Movement and Architecture
Design Entry for the 1998 Van Alen Prize in Public Architecture

Design Ideas for New York's Other River: the East River

an undergraduate thesis by
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- Building both in the process of design and later under construction should be a celebration.
- The experience of the edifice should lift the human spirit.
- The architect should use any means possible to achieve the above.
  Within the confines of these objectives, it is not possible, or desirable to become a slave to a philosophy, style or specific procedure. Instead it is more important to consider yourself as the consumer of the products of architects (and others) before subjecting the world to products born of architectural debate by architects.

  The Dresden Principles; (Alsop p. 15)
Credits

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Abstract

Think of a neighborhood. It knows the Johnsons next door. It knows the ice cream parlor down the street. It knows stories of grandeur and depression. It has coherence. But technology changes. Location or peculiarities of the region that might have brought early success may later bring destruction. Grandma’s stone cottage makes way for a parking lot for the new high-rise office complex across the way, and a cobblestone street gets bisected by a superhighway over here. What happens in the fragments where community becomes divided? Does it mutate into something new after losing a limb? Or will it decay and die? Will the same technology that changed the community once change it again? And how can any sense of resistance to this change bring about a self-destruction?
Map of the selected thesis site

(Brooklyn is on the bottom; Manhattan is above; North is up)
The red cross in the middle of the map represents the exact location of the thesis site, at 100 Water Street, Brooklyn, New York. Note how the Manhattan and the Brooklyn Bridges and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (Interstate 287) box the site in against the East River shore line. (image: Yahoo!Maps)
The Brooklyn Bridge, view toward Manhattan from Brooklyn

The bridge carries traffic high over the shores, and drops it off a good distance from the water, while the anchorages terminate previously connected streets. (image: Blonstein)

Brooklyn-Queens Expressway at Brooklyn Heights, view north
These photos show a good example of how a freeway and pedestrian space can coincide. However, a problem exists in that access to the river below is denied to pedestrians. (images: The Freeway, 105, 108)

Introduction
At the beginning of this inquiry, there were several issues I was interested in in the areas of urban housing and community rehabilitation. Some of these issues were:

1) Reintroducing residents/commerce to an abandoned and dilapidated neighborhood.

2) Avoiding gentrification while making (1) happen, and yet encouraging development to happen. (i.e. allow developers to attain the return on their investment that they normally could only get elsewhere)

3) Reestablishing connections from abandoned/disassociated communities to the livelier centers of the city. Many times these isolated communities have become abandoned through the construction of new urban expressways (or bridges for that matter) that sever natural flows of traffic and terminate friendly wanderings of traffic from one community to another. ((1) and (3) will be complimentary efforts, while keeping in mind (2))

4) Avoiding the over-use of automobiles, and instead promoting public transportation and pedestrian-friendly access while making (3) happen. ((4) and (2) could possibly be complimentary efforts, through encouraging frequent, yet spontaneous meetings among residents)

5) Thinking in terms of sustainability while considering all of the above.

These issues have become the primary source of inquiry. Although at best they could be termed 'hypothesis,' they have been answered in some degree of detail in the design solution that follows. What follows immediately are condensed summaries from various readings on these issues that proved to become an influence as the solution took form.

Highways
In the selected thesis site, three individual freeways act as boundaries, isolating the site from surrounding communities: the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridge, and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. In their report to the Secretary of the Department of Transportation, Kevin Roche, Matthew Rockwell and the other members of The Urban Advisors to the Federal Highway Administrator found some general guidelines that should
be conformed to in most cases. They found that if an arterial highway must pass through the heart of a city or central business district, then it should have few or no entrances or exits within the CBD. (The Freeway, 49) A freeway may well be a boundary but should never be a boundary between communities. Freeways entering the city should, by their location, present each city in its most interesting light. (The Freeway, 40) In addition, guard rails should be as open in section as possible to provide maximum viewing. A primary objective of the freeway should be to offer spectacular views and provide for an enjoyable driving experience. (The Freeway, 77) Although there are three freeways serving as boundaries for the neighborhood, these boundaries can also offer some wonderful opportunities. As the views from these vantage points is rather impressive, the image of the selected site created from these freeways is one that should be enhanced. The competitor for the focus of the image is the skyline of Manhattan, a formidable rival. Therefore, although an identity entirely its own is desirable, the area in Brooklyn should compliment Manhattan. Using it as a backdrop in its own identity, this particular area of Brooklyn should perhaps lend itself in identity more toward Manhattan (and the East River) than toward Brooklyn.

