AN ARCHITECTURE BEYOND THE WALLS: Aligning Mind, Body, and Soul For Human Connection

Priya Kharel

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AN ARCHITECTURE BEYOND THE WALLS: ALIGNING MIND, BODY, AND SOUL, FOR HUMAN CONNECTION

by

Priya Kharel

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture
Major: Architecture

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AN ARCHITECTURE BEYOND THE WALLS
ALIGNING MIND, BODY, AND SOUL FOR HUMAN CONNECTION
DEDICATION

To my father, Pusker Kharel: A strong person who always encouraged me to live a life doing honorable deeds, and who always prioritized my education on top of everything.

To my mother, Uma Kharel: For never letting me down during tough times, raising me with unconditional love, and encouraging me to believe in myself.
I thank my brother Prashanna Kharel and my sister Pratima Kharel for spiritually supporting me, for their continuous support, and for never letting me give up.

I thank Nabin Maharjan for taking care of me when I was feeling low, and for those late night and early morning pick-ups from school. Thank you for continuously taking care of my health.

I thank Ashmita Neupane: You have felt my pain during my hard times. You kept on encouraging me and always appreciated my achievement.

I thank my roommate Sunita Sharma and my friend Sheela Shrestha for adding fun to my hard times.

I would like to especially thank Dabney Swaidner for being my friend after meeting me on a flight, and for motivating me to see in-depth and responding to my queries all the time.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my fiancé, Jeevan Thapa "Bunu." You proved distance doesn’t matter if you really care. Thank you for never leaving me alone, even though we are miles apart. I am glad to have you in my life.
ABSTRACT

The pace of urbanization is deepening a sense of social isolation. The brutality of urban settings allows limited access to nature resulting in stress, anxiety, and depression among city dwellers. To bridge the gap of human disconnection, this thesis project proposes an architecture of connection: A connection of mind, body, and soul, with nature as the medium. This connection is achieved by actively designing for the senses, in order to reconnect city dwellers with the built environment. Architecture with nature at its heart can produce a beautiful way of living. To understand this lived experience, phenomenological architecture is discussed, and is presented as the specific approach to reestablish a connection between architecture and emotion. This project aims for a spiritual awakening of human beings through architecture by reconnecting humans with themselves.
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MANIFESTO

In search of wellbeing and happiness.

With hope, I open my eyes every morning.

To see the sunlight stream into my bedroom window.

Here and there I feel the silence.

I try to reach out
To hear someone, to touch someone.

All I can find is "ME."

With a hope, I start my day.

I wish for people
To give me a smile, to talk to me.

This world, this busy "Urban World."

I can hardly feel the swirling wind throughout the day.

With a belief of being happy by myself. I go back home.

I have all the technology to entertain,
Or to further increase my stress.

I feel empty inside, dreaming of a life I might never have.

Only part of my smile, are the shining stars above my head.

I want someone to laugh and loud,
I want someone to care for and to care for me.

I am tired of being ignored, I am tired of being alone.

I am not asking for wings to fly;
I don't want a different paradise;

All I want is to live here,
"TOGETHER" Where "WE" exist.

I am tired of my life,
I am tired of being alone.

I am tired of living with this social pain.
INTRODUCTION

"Architecture moves us. It can comfort us or intimidate us; it can enlighten us or mystify us; it can bring joy or tear at our hearts."¹

Architecture is about designing an experience that creates "a moment" for the people (figure 2). "It is a way of acknowledging the sacred in the secular; of giving something ordinary a unique context, spirit, and warmth; a way of taking time to make it extraordinary so that today's moment will be tomorrow's memory."² This belief about architecture extends into the design of urban environments.

Half of the world's population lives in urban areas.³ Despite infrastructure, good socioeconomic conditions, and opportunities, studies show that urban living can raise the risk of anxiety disorders by 21 percent and mood disorders by 39 percent.⁴ Stress, as a component of anxiety and mood disorders, is defined as the unspecific physiological and psychological reaction to perceived threats to our physical, psychological, or social integrity.⁵ Urban dwellers experience many stresses including traffic, noise, higher rates of crime, pollution, towering skyscrapers, social isolation, lack of contact with nature, and other environmental stresses.⁶ It is these latter two stresses—social isolation and lack of contact with nature—that this thesis wishes to explore. People are so busy fulfilling their duties and responsibilities that they have forgotten to take a meaningful break to connect with themselves and others.⁷ One Harris Poll survey of 2000 people estimates that approximately 72 percent of Americans feel

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¹ Eberhard, *Brain Landscape*, 89.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Adli, "Urban Stress And Mental Health:"
⁶ Chelala, "Challenges of Urbanization:"
⁷ Safi, "The Disease of Being Busy:"
The purpose of this thesis is to promote an architecture that addresses urban stress through the integration of nature, in order to foster human connection. Human connection with others requires adequate self-connection first. To obtain this state, people must be able to engage the built environment with all of their senses. Thus, the physiological and psychological benefits of inhabiting nature environments needs to be full of sensory experiences. This thesis intends to incorporate various natural elements, materials, and spatial arrangements to further these goals. It will be explored through the design of a meditational journey that will fully immerse users and spatial arrangements to further these goals. It will be explored through the design of a meditational journey that will fully immerse users and experience more relaxing.

