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Design Hub: Activating Community by Design

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DESIGN HUB

ACTIVATING COMMUNITY BY DESIGN
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0.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an exploration of community. I ask questions about human behavior and group dynamics. I attempt to understand what happens in the transition from “individual” to member of a community.

The project also explores various roles of design. I explore the characteristics of community places, seeking out definitions for success. Consideration is given to the built environment as a place for communities to form, grow and thrive.

The first section of this book presents findings from research. I find concrete and theoretical evidence for environmental features that influence a person’s “sense of community,” or incline a person toward interacting with another. Inspired by a project presented in section 1.2A, I begin to question how interacting with objects within space may enable or enhance the interactions we have with other humans in that space.

The second section presents a place for a hypothetical community in Richmond, VA. I study the ideas of “symbols” and “boundaries,” as presented by Chavis + McMillan (1986). As a result, I present a designed object intended to be a reflection of the community it serves, then use this object to define physical boundaries. A system is built around explorations of connections, which are seen as having the potential for conversation, essential to communities (Oldenburg, 1989).

I present this thesis as an inquiry. Could design systems begin to develop out of what we understand of the psychological processes experienced in communities and by their members? The question remains as to what the effects of doing so would be. This would ultimately need to be tested.

It is important that designers reflect on the critique we receive, as this will present new opportunities and ways of thinking. New ideas emerge from this process. I thank my defense panel for their valuable critique of my project. Reflections are presented at the end of the book, in section 3.1.
1.1 ABSTRACT

MOTIVATION

At the turn of the century, Robert Putnam (2000, 27) wrote "...a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current." Putnam is describing a loss of "social capital" throughout American society. Research suggests that many of our contemporary issues are the result of a decline in "social capital," or "community."

This pervasive lack of community is thought to be detrimental to "educational performance, safe neighborhoods, equitable tax collection, democratic responsiveness, everyday honesty, and even our health and happiness." (Putnam, 2000, 367). In contrast, a strong sense of community is linked to feelings of safety, increased civic participation and improved wellbeing (Francis, et al, 2012).

OPPORTUNITY

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989) posits that there is a "problem of place" in America, suggesting a lack of "informal public gathering places." Oldenburg argues that regular attendance at certain venues, such as a community coffee shop where people are known to engage with one another, is thought to have great benefits to the individual. Furthermore, the connections that are made in these institutions are thought to be beneficial to society as a whole. Oldenburg notes that the American Revolution grew out of conversations that took place inside of taverns in Colonial Philadelphia (1989, 68).

A definition of "Design", put forth by Glenn Parsons (2016, 11) states: "Design is the intentional solution of a problem, by the creation of plans for a new sort of thing, where the plans would not be immediately seen, by a reasonable person, as an inadequate solution."

This definition supports and doubles down on the idea that design is a method for solving problems.

Section 1 of this thesis examines what communities are made of, diving into individual and group psychology to understand the abstract qualities and the processes that take place in the transition to membership. Section 2 presents a place for a "design community" in Richmond, VA. This place allows for a hypothetical test of findings from Section 1.

In addition to the building serving as a professional resource center for designers, the program educates and orients new users to design, preparing them to take on the task of designing. Members are invited to participate in design charrettes that address various issues in Richmond's many surrounding communities.

METHODS

This thesis examines both design and programmatic strategies for building and engaging community. Research topics range from design and architecture to sociology and environmental psychology. As conversation has shown to be a significant consideration, research has gone into designing to promote and encourage social interaction.

Books, academic journals and trade publications make up the bulk of the research. Case studies on design for social interaction are particularly interesting and suggest an experimental approach to increasing and enhancing social interaction within the built environment. Further precedent studies on A/D/O, in Brooklyn, as well as the IDEO headquarters, in Cambridge, MA, provide insight into similarly programmed spaces.
RESULTS

Oldenburg's research on "Third Places" lends a great deal of information on informal communities and their relationship to space and place. So-called third places have many characteristics in common, but a lively interaction between people within the space is chief among them. Conversation is at the heart of Oldenburg's "community." Research into "Sense of Community" yields some interesting psychological data that describes how people come to see themselves as members of a community. Of particular interest to this thesis are the elements of "membership," specifically symbols and boundaries. In communities, symbols, such as a dress code or a unique vocabulary, create boundaries that tell non-members what to expect of the community.

CONCLUSION

While some concrete evidence is offered to support certain design features that are more prone to get people talking to one another, this project raises additional questions. Particularly, is there an opportunity to translate some of the data uncovered in psychological explorations of community? Using this information, can we begin to hypothesize on design features that may help users better understand the community, decide whether or not it is right for them, and - if it is - become a contributing member?
1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

ACTIVATING COMMUNITY BY DESIGN

“To share the same place is perhaps the most primitive of social bonds...” - Lewis Mumford

BACKGROUND

This thesis began by exploring some of the world’s greatest issues. It attempted to look at what was at the root of some of our most pressing challenges. Research suggested many of our issues are either due to or exacerbated by a divided society. It suggested that society is divided, at least in part, and with emphasis on American society, due to a decline in what can broadly be described as “community.”

Ultimately, this thesis puts “community” under the microscope and questions the role of the built environment. How can it better serve its community? How can it enhance or create a “sense of community” among its visitors?

The work is presented in two parts. The first is research driven. It focuses on the issue of community through the lens of the built environment and examines the neighborhood and history of a building located in Richmond, Virginia. The second part presents that building as a place for “community.” It attempts to address the questions raised in this first section and test solutions in a sample environment.

Immediately upon its publication, this thesis will become a project from the past. The exact date this became true is complicated; for most it was official in March 2020, when a viral pandemic sent countries around the world into lockdown.

This thesis relies primarily on pre-pandemic research to imagine a hopefully near, post-pandemic future in which things have returned to a level of normalcy that allows for regular social gatherings and personal interaction. However, it must be noted that any future research will, by necessity, be conducted through a different lens.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent opinion piece in The New York Times columnist David Brooks (2020) describes an America in which “membership in civic organizations has collapsed, political polarization has worsened, income inequality has widened, social trust has cratered, religious attendance is down, social mobility has decreased, deaths of despair have skyrocketed and on and on.” Citing new work by Robert Putnam and Shaylyn Garrett, Brooks quotes the authors: “The story of the American experiment in the twentieth century is one of a long upswing toward increasing solidarity, followed by a steep downturn into increasing individualism. From ‘I’ to ‘we’ and back again to ‘I’.”

Sociologists, such as Putnam and Ray Oldenburg, have, for decades, pointed to a decline in community, or “social capital,” as a major factor contributing to the rise of many of our contemporary issues (Oldenburg, 1989)(Putnam, 2000). This pervasive lack of community is thought to be detrimental to “educational performance, safe neighborhoods, equitable tax collection, democratic responsiveness, everyday honesty, and even our health and happiness.” (Putnam, 2000, 367). In contrast, a strong sense of community is linked to feelings of safety, increased civic participation and improved wellbeing, among other benefits (Francis, et al, 2012). FIGURE 1 illustrates the relationship between a “sense of community” and quality of life.

