

PRESERVATION AS PROVOCATION

2 0 0 7 A C S A / A I S C C O M P E T I T I O N

The nature of this competition is inherently an essay in time- an experiment to investigate how history inspires contemporary design. The analysis and understanding of the past was essential to inform and inspire the design of a new addition to a historic landmark. Designing architecture of the present time however requires a separate analysis of today's world, a consciousness of evolving typologies, technologies and trends. Bridging between the two is the source of the challenge – to add the new to the old whilst respecting the essence of the existing design essentially by using preservation as provocation.

REENA MISTRY
ARCH 384
T M BOAKE



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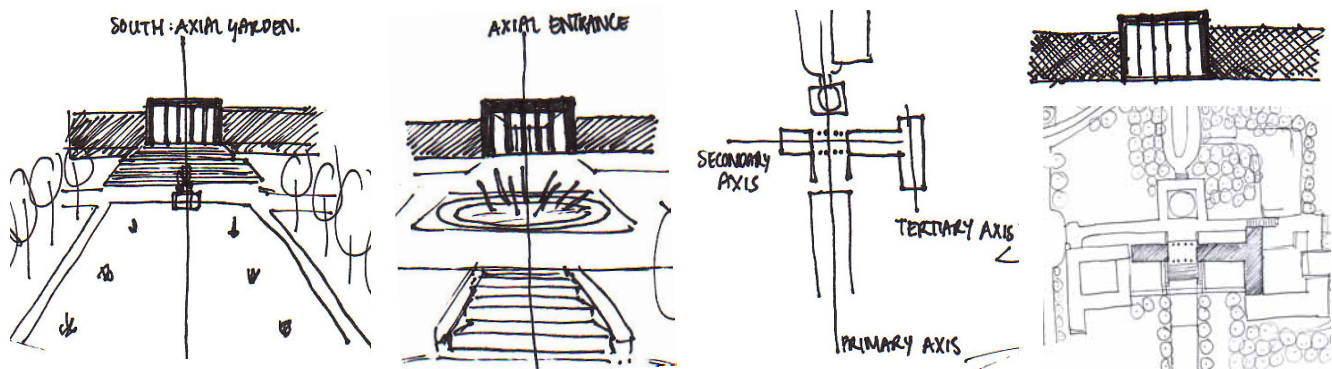
Prior to engaging in the preliminary stages of design, initiative was taken to research the meaning of preservation and its implications, since it is the root of this design challenge. It was immediately apparent that no single definition could encompass the many attitudes towards preservation ranging from Violet-le-Duc's notion of rebuilding architecture as it "should have been" rather than "as it originally was", to John Ruskin's view of seeing restoration as impossible as raising the dead.¹⁰ It was realized that it was important to define a stance on our personal beliefs of restoration and preservation.⁵ In addition, several reoccurring issues with preservation were determined: contextualization – the decision to match or contrast with the existing, or mediate by using compatible design features, consciousness to time and place – to recognize the time continuum of the past to present to the future and actively partake in it, and visual maintenance – preserving the integrity of the original.¹⁰ As a result, we decided to treat the past as prologue, best described by this quote,

*"The basic purpose of preservation is not to arrest time, but to mediate sensitively with the forces of change. It is to understand the present as a product of the past and a modifier of the future."*¹⁰