Many of the seatings are shaded by large trees. It provides an escape from the hustle and bustle of the city. The High Line has different species of plants. These non-flowering and flowering plants attract wildlife. The High Line has different species of plants. These non-flowering and flowering plants attract wildlife. The High Line is an elevated rail line transformed into a public park located on Manhattan's west side. People Enjoying the Different Designer Furniture. People Choosing to Walk Home from Work on the High Line. The High Line, New York, is an elevated rail line located in a public park located on Manhattan’s west side. It has a green space inside the middle of the jungle. The High Line has different species of plants. These non-flowering and flowering plants attract wildlife. The High Line is a powerful healing and rejuvenating source. It includes walking in the woods and opening all the senses for a mentally soothing experience. The experience of engaging the senses in nature helps to reduce stress. The experience changes not only mood, but also how the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems work. Research shows that Shinrin-Yoku can reduce the stress hormone cortisol and increase the immune defense system. Franklin B. Hough, M.D. reports that forests have a “cheerful and tranquilizing influence which they exert upon the mind, more especially when worn down by mental labor.” Natural sounds they exert upon the mind, more especially when worn down by mental labor.” Natural sounds can physiologically change our mind and bodily systems, helping us to relax.” A research study in 2007 at Kyoto University’s Graduate School of Medicine found that “forest environments are advantageous concerning acute emotions, especially among those experiencing chronic stress.” Walking into the woods can lower the concentration of cortisol in the saliva, heart rate, and blood pressure.

The idea of Shinrin-Yoku is such that all the senses open in the forest environment, improving the mental health and providing physical relaxation. It is about accessing nature physiologically and psychologically.

1. Halliwell, “Connecting with Yourself.”

Shinrin-Yoku

Shinrin-yoku is a Japanese term for “forest bathing.” It includes walking in the woods and opening all the senses for a mentally soothing experience. The experience of engaging the senses in nature helps to reduce stress. The experience changes not only mood, but also how the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems work. Shinrin-Yoku can reduce the stress hormone cortisol and increase the immune defense system. Shinrin-Yoku is such that all the senses open in the forest environment, improving the mental health and providing physical relaxation. It is about accessing nature physiologically and psychologically. Shinrin-Yoku

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Biophilia

Like Shin-Lyu Biophilia describes a oneness with nature that addresses its healing aspects. Biophilia is a term that expresses an emotional affinity or personal relationship with the natural world. It addresses the connection between humans and nature, which is essential for human well-being. Biophilia is grounded in research by Dr. Edward O. Wilson, who observed how increasing rates of urbanization and the increasing population of urban cities have led to a disconnection with the natural world. This disconnection has led to a sense of isolation and a neglect of the healing aspects associated with nature.

**Biophilia**

The term biophilia is a concept that highlights the relationship between humans and nature. It emphasizes the importance of contact with nature, including the physical environment as well as emotional and spiritual connections. Biophilia fosters a sense of belongingness and a sense of safety. The design for contemporary urban fabric tends to isolate people and hinder their ability to live better. The alteration of environments can positively affect the life-world of users, thus contributing to their emotional and physical well-being.

In biophilic design, the built environment is reconsidered as a dynamic social field for human interaction. The design of the physical environment is a means to support the well-being of the user and the built environment. Martin S. Reiss, an American psychologist, described the need to be appreciated as the first essential need and values that motivate people. The need to be appreciated is seen as an integral part of human beings' sense of belongingness and a sense of safety. The design for contemporary urban fabric tends to isolate people, and biophilic design addresses this issue by fostering a sense of belongingness and a sense of safety.

**Human Connection**

For humans, being food and shelter are basic needs. Similarly, people are psychologically structured to belong to groups and form relationships. People have a strong need for belongingness and a sense of safety. The design for contemporary urban fabric tends to isolate people, and biophilic design addresses this issue by fostering a sense of belongingness and a sense of safety.

**Connection to Built Environment**

To shape a journey with valuable experience, it is necessary to form a relationship between the user and the built environment. Martin S. Reiss, an American psychologist, described the need to be appreciated as the first essential need that motivates people. The need to be appreciated is seen as an integral part of human beings' sense of belongingness and a sense of safety. The design for contemporary urban fabric tends to isolate people, and biophilic design addresses this issue by fostering a sense of belongingness and a sense of safety.
Heidegger, a German philosopher, believed that a connection to built environment is stronger if the user can recall it by the process of thinking that is never really abstracted, but is connected to things. Similarly, if the built environment is woven together with the senses it can help people form deeper connections. When people participate in architecture, they create memories. Architecture should generate this memory by designing physical spaces that deepen interaction, facilitating the relationship between the individuals and their area.