DEFINING COMMUNITY

The concept of community has changed in the modern world. In line with Putnam and Garrett’s argument, the word “community” has, popularly, come to mean “one’s identity” (Garber, 2017). Garber quotes author Bill Bishop, “it used to be that people were born as part of a community, and had to find their place as individuals. Now people are born as individuals, and have to find their community.”
FIGURE 1
DATA: (Putnam, 2000, 367)
As posed by French, et al (2013), “people are said to be increasingly searching for local belonging and identity in a modern and changeable world.” Garber (2017) describes a contemporary experience in which people choose communities for themselves through a process of self-discovery, based on shared circumstances.

Garber suggests that, historically, one’s community typically referred to one’s “literal place” in the world, such as a neighborhood or town. Academics have debated various meanings of the word, distinguishing between two primary types: geographical and relational (McMillan + Chavis, 1986). Geographical communities are those, described by Garber in the past tense, that are based on connections to territory. Meanwhile, relational communities are those “chosen” communities that are made up of people with similar interests, regardless of physical location. McMillan and Chavis (1986) remark that relational communities, concerned with members’ interests and skills, have been more prominent than geographical communities in “modern society,” noting a study published in 1964.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The bulk of the work presented by McMillan and Chavis (1986) is concerned with a “sense” of community. The authors examine the abstract qualities that contribute to creating a sense of community among a group of people. A proposed definition includes four elements: membership; influence; integration and fulfillment of needs; shared emotional connection.

Membership (first) is defined as a “feeling of belonging,” and is described as a cyclical relationship between its five sub-elements: boundaries; emotional safety; personal investment; sense of belonging and identification; a common symbol system. Summarily, a personal investment, such as an earned membership, contributes to one’s sense of belonging in the group. A sense of belonging may also arise from one’s personal identification, if it aligns with the group identity. A common system of symbols is defined and used by members of the group. These symbols, which may include a dress code or shared vocabulary, serve as boundaries. The authors insist that “membership has boundaries,” suggesting that there are people who belong and people who do not. These boundaries help to guard the community and its members from the influence of outsiders, contributing to a sense of emotional safety. Each element is reliant on and reinforces the others. FIGURE 2 [NEXT PAGE] illustrates this relationship.

The second element of membership is influence. A member will wish to feel that she has a voice and some influence within the community. This is often a reciprocal relationship, in which the community may influence the member as well. Third, a community and its physical environment should fulfill its members’ needs. Potential members will weigh the connections and activities that the community provides against their own individual needs. If they align with the community, a person may join.

The final element thought to create a “sense of community” is shared emotional connections. The authors formulaically describe this as “contact + high-quality interaction.” The success of these “interactions” in creating a shared emotional connection ranges based on a variety of factors. Generally speaking, “the more positive the experience… the greater the bond” (McMillan + Chavis, 1986, 13).

ECONOMY OF ENCOUNTERS

McMillan and Chavis (1986, 13), in elaborating on the qualities that feed a shared emotional connection, state: “The more people interact, the more likely they are to become close.” Co-working spaces are a current phenomenon highlighting the importance of community. Designed for freelancers and independents who crave the camaraderie and resources available in the modern workplace, these spaces frequently feature a variety of ways for members to converse and collaborate. Jakonen, et al (2017) contend, “The key tenet and raison d’etre of coworking is social interactions and encounters.”
Coworking spaces frequently include kitchens and lounges, in addition to individual and group work stations. The expectation, as described by Jakonen et al. (2017), is that through sharing these spaces, “unexpected encounters” are produced. These encounters are thought to lead to “fruitful ideas, concepts and solutions needed in the creative new economy.”

Katsikakis (2017) argues for the importance of social spaces in both traditional and co-working environments. “[They] have an authenticity that comes from supporting spontaneous social interactions with networking/community events, good coffee and healthy food, services and ubiquitous wi-fi.” He further suggests that the people who work and interact in these environments naturally form a community that shares ideas and experiences (Katsikakis, 2017). The future of work, according to Katsikakis, has less to do with “desks and partitions” and more to do with “the cultural, social and value systems of the organization.”

Arguments for quantity and quality of interactions abound. Waxman (2006) argues further that there is a connection between length of stay and sense of attachment to a community, suggesting that extended exposure helps to increase one’s sense of community. The theme seems to suggest that community may be created, or supported, through meaningful “quality” interactions and that a successful public space generates these opportunities in abundance.

QUALITIES OF COMMUNITY PLACES

The Locker Room is a small neighborhood tavern in Richmond, Virginia. It is decidedly not glamorous. Lighting is kept to a minimum and the walls are overtaken by various portraits, ephemera and objects. Many would describe the tavern as dingy or “a dive.” Programming includes darts, billiards, trivia and karaoke.

Within the confines of these walls, the bar’s management, employees and patronage, though not necessarily related in the traditional familial sense, describe themselves collectively as a “family.” Noelle Abrahams (2019) points to certain behaviors among the
patronage. For instance, owner Lisa Ann Peters recounts the story of a regular who was evicted from her home. Upon receiving this news, the entire bar mobilized to assist with the move, leaving their drinks behind. Abrahams reports on a “young regular” who goes to The Locker Room “to get drunk.” “Watching him shuffle around the bar from conversation to conversation, talking and laughing with old friends and fellow regulars, it’s clear that there are motivations deeper than the surface-level initiative of getting a buzz,” she writes.

The Locker Room’s community is exactly the type of community advocated for by the sociologist, Ray Oldenburg, who coined the term “Third Place.” A third place is an “informal public gathering place” separate from home (first place) or work (second place). Oldenburg points to the corner pubs of walkable European neighborhoods and the coffee houses of Italy as examples of successful third places. The sense of community that thrives in places like this is Oldenburg’s bread and butter. He paints a picture of a jovial community evolving organically from natural conversation. The characters are wild and varied, interacting playfully in environments that support the ever-changing needs of its guests.

Oldenburg (1989) elaborates in detail on the characteristics common to third places:

1. A third place is on “neutral ground” - save for the establishment’s staff, nobody plays host.
2. It is a “leveler” - Oldenburg argues that a “transformation must occur as one passes through the portals.” This transformation strips status and rank, putting everybody on an equal level.
3. “Conversation is the main activity” - all other activities support or are conducive to conversation.
4. It is “accessible and accommodating” - visiting must be convenient and rewarding.
5. It hosts a “crowd of regulars” - newcomers are essential and welcome, but regular visitors are the lifeblood of the community.
6. It keeps a “low profile” - though “meticulously clean, ” these spaces are typically “plain” and “unimpressive looking.” Often, “establishments built for other purposes are commandeered by those seeking a place where they can linger in good company.”
7. It has a “playful mood” - in almost all regards. Oldenburg quotes John Huizinga, “Play has its playgrounds - "forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain."
8. It is a “home away from home” - “it roots us, providing a physical center around which we organize our comings and goings.”

Though dated, Oldenburg’s ideas have staying power. While reflecting on new types of social environments, Morrison (2018) expands on Oldenburg’s principles to define the modern practice of combining third place with first and/or second, using the term “coworking” to describe the combination of work (second) and third place. Home (first) combined with third place is called “commingling,” while home (first) and work (second) is called “coliving.” Meanwhile, a combination of the three is described as “Fourth Place,” the function of which is to “foster networking, to promote mingling, and to favor collaboration, face-to-face interactions, and the exchange of tacit knowledge.”

