The Japan Cultural Center: Architecture in a Transition Environment

Illinois School of Architecture  University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

ARCH 573, Fall Semester 2016

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The graduate design studio intends to explore the meaning of Architecture generated by the cultural, political, and philosophical determinants of our constantly evolving ethnic heritage. Though we are a diverse society of many origins, our first two centuries of Architectural, urban, and landscape development have been rooted in the history of Western European influences, thought and practice. Such a legacy has left America with an Architecture, Urban, Landscape environment grounded by European typologies and only substantially challenged by the early century leap to embrace the modern movement and its planning impact. In the last 50 years, the built design professions have been challenged culturally, politically, and philosophically to respond to this duality.

The Japan Cultural Center and gardens challenges the new urban landscapes of decentralized spaces, vast landscapes connected by gridded thoroughfares, and architecture built to recognize the technological impact of the automobile. The challenge is increased by the insertion of a culture with a substantial impact on 20th century western architecture.

Topics representing theory, thought, and architectural history will have a significant impact on the design studio process: History of Japanese Architectural influences, Japanese cultural expectations, History of the American street and campus.

THE JAPAN CULTURAL CENTER

The intent is to design a cultural center on a site where Japanese companies reside or with a University with a long heritage of appreciation for and study of Japanese culture.

The Japan Cultural Center offers an environment for maintaining a cultural link to the Japanese homeland. The center becomes a place for social contacts, for cultural events, and for initiating orientation programs. As important as it is to create a celebration of the Japanese culture into the American consciousness through outreach programs.

The site will be a large multi-acre tract of land with three site choices: the University of Illinois Arboretum near the current Japan House, Cranbrook Academy in Bloomfield Hills, or nationally known extensive landscape area with the inclusion of Japanese Gardens.
The Center for the Study of Etruscan Culture and Artifacts in Volterra, Italy

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The fine arts celebrate and record the legacy of human experience. Cultural architecture exists to serve the social and cultural needs of a society. Cultural centers provide a physical fabric to contain and present cultural character as markers of a society’s evolution into the future. These centers provide the opportunity to preserve, record and find use of the accomplishments of humankind.

The “Center for the Study of Etruscan Culture and Artifacts” project will seek to confront and analyze a number of profound issues on expectations for new urban or campus-like civic environments. The following issues will be discussed:

1. To establish a centerpiece structure, a “light obelisk” of symbolic significance.
2. To search for a timeless architecture to display the art, culture, and history of the Etruscan region and its mosaic of peoples.
3. To reflect an appropriate contemporary Architectural expression.
4. To record appropriately, the legacy of both indigenous Etruscan peoples and immigrants.
5. To search for simplicity so as not to overwhelm what is contained.
6. To establish an “urban/campus” presence: a complex of early 21st century contemporary forms with permanence, dignity and integrity.
7. To search for timeless contemporary architecture to represent the past, express the present and anticipate the future.
8. To create an Architecture dedicated to a people who want to express and experience their heritage, to engage in scholarship and research, and be repositories of historical and contemporary artifacts.
9. To establish a series of connective, reflective and interactive spaces that weave the various physical components together and provides sensitive linkages to major arteries.
10. To understand how information on culture and climate influences the shaping of forms and spaces to provide appropriate architecture.

Unique to the development of The Center is the utilization of both natural lighting (interior and exterior spaces) and artificial lighting in galleries, atriums, lobbies or other important spaces. The development and use of both natural and artificial lighting has a profound and restrained effect on an Architecture’s cross-section and in the placement of buildings so as to create well lighted public spaces and transition spaces: structure and light will be a critical component, especially as the site area of the Etruscan gate and vehicular bus/car entry has about a 67 vertical meter grade difference.

The Center for the Study of Etruscan Culture and Artifacts will be located in Volterra, Italy, in the Tuscany region. Volterra, Italy is in the heart of the Etruscan region, a 3000 year old culture and was the urban seat of Etruscan culture. Volterra started as an Etruscan City, then became a Roman City and then a walled Medieval City atop a high plateau, 1500 ft above the Tuscany valley floor. The Roman Theatre and Baths are the only current visible signs of the old Roman City. The completely walled city is served by four primary gate (Porta’s) entry. The Porta All’ Arco is the only original Etruscan gate into the city left. It is just below the vehicular bus/car entry into the city. The vehicular bus/car plaza with its entry to a four level parking garage and formal entry into the city, will the site area for the Center for the Study of Etruscan Culture and Artifacts.