Senses are the medium through which people perceive their surroundings. These senses develop our attitudes and activities. In the book, Eyes of the Skin, Juhani Pallasmaa, a Finnish architect, states that "incidental design has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination, and dreams, homeless." Contemporary architectural design engages the visual sense, but neglects to engage other senses well. Through the phenomenological experience, Pallasmaa argues for a holistic architecture, one that considers the feelings rather than how it looks. Human body awareness sees space even before cognitive understanding. This theory promotes the integration of sensory perception as a function of a built form. Phenomenological concept strategies in architectural design intend to develop a unique experience of the phenomena of space, light, and form.

Light and Dark

One essential part of this meditative journey is to be aware of the light and dark spaces. Light and shadow help us to discern the form, materials, textures, rhythm, and history. The design will combine the experience of moving through indoor and outdoor areas with the variability of daylight and the contrast of light and dark spaces. When the body is experiencing space, it subconsciously constitutes its existence. An example of this kind of architecture is Maggie’s Cancer Center. Maggie, a writer and designer from Scotland, believed that architecture has the power to heal psychologically. Architecture cannot cure the illness by itself but can help bring good memories from the worse times. She believed that people should never "lose the joy of living in fear of dying." Today there are more than 17 Maggie’s Centers in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong (figures 5-6). Architecture has the power to mend and awaken the soul giving it new perception. Maggie’s Cancer Center embraces sensory qualities and introduces positive attributes of light, space, openness, intimacy, views, and connectedness to nature. Renowned architects like Steven Holl, Norman Foster, Zaha Hadid, and many more have designed Maggie’s Centers by integrating nature as a crucial part for the well-being of people. Today, all 17 Maggie’s Centers design have nature at their heart.

Architecture is not merely about the aesthetic. Instead, it is about creating an intimacy with the observer by stimulating the senses through sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound. Architecture must address all the senses simultaneously and fuse the image of self with the experience of the world. “Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings.” Phenomenological architecture is discussed as a specific approach to establishing a connection between architecture and emotion. Phenomenology is the study of human meanings and...
as constituted by a stream of consciousness. What and how we perceive the built environment can shape us physically and psychologically.

**AN ARCHITECTURE OF CONNECTION**

This thesis approaches nature as a medium by connecting people to experiences and of an infinite openness with sky and unfathomable depths of earth. It attempts to facilitate a meditative connection by incorporating Shinrin-Yoku and biophilic design. This project aims to provide this comfort zone for users with spatial and sensory parameters. This intimacy of unique experience in architecture is based on the experience of the human body and mind as one that constitutes a platform for the emotional experience.

An architecture beyond the walls develops architectural forms that holistically engage users’ bodies and senses. These spaces will help users reconnect with their bodies, becoming more physically active, focused, and relaxed.

Urban living is jeopardizing our health. Urban dwellers have little or no contact with the natural world in their daily lives. In the past, buildings had more open space in the form of courtyards, more openings and more nature in the form of daylight, trees, shrubs, and bodies of water. These spaces provided a space to come together and interact with each other. People believed in the shared experience. But the buildings of today have lost their sensory invitation and have become unresponsive to human emotions. Architecture is successful when it is human-oriented, when it has spaces that foster physiological and psychological well-being of the people.

Architecture can offer intimacy and connection: a connection with self, a connection with others, a connection with shared emotions. It can create a common language for humanity to engage one another and through personal reflection allows us to see our own psyche. An architecture beyond the walls proposes a meditative journey through the design of sequenced spaces that engage the senses through the five elements of nature. The thesis aims to change the built environment in order to change the behavior of people, fostering genuine human connection.

Maggie’s Cancer Center
Norman Foster and Partners
2016
Manchester, U.K.

Maggie’s Cancer Center
Heatherwick
2017
Yorkshire, England, U.K.

Maggie’s Cancer Center bridges the gap between the interior and the exterior:
- Uses lightweight materials, timber, and the glass pavilion to integrate outdoor spaces as much as possible.
- The whole building is designed considering the light and the contact with the garden.
- Maggie’s center has always believed in the power of nature for healing the cancer patients.
- The greenery and the openness of the building make it more successful because it connects human beings to the built environment.

The building offers psychological support, benefits advice, nutrition workshops, relaxation and stress management, art therapy, tai chi, and yoga.
- It showcases a good way of approaching greenery in the urban context here the roofs act as pocket parks.
- Unique design of the building provides a mixture of private and communal meeting spaces.
- The building has been designed in such a way that it looks like giant pot-plant points.

