2012

Between City Street and River Bed: An Urban Indoor Park

Meredith Salley
Virginia Commonwealth University

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Between City Street and River Bed:
An Urban Indoor Park

Meredith Salley
MFA Interior Environments
Virginia Commonwealth University 2012
| 4. | manifesto |
| 5. | thesis statement |
| 7. | case studies |
| 21. | concept development |
| 33. | schematic development |
| 36. | program |
| 39. | site + building documentation |
| 51. | design development |
| 63. | exhibition documentation |
| 72. | biography |
| 73. | works cited |
This park intertwines open, public space with intimate, private space throughout. The question of how to attain privacy within a potentially very bustling public space is examined in depth and carefully considered throughout this design process.

I believe in happiness, comfort, and authenticity.

Happiness is the feeling evoked when we are genuinely engaged with our surroundings and overcome with excitement.

Comfort is experienced when our body and mind are at ease and feel safe in our environment. Comfort invites openness, risk-taking, and new beginnings.

Authenticity is revealed in the space that you recognize on the surface, only to continuously find new surprise in its details.

I design spaces that invite people to engage and reflect - with their surroundings and with each other.

Public spaces, such as a park, offer a place for these aspects to manifest in their own unique ways by allowing users the freedom to interact with the space however they wish. Though the function of the space is known, the precise impact it can have on individuals as well as the larger community is unpredictable.

A park is a place of many uses. A place to walk, sit, reflect, eat, play, gather, people-watch, work, re-energize. A park can be quiet, loud, busy or slow, sometimes all at once. Parks bring together friends, family, and people who may not otherwise ever interact with each other. Everyone has their own place in a park.

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Privacy is a somewhat loose term. Everyone has their own definition of what privacy is and this can change given the particular place and time. There are many factors that contribute to and constitute the feeling of privacy and that is what this project seeks to explore.

The purpose of the research conducted through the following case studies is to examine privacy in public spaces, specifically how and where it occurs. This may mean finding privacy in an enclosed nook, under a shade tree, on a bench where views are directed into the distance and not into the crowd, or just a seat that is in a corner or anchored to a feature that blocks sound, light, and views.

These case studies explore various types of privacy through a range of projects and media including parks, fashion, and the built environment.

A number of considerations regarding how and where privacy occurs, usually in relation to seating, were taken into account during the research phase:

- On an edge, or anchored to something
- Under or over something
- Enclosed in an area
- Separation from the larger whole
- Focal point or object
- Orientation
- Light
- Proximity to others
- Boundaries (physical or implied)
Veasyble
Italian wearable privacy screen

Veasyble is an Italian wearable screen of sorts that is based on the concepts of isolation, intimacy, and ornament. There are four different designs that are each meant to wear over the eyes, face, or upper body. Veasyble's design stems from the effects of our changing relationship with the home and how it has affected our views and needs for intimacy. The pieces allow the user to create their own sense of intimacy in any environment.

This concept is essentially what I strive to achieve in my thesis design of achieving privacy at any given time within a public place.

No Park project
Natalie Jeremijenko
Director, Environmental Health Clinic, NYU

Natalie Jeremijenko, an artist, academic, scientist, engineer, 1999 Rockefeller Fellow and one of Interior Design’s 40 most influential designers, focuses on design for social change and specifically, environmental improvements. Her environmental health clinic brings in what she dubs “impatients,” people who are impatient with legislation to improve our quality of life through environmental change and want to take matters into their own hands.

One of her most successful projects is the “no parking zone” park, which has evolved into an international “No Parking Day.” This project involves turning a single parking spot into a personalized park. Participants can include anything they would like in their park: benches, plant life, lawn chairs, light, etc.