Public Housing
Housing has long been an issue in New York, where it is scarce and expensive, and the conditions of available units for lower-income residents are often deplorable. Many plans have been proposed for this issue, and a real solution is still uncertain. The numerous public housing projects of the 1940s provide us with an excellent post-occupancy evaluation of some attitudes toward urban sprawl and downtown decay. The plan, as set forth by F.D.R. in his U.S. Housing Act of 1937 had all the best intentions, including "decent and sanitary dwelling within the financial reach of families of low income" during a time when 'one third of the nation was poorly-housed and

Worlds to explore
(image: Goodman, p. 30) Goodman argues that in the old slum street, although conditions were rather deplorable, people had positive interaction, and a meaningful social life. The new project housing blocks promised better opportunities, but instead offered conditions really no less deplorable, and even worse, the projects gave rise to a "gigantic boredom", which cannot be justified as a contribution to a meaningful and valuable social life, or as a desirable pattern for human cooperation. (Goodman, p. 30)

Suyvesant Town on New York's East River
(image: Goodman, p. 31)
Fenced-in, unusable space in a housing project in Suyvesant Town on New York's East River, built in 1947. The 18 high-rise blocks house 24,000 people. The inner open spaces are used only; walking on grass is prohibited. There are no school, shopping centers, provisions for cultural activities.
Photos from the site
(photo: grad. studio, B.U. '97)
These photos show the neighborhood: how it is at the street level: abandoned and old, yet beautiful and promising.

poorly-nourished.' (Goodman, 25) The housing project, whether in Manhattan, Detroit or Chicago "all seem to follow a standard pattern: high-rise apartment slabs grouped around a vast expanse of open drab-green space." (Goodman, 26) The idea of building 'public neighborhoods,' as opposed to simply 'public housing structure' has been frequently discussed, and social workers insist on 'eking such facilities' out of the scant budgets.' (Goodman, 33) These often become apparent in the form of shopping and welfare centers, playgrounds, daycare for children, sports, and dances for teenagers, musical and dramatic events for adults, as well as libraries, crafts shops and meeting halls. (Goodman, 33) However, the most obvious problem, as Goodman sees it, is where the planners place these facilities. "They are hidden in basements of elsewhere within the standard slabs, marked by nothing but a sign no bigger than the ones that tell you to keep off the grass or not to loiter. Even organized human activity must not disturb the serenity of the architectural design." (Goodman, 33) Furthermore, the only other concession to 'neighborhood,' the nearby shopping center, is all too often confined through zoning regulations as a 'commercial intrusion,' and it must not disturb the greenness and openness of the dead spaces that the standard planning concept demands. (Goodman, 33) In the selected run-down site in Brooklyn, there is a small number of existing residents, mostly lower-income families. It is intended that more housing units will be brought into the community. However, the issue is how to incorporate new housing without gentrifying the region, and forcing the low-income resident out of their homes through the higher-priced rents of new development. The lessons learned from Life for Dead Spaces is that rather than demolishing all the old abandoned buildings, perhaps more can be done for the community by simply "hemming the edges" of run-down neighborhoods. Under the reasoning that these old buildings are simply 'shells' ready for a retrofitted new life, they can be reincorporated back into the urban fabric as useful and beautiful, functional.
structures. This means that although they might be preserved, if they hold not endearing architectural merit beyond their basic contribution to the urban fabric and formation of identity, they can (and often should) be given such a face lift. This should allow them to become functional according to current standards, and to lend themselves toward the possibility of becoming a catalyst for a direction of future development.