Figure 5 Greenery and Openness in Maggie’s Center

Figure 6 Roof Garden to Integrate Nature in Urban Context

Exterior
Maggie’s Cancer Center bridges the gap between the interior and the exterior:
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DESIGN SOLUTION

Urban living is taking a toll on health and well-being. People live and work in an environment that is jeopardizing their physiological and psychological health. They fight stress with overwhelming work and still must tackle a polluted, unfriendly, and dense concrete environment as an everyday part of their life. To overcome this stress, a genuine connection between people is necessary. We cannot control the pace of urbanization, but we can control the quality of the cities we make. To achieve this genuine connection between people, a built environment that provides an opportunity first for self-connection is necessary. A series of experiences that connect to nature, directly or indirectly, can create a better chance for more inward connection.

An architecture beyond the walls proposes a connection with nature through the built environment. It offers an intimate journey from an outwardly focused lifestyle to more inwardly focused living. This serene environment, in the middle of the concrete jungle, offers a place of escape within the urban context.

Site

It is the aim of this project to re-introduce nature to the urban context providing urban dwellers a place to contemplate and meditate. One site that is emblematic of the inhuman urban environment lacking nature is South Front Street in downtown Memphis (figure 7). The proposed site is occupied by an existing parking garage and fire station bound by Riverside Drive, Union Avenue, South Front Street, and Monroe Avenue (figure 8). South Front Street is historically significant to downtown for being at the top of the fourth Chickasaw Bluff, above the riverfront and flood zone. Since riverboats loaded cotton at the river, Front Street became the heart of the cotton trade and the center of the Memphis economy.1

Although holding great historical importance the design of the urban fabric in this area does not make the pedestrian experience pleasant. I realized that the pedestrian experience was unpleasant while walking from Union Avenue to South Front Street. As I was walking along Union Avenue, I saw the human-scaled historic brick buildings with street trees and a view to Mud Island River Park (figure 9). When I turned on to South Front Street, I saw concrete buildings with no trees, making the experience dehumanizing because of the hard materials, lack of nature and humans (figures 10-11). However, as one walks further down South Front Street, trees reappear and a connection to Mud Island is reestablished (figure 12).

The proposed site is surrounded by tall urban structures, where many people live and work. The site has the potential to alter the unfriendly South Front Street experience and connect it to the dynamic experience of the river.

Analysis

The city block intended for the project is now the site of an under utilized parking garage and an administration building for the fire department (figure 20-23). The fire department building will be removed to facilitate the primary intervention of the project. The parking building will be renovated to incorporate some of the principles of a meditation building so that it will serve as a prelude to entering the primary building.

The proposed site is handcuffed by tall urban structures, where many people live and work. The site has an opportunity to provide these people with a place of escape from their everyday stress. The site topography, which slops to the riverside, provides an opportunity for the project to act as a connection between the urban life and the existing waterfront. The proposed site has the potential to alter the unfriendly South Front Street experience and connect it to the dynamic experience of the river.

Figure 7 Site Location

Figure 8 Walkable Area for Primary User

Figure 9 A View from Union Ave. to the East of the Site. Street trees can make the built environment feel more friendly.

Figure 10 Turning from Union Ave. to the East of the Site. On South Front Street, a built environment with no street trees provides a dull experience.

Figure 11 Moving along South Front Street

Figure 12 Farther down Front Street. Humanizing the built environment with street trees and a connection to the riverfront shapes a beautiful experience.


Street Since riverboats loaded cotton at the river, Front Street became the heart of the cotton trade and the center of the Memphis economy.
The unique position of the site to the city has attracted other proposals that seek to connect the downtown to the waterfront. One such proposal is the Fourth Bluff plan by studio gang. The plan envisions the connection of sites along the Memphis waterfront, which collectively will be a transformational civic tool—a network of spaces and opportunities that can enrich the human experience, lift the fortunes of Memphis as a whole, and reinforce its future viability and resiliency (figure 19).2

This plan seeks to link the Mississippi River Park and Memphis River Park, with Cossit Library, north of the site, and with other green spaces on the river further South. Already a yoga studio has begun to use the parks for meditation classes, seeing the value in the site.

The downtown business district is to the east of the proposed site. This provides a significant user pool of urban dwellers experiencing urban stress. With the exception of Court Square, this area of the city provides little green space for respite from their hectic work schedule.3 The site, with its position between downtown and the waterfront, provides a unique opportunity to connect downtown dwellers visually and physically with the river and other green spaces along the river (figures 13-18).

2. “The Fourth Bluff and the City of Memphis Partner”
3. Ibid.
The Fourth Bluff City
Studio Gang
Memphis, Tennessee

The Fourth Bluff envisions bringing the community together by providing a place of relaxation, gathering, and learning with varieties of plants and spaces:

• It revitalizes and connects public spaces like parks, plazas, trails, and libraries.