I appreciate this project because it acknowledges our basic needs as humans to have access to the natural environment and puts this importance ahead of that of industrial and materialistic needs such as cars. I also enjoy the fact that participants are able to supply their own “park” with anything they would like to include. This allows the individual to establish their own boundaries and even sense of privacy to the degree they choose.
The bathing facilities in Bellinzona serve as a means of connecting the city to the river that runs wild nearby, a landmark to the local natives. Great care was taken to preserve the natural habitat in creating a functional walkway and facility structure for the pools and nearby sports complex. There are three levels to Galfetti’s design: ground, first, and second (top). The ceiling of the ground floor functions as the floor of the first, the ceiling of the first floor functions as the floor of the second. This makes this a unique case study because privacy occurs both under and over the same structure at the same time.

13.1 (Above): Plan - bathing facilities create connection in linear path
13.2 (Left): Bellinzona bathing facilities elevated walkway
Parc Andre Citroen has a section of gardens with tall landscaping that evokes the sense of walls around you as you walk through them, thus putting it into the enclosed category of privacy.

Landschaftspark Duisburg, Germany, falls into both enclosed and under/over types of privacy due to its bunker gardens enclosed by concrete walls and an elevated path that spans the length of the park.

Piazza San Marco is primarily a large open space; therefore the only sense of privacy occurs along the outer edges along the building walls where attention is not directed.

Park Andre Citroen has a section of gardens with tall landscaping that makes the sense of walls around you as you walk through them, thus putting it into the enclosed category of privacy.
I consider Scuffletown Park to be a successful park model for many reasons. Known as a “pocket park”—hidden between row houses in the heart of the Fan district of Richmond, Scuffletown is just larger than a standard basketball court. There is a wide brick path that draws users between two grassy lawns, one of which is designated for dogs to run free. The other lawn is home to benches, flowers, a bird bath, and a shade tree, all of which create their own intimate space to relax. There is also plenty of open space for those who wish to relax without disturbing those who may be enjoying the activities taking place. Scuffletown is taken care of by local residents who take turns watering the plants and weeding the flower gardens. The sense of community felt in this park is strong and can be observed whether it is day or night (streetlights along the path keep the park well-lit at night), crowded or not.
I consider Monroe Park to be an example of an unsuccessful public park. The park is on the outskirts of the VCU campus and therefore serves as a means for students to travel through to get from dorms and apartments to class. Instead of feeling inviting and beautiful, the park seems to give most people a feeling of uneasiness and fright and therefore cause people to go out of their way to avoid walking through it.

The park grounds are quite unkempt, mostly consisting of cracked cement sidewalks and vast expanses of dirt where grass no longer grows. The park has become infamous as Richmond’s homeless hangout and is frequently the scene of crime and drug dealing. If you live in Richmond, you know not to venture into Monroe Park after dark.

This park has potential to be a wonderful public space, especially since it lies along some of Richmond’s most populous streets. A major improvement would be to add more seating. There are only a few benches in the center of the park and they are usually occupied by the homeless. Better lighting, signage, and well-kept landscaping would all contribute to this park being better utilized by the public and becoming a desirable place to spend time.
Programmatic Models

This model was the first one built in relation to the project’s program. It is a physical representation of the metaphor of a new friendship, expressing how trust builds in order for the friendship to gain stability. As the thickness and therefore enclosure of the wood squares around the chipboard tube increases, the stability, support, and strength of the chipboard tube increase. This model initiated the thought process of open vs. closed spaces within the project and how it could be established and experienced.

This model is a physical representation of the diagram on the opposite page. It expresses various spatial areas within the program through dimensionally dark box represents a different area for resting, gathering, or activity of some sort. In constructing this model I explored various ways of relating and connecting various areas to others and how the adjacencies of these areas affect others.

This model was developed after the previous one in order to explore the adjacencies and interactions of various spatial areas within the project in more depth. The wood represents spaces or activities that could be transported or fixed throughout the site.
These diagrams express various combinations of open and closed space within the existing site structure. Within each, dark represents closed while white represents open.