Oldenburg is a grandfather on the topic of the built environment as a place for serving its community. Many rules may be deduced from Oldenburg’s research. Most important, however, is as Oldenburg bluntly puts it, “conversation is the main activity.”

Within the larger built environment, the presence of green space and nature is thought to have a positive correlation with one’s sense of community (Francis, et al, 2012). The authors cite the following “quality” features of public spaces that are either thought or proven to influence social interaction: focal points; food outlets; connected pathways; shade; seating positioned for conversation; activity generators.

Lisa Waxman (2006) found in a study on the factors that influence “place attachment,” the top five design considerations for an interior space should be: cleanliness; appealing aroma; adequate lighting; comfortable furniture; a view to the outside. Waxman (2006, 43) expands on seating as an important factor, noting that people tend to prefer “sheltered seats,” with architectural elements, such as walls, on at least one side. Patrons reveal that they feel more protected this way.
SPACE AND PLACE

According to Lentini (2010, 408), the concept of space is limited to the “structural and geometrical qualities of a physical environment.” Meanwhile, place “includes dimensions of lived experience, interaction and use of space.” Through this lived experience, which includes social interaction, space may become place.

Following this, Lentini (2010) suggests “people apprehend physical space not only through the perception of its spatial characteristics but also through the awareness of the social cues related to it.” These cues serve to frame the types of behaviors and activities that happen within a place.

Lentini (2010, 413) describes “five dimensions of the experience of physical space.”
1. Geometrical and geographical - concerned with “the spatial qualities of the environment.”
2. Sensorial experience - concerned with the senses (smell, sight, etc)
3. Cultural experience - concerned with the activities and behaviors expected in a setting.
4. Personal experience - concerned with individual opportunities for reflection and growth.
5. Relational experience - concerned with “interpersonal relationships and interactions.”

There is an interesting relationship between place attachment and sense of community, for “place attachment involves positively experienced bonds, sometimes occurring without awareness, that are developed over time from the behavioral, affective and cognitive ties between individuals and/or groups and their sociophysical environment” (Brown + Perkins, 1992, 284). It is both the physical environment and the quality of social interactions within that environment that contribute to place attachment.

SPARKING INTERACTION BY DESIGN

[DESIGN HIGHLIGHTS 1.2A]

Oldenburg highlights the importance of conversation. It’s interesting to imagine how the design of a space or an object can encourage both interaction with the space or object and interaction with other people in the space or around the object. Following are several examples of interactive design meant to encourage interaction between people using objects within space.

In 2016, college student, Mandi Cai, was curious about how to get two strangers to talk to each other. With assistance, Cai (2016) designed an L-shaped bench so that two users could face each other easily. The bench was located outdoors in a cold setting and featured two seat warmers. Because Cai found that asking for help was the best way to pull somebody into a dialogue, she designed the bench so that the seat warmers would only work when two people sat down.

Lentini (2010, 407-8) describes a “clavier path.” While walking along the path, sensors activate colored spotlights and sounds. The installation “requires the activity of several people in order to create complex ‘soundscapes’.”

In 2017, the Tate Modern, hoping to encourage social interaction between visitors, installed a series of swings with three seats each in its Turbine Hall. The project, known as “One Two Three Swing!,” invited attendees to “combat social apathy through collaborative action, joining together on the count of three” (Morris, 2017).

In 2019, a design studio in Beirut attempted to redefine a wall at the Lebanese Pavilion at Dubai Design Week as a hub for social connection. The resulting foam wall featured a variety of openings, allowing people to converse over and through sections of the wall. These apertures were meant to “encourage visitors to interact by touching, holding hands, looking at each other moving through or over the wall” (Hitti, 2019).
CONCLUSION

Community is an important part of our cultural and social experience. A strong sense of community has lasting benefits to the individual as well. The central inquiry of this thesis is to explore how design may be used to create, foster and strengthen “relational” communities. It raises questions about how we define community and how communities are formed.

Oldenburg is one of the most upheld voices in the inquiry into the role of place and its correlation with sense of community. Oldenburg’s conception of community is organic. It forms and grows naturally, through routine use of a public space. The formula is simple. “Conversation is the main activity.” Everything else serves this principle. Though seemingly suggesting such places are not “designed,” Oldenburg’s characteristics of third places give us an understanding of the types of places in which a sense of community thrives, and some of the reasons why it thrives in those places.

An economy of encounters is important to creating a sense of community, as encounters lead to social interaction. However, the quality of these encounters appears to be equally important. Encounters of high quality may lead to a shared emotional connection between members.

Furthermore, McMillan and Chavis go into great detail defining the concept “sense of community.” Their ideas on membership, specifically, stand out as an opportunity to begin translating ideas into design solutions. Though discussed in a more abstract way, symbols and boundaries might be translated to designed elements within the physical space.

Waxman and the Francis, et al, detail environmental features that are known or hypothesized to spark social interaction. These include: cleanliness; adequate lighting; comfortable and varied furniture; seating positioned for conversation; focal points; connected pathways; activity generators; food; nature and views to nature.

These insights help us to better understand the ways that community is created and maintained. Though the research is not necessarily prescriptive, we can begin to experiment with different design options that line up with these ideas to support and encourage social interaction. These individual interactions strengthen the connections that make up the community.

REFLECTIONS

Research on “sense of community” and social interactions in the built environment has been particularly useful. There is an abundance of literature and thought on the topic. However, some of the more practically useful information has come from comprehensive studies on behaviors within specific environments. Waxman’s study examined both the physical characteristics and the social (or sometimes antisocial) behaviors within three separate coffee shops. More of these observational and interactive studies could be particularly helpful.

Some research has described environmental features or installations that are meant to spark collaborative behavior. The section titled “Sparking Interaction by Design” features four mini case studies. However, there was little mention of the results of these experiments. Mandi Cai’s seat-warming bench tested a small sample of users, but her process was well-documented and results and conclusions were shared. Similar studies on a larger scale could greatly contribute to our understanding of social interaction.
REFERENCES


Oldenburg, R. (1989). The great good place: Cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons and other hangouts at the heart of a community. Da Capo Press.


DESIGN HIGHLIGHTS

Cai’s 2016 experiment has relevance to various fields of design. Her self-published article, “How to get two strangers to talk to each other,” documents her process, from field research through building and testing a prototype. The project was fueled by a desire to “understand ‘public’ spaces and figure out a way to increase ‘creative capital’ by incentivizing individuals to talk to other individuals.”

First, Cai and a small team chose to observe the behaviors of people as they interacted with one another in a public plaza in Providence, RI. The team conducted interviews and recorded their observations. Two themes were identified: eye contact led to better conversation; asking for help is a great ice breaker. They also found that “deliberate attempts to strike up conversation” did not go over well, noting that they “rendered you as ‘creepy’ or ‘untrustworthy’” (Cai, 2016).