• Reproposing Memphis Park, Mississippi Park, and Cossitt Library, it seeks to create common spaces where the diverse populations can come together and shape the future of Memphis.

• This bluff is admired by the local people; they see it as a place of relaxation and de-stressing.

• Every Tuesday there is a yoga program, where many Memphians join together to practice a peaceful meditation and increase their well-being.

Figure 20 Overall Context of Site
Figure 21 Existing Building on Proposed Site, South Front Street
Figure 22 Immediate Site Surrounding
Figure 23 View from North, towards the Existing Building

Figure 19 Fourth Bluff Plan by Studio Gang
Figure 23 View from North, towards the Existing Building
An architecture beyond the walls is a center for meditation that connects people with nature from the infinity of sky to the infinity of earth. Unlike surrounding buildings, this project integrates the outdoor landscape as an important part of the building. For humans to live a healthy and happy life, they need to explore beyond just an enclosed box. The program has been designed based on short-term and long-term use. Both approaches engage the senses with a built environment that suggests a way of being that can be free of everyday stress. It includes a roof terrace, lecture hall, community kitchen, café, yoga hall, multi-purpose hall, retreat pods, bathhouse, sauna, and private meditation chamber (figure 24).

The sky datum (roof terrace), serving as a public park, allows individuals or groups, for short or extended periods of time, to escape the mundane city to contemplate nature. Since the programs of the building are planned as a journey towards de-stressing and awakening oneself, it is advised to experience the sky datum before one experiences other datums.

The horizon datum focuses on preparation for the inward connection. Activities like yoga, lectures, and communal healthy cooking classes help in self-actualization and preparation for the deep meditation. Upon entering the horizon level, a visitor passes a point of reception that is the entrance to the city to contemplate nature. Since the programs of the building are planned as a journey towards de-stressing and awakening oneself, it is advised to experience the sky datum before one experiences other datums.

The earth datum program is comprised of deep meditation, water meditation, sauna, and group meditation that keeps people in touch with non-visual nature (figure 26-27). This level prepares people for the final solitary meditation. This final step involves inwardly focused meditation and a return to everyday life.

Figure 24 Sky Datum

Figure 25 Horizon Datum

Figure 26 Earth Datum

Figure 27 Program Layout in the Building.
Concept

The concept arose from the thesis research about the need of human connection for lowering the stress level in urban environs. Natural and meaningful human relationship has its roots in self-connection. Establishing a sense of belongingness, while embedding people within the natural world, brings harmony to the mind, body, and soul. This revived balance further promotes pro-social behaviors. This thesis is about being. Designing a site within the urban context that allows stressed urban workers a place to escape from the urban environment, for short to extended periods, can propose a robust human connection. We perceive the surroundings using the sense of sight, touch, sound, and smell. Designing with full consideration of these sensations will enrich our experience and awareness of the place. This design proposal intends to create experiential relationships between nature and man, fostering a more inwardly focused lifestyle by bringing nature to the de-humanizing context of downtown Memphis. The goal of this architecture is to guide awareness through the built environment.

Design Development

Design as a journey of awareness through nature is experienced in different datums (figures 28-33). But before one experiences this connection in all datums, he or she has this opportunity of connecting to nature in the existing parking garage. A part of the existing parking garage has been re-envisioned to connect users to small pockets of nature. The new vision of puncturing the slab makes the building porous, bringing life into the building. The four different mini gardens engage people within the garage, helping to soothe them for even short periods of time.

Figure 28 Horizontal and Vertical. The building is conceived as a tapestry of experience. The horizontal movement from the city to the river is represented by dashed lines split to denote "Sky", "Horizon", and "Earth" datums. The vertical line shows connection between these layers and experiences.

Figure 29 Engaging Senses. There is the opportunity of engaging various senses through nature across the vertical experience of the building in addition to the horizontal.

Figure 30 Going above and below. Through the design of the building, the city can experience nature in several ways.

Figure 31 A Contemplative Self-journey. The contemplative self-journey emerges from the darkness of the earth datum. User will put on a clean bath robe after completing water meditation and will move towards the journey of self-actualization. This thoughtful long walk completes the process of connecting with nature.

Figure 32 Inward and Outward Connection. The horizon datum and sky datum are outwardly focused. They provide a view to the waterfront. Conversely, the earth datum is about non-visual, inward-focused meditation.

Figure 33 Self-actualization. In solitary meditation visitors realize their strength, positivity, and thoughtfulness.
The journey begins here. A green oasis sits as a community roof terrace in the dense concrete urban fabric, allowing the experience of the open sky. This datum is more outwardly focused, and multiple senses are engaged. A visitor from the city is enchanted by the vibrant colors, trees, and pleasant-smelling cherry blossoms and lavender plants (figure 34). Friendly and inviting, the sky datum is an easily accessible public space to participate in nature. Trees and plants on this layer buffer noise, mitigate the urban heat island effect, and frame views of the Mud Island River Park. The linear nature of the building on the site re-establishes a visual connection between South Front Street and the river.