Another point taken from this reading is that commercial/residential spaces need not be separated. Social interaction is imperative, and the spontaneous and accidental meetings of diverse groups of people should be promoted and encouraged.

Identity

An important missing element for this area is the general confusion of the area, and the lack of a recognizable identity. Kevin Lynch describes what comprises an identity in *The Image of the City*. One method of research he uses in his book is he asks people in various cities to describe to him their city in their own words, thereby finding an identity (or lack thereof) by what is significant (and also what is not significant) to the people who live there. One city in particular, Jersey City, (which happens to hold a lot in common with this region of Brooklyn, more than the fact that they are both “on the edge of something great: Manhattan!”) offers an opportunity for reference. When asked for a general characterization of Jersey City, one of the most common remarks was that it is not a whole, that it had no center, but was rather a collection of many hamlets. The question he asked the residents: “What first comes to mind with the words ‘Jersey City’?” The repeated answer was ‘nothing special, and that the city was hard to symbolize, that it had no distinctive sections.” (Lynch, 29) One woman put it:

“This is really one of the most pitiful things about Jersey City. There isn’t anything that if someone came here from a far place, that I could say, ‘Oh, I want you to see this, this is so beautiful.” (Lynch, 29)

Possibly the easiest way to describe the area of Jersey City is that it is at the edge of something else. This method of characterization is also currently prevalent in the area ‘Between the Bridges.’ In establishing an identity for Brooklyn, it must
be noted that is should be recognizable on multiple levels: (1) from within its own boundaries, (2) from the highways by people passing over or through, and (3) from the skyscrapers of Manhattan.

In order to begin to evaluate the effectiveness of each component, Lynch classifies the contents of the city images into five types of elements: path, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. (Lynch, 46) In each component, I have described how it will be used so as to best compliment the community as well as how it can compliment the larger region of Brooklyn and New York.

Paths
Lynch found that paths became the predominant city element for people describing their city, though their importance varied according to the degree of familiarity with the city. (In keeping with this finding, the region of my thesis site is called D.U.M.B.O. by New Yorkers, or Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass). People with the least amount of knowledge spoke of large regions, generalized characteristics, or topography. People with a fair amount of knowledge about a city usually spoke in terms of the city's paths and their interrelationships, while people with the most knowledge spoke of paths or regions, but of landmarks. (Lynch, 49) Where major paths lacked identity, or were easily confused one for the other, the entire city image was in difficulty. Characteristic spatial qualities were able to strengthen the image of particular paths. In the simplest sense, streets that suggest extremes of either width or narrowness attracted attention, while a sense of continuity was also essential for a general understanding, as people regularly depend on this quality as a functional necessity. (Lynch, 52) Lynch advises that the potential drama and identification in the highway system should not be underestimated, as cus-
Edges:
The same as the paths; the two bridges and the expressway, and the East River.
(image: Lynch, 65)

Districts:
The boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan at one level, and the individual neighborhoods within these boroughs at another level.
(image: Lynch, 66)

Edges
Paths are often edges. Elevated railways or roads (such as the bridge overpasses) are examples of what might be called overhead edges. Although high overhead edges, which would not be barriers at the ground level, may become effective orientation elements in the city. These may identify certain paths and fix direction. (Lynch, 66) In the thesis site, the bridges direct the attention toward Manhattan. Most often, people had difficulty in making a mental connection between the fast highway and the remainder of the city structure, and in describing the directions, would even walk over highways as if they did not exist. (Lynch, 55) In the thesis site, the directness of the bridges will be enhanced, and attention will be paid toward the Manhattan skyline as the backdrop, or fourth wall for the neighborhood. The river, instead of becoming a hard edge, will open itself up as an accessible public space, and as in Venice, river transportation will be encouraged. The intended outcome is the tendency of thinking of the water as a public plaza.

