Exploring the Opportunities of a Pre-existing Structure:

Retreat and Recording Studio for Musical Artists

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Play music with friends. Don't just play with somebody because they happen to have a lot of skills.

Play with people you get along with because happiness is a road traveled, not a destination.

...Mike Dirnt, Green Day
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I think music in itself is healing. It's an explosive expression of humanity. It's something we are all touched by. No matter what culture we're from, everyone loves music.

...Billy Joel
SUMMARY

Creating music is often described as a unique and personal expression, that when recorded and duplicated correctly, can be enjoyed by many people in remote locations. It is this concept that has led to the creation of sophisticated recording studios where musicians come to duplicate and document their artistic talents and achievements.

This project, through architectural design, will have the spatial and physical features to be regarded as one of the premier recording studios in the world. Not only will technical and acoustic considerations be taken into the design from the very beginning, but also the user's experience of the retreat. As a retreat, the building will function not only as a fully capable recording studio, but also as an escape from the intrusions of everyday life. More importantly, the retreat and recording studio will function as a generator/incubator of inspiration for the temporary inhabitants.
Musicians, like any other artist, need an environment in which they can be comfortable, focus, and explore. All artists, as individual people, have their own personality and characteristics. The expression of these qualities is what makes an artist’s product valuable and unique. Each individual band as a unique entity, has its own personality and image. To accommodate, and in some cases accomplish, this image or personality, bands need to have the ability to establish a bond and grow as a common entity.

This need for a specialized environment, however, is not continuously present. Groups will compose and record an album, a process that can take anywhere from a handful of days to years at a time. Following the release, groups will tour the country, even the world, in an effort to promote the new album with concerts and publicity. During the next cycle of
RECORD PRODUCTION, THE RETREAT IS NEEDED AS A LOCATION WHERE ALL THE BAND MEMBERS CAN COME TOGETHER, POOL THEIR RESPECTIVE RESOURCES, AND EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR A NEW MUSICAL EFFORT. THIS FACILITY WILL ACCOMMODATE THAT COMMON GROUND ON WHICH THIS EXPLORATIVE EXPERIENCE CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED.

THE RETREAT WILL BE DESIGNED INTO THE PRE-EXISTING SKELETAL STRUCTURE.

HOW WILL PRESERVING THE EXISTING STRUCTURE BENEFIT THE USERS AS WELL AS THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD?

HOW WILL PRESERVING THE EXISTING STRUCTURE BENEFIT THE USERS AS WELL AS THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD?

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING SPECIALIZED RECORDING STUDIOS FOR MUSICIANS?

WHY DO MUSICIANS NEED AN ENVIRONMENT SUCH AS THE ONE PROPOSED IN THIS THESIS?

HOW DOES THIS ENVIRONMENT BOLSTER CREATIVITY WHILE STREAMLINING PRODUCTIVITY?

HOW WILL THIS FACILITY WORK TO HELP THE MUSICIANS COMPLETE THEIR TASK?

WHAT CONSTRUCTION METHODS ARE NECESSARY TO CREATE SPACES OF OPTIMUM ACOUSTICAL PERFORMANCE AND FLEXIBILITY?

HOW CAN THE FRAME, CONCEPTUALLY AND PHILOSOPHICALLY, BE SEEN AS A BASE FOR THE COMPOSITION AND EXPLORATION OF NEW TRENDS IN MUSIC THAT WILL PERMEATE THE FACILITY JUST AS IT SERVES AS A STRUCTURAL AND HISTORICAL BASE FOR THE NEW LAYER OR GENERATION OF CONSTRUCTION?
The retreat will be utilized by those bands that have the ability and resources and, if necessary, accommodate for lengthy stays. This requires the existence of extensive living arrangements for the band members. Primarily, an atmosphere of comfort and anonymity must be accomplished. Consequently, the atmosphere will be more introverted than extroverted, however, one without the other will lead to monochromatic experiences.

Living quarters will be provided as one of the most private spatial concepts. From there, gathering spaces will increase in size and participation of the inhabitants as well as the architecture. Spaces of exploration, both musical and personal, will exist from the individual scale to a scale that will allow gathering and participation of all band members. Luxuries such as exercise facilities, pool, hot tub, sauna, rooftop terrace, etc... will be
provided in the retreat portion of the facility to enhance relaxation, promote the continuance of everyday habits, and escapist inspiration.