The top of each diagram is the location of 14th Street and therefore the front of the building.
The final diagram shows closed space extending from the front two corners of the building to the center of the back of the building. The two back corners receive the least amount of natural light and traffic. Open space lies in the front of the building, where the main entrance is, opening to 14th Street.

In this diagram, the columns determine where closed space lies. Closed space extends from each column to the front (14th Street) side of the building. Open space also extends from the void between each column to the back of the building. This is shown in diagonal lines.

These diagrams show the breakdown of open and closed space into five different categories. From top left over to right:

- Open/closed organized around columns
- Open/closed organized by column orientation
- Open/closed organized by four main sides of building
- Open/closed organized by paths
- Open/closed organized by voids/proportions in building

Three diagrams were then chosen, each from separate categories, that best represent open/closed space and its relationship to the existing site structure.

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Three diagrams were then chosen, each from separate categories, that best represent open/closed space and its relationship to the existing site structure.
Models of Open/Closed Diagrams

This model is of the first diagram chosen to represent open and closed space within the site. The double wood dowels extend from the back of the building to embrace the single dowels that extend from the front of the building. The placement of each dowel unit reflects the placement of the existing row of columns in the center of the site. This model shows that closed space within the site could be determined by existing factors and could be sectioned in various ways if the program required, leaving open space in between.

The second model of the series examines closed space as primarily the diagonal half of the site extending from what is the corner of Canal and 14th streets to the back corner of the canal plaza and Turning Basin building. This area is furthest from the main entrances, circulation routes, and primary natural light sources. As you move from the front of the building along 14th Street to the back, the space becomes increasingly shaded, shown here by the height change in dowels.

The third and last model in the series represents closed space as the back two corners of the site. Much like the second model, the dowel height increases as they extend towards the back of the building to show the more enclosed space. The space that is consequently left is the 14th Street entrance and facade. This is where the main entry to the building exists and therefore receives the most traffic, as well as the most light since the facade consists of large storefront windows.

Diagrams of Open/Closed

Silk-screen prints: 1 layer on chipboard
Chipboard: Open
Yellow Ink: Closed
The purpose of this plan was to examine where open and closed space could occur within the site. The shaded area (open space) taken from the first diagram and model introduced previously. This plan is more conceptual than literal, but served as a basis for plans to follow.

These plans of the first and second floor of the building begin to show the various spaces within the program and their square footage. Adjacencies, shelter, and light needs were taken into consideration as these plans developed and led to a more detailed space plan.
After developing the three main diagrams of open and closed space within the site, each was layered over one another to form the diagrams on the left. This informed me where the most concentrated open and closed space could lie within the building. The above space plan was developed by measuring these diagrams in conjunction with a formal adjacency matrix of each space within the program.

Preliminary Ideas

Coffee Bar

Group seating with views to 14th Street

Bar top tables along 14th Street

Board game area

"Deck" for eating lunch

Space Planning
Program Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Size (sq. ft.)</th>
<th>Natural Light Type</th>
<th>Noise Level</th>
<th>Adjacencies (Interior)</th>
<th>Adjacencies (Exterior)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plaza</td>
<td>1,408</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1, 3, 5</td>
<td>14th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terraces</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
<td>14th St., 15th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee Bar</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14th St., 15th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Corners</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Artificial</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
<td>Kanawha Canal plaza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Game Area</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>Artificial</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
<td>14th St., Canal St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catwalk</td>
<td>2,845</td>
<td>Natural + Artificial</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2, 4, 5</td>
<td>14th St., 15th St., 16th St.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Square footage = 6,545 sq. ft.

Description of Spaces

RAZA
The plaza is the most open space within the entire park. This is meant to invite people in and move them from one end of the space to the other while also allowing the activity both inside and outside of the park's walls. The existing storefront windows would be replaced by overhead doors that could be open during nice weather and easily closed during inclement weather. Visitors would be able to walk through these spaces and into the park from the south (canal) end to the central stairs of the 15th street entry.

