READINGS


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Bill Galloway

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