The retreat and recording studio will take place in a neighborhood directly west of downtown Chicago, IL. The neighborhood has seen better days and has recently been in a state of decay and disrepair. As the trend of development continues strongly in Chicago, this area is no exception. Developers have already moved in and are currently renovating building with previous lives as well as constructing others from the ground up. The retreat and recording studio will continue and architecturally enhance this trend.
TENSIONS MAY FLARE AND BONDS MAY FORM THAT ARE STRONGER THAN ONE'S OWN FAMILY... THIS VERSATILITY OF EMOTION AND COMMUNICATION IS FOUND IN WHAT WE REFER TO AS THE MODERN ROCK BAND. THESE GROUPS ESTABLISH UNIQUE RELATIONSHIPS IN A WAY THAT ALLOWS THEM TO MERGE TOGETHER IN A CREATIVE EFFORT TO MAKE MUSIC. THE MUSIC MAY BE INSPIRED BY THE OPPORTUNITY TO DELIVER A MESSAGE, AN IDEA, OR AN EMOTION. IT MAY BE POLITICALLY BIASED, DESCRIBE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, OR ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN SOMETHING AS INTANGIBLE AS LOVE. WHATEVER THE MOTIVATION, MUSIC IS A UNIVERSAL AND POETIC LANGUAGE, THE BEST COMING FROM WITHIN.

ROCK BANDS CAN BE SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A UNIQUE LIVING ORGANISM. IN THIS WAY, IT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION IS FROM ONE COMPONENT TO THE NEXT IN ORDER TO SURVIVE WITH SUCCESS. THE RETREAT IS A FACILITY THAT EXISTS TO BE USED WHEN THE NEED FOR THIS COMMUNICATION TO BE CLEAR
AND INTENSE IS THE GREATEST.

Because of these specialized conditions, a demand is created for an environment in which musicians can devote their full concentrations to the work they do. Without this environment, the groups and bands would be hard pressed for a place to come together both physically and as a creative entity.

This “coming together” is a very important event that needs to take place and serve as a pooling and focusing of energies. To accomplish this, members will need to be inspired by both themselves and the group. The need for individual meditations and focusing will be as important as being in sync as a single unit. The architecture will reflect this need for the balancing of these energies.

The challenge is to design with the perceptions of each unique individual in mind.

The city of Chicago is an exciting place recently quoted as the Greatest City on the Face of the Earth 2002. While the city has never been a major site for the production of music, Chicago and the Midwest have developed a rich history of being great music-listeners. From Jazz and Blues to Rock and Roll, Chicago has many fans.

Not only is Chicago a beautiful city during the day, it comes alive at night as well. Between nightly events at the House of Blues, festivals at Grant Park, outdoor performances at Ravinia, and street performers on North Michigan Avenue there is always a performance to experience.
Research:

The site in which this creative process will take place is found in Chicago's near-west neighborhood, close to the corner of Jackson and Racine. For years, the surrounding area has represented a monotonous expression of rundown warehouses, some abandoned. A number of these concrete and brick boxes have been renovated and even more are currently in the process of transformation. The entire area is in a state of revitalization. The retreat will continue this trend and at the same, add architectural flavor, attempting to improve the quality of life for both the direct users as well as those in the neighborhood.

The site is located 10 blocks west of the landmark known as the Sears Tower. From here, the artists can easily plug into the city and its events.
THE EXISTING STRUCTURE, IN THE STATE THAT WAS CURRENT WHEN THIS PROJECT BEGAN, STOOD AS A BARREN SKELETON, STRIPPED OF ALL INTERIOR CONSTRUCTION AND EVEN EXTERIOR BRICK INFILL. THE REINFORCED CONCRETE FRAMEWORK, SEEN IN THIS CONDITION, LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN APPROACH TO THE DESIGN OF THIS FACILITY. SEEN AS A MATRIX, THE PROJECT ENHANCES AND SUPPORTS, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND CONCEPTUALLY, THE INTENTION OF COMBINING THE RETREAT AND RECORDING STUDIO PROGRAM WITH THE EXISTING BUILDING ON THE SITE. THE HISTORY AND INHERENT CHARACTER OF EACH WORK TOGETHER TO FORM AN EXCELLENT SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP.
VIEW TO THE INTERIOR OF THE GROUND LEVEL - THE FUTURE EXHIBITION SPACE

VIEW OF THE SITE FROM THE NORTHEAST ON ADAMS STREET

VIEW OF THE SITE FROM THE NORTHWEST ON ADAMS STREET
What could programmatically exploit as well as give validity to this approach to design?

The original intention of the project was to investigate the revitalization of an existing structure. Next, the challenge came in deciding on a use or programme for the structure that would support the decision to infuse the new with the old as well as possible.

