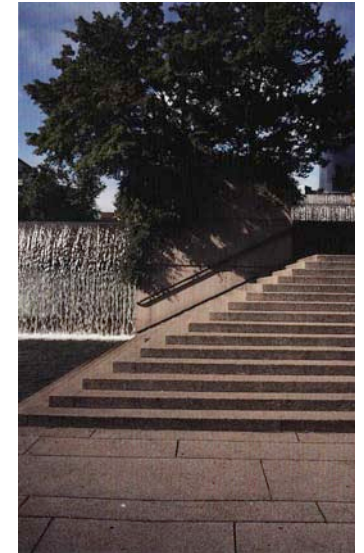**Finding Definition: Park Intervention**

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The Park Intervention seeks to fulfill an open-ended design problem of the "community gathering place", aiming not to be an existing place, and striving to avoid any recognition of a typical government commissioned community centre[i]. To create a typology for the ambiguous outline, a journey through precedents, both similar and at times and radically different is essential. In finding definition of typology and design specificity for the Park Intervention required filtering through precedents, distilling, translating, emulating, to varying degrees of connection; a melting pot of ideas and languages coming together to create a unique project.

"Machine in the Garden" Robinson Square Courthouses

New architectural proposals in Vancouver cannot be made without an awareness of the work of Arthur Erickson. The Robinson Square Courthouses set a point of departure for the Park Intervention. The Robinson Square Courthouses consists of an urban intervention: water, vegetation, and a bold concrete structure, more in tune with an ancient ziggurat than of the typical building (Fig. 1. and 2.). This new language of terraces and vegetation is introduced to a purely constructed downtown core; a developing city, where each building is typical glass, or faux historic object (Fig. 3.).

(Fig. 1. and Fig. 2.) Photos of the Courthouses

A key to this project is the identification of a problem. A city was developing ignorant to its surroundings, consisting of vastly vegetated mountains to the north, gently rolling hills to the south, and the downtown itself projecting out into the inlet of the Pacific Ocean. The element of water and vegetation, as well as a terracing scheme that has the ability to move from gently interacting planes to that of a terraced hill (Fig. 4.), all create "that acropolis of elements where casual and even discordant


(Fig. 3.) Middle: 3 government parking lots, the site for the Courthouses

juxtapositions are allowed"[ii]. This "juxtaposition" is actually more in place with the greater surroundings than the rest of the downtown development as it was happening. As summed up by Ricardo L. Castro and David Theodore, the Robinson Law Courts "capture a striking mix of neo-hi-tech Law Courts and urban garden"[iii]. Furthermore, a "panorama of artificial nature - shrubbery, trees, water, waterfalls - that strains to reinterpret the urban plaza as urban park. The Law Courts, with its long concrete beams and greenish expanse of sloping glass, rises not so much as an urban cornerstone but rather as the machine in the garden"[iv].

   Valuable to the conception of the Park Intervention are the concluding points that were identified through the investigation into the Law Courts. Arthur Erickson identified a problem of disconnection of the city to the surrounding natural landscape. Overall the Law Courts consist of an introduction to the
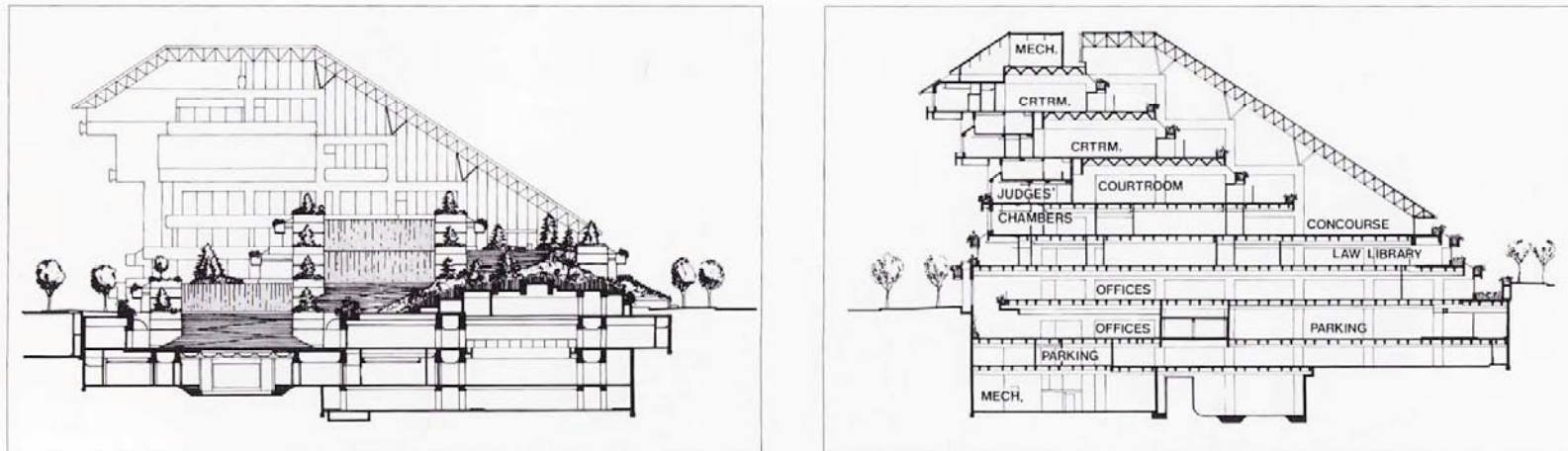
(Fig. 4.) Cross sections of the Courthouses, note the schemes ability to flow into different densities

