A Cemetery on an Island
In Search of a Sacred Gathering Place.

Gregory W. Lewis
If we look at the world around us the places which are most rich in life are meeting places, and not only cafe's and city squares. In nature, life is at its most vigorous where the elements meet—in the warm sun-drenched marshes, and the humid jungle. When we seek rejuvenation in natural surroundings we are drawn to those places where the spirit of place is strongest—where there are meetings between elements—places which emphasize the meeting of, for instance, earth and sky or water and rock.

—Christopher Day

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This book is dedicated...

To my parents for the continuous love and support they have given me, and to Erika, my fiancé and best friend, for always being there.
I am deeply indebted to both Sonny Palmer and Andrea Swartz for their guidance throughout this project. Their assistance played an integral part in helping me formulate and clarify my ideas.

I am also indebted to all my classmates and peers, who have, in their own way, made a substantial contribution to this project.
The Impetus

The impetus for this project came about a year ago on the Polyark XI trip. Although I didn't quite realize the impact of that particular day in Paris until months later, I was deeply affected by my journey within the walls of the cemetery Pere Lachaise.

Our time in Paris was quite brief, and there are, of course, many, many places of interest in and around the city. As we were choosing our plan of attack, we knew no matter how tight the time constraint, we were going to visit the grave site of Jim Morrison. After having heard so much about the experience, and being big fans of the poet ourselves, we weren't going to miss this opportunity to be in his presence.

The event started as merely another quest for a place to see, but the experience soon transcended the ordinary. First, not being terribly fluent in French, we found ourselves in the wrong cemetery. This was certainly not a total loss—the cemeteries in France are some of the most interesting in Europe. After exploring the area for a short while, my friend and I decided to ask one of the attendants at the gate which cemetery we were in. After fumbling aimlessly for several minutes to convey our question, we were about to give up. Then, the two words Jim and Morrison slipped out of one of their mouths. At this moment the gatekeeper's eyes illuminated. He knew we were on the journey.

Still very pressed for time, we followed the man's directions to the other side of the city, and found Pere Lachaise. As strange as it seems, this cemetery is a very exciting place. It has been described as a necropolis, or city of the dead. This is a fairly good assessment of the place. Over the years, the cemetery has been built up with numerous monuments and mausoleums, which has given the space a somewhat urban feel.
The journey did not end once we were inside the cemetery gates. We still had the monumental task of finding the small plot in a very large area of land. We soon learned, however, that this was certainly part of the experience. As we were exploring, we found that people who traveled this path before had left clues along the way. In many cases they had inscribed the word Jim into other monuments and trees with an arrow to lead fellow explorers on their way.

This was the first hint of the overwhelming power and desire to share this experience. As we continued our search, we ran into many others who were also looking for the final resting place of the lizard king. These meetings were very exciting. People of many different national and ethnic backgrounds were united in a common goal. This, however, did not prepare me for what I experienced when we finally reached the grave site.

This place was truly magical. Here, a great crowd of people from many different countries had gathered together to share a special moment in time. Some were contemplating silently within themselves, but many were talking, laughing, meeting one another, and sharing travel experiences, ideas, and thoughts. Some of these conversations were in English, and some were in other languages. It was truly exciting. The whole act of meeting and communication was enormously heightened by the sacredness of the space.

I had many wonderful experiences in Europe, but none struck me quite the way the cultural meeting at the grave site did. We will meet again Mr. Mojo Risin'.
The Introduction

After the trip to the cemetery in Paris, and especially as I began to develop my ideas about the thesis project, I became deeply interested in the emotive quality of sacred or spiritual places, and the ability of a designer to call forth the spirit of place.

This thesis, then, is a personal exploration of those elements that give meaning to architecture and purpose to my quest and learning process. The built environment must invite the users to explore around and within themselves. It must be a vehicle through which a higher awareness of life can be achieved.

It follows, therefore, that the exploration in this project evolved from an inner passion to evoke a spiritual ambience in architecture, and how that might enhance a wholistic learning process through man's social interaction.

I decided to develop a cemetery that was designed to be a gathering place for a community and visitor's alike. Tapping into the sacredness and enchantment of the cemetery, I wanted to explore sacred festival and ritual as a catalyst to call forth the spirit of place, which, in turn, could heighten the experience of gathering, sharing, and communicating. In effect, I am searching for a sacred gathering place.

In this project, the cemetery is for the living—a spiritual world of ceremony and journey; of social interaction and personal introspection. It is comprised of several different buildings and spaces—a gate house, chapel, burial area, fellowship hall, and crematorium, which are linked together by a natural and architectural expression. The cemetery becomes the threshold or opening by which a passage or journey is made possible. A journey to the spiritual world.
The Question (premise)

There are several reasons why these ideas are very important to me.