The choice to concentrate on a retreat and recording studio for musical artists was not an obvious one at first, but as the idea developed, the project quickly gravitated towards this option. The use of the project by musical artists perfectly complemented the meshing of pre-existing frameworks with a new generation of creative energy.
How can the frame, conceptually and philosophically, be seen as a base for the composition and exploration of new trends in music that will permeate the facility just as it serves as a structural and historical base for the new layer or generation of construction?

How will preserving the existing structure benefit the users as well as the surrounding neighborhood?

The users will benefit by being placed into a neighborhood grid and cultural fabric directly adjacent to the vibrant downtown city of Chicago. The reuse of the existing structure will heavily enforce this connection and a historical connection to an earlier industrial Chicago scattered with warehouses and mini-watertowers. The character of the facility will be greatly enhanced by weaving the new development into the historic framework. Just as the built environment grasps and embraces the roots of its past, the musicians are conscious of the jazz and blues roots that their efforts are coming from. The direct connection is conceptually intended to be powerful in this way.

The neighborhood will benefit from the new development most but will also be reminded of what the original neighborhood consisted of. As the layering of new development continues, the fabric of the past will remain apparent.
QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

What are the benefits of developing specialized recording studios for musicians?

Why do musicians need an environment such as the one proposed in this thesis?

Established musical artists have a need for an environment in which they can devote their full concentrations on the work that they do. These environments, however, are not required year-round or for any extremely long term period. This means that these musical artists are not willing to develop such an environment on their own. A need has been established for a third-party retreat and recording studio that will facilitate a group of people and support staff. The facility will go so far as to provide extensive living arrangements for the musicians. With a full-time administration and support staff, the facility will cater to the artists allowing logistical things to run smoothly while at the same time freeing their time and energy to focus on their work.
How will this facility work to help the musi-
cians complete their task?

How does this environment bolster cre-
ativity while streamlining productivity?

As mentioned before, this facility
and its staff will aid in the free-
ing of the artist's energies to
focus them on more important
things like composing and record-
ing. The layout of the retreat and
recording studio effectively sepa-
rates distractions from the re-
cording process and helps the
user feel comfortable and re-
laxed when time calls for it. In
this way, the ability to focus and
be creative is easier when it is time
to focus and be creative.
CONCEPTS:

MATRIX

The architecture will begin with a post-warehouse concrete structure. This reinforced concrete framework will serve as a starting point, an origin, a matrix from which the design will develop. It provides both a physical base as well as a psychological connection to the previous historical cycle of the neighborhood and site. From this base, the architecture will be allowed to expand/explode/grow while exploring design opportunities, for example, as a vine would commandeer a trellis. As the architecture permeates this matrix, a new generation of matrix will be discovered and encouraged to exist. The old matrix and new matrix will organize and contain the recording studios and retreat areas respectively.
ISOLATION

The retreat and recording studio is unique in the fact that it is in the midst of a vast urban fabric. Many retreats of this sort are isolated by location, being nestled into the heavily wooded area or a cabin in the mountains. This need for an isolation from the hustle and bustle of everyday life is still present however, so a creative solution must be reached. The retreat and recording studio would have to maintain its identity on the streetscape and within the neighborhood context, but do so with a thick skin reflecting anonymity and a certain level of security to the inhabitants within. While containing the facility, it is also important to reveal the character of the past from which it is evolving. Specifically, an attempt was made to carefully reveal the structure of the building previously used as a warehouse and blend it into the purpose and intention of the exterior barrier as seamlessly as possible. To accomplish this, a series of folds was designed to not only hide the public entrance to a certain extent, but also peel away from the existing reinforced concrete structure in a manner that gradually re-envelopes the structure. High walls are also erected in the design to complete the containment of the facility on the East and South side.
ANTI-ISOLATION

While the effort to contain and isolate the inner-workings of the facility from the surrounding noise (meaning any distraction), can be very effective, it is extremely important that the inhabitants do not feel imprisoned. While this project is meant as a retreat, it is very beneficial to remember that instead of being isolated in the middle of nowhere, the retreat and recording studio is isolated in the middle of somewhere.

A hide/reveal dichotomy approach to the design is implemented to help ensure that the users of this facility will not feel claustrophobic in any way. From within, an attempt has been made to interconnect key spaces with open sightlines as well as provide ample fenestration to the private exterior courtyard. From the courtyard, reminiscent of an academic cloister, the building appears much more transparent and accessible. The apparent enclosure of the raised corridors surrounding the courtyard help the inhabitant to feel secure without feeling caged.
DETACHMENT

Another effort to enhance the sense of separation from the outside world is one of establishing a sense of detachment at entry points. The two key entry points are the public entry from the North and the private artist entry from the South.