developing urban section. A language of building that becomes "hidden in the garden", creating a juxtaposed "panorama of artificial nature" in the form of an acropolis city centre, a centre that through its elements reflects the natural surroundings.

If the Courthouses stand as an urban park within a now dense urban core, then the Intervention for the larger community of Vancouver comes at a connecting island just north of the downtown core, Stanley Park. Stanley park is a centre to both West and North Vancouver, as well the downtown core itself, also being visible from the coast to the South consisting of places such as English Bay, Point Grey, etc. Stanley Park stands as a natural setting claimed by the urban core, a bridge between the urban community to that of the mountains and natural landscape surrounding the larger border of Vancouver. The "machine in the garden" comes translated as the juxtaposed ramps, each oriented toward the landscape beyond, with a

digital array of screens on the underside of the "garden". They fit in with the future and current state of digitalized social relations, and bring the problematic condition of a typical anti-social realm out into the open, in harmony with natural landscape. The Intervention itself is precisely an intervention due to the realization of a problem (as Erickson did), beyond the granted connection with landscape surroundings, is the problem of flow the park presents. Flow is restricted to a series of bike/pedestrian paths and roads, whose aim is to efficiently move volumes people around the park
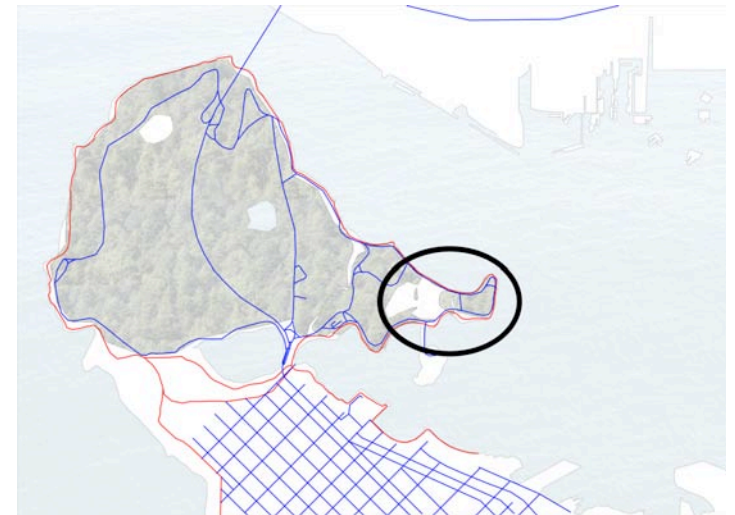
(Fig. 5.) Stanley Park roads and pathways, forested area and clearing

without creating interesting moments of stasis gathering and interaction between one another. Hence the Intervention is oriented to break flow momentarily, encouraging people off the paths to explore the created landscape and interact with fellow community members, all in an existing dead space and clearing of the park (Fig. 5.). This idea of urban intervention is what Arthur Erickson did in the Law courts, creating a "low-density landscape with considerable planting, rather than as a (politically unpopular) tower" (as was originally conceived by the government)[v].