I. Today's society lacks the media for any spiritual expression. Man's primal desire for an existential existence is not being fulfilled. Architects, as designers of the built environment, must respond to this need; however, most contemporary architectural endeavors are banal, lifeless, and devoid of any meaningful expression. I-Fu Tuan, in his book, *Space and place: The perspective of Experience*, states:

Space in our contemporary world may be designed and ordered so as to draw one's attention to the social hierarchy, but the order has no religious significance and may not even correspond closely to wealth. One effect is the dilution of spatial meaning. In modern society spatial organization is not a function, nor was it ever intended, to comply a total world view.

Most buildings today have very little positive impact on the user, and are merely inestimable consumers of our vital natural resources. Ritual and ceremony are no longer explored as part of the architect's palette. In fact, there is no spiritual ambience in our built environment. This is a real problem in our western technological society because building and construction is so pervasive and dominant. Architects must begin to assign some cosmic or transcendental significance to their work. If we cannot fulfill our spiritual need from within ourselves or through our environment, we begin to seek other means of doing so. It seems that our society has attempted to compensate for our lack of spiritual fulfillment by recklessly clinging to those items that represent our advancement ability to satisfy our physical needs: cars, clothing, fancy homes.... Those people who cannot afford this luxury are compelled to look for spiritual fulfillment in other ways.

Some of these ways, art and music for instance, are positive and do offer some measure of fulfillment. However, many others are not so fortunate and find themselves uncontrollably involved in quick-fix dependencies such as drugs, alcohol, and sex.

As part of my personal exploration, I began to ponder several questions: Can architecture capture this spiritual ambience? What is spiritual place? What elements make a place spiritual? In the words of Le Corbusier, I am interested in "the effect of architectural forms and the spirit of architecture in the construction of a vessel of intense concentration and meditation."

II. Throughout history, the public forum has been the arena for man's social interaction. Here each person gains insight and knowledge via communication and exchange. This is the basis of a holistic learning process. Through active discourse, ideas are shared, understood, elaborated, and enhanced. Today, however, the forum is gone—there is no common ground. One-way media, especially the television, has suppressed our desire to communicate on a personal level. The community no longer gathers to learn from each other or celebrate together. Each person or family has become an entity or cell on its own, and is no longer part of the whole. As I began thinking about this project, I wanted to explore the possibility of recreating the public forum.

III. The appreciation of the cemetery in our society is on a steady, systematic decline. In 1989, Mount Hope Cemetery in Rochester was visited by 500-500 visitors each weekday, and upwards of five thousand visitors on the weekends. In 1989, however, attendance was one-fifth this number (Jackson and Vergara, 1989.) I can't help but wonder if the prevalent attitude toward the cemetery in this country needs reevaluation?
The Question (premise)

We are losing touch with many important aspects that can be learned from our sacred burial grounds. The cemetery is a place for the living. It teaches us something about the fundamental attitudes and philosophies of a society or culture. The attitudes of life and death, of being and not being, of existence and mortality. Also, the cemetery is a place of fulfillment. There is life-force in a cemetery—an aura of sacredness, and enchantment. In the cemetery a link or connection occurs between people of all time periods. History is brought to the present.

We need to reaffirm our affinity with these sacred grounds. The cemeteries in America were actually this country’s first open public places. Before public parks existed, people flocked to the cemeteries. Some came to mourn family and friends, while others came to escape the noisy settings at home and work (Jackson and Vergara, 1989.) As part of the exploration in this thesis, I wanted to create a cemetery that, once again, served as a favored public space. Life truly can be enhanced through the understanding and celebration of ceremony.

Synthesis.

I am fascinated by the prospect of the cemetery, as before, becoming a spiritual or sacred escape for the public. Our society today is in desperate need of a fixed point. A point of reference to meet, to gather, and to learn. This place must evoke a spiritual ambience, and make fundamental connections to our culture (past, present, and future.)

All this to ask...

Can the cemetery act as a sacred gathering place?
At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a revolutionary change in cemetery design occurred in Europe.

In England the park-like cemetery was developed in reaction against the horrible burial conditions prevalent at the time. As hoards of people left the English countryside for work in the city, the urban areas became increasingly overcrowded. Poverty, disease and premature death were commonplace. When conditions were at their worst, dead bodies were carelessly disposed, and public graveyards became disgraceful. The poor were not only buried in cheap coffins that often disintegrated before they were in the ground, but many of these coffins were stacked one on top of another with little or no separation (Lamot, 1977). The cemeteries in the churchyards were no better. Very soon after a body was buried, it was exhumed and burned to make room for another burial. The smell of decaying matter surrounded the entire area with a horrid stench. (Lamot, 1977) Ultimately, the only visitors to these cemeteries were thieves plundering the open graves. The English, therefore, put forth a monumental effort to change these conditions, and the result was a spacious, park-like setting for their cemeteries.

At roughly the same time, the people of France were building Pere Lachaise just outside of Paris as a pastoral retreat from the city. The remains of many of France’s most renowned citizens were transferred to this cemetery, and fine works of architecture and sculpture were constructed to honor these great individuals of past eras. Soon, Pere Lachaise developed into a cultural institution (Bergman, 1988.) The cemetery instilled a great amount of patriotic and civic pride in the people of France.