These observations led Cai’s team to develop a built element that would allow them to test their hypotheses in a real-world setting. They decided to build an L-shaped bench that would allow for two people to easily make eye contact. The tests were run during the Winter months, so the bench featured built-in seat warmers. In order for the seat warmers to function, the bench required that two people sit on it.

Asking for help came in the form of asking passers-by to sit down, effectively activating the seat warmers. Though the sample size was quite small when this article was published, the results showed that this was an effective way to break the ice and allowed for sufficient segway into other conversations.

Cai describes plans to test the bench on the campus of her college, which she does not name. It would be interesting to see a similar experiment conducted on a larger scale. The data collected could help to inform more interactive design within community spaces, potentially allowing for an increase in higher-quality interactions, which McMillan + Chavis (1986) cite as formulaic to the success of creating a “shared emotional connection,” one of the key elements to a “sense of community.”
One Two Three Swing! at Tate Modern²

Feature at Lebanese Pavilion During Dubai Design Week by T Sakhi Studio³

1: [SOURCE] Medium
2/3: [SOURCE] Dezeen
1.3
PRECEDENT STUDIES
The Amalgamated Drawing Office got its name from the “secret team” that invented the MINI Cooper in 1959. A/D/O, for short, is a “creative space in Greenpoint, Brooklyn dedicated to exploring new boundaries in design.” (2016, PR Newswire)

The former warehouse offers 23,000 square feet of programmed space. The general public is invited to use a communal workspace, adjacent to a store and a world-class restaurant. Membership provides access to dedicated work space, a fabrication lab and a network of experienced designers.

An early press release, published shortly prior to A/D/O’s public opening, touts a “Design Academy” as the heart of the space. The design academy hosts educational workshops, talks, exhibitions, commissions and designer residencies: A/D/O also hosts kid-friendly programming and support for the neighborhood.

The space is primarily programmed to target “mid-career design professionals searching for collaboration and inspiration” (Quirk, 2017). A key full-time inhabitant of the space is Urban-X, a startup accelerator backed by MINI.

When asked how to design “a space for design,” nARCHITECTS principle, Eric Bunge suggests “a building that can evolve and be appropriated for a variety of uses. We think of not just users but misusers” (Quirk, 2017). The firm expands on their own website: “neither rooms nor an open hall, the spaces kind of bleed into each other, allowing people who are curious to see what would normally be going on behind closed doors.”

A prominent architectural feature is the “periscope,” which resembles a large skylight in the open forum. Upon glancing upward, a viewer will see a purposefully placed mural reflected in one of three mirrors. The others reflect the Brooklyn and Manhattan skylines.

While A/D/O makes use of much of its public space for design exhibition, its open-air terrace has exhibited outdoor sculptures that have received critical attention, bringing an international buzz to this New York neighborhood corner.


The model on the left shows the arrangement of space. A central axis separates private from public space, while a secondary axis includes a public Design Library, weaving into and pushing against private terf.

Along the central axis, an overhead "peroscope" in an atrium-esque space features different views of the Brooklyn and Manhattan skylines, shown in the image on the right.
IDEO is a large design group, headquartered in Palo Alto, CA. The firm currently has nine international offices and several ongoing projects requiring additional physical space, including the philanthropic wing: ideo.org.

IDEO set up its first corporate offices in Cambridge, MA in 2007, pulling creative talent and resources from the nearby campuses of Harvard and MIT. Less than a decade later, the firm contracted Hacin + Associates, the designers of their first Cambridge office, to create an upgraded environment, in a more centralized location, that would better enable "collaboration between its teams and Boston’s burgeoning start-up and tech communities" (Edelson, 2018, 105).

The new space, located in a former parking facility, features 20,000 square feet of flexible work spaces, a library, a fabrication lab and first-floor event space. While clients and visitors are invited to explore the first and second floors, the third floor is reserved as a focus-space for employees only.

Entry into the building is through the original garage doors, preserved in a move by the architects to symbolically support “IDEO’s objective to build a creative office and plan an essential node in Cambridge’s tech start-up community” (Edelson, 2018, 106).

IDEO’s CoLab is a fee-based research and design program that occupies a highly visible portion of the ground floor. CoLab invites clients and designers for weeklong design “sprints” taking place in this space (Edelson, 2018). Because these sessions may be uniquely individualized, flexibility was key in the design of the space. Features include moveable furniture and drop-down electrical outlets.

Part of what makes IDEO so effective, as a creative team, is their own creative ambition.

The company goes out of the way to do things quite differently from expected. IDEO’s culture is one of play. To stimulate the mind, a weekly lunchtime activity involves coming together to create “design fiction.” The Boston Globe (Bray, 2019) reported on a small spaceship pieced together from surplus materials, then revisited several weeks later to simulate an alien invasion.

A “semi-circular video display adorned with oddly shaped sigils and logos that cruise slowly across the screen” sits above a lounging area on the building’s third floor common area. The reporter is told “it’s like a secret code. Anybody in our studio should know what they mean.” The swirling patterns and colors on the display, called the visualizer, are visualizing important information about ongoing IDEO projects (Bray, 2019).

Care is taken by leadership to provide the tools and prompts for creativity to happen. Sketching has been identified as “one of IDEO’s biggest collaborative vehicles.” As such, designers will set up “swaths of blank paper to lure colleagues into drawing, deadline, and ideating,” a practice jokingly referred to as leaving a “sugar trap” (Edelson, 2018, 111).
Considered at scale, these “sugar traps” serve as moments of inspiration and temptation. What if the scale were to grow? What if these sugar traps were to be occupied by people to become moments of education, exhibition and experience?


1.4 NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

Jackson Ward was once known as “Black Wall Street”, or “The Harlem of the South.” In the early twentieth century, Jackson Ward’s boundaries included the Gilpin neighborhood to the North. The larger neighborhood was the “cultural heart of the city’s African-American middle class, a place where people came to see Louis Armstrong or Ella Fitzgerald perform” (Plumer + Popovich, 2020).

Plumber and Popovich describe a practice of “redlining” in the 1930s that ranked the desirability for investment in various neighborhoods. The inherently biased system gave preference to white neighborhoods, resulting in a major blow to the culture and local economy of Jackson Ward. Plumber and Popovich continue, “A decade later, over the objections of residents, Virginia’s state government decided to build a new highway right through the neighborhood, destroying thousands of homes and isolating [Jackson Ward from] Gilpin.

101 West Main Street in Richmond, Virginia is sited on a triangular patch of land in the heart of Jackson Ward’s central business district. Brook Road is one of two major paths to cut through the neighborhood off grid. This has resulted in several city blocks that feature buildings breaking the mold, following non-orthogonal or triangular floor plans. While unusual shapes are not an uncommon solution for unusual sites, and there are notable examples outside of Jackson Ward, the frequency and forceful impact make it a defining feature of the immediate neighborhood within the city of Richmond.

The interstate is Jackson Ward’s northern boundary. Belvidere and Broad Streets, frequently described as the city’s busiest intersection, make up the western and southern edges. Broad Street is also the city’s primary East-West path of travel. The city’s eastern edge (officially) stops one block short of the Convention Center.

