MADRÓN LAKE HILLS
Resort and Winery
Buchanan, Michigan

Undergraduate Architectural Thesis
An interpretation in architectural design of the regional vernacular architecture of southwestern lower Michigan.

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It is with my deepest gratitude to my family and my friends in studio 415 I present this thesis...
ABSTRACT

This thesis has been my exploration into understanding the important role that architecture plays in the enrichment of the lives of people. This enrichment is reliant upon meanings derived from the traditions of each specific place. Each place is different and the people are different in each place. Therefore, I believe that the places we create should reflect the unique differences derived from each specific place's culture and history. The existing architecture of a place is the most visible indicator of the forces which shaped the place. It therefore seems senseless to produce architecture in Muncie, Indiana which seems the same as architecture in Chicago, or New York or St. Joseph, Michigan. The richness of the architecture and the natural environment of the place where I grew up is very close to my heart. I hoped, in this project, not to compete with or overpower, but to respect and respond to the beauty and richness that exist there. I chose to express these ideas with architectural designs which would seem a part of the economic, agricultural and architectural traditions of the region. The resultant project is the design of a resort and winery at a site in southwestern lower Michigan five miles inland from the lake Michigan shoreline near the communities of New Buffalo, Michigan, Lakeside, Michigan and Buchanan, Michigan.

The program for this project is derived from vineyard and orchard agriculture combined with the resort and tourism economy which has existed for at least 100 years. The design responds to this correspondingly with vineyard, winery, and nine guest cottages. The project, if built, would bring into the region a place for the performing arts with the restaurant-playhouse building. A place for quality live entertainment has been absent from the area far too long. A complex of this type as an ongoing entity is, I feel, appropriate for the regional business climate.
PROGRAM

Producing a program for this design required much consideration of what building types and functions would best serve the contextual, cultural and economic traditions of the area.

I felt it was imperative that the thesis provide insight into social, economic, agricultural and environmental issues as well as the esthetic of the indigenous architecture of the region.

The Winery

The project began in the early programming as simply a winery. The wine industry in Michigan has a history dating from the mid-nineteenth century and the industry grows larger each year. An average winery in southwestern lower Michigan produces 8,000 to 20,000 cases of wine yearly: I chose to design the winery for a capacity to produce 10,000 cases of wine annually. The various spaces housing the wine production functions combined with a small wine store encompass approximately 13,000 square feet.

Restaurant-Playhouse and Guest Cottages

In order to characterize other important aspects of the region's history, I decided to combine, with the winery, a modest sized inn to accommodate up to twenty guests. This region, as well as all along the Great Lakes shorelines, has historically been dotted with small resorts; and the economies of most of these communities continue to be predominantly tourism oriented. This piece of the program evolved into a resort complex which includes a restaurant-playhouse and nine guest cottages. The restaurant-playhouse was conceived to provide a locale for cultural events and performances of all types.

The restaurant-playhouse is designed to accommodate up to 400 guests. The total square footage including dining areas, bar, office spaces, kitchen, support spaces, stage, and backstage spaces totals 20,000 square feet.
Guest accommodations are small cottages of 900 to 1,000 square feet in groupings of three or four cottages scattered throughout the woods near the restaurant-playhouse. A small building of approximately 1,500 square feet houses the administrative office, guest registration desk and space for custodial supplies.

THESIS ARGUMENT

The Landscape

It would be extremely difficult for me to sum up the conceptual rationale driving this project in one statement. It is a number of different concepts shaped each by their functions, orientation, and individual precedents.

This design separates the various parts. A different conceptual direction might have led me to combine all of the parts into one. However, the patterns existing, or that once existed, do not coincide with this approach. For example, once the butcher shop was an identifiable part of a community of a number of other identifiable pieces. Or, the farmers barnyard is enclosed by a number of structures, each of which has its own function and identity, i.e., the farmhouse, the barn, the chicken coop, the pump house, etc.