The beautiful monuments that were built to glorify those who were buried there still stand as
The Cemetery

a testament to the timeless quality of historical continuity (Bergman, 1988.)

These examples represent two distinct models of design—the rural cemetery, where people are buried in a pastoral, garden setting, and the Necropolis, or “City of the Dead,” which is mostly architectural. In either case, the cemetery is a retreat for the living.

The cemeteries that emerged in the days of America’s infancy were created along the same lines as those European counterparts. Our founding fathers’ interest in civic concerns, religious liberalism, and horticultural interests combined to create a dramatic landscape in the rural cemeteries. David Charles Stoane, in his book, The Last Great Necessary, states.

Salvation and the hope of immortality were directly integrated into the landscape through the use of natural and artistic representations. The landscape was also a place of pride for town and family, whose monuments and statues reminded visitors of their successes and their future. The cemetery offered a celebration of life and death, hope for the dead, and repose for the living.

The prevailing ideas about death and resurrection in America at the beginning of the nineteenth century lessened the fear of death, and brought the world of the dead close to that of the living. Eternal life was offered to the faithful, and the funeral was “proof of the friendship and unity of the small town, because the entire community participated in the remembrance of the dead” (Stoane, 1991.) In essence, the ceremony became a large gathering of family and friends to celebrate the continuation of the community. In the last half of the nineteenth century, however, the newly discovered ideas of science began to strengthen the boundaries between the living and the dead (Stoane, 1991.)

When Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged the concept of God as supreme creator and destroyer, people began to doubt the meaning of life and death. Darwin described life as merely an organic reality in which those species who were best adapted to their environment survived, while those who were poorly suited died off and became extinct. Death, then, was no longer a sacred encounter, but “a necessary event in order for new life to survive and for evolution to occur.” These new theories disturbed people’s understanding of salvation and resurrection, and raised anew “the fears and confusion people felt when confronted with death” (Stoane, 1991.)

As the cemetery’s role of historical and cultural repository for the community faded, other institutions, such as art museums, local historical societies, and botanical gardens assumed these roles (Stoane, 1991.) When this happened, Americans replaced the community cemetery with a “serviced-oriented” cemetery. This institutionalization of the cemetery “reflects a greater distance between the residents of the community and the graves of their ancestors” (Stoane, 1991.)

Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, it was not terribly uncommon for graveyards to be moved out of the city center, but by the twentieth century, local, state, and federal laws severely limited such violation of the grave. Interestingly, though, as the grave has become “legally inviolate. Americans have become increasingly indifferent to the cemetery as a sacred space or as a community and cultural institution” (Stoane, 1981.)

Part of this thesis, therefore, explores the possibility of recreating these aspects of the cemetery’s importance to the community and culture.
The Sacred

In order to seek meaning in the creation of sacred space, I felt I must first begin to define what that means. As I started to study these ideas, I came upon several interesting notions concerning the nature of sacred places and spiritual experiences.

Sociologist James W. Vander Zanden defines sacred as "extraordinary, mysterious, and awe-inspiring," and because these feelings of reverence are very strong, the sacred is usually only approached through rituals (1993). In this view, sacred space becomes the physical environment in which these rituals take place. Richard H. Jackson and Roger Henrie, in their article "Perception of Sacred Space," slightly broaden this view. They define sacred space as "that portion of the earth's surface which is recognized by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem" (1983). In other words, sacred space is personal, and is determined on how we define a place. In essence, the world is not one large, meaningless, homogenous space, but a fabric which consists of special places, such as a home, a birth place, or a childhood fortress, that we assign some qualitative value (Jackson and Henrie, 1983).

This act of assigning a qualitative value to a common place or object is much akin to the creation of a hierophany. In his book The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, Mircea Eliade defines a hierophany as the "manifestation of the sacred" in places or objects of the ordinary or profane world. For instance, when we deem a special artifact as sacred, the object has become a hierophany. Any hierophany represents a break in the homogeneity of space.

According to many spiritual traditions, the universe began as chaos: a homogeneous and infinite expanse. Within this expanse there was no point of reference, and therefore, no orientation was possible (Eliade, 1959). Out of this chaos a comprehensible order emerged, and the world was created. Because the earth and all things within her sprang from the cosmos, we are all connected on some spiritual level. This aspect is crucial in the understanding and development of a sacred place. Every hierophany is representative of this founding of the world, or cosmogony, and, therefore, subliminally recalls the creation myth for the individual, (Tabb, 1993) which ties him or her to the cosmic whole. The hierophany, then, acts as a reference point or center from which orientation within the profane world is possible (Eliade, 1959). Eliade explains the importance of this:

Nothing can begin, nothing can be done, without a previous orientation—and any orientation implies acquiring a fixed point. If the world is to be lived in, it must be founded—and no world can come to birth in the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space. The discovery or projection of a fixed point—the center—is equivalent to the creation of the world.