The neighborhood is denser closer to its southern edge, where both residential and commercial buildings are larger and more numerous. Centrally located within the neighborhood, Abner Clay Park serves as a primary district.

The neighborhood is denser closer to its southern edge, where both residential and commercial buildings are larger and more numerous. Centrally located within the neighborhood, Abner Clay Park serves as a primary district. Off the main path that is Broad Street, Jackson Ward is a primarily residential neighborhood that features both multi-unit housing and row homes in Greek Revival and Italianate styles. Lumber framing and brick masonry are the primary materials used in the neighborhood’s dwellings.

A statue of Maggie Lena Walker, a prominent African American businesswoman and civil rights leader is, perhaps, the most important landmark in the neighborhood. This statue is located at the base of N. Adams, facing Broad Street, and forming the start of a major path into the neighborhood. This landmark exists within a plaza serving as a primary node for the neighborhood.

Maggie L. Walker Memorial Plaza³

1: (SOURCE) Richmond Times-Dispatch
2: (SOURCE) VA Dept Historical Resources
3: (SOURCE) Trip Advisor
1.5 BUILDING HISTORY

Entering the neighborhood from the Maggie Walker statue, a landmark midway along the southern edge, the primary entrance of 101 W. Marshall Street lies directly within view one-half block to the north. The building appears relatively monumental in its own right. From this view, the parking lot is hidden and the adjacent building is obscured. The building appears to sprawl across its own triangular city block, breaking the grid we are accustomed to seeing in adjacent neighborhoods. It stands slightly taller than buildings in the immediate vicinity. As such, the building’s “penthouse” level offers vistas of the city’s downtown skyline.

The building was designed by the architect Henry T. Barnham and was constructed in 1925. Its original purpose was to serve as the Emrick Chevrolet car dealership and showroom. The business moved in 1966 and the building has served many commercial interests since. (Grenzabach, nd.). However, in 2007, Walter Parks Architects led a major renovation that changed the nature of the space. Under the moniker “Emrick Flats,” the building is now host to 25 condominium units and ground-level commercial space.

Architecturally, the building is an example of early 20th century neo-traditional design. Grenzabach (nd.) suggests many of the “classical decorative details that once adorned the building have been lost.” These include a “pediment that crowned the roofline” and an “entablature that wrapped the building directly below the third story windows.”

Emrick Flats makes a bit of a statement among many of its densely packed masonry or wood-frame neighbors. Its relatively grand footprint is composed primarily of concrete, steel and glass. Though not an imposing figure, it unapologetically stands out offering an invitation to passersby.

In the current manifestation of interior space, paths are blurred or obscured by columns in more public spaces. Primary circulation between floors happens in a small elevator or cramped stairwell in the northeast corner of the building, the farthest point possible from the primary entrance. It is important to note that this corner of the building presently serves as a private entrance for residents.

Stripped of existing furnishings and partitions, districts present themselves within the building. These are informed by the grid and density of columns. On the first floor, there are three distinct districts: south, central and north (from the primary entrance to the northern edge of the building with boundaries along the most dense east-west column lines). Though the density of columns decreases above the second floor, these districts repeat on each of the four primary floors of the building, with the basement as its own district. The penthouse level is presently divided between several apartments. Taken as a part of the larger whole, this level may be seen as a distinct district offering access to outdoor spaces alongside the best views.

Emrick Building Over Time¹

Emrick Chevy Dealership¹
Condominium Interior¹

1: (SOURCE) W. Parks Architects
2.1
SITE ANALYSIS
POPULATION 1,452
ROUGHLY 50% MALE
ROUGHLY 50% FEMALE
54% BETWEEN 22 AND 34
76% NEVER MARRIED
77% SOME COLLEGE OR MORE
<50% OF OCCUPATIONS:
- HOSPITALITY (20.4)
- EDUCATION (17.7)
- RETAIL (10.3)
- PROFESSIONAL (10.1)
DATA FROM
US CENSUS BUREAU

(JACKSON WARD)

(STATISTICAL ATLAS, 2020)
IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

CLOSEST LANDMARK: Maggie L. Walker Memorial Plaza

BROAD STREET ARTS DISTRICT: Galleries and Institutions w/ Events on the First Friday of Each Month
SITE PLAN

101 WEST MARSHALL STREET
RICHMOND, VA 23220

PHASE THREE
POCKET PARK
[3,354 sq ft]

NORTH ADAMS STREET
BROOK ROAD
WEST MARSHALL STREET
2.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS
EXTERIOR ELEVATION_W
FROM N. ADAMS STREET + BROOK ROAD

EXTERIOR ELEVATION_S
FROM BROOK ROAD

EXTERIOR ELEVATION_N
FROM N. ADAMS STREET

EXTERIOR ELEVATION_E
FROM W. MARSHALL STREET
The interior of the building features a variety of clay and concrete bricks, each speaking a uniquely modular language. This pattern is repeated in the rhythm of board-formed concrete, present on the underside of each deck.

Materials are rough and weathered. In some places, paint is used to bring additional color into the space.

Concrete is the primary language of the building. The building reads as a concrete structure from the street.

Depending on where one stands in the building, the concrete floors may be rough, or stained and polished.

Interior Photos: Courtesy of Tashi Scott
PROJECT STATEMENT

Design Hub is a place for community. It is a place for design. During the day, Design Hub operates as a co-working space and resource center for designers. After hours, events and classes take center stage, as visitors are encouraged to mingle with members.

Design Hub’s primary goals are to bring design to a larger audience of potential practitioners, and to create a place for community to thrive. The program seeks to provide the resources for designers of all levels to learn and practice together in one space.

Design is exhibited as something that is achievable to the average person. The intention is to spark interest in design, educate or train, and then to provide the resources for design practice.

USERS [RIGHT]

In addition to 5 administrators and floating part-time staff, the building will serve as a hub for an intended audience of “designers”, “admirers” and “uninitiated” visitors.

Designers are broken into three tiers, indicating likelihood of using Phase 2 member spaces. The Design “admirer” is a person who does not practice, but appreciates design and may participate in classes and events. The “uninitiated” are those visitors and passers-by who are unfamiliar with what design truly is and curious enough to stop in.

Among it’s user group, this project imagines a growing and rotating group of designers using the space to work on real-world, community-oriented design challenges. This group is inspired by IDEO’s philanthropic wing, as well as local groups like mOb Studio, which places student-designers in front of real world design challenges in the local community. No space is given to this group. Instead, the space is meant to flex to accommodate the potential for this or similar groups.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space Type</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;UNDERPROGRAMMED&quot; SPACE</td>
<td>10,262 SQ FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHASE ONE FRONT OF HOUSE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHASE ONE BACK OF HOUSE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHASE TWO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHASE THREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILDING [36,978 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POCKET PARK, EXTERIOR SPACE</td>
<td>2,344 SQ FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KITCHEN [3,17 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO-WORKING (2) [3,895 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN STUDIO-CLASSROOM (2) [5,169 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKERSPACE [2,584 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STORAGE + HOUSEKEEPING [700 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROOF GARDEN, EXTERIOR SPACE</td>
<td>4,750 SQ FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESTROOMS [1,682 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMIN [1,311 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GALLERY [1,934 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBRARY [2,087 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONVERSATION NOOKS (4) [3,534 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATRIUM [2,420 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATRIUM_UNDERGROUND [1,083 SQ FT]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;UNDERPROGRAMMED&quot; SPACE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROCESS GALLERY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN LIBRARY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONVERSATION NOOKS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"UNDERPROGRAMMED" SPACE Includes major pathways and corridors. Supports programmed space with additional opportunities for conversation.