Direct Connection: SFU

If The Law Courts by Erickson is an "artificial nature" in the existing urban core, Simon Frasier University presents Erickson's created "urban complex"[vi] in the midst of a totally natural setting of the mountains. As such, this precedent further explores the connection between site and surrounding natural context, in a way more directly related to the Park Intervention. They share a commonality, each is a created topography placed as a sort of island in the context of a larger existing landscape. Where the Law Courts stop at an augmented landscape merely reminiscent of the surrounding landscape, SFU and the Park Intervention are this as well, but with a further direct connection of views to the greater surroundings. Castro and Theodore describe the architecture at SFU as "the surrounding walls are made of arcades open on both sides, allowing a direct connection with the distant landscape. Erickson has not missed here the opportunity of experimenting with shakkei, the Japanese concept of borrowing views."[vii]

(Fig. 6.) Arthur Erickson describes the space of the central mall as "in Vancouver, such a space needed an umbrella,"[viii].

In a simple form, the Park Intervention consists of the ramps as umbrellas, and on the top of them, projecting heightened views facilitating "direct connection with the distant landscape". Arthur speaks of the experience at SFU being "the anticipation of breaking through the forest to the first alpine meadows, then the excitement of getting above the treeline and finally the climax of standing on the summit. Quite unconsciously this experience had been translated into the spaces of Simon Fraser."[ix] This sums up the experience of the Intervention at Stanley Park, alpine meadows in the form of climbing ramps, with an added digital meadow underneath. Once the summit of the ramps is reached, the viewer experiences a climax of the surrounding landscape, all initiated by the parting of the heavily forested park where it is sited, just as Arthur Erickson describes SFU as "breaking through the forest".


(Fig. 6.) The arcades opening themselves to frame views of the mountains beyond

Specificity: Herzog and de Meuron, Abalos & Herreros, Snohetta, XDGA

The two previous precedents laid out ambitions and the beginnings of a definition for the Park Intervention, valuable exploration into background development of Vancouver architecture. In finding definitive form of the Intervention, several contemporary projects can be stated for giving specificity to concepts and schemes.

Abalos & Herreros's Office Building and Urban Park in Barcelona consists of an office and industrial factory, largely orthogonal transparent volumes placed together. However, a portion of program that blends into a burm has one bold moment worthy of conceptual and structural interest pertaining to the Park Intervention. As seen in Fig. 7., one can view the idea of raising the ground plane, opening the potential for a program of a raised park, with shelter below.
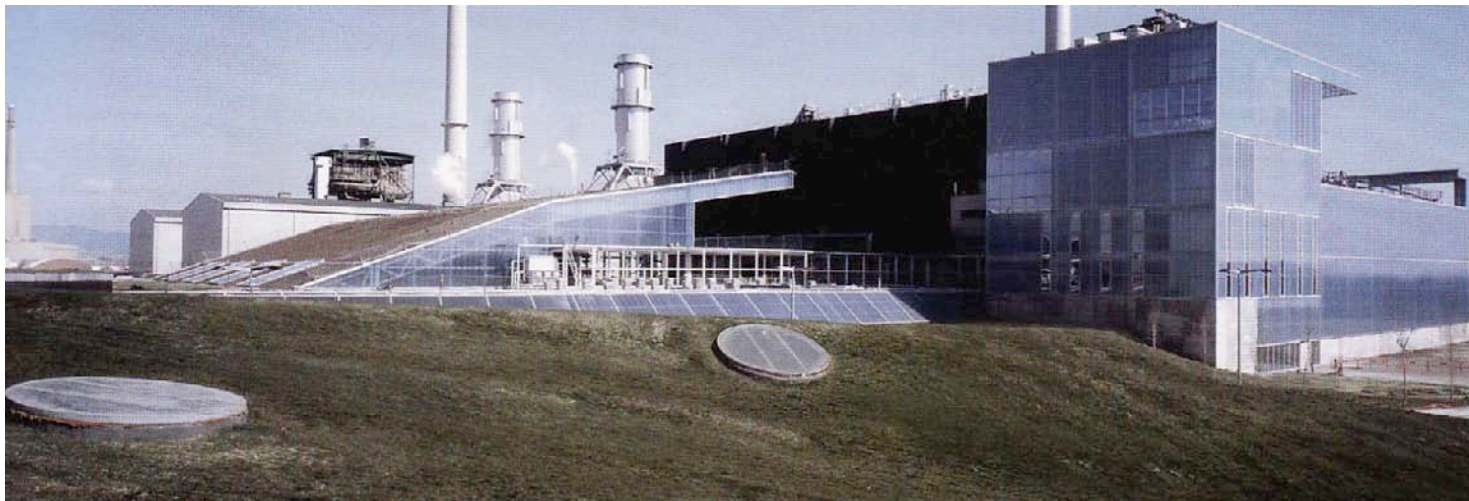
(Fig. 7.) Raised ground
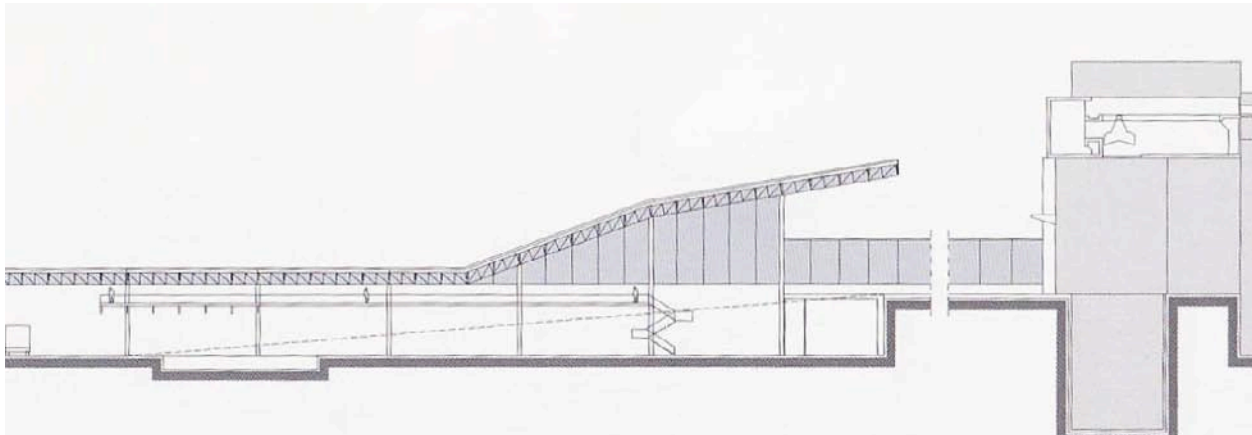
(Fig. 8.) Section of steel trussed canopy
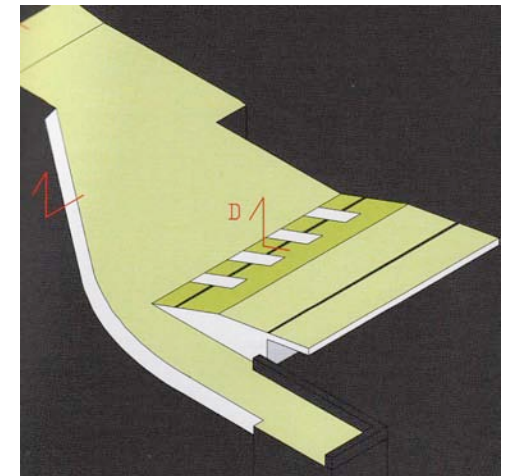
(Fig. 9.) Raised ground diagram