The passage into the sacred space, as described by Eliade, is symbolized by a threshold that allows movement from one cosmic region to another—between heaven, earth, and the underworld. Communication with these other worlds is expressed by images which refer to the axis mundi, or connecting piece (Eliade, 1959).

Most architectural endeavors that are deemed sacred have a previous background from which their spiritual power is drawn. Jackson and Henrie define three broad categories of sacred space that relate to these foundations of sanctity:

-Mystico-religious spaces are sacred because they are associated with religious or other experiences inexplicable through conventional means.
\textbf{The Sacred}

- Homelands are sacred because they represent the roots of each individual, family, or people.

- Historical sacred spaces are sacred because they have witnessed or have been home to certain special events.

Most cultures or religions have their own sacred places. They occur for the same reason that religious beliefs and family life exist; "they are adjustments to an otherwise bewildering, chaotic cosmos" (Jackson and Henrie, 1983.)

The 'mystico-religious' places serve as points where man can communicate with his god or gods. "Temples, shrines, cathedrals, sacred groves, burial grounds, mountains or trees may serve as the focus of such mystico-religious sacred space" (Jackson and Henrie, 1983.) These places seem to facilitate access to supernatural power.

Homelands also bring order to the chaos of profane space. "Most people feel an emotional tie to a portion of space designated as 'home'" (Jackson and Henrie, 1983.) This home could be a place where childhood was spent, a current home, or an ancestral homeland.

The important point is that it is established in their mind as home through family tradition which leads to a type of familiarity and a perception of it as a homeland. Homelands are sacred only to those who share the view of their distinctiveness (Jackson and Henrie, 1983.)

Special historical sites also break the homogeneity of profane space because they connect the places to the land, to the culture, and to the cosmos throughout time. We each make a personal connection to such a site, and feel the emotive quality inherent in its history.

In sum, the research yielded several interesting ideas and important points concerning the creation of sacred spaces. Ritual experiences, personal emotions, cosmic connections, and sacred foundations or backgrounds all enhance the spiritual creation of place.
The following is an excerpt from a paper I wrote for Malcolm Holzman in Arch 498: Contemporary Issues in Architecture. In this class, we looked at several turn-of-the-century Scottish architects—Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and we were asked to write a paper concerning some of the things we had discussed. I wasn’t terribly intrigued by the work of the first two architects, but I had been to the Glasgow School of Art during the Polyark trip, and felt its magic.

As I stood in front of Mackintosh’s building, the history of modern architecture began to flow in front of my eyes. I felt the connection to the secessionists in Vienna, where I had been only weeks before. This, however, is only a small portion of the vibrant emotion I felt in its presence. I was completely swept in by the spirit of the place. There are many elements that are part of Mackintosh’s design that add to this spiritual emotion.

Christopher Day, in his book Places of the Soul, characterizes sacred places created as involving that area where the environment can offer “interest, activity and intriguing ambiguity, timeless durability and a sense of roots (in place, past and future) in the wider rational world with its overwhelming rhythms and social places” (Day, 1990). The Glasgow School of Art matches into this description. The juxtaposition of the bold forms and the delicate ironwork are interesting and intriguing. The building’s materials speak of a timeless durability and its history gives us a sense of roots.

Day described two conventional streams of architecture that must be forged to call forth the spirit of place. The high architecture stream is inspired by cosmic ideas, the vernacular stream is rooted in daily reality. One is elevated by prolonged esoteric study, the other by making, doing and building, by mud, dirt and wood shavings. Both are artistic but neither is complete without the other; they need to be brought into conversation (Day, 1990).

Mackintosh has indeed brought these two streams into conversation. “The verticality of the proportions recalls Art Nouveau, but the stripped, pristine quality of the forms, and their rectangular character, speak of a new direction” (Curtis, 1987). A cosmic direction where the homogeneity of the space is化身 by the building.
The architect, however, did not forget the vernacular. He used a regional stone to construct the building. Also, where the site slopes sharply down in the southern boundary of the site, the "wells fall away as large expanses of subtly articulated stone surfaces, recalling the architect's interest in regional farmhouses prototypes and Scottish baronial halls" (Curtis, 1987).

Both Ellicott and Day describe the importance of the threshold in creating a place of spirit. "As one approaches a building there is a moment when you come to be aware of the influence of its activities. This is a threshold. It is the place for a bridge or archway, either built, formed of trees meeting overhead or implied by buildings compressing and focussing space. Gates and steps are traditional threshold markers" (Day, 1996:).

Mackintosh emphasized the school's threshold with the ironwork on the exterior. This was a beautiful display of sculptural discipline. He clustered many motifs and placed an arch over the door to signify entry.

Another element that brings spirit to buildings and breaks the homogeneity of the chaos is light. "Light is the life-giving element and both in quality and quantity it is absolutely central to our well-being" (Day, 1996:). Light played a central theme in Mackintosh's building. The orchestration of different qualities of light added an enormous richness to the school. The grand upper windows were set into the massive masonry walls creating a sublime juxtaposition of light and dark, of void and solid.