ATRIUM The central organizer of the building. It connects all of the spaces through six floors and features primary circulation.

ATRIUM_UNDERGROUND Connects guests to restrooms and a kitchen (PH2). Features an elevator; tables and seating; lockers for storage.

PROCESS GALLERY Positioned at the front entrance, the gallery puts the design process on display and introduces newcomers to the process.

DESIGN LIBRARY Features a modular screening solution to display and store resources. A large custom table features cubbies for housing material samples.

CONVERSATION NOOKS Spillover areas serving as extensions of the fifth-floor library. Features a similar modular language and comfortable furniture.
This project explores community. Many principles seemed immediately evident. VARIETY is important, as diversity is important within the membership of a community. UNITY is important because a community must be united.

 Unexpectedly, the project has become about BALANCE:
  between VARIETY and UNITY
  between BOUNDARIES and TRANSPARENCY
  between PUBLIC and PRIVATE
  between ACCESSIBILITY and EXPERIENCE

Initial explorations were organized around the fact that communities form around something. Often it is something abstract, like an idea, a set of values, etc. It is the central theme of the community. Spatially, this is explored in an atrium that connects the building’s two most-publicly programmed spaces. The atrium and its adjacent spaces are explored as tools to pull the user through the building, encouraging interaction along the way. Zoning of Phase 2 (“PRIVATE”) spaces is meant to provide structured space for both daytime and evening activities, while encouraging members and visitors to move about and mingle in PUBLIC common areas.

Alongside this initial study explored in the Atrium (2.5A), two primary themes are presented. The first is based on research that suggests, in the transition to membership, a non-member will choose to interact with and adopt the symbols and boundaries established by the group. Common examples of community symbols include dress code or vocabulary. This project imagines a type of symbol, presenting a designed element in the space as having symbolic purpose. The object is a unit from a flexible modular system (2.4A) that offers interactive storage, display, screening and threshold options. It’s simplistic design and material language is meant to flex with users’ needs and appeal to the designer’s sense of efficiency. It also serves as a public display of “achieveable” design. This secondary role is meant to appeal to the new designer or admirer, and is in line with a theme to bring a sense of achieveablility to the new or non-designer who may be considering membership. Consider that the primary entrance leads directly into a gallery of process work that doubles as Critique Space.

The modular system is VARIED in its flexibility to accommodate many potential configurations, yet UNITED in materiality. It appears in a unique rhythm throughout the spaces it defines within the environment. The rhythm that defines placement of these and many other objects and architectural features is the result of pattern and graphics exercises imagining the connections between members (2.4B).

The BOUNDARIES defined by this rhythm are impermanent, flexible and frequently transparent. The entire experiment bets that bringing a level of TRANSPARENCY to design will make it seem more achievable and inviting.

The connections explored in pattern work are potential opportunities for conversation. Conversation is thought to be essential to a healthy community. The sociologist Ray Oldenburg argues that “conversation is the main activity” in a successful “informal public gathering place.” Design elements are meant to support and encourage the act of conversation. Where that is not possible, attempts are made not to hinder conversation.

In post-defense reflection, an element remains to be balanced. It is that of ACCESSIBILITY to the EXPERIENCE. Equal access to the experience is essential to inclusiveness, and good communities are inclusive. A prior iteration featured a more-central primary elevator. This was moved to provide additional flexibility to the floor-by-floor experience of the atrium. A future iteration would reimagine the central Atrium experience as more fully inclusive.

CONCEPT STATEMENT

The design of this space examines the idea of community through an exploration of symbols and the boundaries they create. It attempts to imagine the building blocks of communities as designed elements within physical space. “Conversation is the main activity.”
Color-coding further separates the most public spaces from those that are meant primarily for members.

Structures made from symbolic materials are the tools that create the physical boundaries, which are defined by pattern work based on “connections” and conversation.

Raw and color-coded materials are used as symbols, representing simplicity, flexibility, and transparency.
Symbols are of major importance to communities. They are used to create boundaries, helping to create a sense of emotional safety for an individual within the community.

The relationship between symbols and boundaries is reciprocal in that each informs the other as the community evolves. Common symbols for communities are dress code, or adopted vocabulary. Research suggests that, in the transition to membership, non-members will interact with and adopt the symbols established by a community.

This system is an attempt to use materials and modularity as symbols that both reflect and shape the boundaries they create. Simple materials, such as plywood and lumber, highlight the simplicity and achievability of the design. While the complex modularity of the system allows for a unified variety that can serve the evolving needs of its community over time.

Frames can be devised as portals and thresholds, but primarily serve to house a series of modular pieces. These modules take on a variety of tasks, such as storage, display, shelving and other interactive elements. Heights are set to accommodate seating and tabletop surfaces should the need arise.

Modular units are used to create physical boundaries within the space as well. Color-coding tells visitors which zones are public “yellow,” and which are meant for members, “magenta.”
The diagrams on these pages explore the possibility of a modular system that can provide storage and display options. The modules are also meant to serve as screening devices, creating highly-visible boundaries that define zones.

Internal modules are designed to be part of a 6’-0” x 3’-0” grid and are built in even 1’-0” increments, in all directions. This grid is lifted 6” off the ground, allowing modules that are 1’-0” and 2’-0” tall to sit at common seat (18”) and table (30”) heights.

The modular grid is placed within a 7’-0” by 3’-0” frame, with a double-width option available. Frames are designed to serve as portals as well. Modules may be swapped to accommodate the needs of the space as its users flex and evolve.
2.4B
“CONNECTIONS” PATTERN

This pattern and its motifs were built out of an exploration of the community’s effect on an individual. An active member of the community is represented in yellow, while non-members are pink. The lines between people represent a direct line of conversation. The theme of “connections” is explored in-depth in process work on the following pages.

A logo image (below-left) shows a sampling of the pattern with one inactive “non-member.” As that individual is adopted into the community, the central idea around which the community is formed, becomes stronger. The number of “connections,” or adjacent opportunities for conversation, also grows. The final image imagines a change in perspective, adding depth to the pattern’s grid and suggesting the group might build something together.

This pattern appears in a custom vinyl wallcovering and is applied to a transparent resin as a material in the modular units. The pattern is applied to vertical and horizontal planes throughout the building to inform the overall layout and arrangement of space, as well as to create unique flooring options and add visual interest to surfaces.
The diagrams on these pages illustrate the potential for conversation as "connections." The diagram on the far right with a sample size $n=90$ (a pretty packed house at Design Hub) divides the users into subcategories, based on their level of experience as a designer.