Districts
A district is a relatively large city area that has some common character, and can be recognized internally, and occasionally can be used as external reference as a person goes by or toward them. Concepts of size may also be affected by how well as area can be recognizable identified. Lynch found that some people referred to Manhattan as being relatively small, due to the number of well-defined characteristic districts, set in an ordered frame of rivers and streets. (Lynch, 67) The most obvious problem with the thesis site in terms of individual districts is the disassociation with the other nearby communities of Brooklyn. The more natural sense of belonging to a borough is to that of Manhattan. This awkward connection will be allowed, most likely happening simultaneously with the creation of an accessible riverfront, and also with tapping into the drama of the overhead paths, allowing the focus to be toward Manhattan.

Nodes
A major problem with the site is a lack of successful, strong nodes. Nodes are the strategic foci into which the observer can enter, "typically either junctions of paths, or concentrations of some characteristic." (Lynch, 72) The importance of such an intersection of movement is that the attention is immensely heightened at these areas where decisions have to be made. Greater detail is perceived in the immediate environment. Nodes may be intreverted or extreverted. An intreverted node gives clear and explicit directions and signals, while an intreverted one simply states, "here I am." (Lynch, 78) The site along the East River lends itself naturally to many dimensions of interaction, and qualities of the node. Although the most forceful junction is that of the automobile (whether it is flying over the top of abandoned buildings and the river, or whipping by vacant lots on an expressway), the junction that will be encouraged will be that of pedestrians. The Brooklyn Bridge is a well-used pedestrian bridge that offers fantastic views, while transporting New Yorkers back and forth between Brooklyn and Manhattan. The local ferry landing and the not-so-distant subway are additional alternatives to the overcrowded-highways. What will be proposed is a node that will allow the interaction of people using a multitude of modes of transportation: ferry (paths from the river), subway (pedestrian traffic into the site), pedestrians from the Brooklyn Bridge (a possible direct connection from the walking path of the bridge to the site), and a small number of automobiles (a small parking garage will be added to the site for a small number of cars).
San Marco Plaza

This public square in Venice is an example of a successful landmark at a node alongside an edge (and path) at the junction of a couple districts. The quality of the interaction with the water's edge is a precedent that is intended to be initiated in Brooklyn.

(image: lynch, 72)

Landmark

A strong landmark within the site is absent. This is a key issue to face in beginning to develop an identity and individual character for the neighborhood. Since the use of landmarks involves the singling out of one element from a host of possibilities, the key physical characteristic of this class is singularity: some aspect that is unique or memorable in the context. (Lynch, 78) The clearer the form, and the deeper the contrast against the background, the more likely the object will become 'the significant,' and selected as a landmark. Although size is not necessarily important for a local landmark, it is something most people use to distinguish landmarks within their environment. (Lynch, 82) Finding and establishing a landmark within the site professes to be a difficult task, however, being that this neighborhood at the edge of the East River has the spectacular Downtown Manhattan skyline to contend with, as well as the looming figures of the Brooklyn and the Manhattan Bridge overpasses. It could be that the overpasses themselves become the focus, but it is my belief that the real landmark for the site should be an inhabitable space, from which the residents of the neighborhood can proudly stand and survey the community, as the lords of Sienna once did from their towers, or the citizens of Venice can do from the bell tower at San Marco Plaza. The landmark then, shall be in a location, and at a height from which to own the spectacular views of the city, and also at a height which could gain respect as viewed from the skyscrapers in lower Manhattan.
Looking south and west from the site
These photos show the Sweeney Building, to the immediate left, the Empire Stores warehouses, directly in front (Water Street runs between them), and the State Park, to the right. Photos are taken from the top of the Gain-Sweeney Office Complex. (image: grad. studio, BSU 1997)
Movement...
(watercolor by MRB, Nov. 1997)

Subject
The title "Movement and Architecture" is reminiscent of ideas left over from the first (fall) semester, ideas for another site that have carried themselves over into the final thesis site in Brooklyn, NY. These inquiries focused on issues of how people circulate in and around architecture, both in automobiles and as pedestrians. The investigation of 'Movement and Architecture' refers to the term 'Movement' in the sense of the movement of people in the now in relation to the primarily-static built environment. Being that the majority of architecture remains inert, it has the potential to 'freeze' time by locking the ideas of a moment (or the ideas of an entire generation of people) into the details, which are often the reflections of a society attempting to place themselves in time while accounting for rapid change. There has always been rapid change in the city, and this change is becoming exponentially greater. Now, with the speed of change within the built environment, it is becoming extremely difficult to really capture the thoughts and ideas of a generation at once. But it is becoming increasingly unnecessary anymore anyway, for the throw-away society is winning out.