C.F.A. Voysey once said, it seems to me that to produce any satisfactory work of art we must acquire a complete knowledge of our material and be thoroughly masters of the craft to be employed in its production. . . . Go to Nature direct for inspiration and guidance. Then we are at once relieved from restrictions of style or period, and can live and work in the present with laws revealing always fresh possibilities.

Voysey's influence is readily perceptible in Mackintosh's search for a meaningful iconography in the new age out of the forms of the past (Macleod, 1968:). This search was an integral part in his creation of a sacred place.
The Program/Programme

The program for this project is a cemetery complex located on an island that provides a new arena for gathering. This is a place of ceremony, where a journey takes the visitor to a spiritual world. A world where social interaction and discourse are mingled with self-reflection and introspection to broaden an entire sense of being. This is truly a place of fulfillment. Ultimately, life is enhanced through the celebration and understanding of ritual and ceremony. The elements of the cemetery include a gatehouse, a burial place, a chapel, a fellowship hall, and a crematorium.

The Gatehouse.

This is the place to commence the ritual or journey: a transition into the ceremony. The visitor must immediately recognize this area as truly the gatehouse or beginning of further exploration.

The Burial Place.

This area has a very special relationship with the land. The burial place is carved out of the earth, but open to the sky. This space begins to celebrate the connection between Mother Earth and Father Sky. The experience in this area embraces the visitor, and invites him to explore.

The Chapel.

The chapel acts, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, as the transition upwards. Therefore, it has a very special relationship with the land. It is both submerging and emerging. The earth tightly embraces the walls and floor on the side of the building that faces the burial area, while the opposite side erupts upward in sculptural beauty. This is a place of silence, of prayer, of peace; yet it purveys a longing to see the land, and, ultimately, to live. It is in this space that the visitor fully grasps the awe and spiritual that he takes with him to the fellowship hall.

The Fellowship Hall.

This is a celebration hall where people gather after the ceremony to talk and learn. Ideas are shared, understood, elaborated, and enhanced through active discourse. In effect, this area becomes the public forum—the community gathering house.

The Crematorium.

This area acts as the ceremonial turn-around in the journey. The design of the crematorium is two-fold: an indoor area where the furnace can function, and an outdoor area that becomes a place of reverence. In the outdoor area a fountain begins that travels throughout the entire complex.
The Context

The site for this project is adjacent to an existing cemetery in Edgartown on the island of Martha's Vineyard. This beautiful island lies off the coast of Massachusetts, and has been described as "a place of eccentricity and serendipity*" (Kopper, 1988).

*Serendipity. v. [invented by Samuel Johnson (1755) from The Three Princes of Serendip: An Essay for Children, in which the pleasant moral in each, accompanied with an apparatus for making more discoveries evidently]

The nature of the island enhances the journey metaphor. The journey, in effect, begins long before visitors have reached the cemetery when they board the ferry in Massachusetts.

Most tend to reside on the island during the warmer part of the year, and live off the island during the cooler parts. There is, however, a strong sense of community that ties the people together.

The people who come to Martha's Vineyard permanently, for the summer, or just for the day, tend to be of an enlightened nature. They are people who would be willing to explore the cemetery, and find meaning in its presence.
Design Objectives and Methodology

The intent of this complex is to evoke the same emotional presence as a religious experience. The building must convey a spiritual ambience, which is heightened through the glorification of the journey, while offering the community a place to gather and to share. User movement and participation are paramount to the success of this complex.

It is precisely this sacredness of place that breathes life into gathering, meeting, and celebrating. When this occurs, man's spiritual need begins to be explored and fulfilled. Only through this heightened sense of awareness can the holistic learning process achieve its fullest potential.

Another goal of this project is to explore the cemetery in American culture, while at the same time questioning the modern value system concerning this institution. The cemetery was once central to urban scene in this country, but now has become an undesirable neighbor in the suburbs. This project attempts to elevate the cemetery, once again, to a community place that acts as a "window through which we can view the hopes, fears and designs of the generation that created it and is buried with in it" (Shulze, 1991).

The myths that begins to develop concerning these goals is derived from a symbolism that makes connections to past times and places. This symbolism adds more and more dimension to the place-making process. The myths reveals "universal and primordial principles that are expressed in story and in physical form" (Tabb, 1992.) The principles are those elements that create the hierophanies about which Eliade spoke. Elements that both create space and relate the cosmogony to us. These elements seem to recur over and over in mythology and other sacred traditions. The following list of elements represents those aspects I incorporated into this project in a cumulative manner. These elements build upon themselves to celebrate the spirit of place.

Exploration of the Journey.
The journey is that experience which is mentally, physically, and spiritually enlightening. Sequences are layered upon and within each other such that the more we become personally involved the more we gain. The degradation loses its importance, and we are invited to explore in and around ourselves.