TERRACE
The terrace, often associated with outdoor public spaces, is the central aspect of the park. The structure of the terrace responds to the existing columns and proportions within the site. It also creates spaces that feel both open and closed depending on where you are sitting, forming different experiences of public and private to occur simultaneously. The ink lines in these images highlight the terrace components that create such boundaries and a sense of enclosure.

COFFEE BAR
As the last entry on the south end there is a coffee bar that extends from inside the park walls to the edge of the sidewalk, allowing passers-by to grab a coffee on the run.

HEALTHY CORNERS PRODUCE STAND
Founded in Washington, D.C., Healthy Corners is a program that strives to bring fresh, nutritious food options to areas where there are not otherwise many grocery stores. As simple as a small fruit stand, it is an easy installation that will contribute to a healthier community. There will also be an area designated for local farmers to drop off Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) boxes for community members who wish to purchase locally grown produce.

BOARD GAME AREA
The north end of the park is home to the board game area on the first floor. Visitors are able to play games of chess and checkers on the large space boards that are on the floor while passers-by can stop to watch. The staircase at this end leads to the catwalk that allows people to watch the games from above and formulate their own strategies of what move to make next. As visitors move from the north end to the south end, the catwalk becomes wider allowing people room to continue walking or sit and people-watch from the handrail that expands into a counter. There is a staircase at the south end as well as an exit in circulation through the space.
Environmental/Use Factors

Natural Light

Primary Circulation
In order for this park to establish itself as a destination amongst the nearby Canal Walk and Shockoe Bottom area, I felt that it was important to keep the material palette simple and consistent with those materials found along the canal just outside the park doors. Therefore the three main materials used in this space are brick, granite, and wood. This also speaks to the simple natural material palette of most other public spaces.

The use of these materials within the park also ties the south (canal) end of the building to the north end, creating a connection between the streets of the city and the natural environment of the canal.

These material differences can be seen in the original silk-screen prints along with a corresponding photograph of each material along the Canal Walk just outside of the park.

The floor of the park consists of unpolished granite which is frequently found along the Canal Walk. The first level of the terrace is the same material, appearing as a raised extension of the floor.

The structural components of each terrace unit as well as the terrace bench and catwalk floor are all composed of local black locust wood. Though it is not the same species, it relates to the wood that is also found along the Canal Walk just below the park.

The existing columns and exposed truss framework are also of heavy timber construction.

Material Palette

Silk-screen prints: 2 layers on chipboard

Silk-screen prints: 4 layers on chipboard
Floor Plans

Sections

Section 1: Through south end
Section 2: Through terrace and plaza
Section 3: Through board game area
The plaza is the most open space within the entire park. This is meant to invite people in and move them from one end of the space to the other while also offering a place to pause and observe the activity both inside and outside of the park's walls. The existing storefront windows would be replaced by overhead doors that could be open during nice weather and easily closed during inclement weather. Visitors would be able to walk through these spaces and into the park from the south (canal) end to the central stairs of the 14th street entry.

The plaza is a multi-functional area located at the front of the building and appearing as an extension of the building's sidewalks. The plaza features are kept quite simple. On most days, there are lightweight chairs scattered amongst a few small tables - easily moved to allow for spontaneous reconfigurations.

When the chairs are removed, the plaza may also be used as an area for showcases or entertainment during special events. These events may include Shockoe Design Day, Earth Day, First Fridays, Restaurant Week, or Friday Cheers.
The terrace, often associated with outdoor public spaces in the central area of the park. The structure of the terrace responds to the existing columns and proportions within the site. It also creates spaces that feel both open or closed depending on where you are sitting, thereby allowing different experiences of public and private to exist simultaneously. The ink lines in these images highlight the terrace components that create such boundaries and a sense of enclosure.

The columns and support beams of each terrace unit extend from the existing columns (far left). This design stemmed from the construction of the second concept model of open and closed space.

People can sit on either side of the wood bench that seemingly floats over the granite slab of the terrace.