As Gooding writes in his book WILLIAM ALSOP Buildings and Projects, William operates with these thoughts in mind. William creates architecture that does not subscribe to the thoughts of the public at large, or even to any specific philosophy or theory. Instead, he elects to create beauty that can stand on its own merit. "Against the description of buildings in terms of their function, Alsop persistently refers to the behavior of people..."
within them. And around and between them. ...To the Modernist dictum 'Form follows function' he opposes 'Function follows behavior.' 'Whether there is a "form" at the end of it is open to question.' (Goody, 20) Will says, "The objective is to reach the point where one is liberated from having to answer with a justification, reason or theory." (Alsop, 15) In so stating, he opts for an architecture that is less the art of prediction. However, this can be attained only to limited degrees, for architectural discourse cannot really be severed from the approximations and speculations of a future that does not yet exist. In any case, this thesis project (being that it is in effect only an 'idea quest' and not a project with a client, heading for construction) agrees with Alsop in that although there are a set of required functions to fulfill, they will not necessarily dictate a form. In fact, it may be that in thinking of 'function' rather than terms of 'human behavior,' there may be the possibility for a better, more humanistic solution. In keeping with Alsop's ideals, it will always be remembered that this project "must always be an exploration, not a confirmation." (Alsop, 15) It may be that the speculations will change, but the speculation-architecture relationship remains.

Another relationship exists that must be noted of, one that is changing: that being the person-architecture relationship. It is my position that these two components, people and architecture, collaborate, under a mutual dependence. Architecture does not happen until it is given a life from its inhabitants. Likewise, people need stability to show them who they are and where they are going, and they find this in architecture. There exists an inertia in architecture that responds to much more than any functionality or usefulness of architecture.

Just the same, the function of a space does not exist a priori, but only exists when we act within the space. Our reality is determined by our observation of it, in other words (a thought

The drawings from Woods reflect a duality in society. There is clearly a lingering presence of a formerly existing function, along with all the associated architectural vocabulary baggage, but the shells have been retrofitted to make them still useful. Society holds dear its history, and yet wants to be functional and enterprising in the present. In the thesis project, abandoned structures are treated in much this same way: simply as 'shells' ready to be retrofitted. (Images from One Five Four)
In the Vacant Lot

There is an untold story in the abandoned spaces of the community. Crime and fear call their home that which is vacant, yet as the cheapest security system is that of the "peoplewatchers" and bystanders, reintroducing residents to the community is the key to breaking the vicious circle. (Image: MRB)

that could have come from Alsop, as mentioned earlier. Lebbeus Woods says that "we will comprehend that the utility of an action or a thing created is determined by the way we create it, the way we work." (Woods, 7) Woods goes on to say that the conditions of existence inherent in the tectonics of the space offer to us only certain probabilities of function, of use, or work. Only in a state of extreme and sensitive attentiveness to these probabilities can we actually exist in some specific way within the space." (Woods, 7)

Object

The intended architectural structure will examine urban housing of various types: mixed-use (residential combined with light commercial), low-income, and multifamily. Other anticipated architectural types will be various shops and galleries, associated with the mixed-use housing. As the river bank between the bridges (composed of a rarely-used state park and walkway) is critical for the success of the larger area, relationships will be explored to promote a lively character there in the face of the rest of the community, and as the community seems to hold closer ties to Manhattan than its own Borough of Brooklyn, especially in the visual sense. However, even with the two bridges providing physical links, the community is all the more isolated for having the bridges so close, for they approach the east bank at a tremendous height that denies any real feeling of personal relationship for either car or pedestrian. Reintegration this community with other parts of Brooklyn behind it will be a major consideration.