Greenery and plants produce therapeutic effects. Tall grasses and trees on the south and north side of the terrace act as a screen, separating the sky datum from the urban city and redirecting the view upward. Experiencing nature in this datum involves being in the urban context with the ability to look above, below, and beyond. The space is designed with plants that change with the seasons, to attract wildlife and engage the senses. It is about awareness: of being in the bright light under the tree shade, interacting with the chirping birds, the warmth of sunlight during the winter, the cool breeze during the summer. This not only increases human comfort, but it also fosters our innate relationship to nature. Seating can be for individual reflection or as a place to be together in community. A visitor can experience this datum even for a very short period. It is an escape from urban life, providing a moment of contemplation by bringing awareness to the senses and reviving people (figures 35-36).

The sky datum is connected vertically to the Zen garden and reflecting pool on the horizon datum. This connection from sky further deepens through the infinity of the earth.
Horizon Datum

After experiencing the sky datum, the next deeper experience in the awareness journey is the horizon datum. It is coplanar with the city, and acts as an extension of Memphis, with a focused connection to nature. A thin veil separates inner world from the outer world. The spaces here are inwardly focused with framed views to the outside for contemplation. Walking through the light and dark spaces emulates the experience of walking through the forest (figure 37-38).

Unlike the sky datum, the horizon datum is about being alternately enclosed and released spatially. The horizon datum has focused experiences of connection to the infinity of sky and the infinity of earth (inspiration from figure 40). It is relaxing to walk through the various abstract nature settings. Spaces offering yoga and meditation classes, in the shifting landscape of open and closed, dark and light spaces, prepare visitor for more deeper meditation (figure 47). This space has no vibrant visual and olfactory stimulation, which assists to limit distraction.

The main lobby is a contrast to the outside world for focused attention (inspiration from figure 41). The Zen garden courtyard is the experience of being aware of light. The rocks, gravel, and sand highlight the essence of nature, where swirling sand represent the water and crystal rocks represent the mountains or islands (figures 39,44-46). This abstraction of nature, accessible only visually, allows the user to focus on selected aspects of nature.

Activities on this level range from a 30 minute session program to an overnight meditation experience. For overnight visitors, the retreat pods surrounding the reflecting pool create an opportunity of connecting with nature. The patio on the retreat pods allows one to admire the subtle beauty of reflections changing on the water (figure 48).
The Hudson hotel is a garden oasis in the middle of a bustling city. It is located in midtown, close to Central Park, Columbus Circle, Carnegie Hall, and Lincoln Center.

- The use of natural materials, including wood, in the reception space keeps people connected to nature.
- The vines on the wall and the roof replicate an outdoor environment.
- The bright elevator in the dark space attracts the attention of the visitors.

A contemplative center at Stanford University is a spiritual retreat center serving for students’ well-being. It is a one-story building covering 4000 sq.ft.

- The vertically-oriented wooden screen system allows for some privacy while at the same time providing a view to the garden outside. It acts as a veil connecting inside and outside.
- Natural light and ventilation infuse the interior with the elements of outside.

AIRE bath house is located in a historic building. Its purpose is to balance mind and body through sensation across various bath experiences.

- The dark underground bath house with glowing floor light creates a relaxing and contemplative environment.
- The illuminated pools denote pathway as negative space.
- Its underground setting allows the visitor to feel separated from the high sensory impact of the city.

Therme Vals is a complex designed using physical materials integrated with light to give tangible experiences.

- The unique color and texture of the building material make it look larger and the magnificent light emphasizes the beauty of linear stone.
- Lights have been introduced to the building from different perspectives suggesting aspects of use of the building and creating a layered light environment with dark and light spaces.
Figure 44  Zen Garden, 12 AM. Exposure to maximum sunlight.

Figure 45  Zen Garden, 2 PM. Light as if peeking through the trees.

Figure 46  (Right) Zen Garden, 4 PM. Sun creating an interesting pattern before it sets.
Figure 47   View from Yoga Room
Figure 48   (Right) Meeting Point after Returning from Journey
The earth datum is an experience intended to feel more grounded, distinct from both the sky and horizon datums. It is the most inwardly focused and provides a cleansing healing process. This level is about experiencing a dark environment similar to meditating in a cave. A light controlled elevator takes the user from the horizon datum to the earth datum where the sounds from the outside world are entirely shut out. A user can then listen deeply, beyond the surface of the usual sounds heard in the everyday world. This datum includes deep meditation spaces like a sauna, a meditation pool, and a group meditation space.