These diagrams also highlight the exponential growth in possible connections, as a sample size grows. The diagrams show samples of $n=6$ (an imagined critique scenario with 15 possible individual connections), $n=10$ (45 connections), $n=12$ (66 connections) and $n=90$ (4,005 connections).
These diagrams explore relationships between triangular and hexagonal geometries. It tests the idea of "connections" using a hexagonal geometry that is broken down into a sub-pattern of equilateral triangles. The diagrams on the right explore the three-dimensionality of the pattern, illustrating how a hexagon, using the "conversation lines" from the sub-pattern, can be imagined as a cube from a different perspective.
2.5
PROCESS + DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

COMMON MATERIALS + FINISHES

CONCRETE, BOARD-FORMED
Lower deck of each floor
Painted SW9543

CONCRETE
Structural walls and columns
Painted SW9543

STEEL, STRUCTURAL
Stairs
Painted SW7073
“Network Gray”

CONCRETE, POLISHED
Floors
Stained Gray, Semi-Transparent

BRICK, VARYING TYPES
Walls
Painted SW9543

WOOD, 3/4” PLY
Railing
Birch, Semi-Gloss

SW9543
“Gypsum”
SECTION_PROGRAM DIAGRAM
NORTH

2º PHASE; LESS PUBLIC
BACK OF HOUSE; NOT PUBLIC
1º PHASE; FULLY PUBLIC
The atrium is the core of design hub. It serves as primary circulation between floors, opening paths connecting all of the building’s spaces.

The two most public-facing elements of the program are a Process Gallery and a Design Library. These are zoned in opposite parts of the building.

The atrium is designed as a tool to pull visitors through parts of the building they might not otherwise visit. This helps staff promote events and everyday programming of phase two interior spaces, while offering more opportunities for interaction between new visitors and more-involved members.

Symbolically, the atrium represents the abstract idea that binds a community. Everybody is connected through that idea. People move through and around that idea, in a reciprocal relationship. The community shapes the person; the person shapes the community.
DIAGRAMMATIC FLOOR PLAN
EXPLORING ORIGINAL ATRIUM LAYOUT
The central theme of the community is expressed abstractly as a void in the space, around which all other zoned spaces are organized. People circulate through the building using this space, moving through and around an “idea” as they choose whether or not to become a part of the community. The final design accommodates flexibility in each floor plan, reflecting the notion that while united in purpose, each individual that makes up the community is unique.
COMMUNITIES FORM WHEN PEOPLE COME TOGETHER
OFTEN FINDING COMMON GROUND IN SOMETHING ABSTRACT, LIKE AN IDEA
2.5B
<LEVEL 00> ATRIUM UNDERGROUND

This lower level of the Atrium extends its circulatory functions to the basement of the building, providing access to restrooms and a community kitchen available to members.

A small, transparent elevator is available for the transition to this space, as the building’s primary elevator only serves the upper floors. Exiting the elevator, one finds a community board tucked into the space, which also features seating with tables and lockers for daily storage needs.

NEW MATERIALS

ARCHITECTURAL FELT
Pine-Framed Drop Ceiling
Custom Magenta Dye

ARCHITECTURAL FELT
Pine-Framed Drop Ceiling
Custom Yellow Dye

WALLCOVERING, VINYL
Custom Pattern Design

FURNISHING + LIGHTING

HERMAN MILLER
Eames Molded Plastic Armchair
4-Leg Base, In “Pale Yellow,” “White” and “Blush”

HERMAN MILLER
Swag Leg Armchair
By George Nelson

HERMAN MILLER
Swag Leg Dining Table, Round
By George Nelson

TECH LIGHTING
Vance 24”
Satin Nickel
2.5C

<LEVEL 01-04> CONVERSATION NOOKS

Conversation nooks are a programmatic highlight, designed to encourage mingling and the sharing of ideas. Conversation nooks are adjacent to the atrium on floors 01 through 04, serving as individual extensions of the fifth-floor library. These floating libraries are publicly zoned and placed between members-only zones to encourage mingling. Comfortable furniture, lighting and acoustics set the stage for conversation.

These spaces feature a variety of modules that make up much of the vertical language in the building. These modules break up the space, while offering display and storage options as well as interactive screening options.

NEW MATERIALS

ARCHITECTURAL FELT
Pine-Framed Drop Ceiling
Custom Yellow Dye

WOOD, 3/4” PLY
Equilateral Triangular Floor Tiles, 36”H
Polyurethane Coated

FURNISHING + LIGHTING

WEST ELM [CONTRACT]
Volume Round Drum Coffee Table
Concrete

HERMAN MILLER
Coconut Chair
By George Nelson
Kvadrat “Divina” 426

3FORM
Chroma Resin
Y17 "Sunnyside"

883 SQ FT / FLOOR_AVERAGE
3,533 SQUARE FEET TOTAL
9.6% OF BUILDING TOTAL
CAPACITY: <10

MODULAR UNIT
Variable Configurations
This series of diagrams imagines the “Connections” pattern as a grid over a floorplan of a CONVERSATION NOOK. This grid was used to determine placement of modular units, partitioning the space into separate areas for conversation.
"Underprogrammed Space" includes all major corridors and paths. These areas serve circulatory purposes with the added functionality of creating opportunities for conversation. These spaces promote an "Economy of Encounters" and offer flexible space to people either in motion, or pausing between destinations.

FURNISHING

HERMAN MILLER
Marshmallow Sofa
By George Nelson
Kvadrat "Divina" 626

KNOLL
K Lounge Low Back Curved Bench
Inside Radius 60°
Kvadrat "Divina" 426

2,566 SQ FT / FLOOR, LESS APERATURES
10,262 SQUARE FEET TOTAL
27.8% OF BUILDING TOTAL

STEECASE
Exchange Table
"Arctic White" Top, "Platinum Metallic" Base
The Design Library is a featured space, intentionally placed at the most extreme location within the building. The library is a public feature for all visitors, pulling new visitors through the building.

The library features a modular display, storage and screening system, as well as a custom table designed to store a variety of material samples. Resources include books, magazines and other printed or made objects that highlight design process or results. Vignettes may be created within the modular units to include electronic resources on portable devices.

Material samples may be raw or processed woods, metals, stones, etc. Samples may also include commercial items, such as textiles or tiles.

**ARCHITECTURAL FELT**
Pine-Framed Drop Ceiling
Custom Yellow Dye

**WOOD, 3/4" PLY**
Equilateral Triangular Floor Tiles, 36"H Polyurathane Coated

**Gypsum Board**
SW6905 "Goldfinch"
SW7005 "Pure White"

**STEELCASE**
Scoop Stool by Turnstone
White Frame, “Sorano” Leather: Honey

**HERMAN MILLER**
Coconut Chair
By George Nelson
Kvadrat “Divina” 426

**PRUDENTIAL LIGHTING**
Architectural Rounds Series: Olive LED 36” in “Daffodil”

**3FORM**
Chroma Resin
Y17 “Sunnyside”

**MODULAR UNIT**
Variable Configurations
2.5F  
<LEVEL 01> PROCESS GALLERY

The first-floor Process Gallery is located at the building’s primary entrance. For most people, most of the time, this is the first space that a person interacts with.

