The Miami Palace Hotel:

Senior Creative Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Living in Miami was the perfect opportunity to explore the freedoms and limitations of a city through architecture. The rich past needed to be respected and represented, but not copied. The present could be reflected through design, but not wholly embraced; Miami is complex. The future is unknown but inevitable, so the design aimed to achieve a sense of timelessness to age and grow with the city.

Designing a hotel was ideal to the place whose beauty and peace attracts worldly travelers year round. With a program including ballrooms and convention centers, the hotel could also contribute to the local culture. Miami’s South Beach is home to some of the world’s most renowned hotels such as architect Morris Lapidus’s Eden Rock & Fontainebleau Hotels, the Shore Club, the Delano, and countless others. Each exuded a distinct aura of peacefulness, extravagance, and exclusive style. The Miami Palace Hotel must do the same in order to achieve a level of enticement that would be comparable to the context.

AUTHOR’S ANALYSIS:

Intent:

Architecture is often described as an art with social responsibility. This creation must positively influence users on a daily basis as well as the green environment decades in the future. A person could easily become weighed down with the burden of these social issues at hand – especially when juggling them along with performance, technology, codes, form, aesthetics, and the list goes on. Nevertheless, designers are dreamers, and architects are conductors. They have the ability to design a change and
orchestrate a solution. The relationship that exists between the architect and the building, before it ever even affects the public, is vital in determining the success of the building.

In the same way, if an architect experiences a city, he or she will be better equipped with the knowledge and understanding of the place and culture that will ultimately create a better building for the site. While spending a semester in Miami, Florida, the comfortable and understandable scale of the midwest was completely reversed. Initially, it was easy to feel lost among the perplexity of the urban life. Through exploring the history, students began to understand the present context of Miami and its surrounding areas. The scale was not comparable to Muncie, but it had many of its own attributes. The ocean was, perhaps, the most mesmerizing attraction in the Miami context. An architectural project here does not have to be the center of attention. The building would not need to be the purpose, because it would always take second seat next to the attractions already present in Miami.

As a whole, Miami is greater than the sum of its parts. With this gestalt, the context carries a great deal of responsibility to the past, present, and future communities of the area. This project presented an opportunity to add to that atmosphere, to be another example of work and passion pouring out among the Miami landscape.

The other side of this social art comes from the artist’s heart and mind. This individual is responsible to the type and quality of relationship between the public and the building. He or she dreams of this environment and then pursues the completion with the belief that it will ultimately result in a better place for the people. While the architect takes many facets of users’ desires and needs into consideration, an intimate connection
and understanding of this art are ingrained in that individual. Designing a public building in an urban setting carries social weight, but is also an intimate experience between the designer and the city.

Context:

The greatness of Miami can be traced to Henry Flagler's railroad that brought its first passengers on April 15, 1896. The main component of any city is people, and this transit system provided access to the south shores. Prior to this, the beauty of south Florida was inaccessible and unengaged. After the prominent atmosphere became known, the city grew rapidly in size and in attractiveness. Starting in the 1930s, Miami was booming with timelessly beautiful Art Deco architecture. Eden Rock, Shore Club, Fontainebleau, and the Delano are just a few of the hotels that drew crowds from around the globe in the climax of the city's infamy. To this day, they remain a success in preserving the aura and bold simplicity of the Miami Shores.

In the 1980's, Miami was cited as having the highest murder rate of any city in the United States. A noticeable decline in the area's popularity quickly followed. Only within the past several years has Miami been on a strong path to full recovery from the fall. The city is, once again, at the forefront of progressive thought. Miami boasts a diverse culture, astounding beauty, a rich past, and a promising future. Architecture plays a role in every aspect of the city's identity.
Precedent Studies:

Miami is magnetic; it attracts travelers worldwide and leaves visitors always wanting more. For these reasons, the relationship between the context and the hotel was conceived as a positive and negative presence. Miami’s history and vivacity has such a strong positive presence. Hence, the Miami Palace Hotel would have a stronger relationship to the context as a negative magnetism. It would exist because of the surrounding environments. Its purpose would not be inwardly focused, but would direct attention to Miami. For these reasons, I studied architects that dealt with similar relationships and design solutions.

Amancio Williams is a Latin American architect who built The House on the Stream at Mar del Plata, Argentina in 1945. The design draws shape from the nature of the brook and responds conceptually to the character of the topography. It establishes a relationship between the context and the built environment with simple geometry. Unlike language, numbering systems, or customs, geometry is common ground to all cultures. Thus, simple movements such as these often do not need to be explained or described by words. Viewers do not need to understand the genius of the concrete’s structural parabolic section to appreciate its mastery. The sight is simple and has proved to be of an elegance that spans generations (Curtis 503-31).