Upon entering this darker level, the visitor proceeds to the sauna where he or she experiences the heat of the element of fire. This is in contrast to the next experience where visitors emerge themselves in the coolness of water. The space of the meditation pool is darker with no wall or ceiling lights. The warm floor lights provide sufficient light to guide the user along the pathway between pools of different size (inspired from figures 42). Spaces in this datum create both moments of solitude and companionship (figures 50-53).

Experiencing this datum is about being aware of the dark. Meditating in dark space with a grounded spirit, one will be able to find the true light of life. Although this datum is predominantly about meditating in the dark, a ray of light falls into the pool connecting the earth datum to the sky datum (inspired from figure 43). It gives an assurance of a never-ending relationship with the sky and at the same time reminds the users that it is the earth that supports them, and they are rooted deep in it like a tree (figure 49). After going through a series of in-depth meditations, the user will take a self-guided reflective walk through a tunnel to emerge again in the light.
Figure 52  Sauna. Connection with the element: A transformation from pool to sauna makes aware of our relation to heat. The warmth of the sauna allows for physiological and psychological reawakening.

Figure 53  Group Meditation on Earth Datum
The Achievement of Self-actualization

Self-actualization is being in a balanced state of mind, body, and soul, understanding one’s full potential. After becoming a self-actualized person, the user will experience a meditation that combines the sky, horizon, and earth datums (figures 54, 55, 57). Visitors participate in solitary meditation in the dome-shaped private chamber, protected by an outer shell of concrete. All the experiences of this building prepare the visitor to meditate in this chamber. Being inwardly focused one can master the mind upon reaching self-actualization.

The journey does not end here. The user returns from the earth datum back to the horizon datum, walking on an ascending bridge, under the shade of the never fading Magnolia trees (figure 56, 58-67). There he or she connects with people in the horizon datum, inspiring them to complete the meditative journey through the earth datum. This change in behavior allows a user to open his or her eyes, open his or her ears to the world around. It is there where the genuine shared human connection starts.
Figure 58  Entrance Courtyard and "Veil." The veil separates the inner world from the outer world.

Figure 59  Mud Island View from the South Side.

Figure 60  (Right) Looking up Union Avenue. The site is on the edge condition within the city.
Figure 61: Section A-A

The return journey
Meditating in the private chamber
Exploring meditation programs and getting ready for deeper meditation
Finding inward connection with the help of non-visual connection to the elements of nature
Experiencing the sky datum where multiple senses are engaged in built environment
Friendly approach from the street as a green roof sits as an oasis in the city downtown
Multiple senses engaged through the characteristics of Sky Datum

Preparing to go for deep meditation

Contemplating through visually-based reflection

Dark lobby experience for altering people's focus as they come from the outer world

Returning after gaining self-actualization
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Human connection is explored by going through a process of deep understanding of oneself. The proposed design aims to provide a soothing meditative environment for people that better helps in balancing their mind, body, and soul. The project can be explored as a series of experiences weaving together nature and the man-made environment. The form manipulation of the building was explored through prioritization of open spaces. The design further evolved based on the need of public, semi-public, and private meditation spaces. The design engages people through various relations to nature. The integrated interior and exterior spaces engage every part of the senses, becoming gateways to a delightful state of being. The project is a journey from light to dark and back to light again to broaden the user’s knowledge.

The design approach to the urban context should be friendly to human existence. The design illustrates that nature is the key element in self connection and human connection, whether it be in an urban area or a rural area. The design of public spaces in urban contexts should have empathic and sensitive approaches integrated closely with nature, in order to lessen urban stress.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


FIGURE CREDITS

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Figure 2     Series of Experiences in the Built Environment

Figure 4 Light and Shadow Defines the Space and Form. Image by Diller Scofidio + Renzo. Retrieved from http://modulo.net/it/realizzazioni/the-high-line.

Figure 5     A Greenery and Openness in Maggie’s Center. Image by Nigel Young. Retrieved from https://www.arthitectural.com/foster-partners-maggies-centre/.


Figure 7     Site Location. Original Image by Google. Adapted as Diagram by Author.

Figure 8 Walkable Area for Primary User. Original Image by Google. Adapted as Diagram by Author.