Two principles guide this space. First, the intention is to introduce the design process as an achievable tool for finding and solving problems. Second, the space must acknowledge the importance of conversation to the community it serves.

The Process Gallery hosts “exhibitions” of process work that may serve as extended critique. The second-floor Critique Space (in the “underprogrammed” zone) serves as a natural extension of the gallery. Combined, the overlapping spaces offer the opportunity to provide a 6'-0" x 3'-0" critique space for up to 60 people.

FURNISHING + FEATURES

HERMAN MILLER
Platform Bench w/ Cushion
By George Nelson
Kvadrat “Divina” 426

MODULAR UNIT
Double Homasote Configuration
2.5G

<LEVEL 01> LIGHT WALL @ SECONDARY ENTRANCE

A lite wall is featured on a rear corner wall of the building, adjacent to stairs and an elevator. In this corner, a glass-paneled, garage-style door on the first floor opens to provide a secondary public entrance.

The wall feature spans the entire height of the building, taking advantage of a corner that has been cut through each floor to provide circulation. A color-tunable LED bar light is positioned on angled vertical lines, representing the “Connections” pattern, highlighting the potential conversation inherent to the connections made by being a member of the community.

COLOR KINETICS
Vaya Series: Cove Color LED
KEY PLAN: LIGHT WALL AT SECONDARY ENTRANCE
LEVEL 01
3.1 REFLECTIONS

COVID-19

The majority of the research for this project took place in the months prior to the start of the Coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has significantly altered the ways that we are looking at interior space. Guidelines on physical distancing and additional safety measures from the CDC and WHO place great restrictions on the way that we use interior space.

It is impossible to say, at this time, what changes will remain when the world returns to a degree of social normalcy, post-pandemic, or when that will be. Design Hub imagines a hopefully-near future similar to our past, in which social distancing is no longer the norm.

An interesting further study would feature programmatically similar spaces, such as Richmond’s Studio Two Three, a neighborhood and community-oriented space that teaches art and crafts and offers studio space and resource rentals for artists and other members. During the pandemic, Studio Two Three has continued to operate in a limited capacity, hosting outdoor events and teaming with community partners to provide personal protective equipment to first-line healthcare workers during a global shortage.

ACCESSIBILITY

During a defense of this project, I received critical advice regarding the accessibility of the Atrium space. As mentioned in an earlier section, this space initially had an elevator that ran the entire six floors of the building. An elevator, unfortunately, fractures the experience of moving floor to floor, interacting with people as you go. It also required more uniformity in the atrium’s aperatures. It was moved to a secondary entrance and enlarged to a freight-size elevator. I have reservations about bringing a full-service elevator back to the atrium as it encourages visitors to skip the middle sections of the building.

However, it is imperative that the designed experience is accessible to all. A future iteration would present a solution to this problem. The Guggenheim Museum by Frank Lloyd Wright in Manhattan, NY may present a case study for a ramp system in place of stairs in the atrium.

CONFLICTING GEOMETRIES

As with any project of this size, on a deadline, there are areas where more time and energy was spent than in others. A professor pointed out the nature of a strong geometrical system for design. At some point, it may conflict with the existing geometries of the building. I use a system based on 60-degree angles, equilateral triangles and hexagons. The geometries created align easily in certain areas, but require more careful consideration in others. Future iterations of this project should be more thoughtful about where the geometries of the system butt against those of the building.

MODULAR SYSTEM

In addition to a system that helps to define geometries, this project makes heavy use of a modular system, designed to serve a multitude of purposes from storage and display to screening and threshold. This system is incredibly flexible and is meant to be adapted to the needs of the community at any given time. However, there is a degree of genericity to the current placement of pieces. It would be an interesting experiment to test different configurations and even new modular pieces against various iterations of Phase 2 spaces.

While the modular system serves to create the boundaries that define these spaces, it will be interesting to experiment with levels of transparency, portals and other ways to interact with these spaces. In fact, the entire system could (and realistically should) be tested against real-world data. Is the system working as intended? Are people interacting with it as intended? Are people finding innovative ways to interact?
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Oldenburg (1986) suggests a transformation must occur as you enter the space. This principle is what led to the decision to place a gallery exhibiting “process” work at the front of the building, putting design into a context that can be understood and transforming anyone who enters into a potential designer.

The Process Gallery, admittedly, falls short. In its current state, it is developed to fill the most immediate needs of the space. This space, as the introduction to the building, should better introduce the themes that are presented throughout. Plans for a future iteration include bringing the material language of the library and conversation nooks to the gallery and critique space on the second floor. Space will be zoned for a semi-permanent base for two “floating” staff members, who will serve as ambassadors and guides. This station, and the space it occupies, should serve as an introduction to the community, rather than simply the space.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Design Hub is a hypothesis that remains to be tested, but it raises additional questions.

This project looks beyond environmental psychology into group dynamics and seeks to understand how one becomes a member of a community. It interprets some of these abstract psychological elements as designed features within the built environment, questioning how space and objects may influence the journey of a user on the path to membership in a community. But what are the consequences when we influence psychological connections to place and to other people?

To be a community place is also to be part of a community. The relational community within a community place must have a relationship with the surrounding geographical community. Design Hub defines its internal, relational community from the start. The idea is that this model should work as a sustainable co-working environment targeting a specific user, the designer, yet “community” remains a core value.

Fitting in to the surrounding community benefits both communities. As members of the surrounding community become members of the Design Hub community, the network of connections grows exponentially.

Does this project do enough to acknowledge the needs of the surrounding community? This project converts a percentage of the neighborhood’s higher-income housing into a place with an objective to benefit the surrounding geographical community. It must ask what effect will follow, taking into full account the neighborhood’s troubled history.

In the hypothetical event that this project found fruition, it would be imperative to the nature of the project that it become fully participatory from this point forward, involving a panel of representatives from the neighborhood. The project draws inspiration from the idea of “participatory design,” in which every stakeholder in a project shares in the design process.

Every member of the community should have a voice. After all, “conversation is the main activity” (Oldenburg).
3.2 IMAGE CREDITS*

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW
1.2A <DESIGN HIGHLIGHTS>

1.3 PRECEDENT STUDIES
1.3 A <A/D/O>

1.3 B <IDEO>

1.4 NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY
2. https://richmond.com/discover-richmond/getting-to-know-jackson-ward/article_a1e4a87b1-e2ab-5a50-8f4c-ea5edc150582c.html

1.5 BUILDING HISTORY
1. https://wparks.com/emrick-flats

2.2 A EXISTING MATERIALS
Interior photos portraying materials used in the architecture and existing design are courtesy of Tashi Scott.

2.5 PROCESS + DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
<FURNISHING + LIGHTING>

All photographic images of furniture and lighting are taken directly from the manufacturers’ websites, with the following exceptions:

STEELCASE “Scoop” Stool
https://i.pinimg.com/originals/ee/1e/8d/ee1e8d352b65026d3870e763165d5b291.jpg

TECH LIGHTING “Vance” 24” Fixture
https://image.ylighting.com/is/image/modern/TECP154187

NOTE*
Research references are listed at the end of the Literature Review (Section 1.2) in APA style.