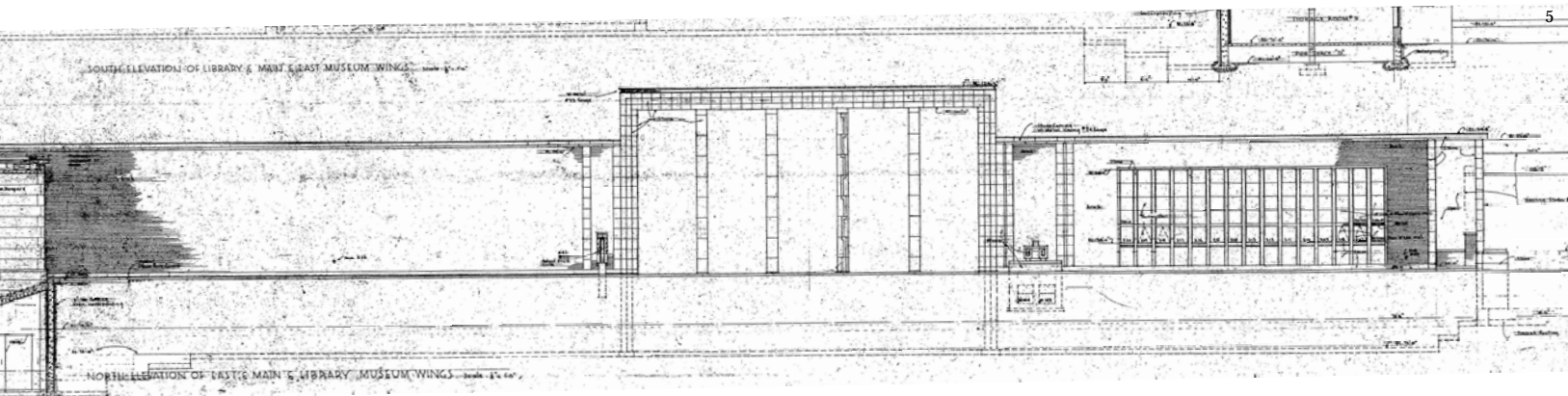
– John Lawrence

CRANBROOK AS A PRECEDENT

The personal philosophy generated from this preservation research informed and instigated the main ideas and decisions made in the addition to Saarinen's Library and Museum of the Cranbrook Academy of Art. This building acts as the centerpiece the Cranbrook, and just as importantly is the main precedent in this design challenge.⁵ A thorough analysis of the building according to program, site, composition, parti, axial geometry and positive and negative space, etc. in addition to researching Saarinen's works and original design intent inspired the design of the addition. Diagrams from this analysis are shown below:



Our personal experience of Cranbrook, in addition to readings, produced an awareness of the network of spaces that form Cranbrook and the importance of the experience of the journey through and between these spaces. The formal axes sets views and the landscaping and paths form the fabric of the site to which the building is integrated. The experience of moving through the propylea demonstrates the purposefully orchestrated experience of Saarinen's design. To maintain this ground level experience, sensitivity to the building mass, sequences of entry and axial relationships were carefully considered and resulted in the inspiration to design an underground addition. This resulted in a new building intrinsically linked to its existing counterpart; thus forming a relationship where Saarinen's architecture becomes the historical gem supported by the extensive but humble pedestal of the new addition.



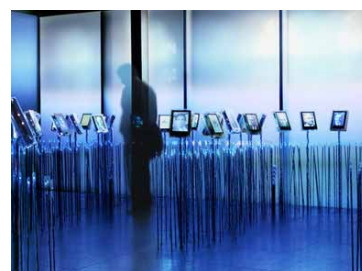
LINKED PROGRAMME PRECEDENT

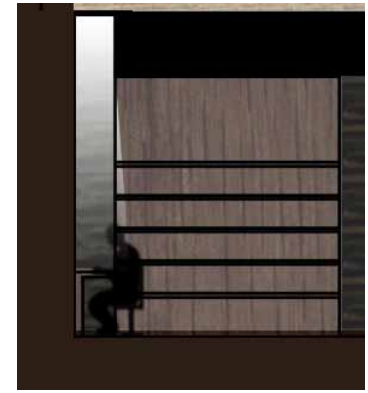


ABOVE: Saarinen's original entrances to library and museum: unification between both sets of programme.

RIGHT: media catalogue and café area, with Adjaye Nobel Field precedent below

Saarinen conceived the library and museum as intrinsically linked program, an idea expressed architecturally through the equivalent entrances and unified structure and form of the building.⁵ This intriguing notion was expanded upon in the design of the addition by producing common spaces between the library and museum. The central area on the lowest floor level is an example of the intertwined library and museum space. The café space creates a grand circulation and social space where both library and museum occupants begin and complete their experiences, producing a place to relax, mingle and expose unexplored programme. At a smaller scale, the “media catalogue” performs a similar function; clusters of screens at the base of the grand staircase provide information for both museum and library program. Students can use these touch-screens to search for library books, while visitors can be informed about new exhibits and general information. The screens can also be used to showcase media artwork for museum or library exhibits. This feature introduces a new technology and contemporary form of experience beyond the traditional information desk, which also marks an evolution of how library and museum spaces are experienced. David Adjaye's design of the Nobel Field exhibit at the Nobel Peace Center served as the precedent for this information area¹; it inspired the idea to use screens as a sculptural yet functional part of the program: a library catalogue presented as an art exhibit.