I might have chosen to place one large building on the site with all of the pieces, winery, restaurant, theatre, and guest quarters under one roof. I felt, instead that the beauty of this place could be better enjoyed through the pathways which I provided in the design as transitions from one place to another. The connections through the landscape are derived from the precedent events from my childhood of walking down a path through the forest and coming to a clearing that made a place. Events like these are implied in this thesis design. I have tried to avoid making these connections seem forced as in diagrammatic solutions, rather instead to be sensitive responses to the natural setting. I hope, through this solution, to enrich the guests' visits by providing a number and variety of events and surprises to be discovered while enjoying the forest, vineyard and marsh.
The Buildings in the Landscape

I did not at the beginning set out to design a building, rather a place, or a collection of places. The buildings are pieces which help to make the places and are each reflective of the regional vernacular architecture in their design concepts. The designs of the individual buildings are not based in strict accordance with conceptual design principles. They are designed with in mind the way I believe people will use them and respond to them, and also with an intuitive notion of the esthetic of the regional vernacular of southwestern lower Michigan.

Of great importance to me is the way in which the parts, the buildings, speak to one another and how they individually and collectively speak to the landscape. This thesis is about place making. To me, a place exists there already. The challenge for me was to enrich the existing place by nurturing and not imposition. It would have been wrong to overpower a compelling site with overpowering buildings. I looked for the subtleties of simple solutions to create compelling places.

The Winery

The rationale for the winery is simple. A winery has many separate functions. By identifying and separating these functions, I was able to make a place, much like the barnyard is a place for the various functions of the farm. The barnyard is generally near the road, and responding to the orthogonal arrangement of country roads. Thus the winery complex is analogous to the barnyard complex.

The Restaurant-Playhouse

A tree-lined promenade crossing the site serves to define the northern perimeter of the site as well as to connect the winery to the restaurant-playhouse. At the end of this pathway is a stairway that turns, stops and curves up the hillside to an outdoor space between the playhouse and guest registration house. The playhouse is oriented facing southwest into the site. It is designed like a house with a corner turret, first and second floor terraces, and a front porch.
Guest Houses

The guest accommodations are designed as cottages. The cottages are grouped in small communities of three and four cottages to a grouping, sharing a raised common outdoor space. The cottages are oriented into the center of the site facing southwest. Each group is connected by a meandering path through the woods. The design of the individual cottages is in concert with the esthetic of the regional vernacular.

CONCLUSIONS

Although I feel there is so much more I want to do with this project, I believe I have created a good place. If this design were to be built, it is my hope that the people living in southwestern lower Michigan would take this place to heart, and think of it as a place with meaning for them. I would hope they would feel welcome there in the same way I feel welcome walking along the park in St. Joseph which overlooks Lake Michigan. These feelings are what give places meaning.

I found that it is not always necessary to impose design on a setting in order to accomplish a goal. There was a point at which time the design took an important turn. With some good advice from my mentors, the design which began with imposition took a more sensitive and nurturing direction. This made the overall design much better and much more sensitive to my own thesis position. Thank you all for helping me to understand what I was trying to do.

I would have liked to have given more time and effort to studying the regional vernacular architecture which initially inspired this study to discover ways of interpreting and transforming it for use in this project. The breadth of this project, however, limited my efforts at the smaller scale for each part of the design. I felt it was more important to deal with a number of various elements to force myself to think of how each will influence the others. This world is suffering miserably from a lack of design which is wholistic in its consideration of its surroundings. In my thesis, I believe, I have spoken to this issue with satisfying results.
It is also satisfying and quite fitting that this, the last of five long years has been the very best. Jack, thank you for your help, your support, and your confidence in me throughout this year. Dan, thank you for your design convictions, and intellectual and moral support over the past four years. To my wife Lynn, it has been a long, hard struggle and you know that I could not have done this without your help, picking me up when I was down, or getting behind me and pushing when I needed it. Now, sweetheart, it's your turn.