The mixed-use apartment block (housing/shops) will attempt to accommodate and promote various types of movement. It will provide ample parking, clear and safe pedestrian thoroughfares, and allow ease of adaptability for future change. Meanwhile, it must provide a bearing for the surrounding community in establishing a character of place. In addition, development of the neighborhood must take place with minimal gentrification.
Location

The East River in New York City plays a critical role in shaping the cities' future identity. "The river is now an underutilized urban frontier waiting to be transformed and reincorporated into the city" (Van Alen) according to the Institute. In an effort to define a vision for the river and stimulate dialogue about its future, this area along the East River has been identified.

Site Map,
Schematic Floor Plan
(no scale; north is up on both)
The large map shows locations throughout the city that have been selected, toward which connections (literally visual or implied) will be made. The floor plan shows the angles of these connections. Some of these lines and angles will begin to become actual walls and hallways in the floor plans. (images: MRB)
Fulton Landing
Plan proposed by David Walentus.
Plan shows proposed new shopping/commercial spaces, in addition to two new parking garages under the overpasses of the bridges. A new marina lies immediately in front of the renovated Empire Stores shopping center. (image taken from Fulton Landing, page 3)

Site
The site I have chosen is on the east bank of the East River in Brooklyn, New York City. The Brooklyn Bridge acts as a wall to the south, the Manhattan Bridge cuts off the north. The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway slices its way under the two bridges just beyond their anchorages, closing off the gap created by the overpasses. What is left is an isolated and generally forgotten site with wonderful views of the Manhattan skyline through the cables of the Brooklyn Bridge, views available only from this site. The site is specifically at 30 Main Street.

Social and Physical Context
This site lies in the physical heart of the City, bordered by three of New York’s five boroughs: Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn. At the base of the Brooklyn Bridge is the small Fulton Street Historical District which has a number of small restaurants and shops. At the base of Fulton Street is the new Fulton Ferry Landing. This stretch of waterfront is one of the most contested stretches of the East River currently.

Two plans are being proposed for the area, each with its own vision for the future of the river front. One is by Jed Walentus, a developer who owns some property in the area. He proposes a regional shopping mall, surrounded by new residential lofts, served by two new parking garages, one under each bridge. The combined total new parking capacity of these garages would be 2,900 cars.

The second plan is by a community planning organization, the Brooklyn Bridge Park Coalition (BBPC), who is being backed by another community planning organization, the Old Brooklyn Waterfront Alliance. They propose a waterfront park with minimal
Sweeney 1 (above and right) and Sweeney 2 (left)
(North is up, no scale)
Plans show existing layout of two buildings within the site that will be looked at in more detail. Construction is reinforced concrete. Sweeney 1: top plan shows first floor only. Bottom plan shows floors 2-10. Floor 11 resembles this same plan, except the outer wall lies at the first inner set of structural columns. Elevation to right above is of East Elevation facing Main Street.
Sweeney 2: Top plan shows first floor only. Bottom plan shows floors 2-5.
(image from Fulton Landing)
Hudson River Park, Greenwich Village (piers 42-51)

Plan shows primary focus to be that of a "green corridor." The area will concentrate on providing New York residents with a place to escape for relaxation, exercise, open green spaces, and enjoyment of the river. Commercial spaces are kept to a minimum in this "natural" border. (Image taken from Hudson River Park, page 38-39)

commercial uses, extending beyond the boundaries of the bridges, a plan similar to that being proposed for Manhattan on the Hudson River between Battery Park and 59th Street by the Hudson River Park Conservancy. On September 27, 1997, the community held a public rally to protest the Walentus plan. They are concerned about the volume of traffic that the new commercial center would generate.