Every people and every religion have provided accounts of the "last journey." The ancient Egyptians provided the most extensive account of this journey in their Book of the Dead, which is a sort of guide for the use of the deceased. Their sophisticated funerary ritual was intended as a guarantee that the deceased would have a happy crossing to the place of his survival.

-Michel Ragon

Creation of a Threshold.
The threshold is that point when we become aware of the special nature of the place. In other words, it becomes the demarcation of the sacred.

The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds—and at the same time the paradoxical place where these worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.

-Marcus Eliade

The passage should be distinct, as actual spaces and thresholds of continuity. The passage must function to dominate the point and place of actual entry—"dematerialization" in the boundary.

-Dr. Phillip Tabb

As one approaches a building there is a moment when you come to be aware of the influence of its activities. This is a threshold. It is the place for a bridge or archway, either built, formed of trees meeting overhead or implied by buildings compressed and focusing space. These are part of the experience of approaching and entering a building.

-Christopher Day
Design Objectives and Methodology

Creation of a Center
The center is defined as a break in the homogeneity of the status quo—the area of intense creative quality that we feel is sacred.

It must be said at once that the religious experience of the non-homogeneity of space is a primal experience, homologizable in a founding of the world. For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be consumed, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation.

-Marcus Eliade

The center is what the creation myth seeks to express. In its physical expression, it can represent the center of the world, what is known, or can be an experience position in space. It is a physical focal point and usually has an intense activity and meaning.

-Dr. Phillip Tabb

Creation of a Boundary.
The boundary is very important in the creation of sacred space. It helps to set the area off from the rest of the profane world around us.

A boundary can be defined as a comprehensible surrounding edge with a fixed relationship to the center. This relationship further suggests the trinity of unity in the center where all the parts become one, diversity at the periphery where everything is distinct, and homogeneity within the domain where the parts mediate between unity and diversity. The sense of enclosure may be more or less complete: openings and implied directions may be present.

-Dr. Phillip Tabb

Celebration of a Special Orientation.
There are certain elements that add to the spiritual dimensions of a sacred space. The project should embrace these elements, and celebrate them.

Orientation for the sacred space can correspond to the cardinal directions, the natural contours of the site, to views of the sea or other natural features, or the position of the sun. The four directions are often acknowledged and related to elemental qualities of fire, earth, air and water.

-Dr. Phillip Tabb

Descent into the Earth
To appreciate in full the power of Mother Earth we must descend into the depths of her soul. Here we can feel her energy all around us, and we can appreciate the magnanimity of her presence.

The well symbolizes the deep soul of a community and a point of gathering. Going down into the earth is important in grounding the energy of the place. The descent is related to the deep psyche, the instinctual, and the primitive and there is a resolve of sacred action. There also is a relationship of the descent and fertility. A sacred place can have an earth-womb.

-Dr. Philip Tabb

Ascent into the Sky.
The spiritual power of rising from the womb of Mother Earth is heightened by a strong connection to the sky. This connection is a tradition that has long been rooted in sacred ways. Many primitive societies have used a tall pole or other "cosmic pillar" to facilitate communication with the sky.

Communication with heaven is expressed by one or another of certain images, all of which refer to the axis: mound, pillar, ladder, mountain, tree, vine, etc., around this cosmic axis the world (our world), hence the axis is located "in the middle," at the "navel of the earth," it is the Center of the World.

-Marcus Eliade

Verticality is a path from the world below to the world above: it is a place where a breakthrough of one realm to another can occur. The well or life energy must first be fully embodied in the earth in order that there is something against which to push and there must be an awareness of the aspirational path and the pull which gives an upward direction. A sacred place must have verticality either with the emphasis of the actual site, a mountain top or ridge, or constructed within the actual structure. This verticality is an opening and gesture to the heavenly realm above.

-Dr. Philip Tabb
Design Objectives and Methodology

Expression of Nature Within the Space.
Bringing nature within the sacred space is another means of creating a power source. At this scale we can become attuned to the energy found in natural elements and learn to appreciate this part of the world around us.

It is doubtful whether human beings can truly apprehend these qualities in nature without prior experience in sensuous forms and scale created by men. Nature is too diffuse, its stimuli too powerful and confounding, to be directly accessible to the human mind and sensibility.

-Liu Yuans

The unknown forces and chaos of nature are brought into the safe realm of the sacred place. While they are known, they must also be recognizably natural and maintain the natural processes. The nature within can also be visible signs of the changing of seasons which can contribute to the ceremonial rhythm of the year.

-Dr. Phillip Tabb

Expression of Special Views.
When we enter the realm of the sacred, all of our energy should be focused within this space. We draw power from within ourselves and from our immediate surroundings. In effect, everything that we see should be an expression of the special nature of the spiritual place, and not be a part of the profane world.

Views within a sacred place should be limited to places of beauty and nature and not allowed to accentuate the mundane landscape. Views should be carefully directed or framed within the sacred place and contained.