At the point of entry for public users of this facility, the exterior skin has been peeled away to reveal a sheltered corridor that first engages the user in the pattern of the pre-existing structure. Quickly, but gradually, the visitor is forced into a small draft lobby, now traveling a path dictated by the new construction. This passage is intended to be dimly lit, and once through to the point where the westmost column has been completely engulfed by the metal panel construction, the architecture immediately opens up to a brightly lit exhibition space of much larger scale. This “hidden” entry and mini-labyrinth progression are intended to establish a quick feeling of intimacy and then a bright welcoming to the event that the visitor is going to engage in.

To the South, a private entry is located for the artist’s use. After arriving by car or bus, the artists will enter a small elevator lobby. Quickly, the users are whisked up in the elevator to the next level. Here, the process of entry continues through a corridor raised off the ground level, and into the studio and living portion of the facility. Anticipation is building. The artists enter into a lounge/lobby space that overlooks the performance space, peers into the control room of the recording studio and through that into the actual recording studio. Also, the post-recording atrium lounge is openly visible which has an open, transparent fenestration pattern to the exterior courtyard. This entry quickly detaches the users from the level they arrived on. Once the users finally reach the rich visual node described above, they should be ready to fully engage in the facility having forgotten the bus they arrived on minutes ago.
The recording studio and control room are very technically oriented both acoustically and electronically. This is where the final product is performed and recorded. Since this is where hours upon hours of practice and exploration reveal themselves, a certain amount of anticipation and pressure is present. The intention, then, is to make the process as comfortable as possible. Architecturally, this can be accomplished by assuring clean sight lines between the control room, studio, and isolation booths as well as other techniques. The design of the studio needs to be conscious of having comfortable proportions of volume and the physics of sound.

A primary technical goal is to eliminate the possibility to create standing waves. This is assured by not allowing any wall surface to be directly parallel to another. The ceiling must also be canted or vaulted to negate any standing waves forming with the floor surface.
A primary technical goal is to eliminate the possibility of creating standing waves. This is assured by not allowing any built surface to be directly parallel to another. Even the ceiling is not forgotten, and must be canted or vaulted to negate any standing waves forming with the floor surface.

Other requirements include:

- The control room must be acoustically isolated from the studio itself.
- The control room and the studio will be built on top of neoprene pads to accomplish acoustic isolation from the existing structure.
- All windows are tilted to reflect sound to the ground, ensuring that the performer does not receive a direct reflection.
- Movable oak panels are used within the main recording room to allow the flexibility between a hard surface and an absorptive one changing the decay from 2.5 seconds to less than 1 second.
The performance space is designed to seat approximately 200 participants. The purpose of the space is twofold. Primarily, it is designed to be used for small, intimate, acoustic performances of the musical artist or group in front of a select audience. The format is foreseen to be much like that of an MTV's Unplugged or a VH1 Storyteller production.

This space also requires a certain amount of sound control and acoustic flexibility. Acoustical clouds are used as well as a sound-trapping wall system. The wall system begins enhancing the sound control by blocking a large range of noise from the exterior with a continuous 18” concrete barrier. Next towards the interior, the combination of a diaphragmatic absorber, an air pocket lined with absorptive material, and a hard/soft louver system allow for much control over the sonic character of the room.
BEAM

COLUMN LINE

3/8" PLYWOOD

6" AIRSPACE

18" CONCRETE WALL

WOOD LOUVER

FACED ON ONE SIDE

W/ ABSORPTIVE MATERIAL

WOOD PANEL

FLOOR SLAB

EXTERIOR

PERFORMANCE SPACE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibition Space</td>
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<td>Pre-Performance Lounge</td>
<td>800</td>
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<td>Refreshment Service</td>
<td>250</td>
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<td>Performance Space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Washrooms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corridor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exterior Courtyard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrative Offices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unisex Washroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
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<td>Control Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recording Studio</td>
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<td>Isolation Room #1</td>
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<td>Post-Recording Lounge</td>
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<td>Storage</td>
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<td>Unisex Washroom</td>
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<td>Retreat-Studio Corridor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Room</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreat</td>
<td>2800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooftop Terrace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retreat-Artist Entry Corridor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Conference Room</td>
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<td>Rehearsal Room #1</td>
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<td>Rehearsal Room #2</td>
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<td>Individual Exploration Room #1</td>
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<td>Media Library</td>
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<td>Living Units</td>
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<td>Kitchen</td>
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<td>Artists' Welcoming Balcony</td>
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<td>Exterior Terrace #1 (Third Level)</td>
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<td>Communal Rooftop Terrace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanical Block</td>
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RESULTS:

PLAN 1

THE FIRST LEVEL IS THE MOST PUBLICLY USED LEVEL. SELECT PUBLIC PERIODICALLY USE THE RED PORTION OF THE DIAGRAM FOR PLANNED PERFORMANCE EVENTS. STAFF AND ADMINISTRATION USE THE GREEN PORTION ON THE DIAGRAM DAILY.

ADAMS ST.

GROUND LEVEL

(NOT TO SCALE)

(ALLEY)
GROUND LEVEL
SCALE 1:8' =

Retreat and Recording Studio for Musical Artists
RESULTS:

PLAN 3

The third level consists of spaces almost completely private to the users. Occasionally, others will be present when meetings are held in the executive meeting room. Spacious rooftop terraces are found on this level.
THIRD LEVEL

Retreat and Recording Studio for Musical Artists
LEVELS 4 AND 5 ARE THE MOST PRIVATE LEVELS IN THE FACILITY. THE ARTISTS EACH HAVE A PRIVATE ROOM WITH KITCHENETTE, PRIVATE BATHROOM, AND PRIVATE BALCONY. THE ROOMS ARE EACH A TWO STORY LOFT SPACE, AND RAISE ONE LEVEL HIGHER TO SHARE A COMMUNITY ROOFTOP BALCONY. FROM THIS HEIGHT, THE INHABITANTS SHOULD HAVE A CLEAR VIEW OVER THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD EAST TO THE BEAUTIFUL CHICAGO SKYLINE.
Retreat and Recording Studio for Musical Artists
RESULTS:

PLAN ROOF

From a birds-eye view, the interplay of standing-seam metal, granite covered terraces, and flat roofs can be seen and understood.
ROOF PLAN

Retreat and Recording Studio for Musical Artists
Retreat and Recording Studio for Musical Artists
Retreat and Recording Studio for Musical Art
RESULTS:
IMAGES
RESULTS:

REFLECTIONS

Designing the Retreat and Recording Studio, in the end, has left me with both a sense of accomplishment and an impression that there is so much more left to do. At first, the opportunity to create a programme and project unique to my own interests was exciting and overwhelming. I knew how I wanted to approach the design with the existing structure, but the problem lied in discovering the programme that would be a good compliment. The decision to design a Retreat and Recording Studio was made half-way through the conceptual phase of the project, in effect wasting a couple weeks of focused design and research time. The time spent researching the project and in design, however, was very enjoyable due to the subject matter and that the project was something that interests me very much.

With more time, more intense studies would have been made in a variety of areas. First, an entire project could
BE DEVOTED ONLY TO THE LIVING UNITS FOR THE ARTISTS ON THE 4TH AND 5TH FLOORS OF THE BUILDING. THE DESIGN OF THESE UNITS WOULD BE AN EXCELLENT EXTENSION OF THIS PROJECT TO BE CARRIED OUT ON MY OWN TIME. ANOTHER AREA THAT I FELT LACKED A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF ATTENTION WAS GETTING INTO THE DETAILS OF THE EXTERIOR COURT YARD AND EXTERIOR MATERIALS. STUDIES OF THESE AREAS WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY HELPFUL TO UNDERSTAND BETTER WHAT THE FACILITY WOULD LOOK LIKE FROM THE OUTSIDE. AN OVERALL REFINEMENT OF THE FENESTRATION WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO THE STAGE THE PROJECT IS CURRENTLY IN. ALSO, I WOULD LOVE TO GET INTO EACH OF THE UNIQUE INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR SPACES AND BE ABLE TO ENSURE THAT THEY REFLECTED THE SAME CHARACTER THAT THE PROJECT AS A WHOLE DOES.

ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE, AFTER ALL THE HARD WORK AND LATE NIGHTS, I AM ACTUALLY SATISFIED WITH WHAT HAS BEEN PRODUCED. I AM PLEASED WITH THE PRODUCTS: THE PROGRAMME, THE PRESENTATION, AND THIS BOOK THAT HAVE BEEN CREATED ALONG THE WAY.

LAST, A SPECIAL THANKS TO MY ROOMMATES AND FRIENDS FOR THEIR HELP, HONEST OPINIONS, AND SUPPORT THROUGH THIS PROJECT.