The issue has come to a temporary standstill, because both groups are competing for state funds and the right to develop the area, and the Department of Planning is unclear of its position. In addition, there is state property (a small open park and a couple dilapidated warehouses) that occupies a pivotal position within the neighborhood. The Department of Planning has voice that it would like to see a large-scale master plan renovate the community as one, rather than as individual components.

Local Designated Historic Landmarks

Brooklyn Bridge—John Roebling and Sons, Engineers; finished 1883. Largest suspended bridge in the world at the time of construction.

Fulton Ferry Historic District—Brooklyn’s central commercial district from 1814 to the 1880s; declined after the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Empire Stores—53-83 Water Street—built by Thomas Stone, 1870 and 1885. These old warehouses constructed as tobacco inspection warehouses are the pivotal structures of the area.

Goals, Methods, Processes

Due to the heights of surrounding buildings, in many direc-
Schematic Diagrams - Sections
The Natural Waste Water Purification System is not a new idea anymore. However, how it is being used in the diagram at bottom is in an urban setting in a high-rise building. The system has been turned on its side 90 degrees, which gives the system adequate space in a dense setting, and allows it to be gravity-fed.

Schematic Diagrams - Elevations
The Usage Diagram shows that the lower two floors will be commercial, the next seven will be residential, and the top two will be commercial/public. The Focus Diagram shows how the atrium spaces will direct focus out and away from the core at the 5th floor level, the level at which the surrounding buildings no longer block broad views. (see photo on page 10)

Natural Water Purification System Diagram (image from Todd)
Schematic Wastewater Purification System (image: MRB)

Schematic Usage Diagram (image: MRB)
Schematic 'Focus' Diagram (image: MRB)
The building will be divided up into five layers. (image: elevation at left with blue ellipses) The bottom two are commercial. These spaces will be created so as to allow for maximum flexibility in usage. For example, there could be as few as three separate units on the two combined floors, or there could be as many as six. The square footage would range from as much as 12,00 sq.ft. to as small as 1,000 sq.ft. This flexibility allows the units to be adapted to changes in the local market. The next seven are residential, divided up into three regions, consisting of the lower three, the middle two and the upper two. This breakdown of floors into regions creates smaller 'communities' within the larger structure. The way these regions will be grouped together is through the use of atrium spaces that will open up, and various shared facilities, such as laundry and storage spaces, and recreational spaces. The top two floors are given over to commercial/public spaces. The very top floor will be a restaurant, complete with rooftop access for patio dining, and access to an observatory to capture the spectacular views of the Manhattan skyline.

Generalized qualities for the existing conditions for the site is that there is a distinctive feeling of being 'left out.' Not only is Manhattan snubbing its' nose, but Brooklyn is turning its' back. The Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges crowd in closely and overpower the insignificant cluster of buildings cowering together around the Main Street/Water Street corner. For this reason, it has been determined that the Sweeney Building must stand tall and be defiant. While acknowledging the power and role of its' dominators, it must begin to take back for the neighborhood the inherent rights of location. Being brilliant and even being boastful need not be thought of as being above proper manners in this case.
Fall 1997 Design Solutions

The photos on these pages show a fundamental strategy starting to take place. One of the components of this strategy is the physical connection to the Brooklyn Bridge: the walking bridge as shown in the drawing on the opposite page. Another part is a node being established at the intersection of Water and Main Street, on the northeast corner of the Sweeney Building. A final part of the strategy are the physical connections between buildings at various levels, as shown in the drawing on the left page and some of the model photos. The existing structures are treated as simply 'empty shells' that are being used for a new purpose. (images: MRB)
**Spring 1998 Design Solutions**