-Dr. Phillip Tabb

Celebration of Materiality.
The material is truly important to a place, it is the physical expression of the cosmic building blocks. The materiality is an important factor in tying the place to the surrounding landscape, yet purveying a sacred connection to the cosmos.

Within a sacred place the materialization seeks to define the form and to reveal the sacred.

-Dr. Phillip Tabb

All materials have individual qualities. Wood is warm, it has life to it even though the tree is long felled; brick still has touch and to the eye, some of the warmth of the kiln.

-Christopher Day
Project Design Solution
The Experience of Place
Project Design Solution
The Experience of Place

Break on Through

You know the day divides the night
Night divides the day
Try to rise, try to fade
Break on through to the other side
Break on through to the other side
Break on through to the other side

We danced our pleasures here
Died our tortures there
Can you still recall the time we cried
Break on through to the other side
Break on through to the other side...

- The Doors

A Walk Through...

As one approaches the site by heading south from the parking lot of the existing cemetery, he or she is immediately confronted by the wall rising from the ground. This wall is very important to the project. Not only does it recall the notion of the traditional cemetery, but it creates a boundary, and defines the homogeneity within. As the wall opens up and the earth parts to allow entry, a threshold into the space is created. The passage, therefore, marks an intensification of the journey—the spiritual realm is now being entered. Inside the wall, a whole new world is immediately apparent. The wall, which on the outside was perceived as a seemingly raucous abstraction in the landscape actually defines the outer boundary of the gatehouse.

The large area given away to glass on the inner side of the gatehouse becomes crystalline in
The Bridge of Souls.
The supposition that the souls of the dead pass to the other world by means of a bridge is pretty widely disseminated. Among the Norsemen, after Odin had constructed his heavenly palace, ruled by the darts, he rear'd the Bridge of Bifrost, which men call the rainbow, by which it could be reached. It is of three colours: that in the middle is red, and is of fire, to consume any unworthy souls that would venture up the bridge. In connection with this idea of a bridge uniting heaven and earth, up which souls ascended, across the custom of persons commemorating bridges for the good works of their kindred. On many grave-stones in Denmark and Sweden there are many references to the bridge. At Sundbyberg, in the Uplands, is an inscription showing that three brothers and sisters erected a bridge over a ford for their father.

The bridge as a means of passage for the soul from this earth to eternity must have been thought of as the Abode for the soul of Death, the goddess of death, as Paracelsus, who was a sorcerer, wrote in his book, 'In order to pass it once after death into Elysium, there was an order of Bridge prayers; but the goddess bore the name of the Lady of the Bridge.'

-Lewis Spence
The repose offered by the trees is heightened by the sublime feeling created by strolling through the tree tops. The trees also serve to naturally connect the burial area with the rest of the world.

The bridge also becomes an orientation point. The view from the bridge, before the directional shift of the path, is focused directly on the entry pillars of the chapel in the distance. This is a hint of another destination, but a destination that is immediately recognized as only a part of the greater journey.

At the end of the bridge, the user is allowed to explore his or her inner emotion and decide which direction to take. He or she can continue straight toward the chapel, fellowship hall, and crematorium, head westward toward the cemetery yard, or take the ramp into the sunken burial chambers. The ramp is the physical manifestation of the ultimate descent into the womb of mother earth.
Project Design Solution
The Experience of Place

Under the Bridge.

Sometimes I feel
Like I don't have a partner
Sometimes I feel
Like my only friend
Is the city I live in
The city of Angels
Lonely as I am
Together we cry

I drive on her streets
'Cause she's my companion
I walk through her hills
'Cause she knows who I am
She sees my good deeds
And she kisses me windy
I never worry
Now that it's late

I don't ever want to feel
Like I did that day
Take me to the place I have
Take me all the way

It's hard to believe
That I'm not lonely out there
That I'm all alone
At least I have her love
The city she loves me
Lonely as I am
Together we cry

I don't ever want to feel
Like I did that day
Take me to the place I have
Take me all the way...

-The Red Hot Chili Peppers

The ramp's slight decline is a very deliberate acknowledgment of the downward movement. The base of the ramp enters the burial circle beneath the bridge. Emotionally, this is a very powerful, but very low point in the journey. The ring of death has been entered directly beneath the element that just carried the user safely over this area. The spiritual force is raw, almost overpowering. Safety and comfort is found in the trees and other natural elements, which act, in our respect, as the axis mundi or connection to the heavens. As one steps out from under the bridge, hope is given by feeling and viewing the open sky, and by experiencing the power of the earth.

The burial area is a circle carved into the ground. The power of the pure geometry is immediately recognizable to the visitor. The space is inward focused, and offers a place of silence and repose. This is a very special place. The emotive quality of the cosmogony is very strong here.
Project Design Solution
The Experience of Place

The dead are interred around the circumference of the circle within the structure of the burial wall in three layers.