On the side open to the plaza there is enough room for someone to lay or multiple people to spread out on the granite slab. On the back side, the granite is not as wide and views are directed out the back windows, creating a more private experience than if facing the opposite direction and looking out onto the plaza.

The three main components of each terrace unit are granite base (appearing as an extension of the floor), wood bench, and wood columns and support beams of the catwalk overhead.

The bench spans the length of the terrace in 3 separate pieces.

Catwalk spans the length of the terrace as one solid unit overhead.

Individual terrace unit.

The three main components of each terrace unit are granite base (appearing as an extension of the floor), wood bench, and wood columns and support beams of the catwalk overhead.
At the site entry on the south end there is a coffee bar that extends from inside the park walls to the edge of the sidewalk, allowing passers-by to grab a coffee on the run.

There is also a small counter where community residents can pick up their boxes of produce from local farmers as part of the Community Sustainable Agriculture program. This stand is also home to Richmond’s first Healthy Corners counter - an initiative to bring healthy snack options in the form various fruit items, to urban areas where there aren’t many grocery stores.

The north end of the park is home to the board game area on the first floor. Visitors are able to play games of chess and checkers on the large life-size boards that lie on the floor while passers-by can stop to watch. The staircase at this end leads to a catwalk that surrounds the entire board game area from above, creating a more enclosed feeling at this end of the building than the plaza or south end.

The catwalk allows people to watch the games from above and formulate their own strategies of what move to make next. As visitors move from the south end of the catwalk to the north end, the catwalk becomes wider allowing people room to continue walking, or sit and people-watch from the handrail that expands into a countertop. There is a staircase at the south end as well as cut out circulation through the space.
The site for this project was chosen with the program of a public space—a park—in mind. This building, originally owned and operated by Southern Railways, currently sits empty in the bustling Shockoe Bottom area of downtown Richmond.

On one end, the building’s doors open to busy city streets full of people traveling to and from nearby jobs, restaurants, food carts, and retail establishments. On the other end, the doors open to the city’s historic Kanawha Canal and Turning Basin with the James River just beyond that.

Main Street Train Station and Interstate 95 are within blocks, making this a perfect place for city visitors and locals alike to stop into at any given time.

This park is a place for relaxing, exploring, gathering, and community enrichment. The design seeks to blend the boundaries of indoor and outdoor while creating various moments of public and private. In this, a new concept of interior design is created.

**Kanawha Canal**

**James River**

**Site:** 111 Virginia Street - Richmond - VA

**Canal/Site outdoor plaza**

**Turning Basin:** view from site

**Turning Basin:** view from canal

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**Conceptual Development**

My design process began by examining the existing site in regards to natural light and circulation patterns. These studies led me to the concept of open versus closed space within my site and how my program of an urban indoor park could reflect this.

Three diagrams were chosen that best represented open vs. closed space within the site. For each diagram, there is a three-dimensional conceptual model that corresponds.

**Open:**
- Canal end + 14th Street facade
- 14th Street facade
- Ends + proportions determined by columns

**Closed:**
- North end + back of building
- Ends + back corners of building
- Proportions determined by columns

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A variety of graphic diagrams were done using charcoal to study the relationship between open and closed space within the site boundaries.

Three diagrams are then set up as referenced and are made into three-dimensional conceptual models and rendered.
In elementary school I built forts and threw tea parties. In middle school I doodled my dream house, complete with a lazy river, in my school agenda. In high school I developed a passion for graphic design, photography, and living every day to the fullest. In college I studied the human mind and what influences our decisions and interactions as individuals and a society. In graduate school I learned how to combine my creative drive with my psychological and sociological interests while developing the skill set of an interior designer.

Today I am a designer and creative problem solver. I am an optimist with much left to explore and learn, and many forts left to build.

biography


"As people become more reflective upon themselves, they will become better attuned to one another and start to understand the importance of living collectively."

- Teilhard de Chardin