This is the beginning, schematic part of the final design solution. These images, in a rather abstract way, show how the layout of the floor plans of the Sweeney Building came about. The first sketches (above and to the immediate right) were derived from the importance of gaining daylighting to the inner parts of the building, as well as the beginnings of aligning walls and corridors with connections to various parts of the city. For example, one hallway that leads out of the elevator lobby guides the view through the cables of the Brooklyn Bridge toward Lower Manhattan. The objects to the upper right (the shells and the pine cone) and the overlaid leaf on the opposite page are images that took on a form that conducive to the goals of this project, and their forms laid a groundwork of sorts for the vocabulary used as the building took shape. (Images: MRB)
As the walls begin to take shape, the organic forms come through in the layout. This inner organism is a manifestation of sorts of the new life given to the rigid, structured grid of the existing shell. Meanwhile, the curving walls of the inner core become an active light curtain, constantly changing with the moods of the skies. The inner core will have sections of the floor cut out, and glass-block 'bridges' will serve as the floor in the central core area. This is meant not to become a model for daylighting solutions (although it is intended to provide some amounts of daylight), but rather for the idea of a glimmer of light, or the beam of sunshine that comes and goes. The crevasses where the light will find its' way through will be the response to the once-abandoned and quiet neighborhood, as well as being a reminder of the living and breathing beast at the core of the building. In addition, the glimpse of light will be a microcosm of the very neighborhood itself, a community on the very edge of something.
**Floor Plans**

The key feature of the floor plans is a new atrium space that runs up the entire length of the building at the very core. This atrium space, however, still functions as the main circulation space, and glass block bridges connect the spaces. As the levels go up, the arcs of the atrium rotate to angle themselves diagonally toward the new node being created, at the northeast corner of the Sweeney Building, the corner of Main and Water Streets. The rooms themselves point themselves outward away from this atrium space, in a manner that fairly well disregards the rigid grid of the structure. In this way, they become more dramatic, in that every unit is unique.

**Glass Block Bridges**

The images to the right and below demonstrate how the flooring could be used in allowing the glimpses of daylight to the lower and inner parts of the building.
Perspective Studies of the
Glass Dome/Water Purification

These images show the roof of the Sweeney Building beginning to take on a glass dome, a proper terminus for the organic atrium within. This rooftop greenhouse will also become the beginning of the natural water purification system. This integration comes in a very bold form, inserting the garden with the main circulation corridors and public spaces such as the restaurant and fitness center (tenth floor).

(images: V RB)
Site Plan

These images show how the site plan has been worked out. A new ferry landing is evident in the drawing to the left, slicing its way nearly into the intersection of Water and Main Streets, the very hub of the community. A physical connection to the Brooklyn Bridge has been established, allowing pedestrians to cross over from Manhattan and Wall Street. A public path will then allow these pedestrians to cross through the Sweeney building at the 6th floor. This floor may be given at least partly over to commercial spaces, instead of being completely residential. The Empire Stores warehouses are to be converted to shops and restaurants, and small office spaces. The node then, established at the corners of Water and Main Streets, will be accessible by foot, boat, and car. The Water Purification System within the Sweeney Building will begin at the rooftop and flow down the western facade in a glass-enclosed atrium space.
The Sweeney Building

The images above show how the roof garden is beginning to establish an identity for the neighborhood, and the water purification system held within could become a catalyst for further development in a sustainable manner. These photos also show the building as seen at night or day. The other photos show the scale of the spaces as they are broken down, and start to show how the roof atrium space will behave at a personal level. (Images: VRB)
The Sweeney Building

The image above further illustrates how the water towers and the glass dome will become a new icon of sustainability and development for the community. The photos of the pedestrian bridge at the far right show the relationships of this bridge to the Brooklyn Bridge, and to people passing underneath. The photo at right is an interior shot of the elevator lobby space, showing the glass block bridge and demonstrating how lighting may be introduced into the space. (Images: MRB)

The Pedestrian Bridge

There are two levels on the bridge: the upper one is an open-air (although there is a semi-perforated solar shield) 16' wide path and uninterrupted for those in a hurry. The lower level is enclosed and will house 6 tenants for small shops, along with offering views of Manhattan through the Brooklyn Bridge cables. The arc of the bridge pays homage to the nearest Brooklyn Bridge pier, and recognizes the prestige of the Brooklyn Bridge by attempting to remain fairly inconspicuous, while demonstrating the new life of a once-forgotten neighborhood.
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