Figure 9     A View from Union Ave. to the East of Site

Figure 10 Turning from Union Ave. to the East of the Site

Figure 11 Moving a long South Front Street

Figure 12 Farther down Front Street

Figure 13 Bridging the Gap

Figure 14 Framing the View

Figure 15 Redefining the Approach

Figure 16 Character of Green Space

Figure 17 Rethinking Integrating the Outdoor Spaces

Figure 18 Opportunities to Expand


Figure 21 Existing Building on Proposed Site, South Front Street

Figure 22 Immediate Site Surrounding

Figure 23 View from North, towards the Existing Building

Figure 24 Sky Datum

Figure 25 Horizon Datum

Figure 26 Earth Datum

Figure 27 Program Layout in the Building

Figure 28 Horizontal and Vertical

Figure 29 Engaging Senses

Figure 30 Going above and below

Figure 31 A Contemplative Self-Journey

Figure 32 The Inward and Outward Connection

Figure 33 Self-actualization

Figure 34 Experience in Sky Datum

Figure 35 Sky Datum Plan

Figure 36 Sky Datum Perspective

Figure 37 Main Lobby Experience in the Dark

Figure 38 Horizon Datum Experience

Figure 39 2bm Courtyard Perspective

Figure 40 Hudson Hotel, New York

Figure 41 Windhover Contemplative Center

Figure 42 AIRE Bath House

Figure 43 Themi Vals

Figure 44 2bm Garden, 12 AM

Figure 45 2bm Garden, 2 PM

Figure 46 2bm Garden, 4 PM

Figure 47 View from the Yoga Room
Figure 48 Meeting Point while Returning after Process
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Figure 70 Presentation Boards—Interior and Exterior Perspectives 1
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Figure 75 Presentation Boards—Precedent Studies
Figure 76 Presentation Boards—Street Elevations
Figure 77 Presentation Boards—Interior and Exterior Perspectives 2
Figure 78 Research Summary Board
Figure 79 Process Piece
Figure 80 Walk Through Experience during Presentation
Figure 81 Final Presentation Photographs
Figure 82 Model Pictures

Unless otherwise noted, figures are by author.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PRESENTATION BOARDS

“Figures 68-78, 80-82” are the final presentation materials
Figure 68  Presentation Boards—Journey.

Figure 69  Presentation Boards—Section B-B

Figure 70  Presentation Boards—Interior and Exterior Perspectives
Standing the idea of “being”. About being in our spaces, about the spaces between the places. This thesis proposes a human connection that is based on understanding the self-connection. It is about taking a break from our regular schedule and living a moment of pause peacefully.

Introduction

Psychological health of people supports conditions and opportunities, urban living was found to raise the risk of anxiety disorders and mood disorders by 21%.

Senses in architecture

Of all the senses engaged, sight is the most powerful. It is the ability to see that makes individuals vulnerable to anxiety, depression, antisocial behavior, and even suicidal behaviors.

2. Urban stress and mental health - LSE Cities.
3. The 5 Elements of Ayurveda. (2018, February 14)

AN ARCHITECTURE BEYOND THE WALLS: Aligning Mind, Body, and Soul for Resilience

Concept

The journey of awareness can be experienced in three different datum: sky, horizon, and earth. Sky datum: A green oasis sits as a roof terrace in the dense concrete downtown Memphis. The goal of this design is to guide awareness through a more inwardly focused lifestyle by bringing nature to the dehumanizing context of urban living. Fostering a more inwardly focused relation with sky.

Earth datum: This is the most inwardly focused datum. Unlike sky and horizon this datum is about the experiencing a dark environment. Feeling the coolness of the mud island river park. It provides an opportunity to look above, below and towards self-actualization.

Horizon datum: This is the most outwardly focused datum. The horizon datum has the connection to the infinity of earth. Open your eyes, open your ears and open yourself to the world around you.

The journey of awareness can be experienced in three different datum: sky, horizon, and earth. Sky datum: A green oasis sits as a roof terrace in the dense concrete downtown Memphis. The goal of this design is to guide awareness through a more inwardly focused lifestyle by bringing nature to the dehumanizing context of urban living. Fostering a more inwardly focused relation with sky.

Conclusion

The journey of awareness can be experienced in three different datum: sky, horizon, and earth. Sky datum: A green oasis sits as a roof terrace in the dense concrete downtown Memphis. The goal of this design is to guide awareness through a more inwardly focused lifestyle by bringing nature to the dehumanizing context of urban living. Fostering a more inwardly focused relation with sky.

Supports conditions and opportunities, urban living was found to raise the risk of anxiety disorders and mood disorders by 21%.

Fostering a more inwardly focused lifestyle by bringing nature to the dehumanizing context of urban living. Fostering a more inwardly focused relation with sky.

Summary

Stress Mindfulness meditation

1. Meditation in five-elements of nature
2. Urban stress and mental health - LSE Cities.
APPENDIX 2: PROCESS PIECE

The project started with an attempt of making human connection that was genuine and true, while being aware of engaging with nature.

To achieve this goal a process showing the outer mask of people and the inner spirit was necessary. There are different human beings (represented by colors and rocks). People may have different perceptions and different ways of living, but from inside we are all same (represented by crystal clear rocks as an inner soul). We all need a balanced mind, body, and soul connection to be in a state of well-being. We crave for connection with others, just like we are common from inside, we are attached to nature psychologically and physiologically for our well-being. The green tree represents the nature as the heart of this connection.

This wind chime is used as an example of different people with the same inner balanced spirit. When the chime is engaged with nature (specifically wind), the arms come close to each other, making a worthy and pleasant sound in the environment.
Figure 82   Model Pictures