Like Amancio Williams, Chad Oppenheim uses simple forms to capture the beauty of the natural surrounding. Oppenheim is an architect currently making a lasting impact on the Miami skyline. His firm, Chad Oppenheim Architect + Design, is governed by principles stemming from the South Florida culture. The experience of Miami varies from one extreme to another. The nightlife, traffic, people, sounds, smells and tastes are all
extremely wild and fast-paced. The shore, however, is a lasting peace. In such a culture, beauty is found in simplicity. Oppenheim literally captures these moments of clarity through his architecture. Architects often focus more on the look of the building rather than the way it looks at the world. The genius of Oppenheim’s designs is the way they master both arts simultaneously (Oppenheim 2).

The design intent of the Miami Palace Hotel was to orchestrate simplicity from the complexity of the program and the power of the context. The Miami Palace Hotel’s location provides the perfect opportunity for a grand building with an all-encompassing program catering not only to its visitors, but to the surrounding communities. While it will be a spectacular place, it must also be a simple frame for the vivacious surroundings. The balance between complexity, intrigue, and simplicity must be maintained without compromise in order for the Miami Palace Hotel to reach its maximum potential.

The Miami Palace Hotel will look out over beautiful Key Biscayne. This island has just been accessible since the construction of the Rickenbacker Causeway in 1963. Since then, high-income neighborhoods have been built on the southside of the island. This site is in the mid-section of the island. Its location serves visitors well – serene on all sides, but just a short drive from downtown Miami. The local homeowners will appreciate the business of travelers, but their privacy will not be breached. The hotel will explore the relationship to the serene beach and the urban downtown. The site is now a vast and empty parking lot approximately 600’ by 600’. One side of this location engages the beach. The program will encompass not only hotel amenities, but that of a community center for the island.
Concept:

Through the process of design, the complexity of the program was molded into the simplicity of the resulting building. A concept of magnetic spaces was explored due to the powerful attractive [positive] nature of Miami. The hotel will become a negative force as it draws views from within by framing another environment. In this way, ‘negative’ does not define a harmful or pestimisting connotation, but a negative magnetism – grounds in which to hold the positive actions.

Because of the openness of the current site, a strong axis was created to establish a grand entrance – one with hierarchy and importance. The main drive leads to the valet drop-off where guests’ luggage is taken to the back of house service areas. Guests then ascend into the grand lobby. On the main axis, this lobby is a square tube, framing the beauty that surrounds. It is cut open at both ends to reveal views that stretch onto the axis of the entrance drive one way, and onto the ocean and beach beyond in the other direction. Large glass doors lead to balconies and plazas outside. Extending 20 more feet from these doors, the frame allows the feeling of outside and inside to become blurred together. The scale of this tube funnels people, drawing them by the outwardly-focused building to the positive attraction of Miami.

Within the program, I explored the concept of magnetism, as well. The hotel tower and cultural center are located on either side of the main axis and lobby. I first defined which programmatic functions might become the positive, negative, and neutral aspects of the concept. The hotel lobby would be the most likely reason people would come to the Miami Palace Hotel. It was the reason, the appeal, so it took on a positive connotation. These magnetisms were expressed through material. The hotel tower was
made with a more substantial concrete material. The cultural center by nature of function and magnetism had a more transparent darkened glass façade. Once these rules of magnetism and axis were established, the Miami Palace Hotel took shape.

Reflection:

This project was a result of the designer’s intimacy with the city of Miami, and throughout the process this intimacy grew deeper. I saw that the city was not a collage of cultural pieces, but a masterpiece from the paramount characteristics of each. The architecture tells of the great history of the area. Recently, the design-conscious attitude (and therefore architecture) has spread as Miami has once again become one of the world’s most progressive environments. In designing with such contextual issues, it was important to respect the area while still making a contributive design statement. The intent was that the Miami Palace Hotel would simply state: Miami is a beautiful place meant to be admired by those fortunate enough to be within its presence.
CONTEXTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY

[PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED]

Above: Inside the Delano Hotel
Left: The Delano Hotel

Below: Chad Oppenheim Building in Miami
Photo from www.oppenoffice.com

Below: Fontainebleau
Above: the Shore Club Plaza and Interior Lobby
Right: The Shore Club hotel Tower with Framed Views

Above: Framed Beauty of Miami Hotels
Right: Yard of the Fontainebleau
WORKS CONSULTED:


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WORKS CONSULTED:


South Florida is attractive to visitors because of the year-long beauty. To maximize the potential of the hotel, the architecture constantly frames the views of the surrounding environment. Studying a 'Jenga' model, it was interesting to see the solids and voids created by simple geometry. Looking at Chad Oppenheim's work for inspiration, the Miami Hotel Palace emerged with framed view and a strong axis.
Second Floor Plan

- parking garage
- fitness center
- retail
- gallery
- hurricane shelter
- patio
- lobby
- retail
- ballet room
- offices
- showers
- stage prep
- theater
- outside seating
- kitchen
- restaurant
- elevator
- fire stairs
Third Floor Plan