This was taken directly into the Park Intervention. Abalos & Herreros used steel trussing and columns to support a raised green roof (Fig. 8., Fig. 9.), this is quite similar to the scheme of the Intervention, however the underside becomes covered with white polycarbonate and a meadow of lit LED screens, operable remotely, and can be interacted with via touch screen outposts around the park. A common digital approach of public screens can be seen in many works of the firm Diller and Scofidio (Fig. 10.). The Park Intervention eliminates the view of trussed structure, becoming a two sided piece of

(Fig. 10.) Diller Scofidio's proposal for a section of "the highline"

urban landscape, it transcends a notion of typical building and becomes an idea: landscape ramps with a duality of digital and natural alpine meadows, no notion of conventional building is quite evidence, fitting for such an ambiguous architecture typology as that of the "community gathering place".

Snohetta at the Oslo Opera House further advances the concept presented at Barcelona. They employed a concept of "The "carpet", the huge public square set on the building's sloping roof, is an embodiment of a desire to make this space a shared property, whose monumental nature is justified by the fact that it is used by the entire community."ˣ The carpet comes in the form of a sloping roof conforming to interior program yet allowing for community program above (Fig. 11.). As in the Park Intervention, this concept is utilized in becoming "tectonic plates", angling and intersecting to create a two-tiered park, with an underside "umbrella" of open program, and grassy meadows bringing people to climatic points about the tree line.