This space can be exited in several different manners, but the most powerful way is to follow the path under the bridge until it breaks free, and the visitor can exit through the land and under the overhead walkway. This path is focused on the entry pillars of the church that were seen previously when walking on the bridge. These pillars act as both a directional element out of the earth and as communication with the sky. They speak of the ultimate connection between Mother Earth and Father Sky—the perennial life-givers.

The chapel, as the transitional element between the earth and sky, is nestled into the ground on the north side (the side facing the burial area) and is reaching toward the heavens on the south side. This arrangement opens the building up to accept the life-affirming qualities of the sun. The north side of the building is firmly rooted in the ground with a heavy masonry wall that recalls the feel of the outer boundary wall. Throughout this complex the walls that are rooted in the earth are very thick, masonry constructions with the interior side covered from floor to ceiling to express its contact with the land.

The south side of the chapel is almost completely given away to glass. In order to diffuse the direct sunlight, pillars, which are reminiscent of those acting as the chapel's entry element, support large canvas sunshades.
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The Experience of Place

These pillars stand in pools of water that throw dancing reflections onto the north wall in the interior of the chapel.

The next experience in the journey is the fellowship hall. This is the gathering place, and is very important to the project. After passing through the gatehouse, descending into the earth, and ascending to the chapel, this is the place for catharsis, and is the catalyst for the sharing and communicating, which is central to the holistic learning process. This building can be used for community meetings and receptions which follow ceremonies that take place in the chapel (funerals, weddings, etc.)

The building itself is rather inwardly focussed.

The curving roof begins to cradle the community, and light is brought in through punched openings. This building, too, is firmly rooted in the ground on one side, and has the thick, coffered wall that acts as a perceptual extension of the boundary. On the other side, the roof just starts to open up and reveal the elevated channel that carries water from the fountain at the crematorium all the way into the burial area. The channel becomes an integral element in the structure of this building.

The crematorium area is the final step in the journey, and the first step in the journey. This area is the last built element in the sequence. It lies at the end of the path, and exists in two parts. The much smaller of the two is the building itself, which is a very small structure seldom seen by any of the visitors. It sits in the opposite side of the large mound, and contains the actual cremation apparatus.
Project Design Solution
The Experience of Place

The public part of the crematorium is an exterior place. It lies within the apex of the hill, oriented on the four cardinal direction points, which places it slightly askew from the pathway. This helps to create yet another threshold.

This outdoor space is slightly reminiscent of ancient funeral pyres. To reach the area, the visitor must climb a series of steps, that enables him or her to personally ascend into the sky. This area is the fountainhead for the stream of water that ties the entire complex together. The pyre rises from the middle of the pool of water in the form of an oversized statuary. The view from this area out over the existing cemetery and the harbor in the distance is limited by the openings in the large concrete wall, which help to frame these special views, and celebrate their importance. This wall is split by a tall, 'pillar' from which fire erupts. There is an enormous energy created by the juxtaposition of the fire, water, open sky, and ashes.
Project Design Solution
The Experience of Place

The cremated remains, which are delivered to the exterior area from the enclosed structure, by way of stairs on the back side of the hill, can be spread into the fountain and, therefore, the ashes will flow back toward the circular burial area.

The cremation area is the beginning of the journey. The ashes have been returned to the earth by a means that celebrates the four ancient elements of the earth. They flow along in the elevated waterway that becomes part of the fellowship hall. As the topography rises, the waterway becomes a part of the ground, and then flows down a grove cut into the ramp. The water then empties into a pool at the center of the circle.

As the visitor begins the journey back toward the gatehouse, the perception of the place is very different. All the buildings are open to accept the sun, and rest on top of the land. There is a spirit of life, of living, and of inner strength.
Project Design Solution

The site
Project Design Solution
The Gatehouse
Project Design Solution
The Chapel
Project Design Solution
The Fellowship Hall
The search for spiritual fulfillment is personal. Each person finds inner strength and emotive power in a different way and through different media. This process, however, can be triggered and supported by things and actions outside us through certain spiritual qualities of the environment. These recurring qualities seem to reveal ordered and universal principles that empower sacred places.

One thing that has become very clear in the discussions I have had with others during the course of this project concerns the nature of the spiritual qualities. These elements must be inspired by and come from both the site and the project. The space must create a sacred emotion in the visitor. Merely inserting some of the elements I listed earlier in the methodology section as a "kit of parts" does not make a building or a site sacred. The designer must embrace the project emotionally and explore it beyond the traditional conceptual and programmatic aspects typically associated with good design. I believe a narrative must begin to develop between the site, the project, and the cosmos in such a way that people truly are touched. In effect, the spirit of the place must be brought to the forefront and be felt by all.

I am not exactly sure how successful I was in creating such a space in this design project, especially since we can't build it and experience it in a real sense. However, I do know that the exploration has been extremely important to me. The things I have learned in my journey will always be a part of me and my design process. In this respect, the project has been instrumental in my education and personal exploration.
Bibliography


Bibliography


Appendix