LIBRARY AND MUSEUM PRECEDENTS

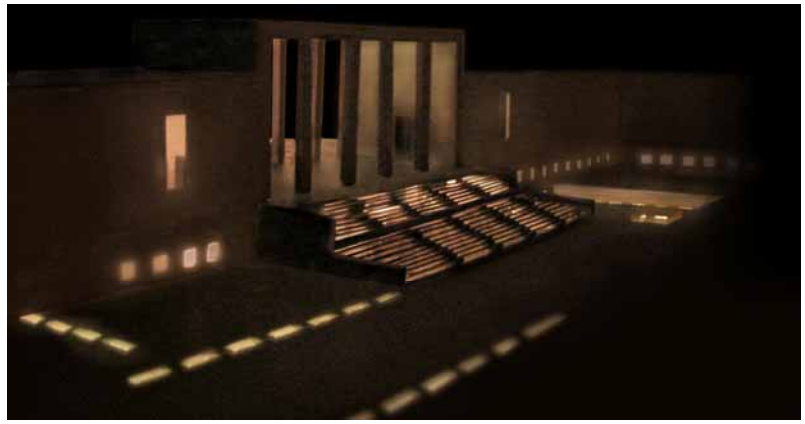
Library and museum typological precedents were based on personal experiences. The individual student desks in our Musagetes Architecture Library were the model for the design of the individual student carrels in the addition. In contrast to the “student cubicles” in most large student libraries, the individual space between each set of bookcases in our Musagetes Library produces a pleasant quiet space we understand and appreciate according to our own positive experiences. Our design takes this space and enhances the isolated and focused experience of an individual carrel by the skylights above each desk. The resultant view to the sky and natural effect of light over the workspace produces the focused and meditative atmosphere and energy of personal cells for studying. With respect to museum precedents, circulation between spaces seems to play the most prominent role in the experience of most museums. From Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim to the ROM, movement through and between different exhibits and galleries defines the architectural experience of a museum. Thus, to incorporate and preserve Saarinen’s original design intent of interweaving library and museum program, the circulation through the museum galleries involves the movement through the main central space shared with library circulation. Also the maintenance of Saarinen’s original entrances and passages to lower floor present the existing architecture as an artefact, preserving circulation as a means of the preservation of the original experience of the historic architecture.

UNDERGROUND PRECEDENTS

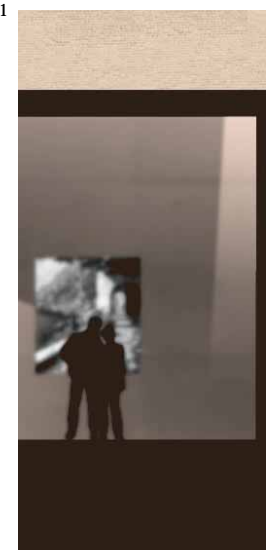
The focus of the new addition explores the realm of the underground, involving a new set of precedents of subterranean architecture². The underground experience was inspired by Peter Zumthor’s Thermal Baths. The use of light in Zumthor’s design encouraged the natural lighting effects in our design. Lighting formed by skylights highlight various parts of the program such as the student carrels mentioned previously, and the skylights running alongside the walls that form a wash of light along the museum walls, which also guides circulation. These skylights puncture the ground resulting in a façade for the new addition on the ground plane. This subtle façade and focus on lighting conditions also led to the manipulation



of the grand stair. Bjarke Ingels held a lecture which I attended where he presented the concept of a façade inspired by Spanish steps. This façade not only allowed for view out, but produces views into the space by night.⁶ With the great potential for dramatic lighting, since the existing Cranbrook stair faces south, the implementation of this idea was ideal. In addition to the view and lighting, the original staircase would be experienced in a new way from the underground. David Adjaye's lecture also inspired the use of natural light with projects that used particular apertures to produce dramatic light¹. In addition, the design of these submerged spaces also embraced the compressive and intimate atmosphere of the underground. This encouraged the use of solid, heavy natural materials, similar to those used in Zumthor's baths, and inspired the compressive and intimate quality of the small student study groups.



ABOVE: Bjarke Ingels staircase precedent
 BELOW: Zumthor and Adjaye lighting precedents, section view into museum space



Resulting from this multitude of precedents that span across a broad scope of time, is the new underworld to Saarinen's design. Historic architecture acted as the precursor to this new design and defined the formal relationships of circulation, organization and siting. Contemporary architecture inspired the interior quality and spatial relationships whilst addressing current sustainable and technological trends. As a result, designing the new addition to Cranbrook involved the evolution of ideas of the existing historic architecture, the influence of personal experience, and the values and trends of contemporary architecture – essentially the intriguing and inspirational fusion of the past and the present.

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