(Fig. 11.) Exterior perspectives of the Oslo "carpet" scheme

The orientation of the Intervention ramps is based on the projecting of people toward one another and their surroundings. The dropped "hanging gardens" are another level of meeting place intimacy based as a projection off of the main form (Fig. 12.). In many ways this scheme is shared with Herzog and De Meuron's Koechlin House. The house begins from street level with a main ramp that projects the inhabitant into the house from the garage (Fig. 13.), as well as featuring rooms as further projections off of the main circulation, much like the Intervention's hanging gardens. After the street level ramp of the Koechlin House, the rest of the house's upper levels are based around a courtyard (also in a form of a projection). "All the spaces of the house gravitate toward the central courtyard."[xi]. As such, all rooms also radiate out of the courtyard into the more intimate rooms, however to circulate out means returning to the spine, or courtyard (Fig. 14.).
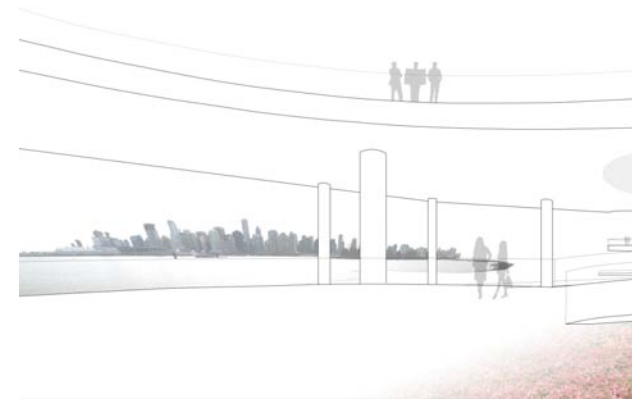
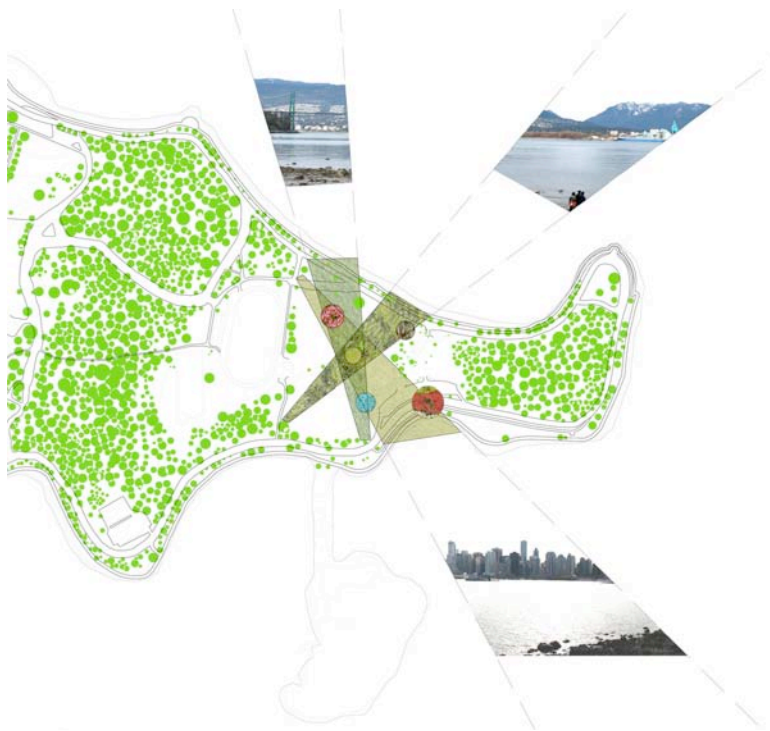(Fig. 12.) Intervention "hanging garden"
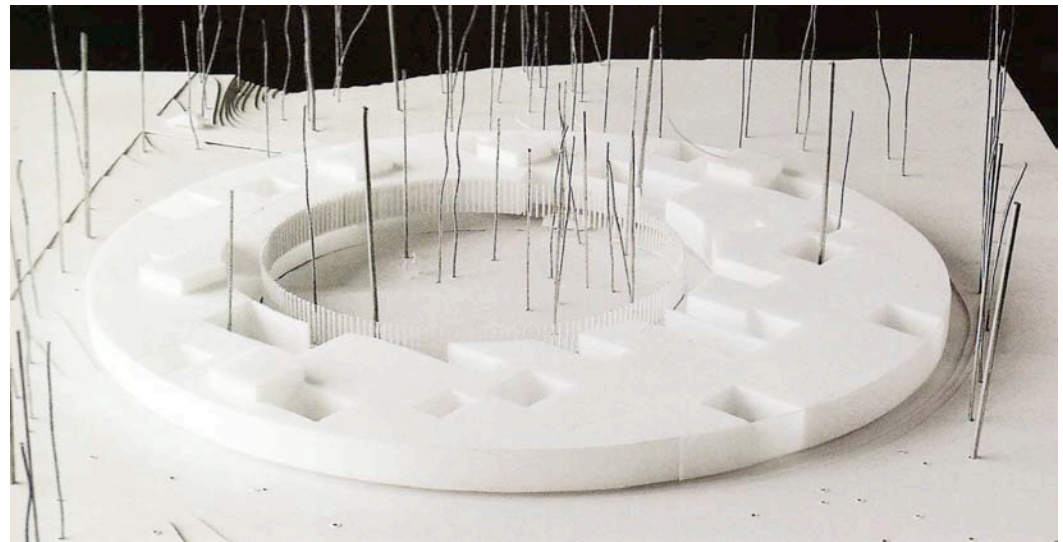

(Fig. 13.) Koechlin opening ramp
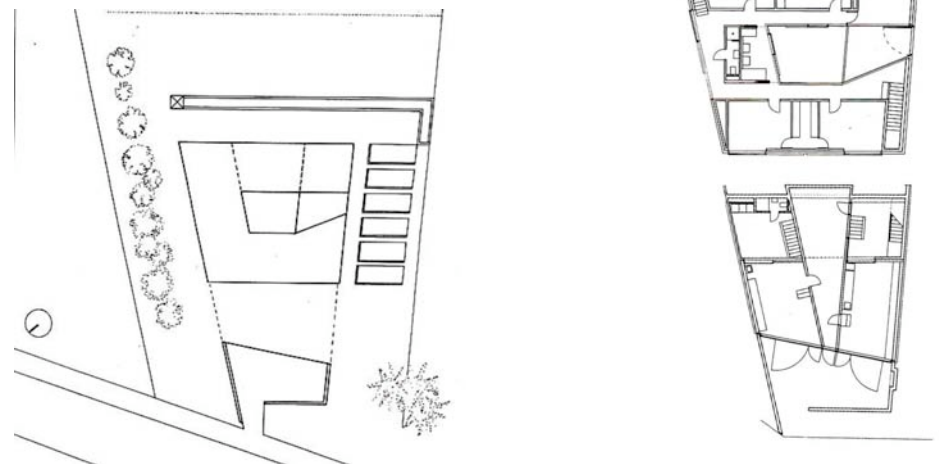
(Fig. 14.) Koechlin site plan and floor plans

The ramps sit on the site in a manor that achieves the flow of the pedestrian path being broken, creating key access points; each ramp orients toward key views around Vancouver (Fig. 15.). The last detail, being the dimensions of the ramps, is mostly determined by the clearing, and the trees defining it. XDGA's Venlo Patio Houses in the Netherlands uses trees as the main determining factor in form, conforming completely to preserve the maximum number of trees as possible.[xii] (Fig. 16.). The Intervention enlists this as the last piece in completing itself and its integration into the site.

(Fig. 16.) XDGA Venlo Patio Houses model

(Fig. 15.) Intervention site plan

Summary

Though these precedents are programmatically different then the ambiguous brief of a "community gathering place", as Park Intervention is, they provided points of similarities in favor of a new architectural proposition. The Intervention is an architecture that requires a degree of uniqueness, reminiscent of concepts and ideas of a broad range of precedents, whose influences help to define and justify the unique typology and design achieved at the community gathering place.

[i] Competition brief
[ii] Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.135
[iii] Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.153
[iv] Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.153
[v] Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.136
[vi] Architecture of Erickson p.151
[vii] Erickson p.85
[viii] Architecture of Erickson p.141
[ix] Architecture of Erickson p.144
[x] Issue 293 L'Arca, p.33
[xi] H&deM AV p. 102
[xii] Issue 126 El Croquis p. 167

Image References

(Fig. 1.) – Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.158
(Fig. 2.) – Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.158
(Fig. 3.) – Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.136
(Fig. 4.) – Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.137
(Fig. 5.) – Andrew Dadds
(Fig. 6.) – Arthur Erickson Critical Works p.85
(Fig. 7.) – The Plan 010 p.53
(Fig. 8.) – The Plan 010 p.53
(Fig. 9.) – The Plan 010 p.57
(Fig. 10.) - http://wirednewyork.com/forum/showthread.php?p=31922
(Fig. 11.) – L'Arca 239 p.35
(Fig. 12.) – Andrew Dadds
(Fig. 13.) – AV Herzog and de Meuron p.102
(Fig. 14.) – AV Herzog and de Meuron p.100;103
(Fig. 15.) – Andrew Dadds
(Fig. 16.) – El Croquis 126 p.167

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    100-03. Print.

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