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THE EXCHANGE: Curating Authenticity + Interaction

sarah webb

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THE EXCHANGE: CURATING AUTHENTICITY + INTERACTION

SARAH WEBB MFA VCU INTERIOR ENVIRONMENTS
"...Architecture is always inhabited by spirits, people known to us may well live in the building but they are only understudy actors in a waking dream. In reality, architecture is always the home of spirits, the dwelling place of metaphysical beings...”
— Juhani Pallasmaa,

I BELIEVE THAT DESIGN IS LIFE.

DESIGN

MANIFESTO
layered, thoughtful, contextual, intuitive, timeless and strategic, the tactile connector between perception and experience.

design is provocative and effectual, the marriage of aesthetics and function. a subliminal leader. a tangible cue. the ubiquitous enforcer.
to design with integrity means to improve the livelihood of those who frequent or inhabit, to be considerate of economy and environment. to embrace both criticism and collaboration. to be inquisitive and multi dimensional. to impress upon the user and allow the user to impress upon the space.
to create textured, engaging spaces evocative of the past, yet representative of the future. that juxtapose both excess and restraint.
to set the stage for authentic and memorable experiences. to cohesively link the two dimensional to the three dimensional and to effectively pursue an emotional connection between the tangible and intangible.
design in practice is to be inspired by colleagues, community, artists, and craftsmen; innovators and savants.
to create spaces that encourage interaction and versatile engagement. a narrative that grows richer with age.

I BELIEVE THAT DESIGN IS LIFE.
For a physical space to have an emotional impact on those who experience it, we must consider the connection and relationship between objects and experience, and how people make individual connections to insentient places. It is this symbiotic relationship that allows a building or space to attain a "soul".

Although it may be impossible to replicate experience, by connecting material and surrounding vernacular to space, designers have the ability to establish the groundwork for not what an authentic space LOOKS like but what it FEELS like. Architects and designers can further contribute to cultivating authenticity by encouraging genuine experiences through organic interactions.¹

Whereas existential philosophers argue that authenticity is the core of ones true self coming to terms with the material world surrounding it [private], and architects and designers may take advantage of local materiality and surrounding vernacular to create authentic space [public], artists invoke an introspective perspective as means to inspire something the larger good [universal].

Artists play an invaluable role in society by providing visual context to cerebral descriptions of their selves, surroundings, and current societal conditions. Through the arts, one is able to viscerally convey disparate ideas across language and cultural variables to a larger audience. By virtue of a somewhat myopic delivery of experience, art assists in understanding the world around us, incites dialogue, and becomes the catalyst of change.

Establishing a hub that celebrates art, artists, and the creative process, reinforces the power of a subculture that engages humanity and unites and strengthens communities.

This thesis project explores physical means of synthesizing these larger philosophies and showcasing Richmond’s transformation from conservative Confederacy to dynamic cultured city.

The project is inspired by the way Richmond sits against the James River: the weight of the buildings supported by undulating currents; the abstracted reflection of the skyline upon the clarity within the water; the junction representative of history and progress, city and nature.

As is the role of The River, the paramount driver throughout the exploration is connections: connecting people to each other, experience, and the creative process and, through sharing and exposing process, connecting visitors and residents to the Richmond Art Community.

Composed of two overlapping programs - a place to stay [hospitality] and a place to play [create, congregate, explore, and celebrate] - THE EXCHANGE engages users to forge a sense of authenticity and intimacy by employing modes [visual vernacular?] of scale, transparency, and layering.
The city began to preserve its historical structures.

African American community and corporate leaders created Richmond Renaissance to break down racial barriers and foster economic development.

Master plans include Brown’s Island as a public park and the Riverfront/Canal Walk development.

Continued revitalization overseen by Richmond Renaissance and the Central Richmond Association.


Downtown received over 3 billion in investments resulting in 200+ development projects and over 4,500 residential units.

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The Jefferson Hotel was restored and reopened in 1986.

Primed for a young creative community, Richmond strives to be a landmark arts destination and has brought worldwide recognition through the success of VCU Arts, the VMFA, The Richmond Mural Project and the under-construction Institute of Contemporary Art.

The designated Culture and Arts District has generated community revitalization and helped further attract the creative class to contribute to Richmond’s economic potential, foster and encourage business and cultural development, and has allowed the opportunity for adaptive re-use of historic buildings.

The hypothetical niche hotel and exhibition center, THE EXCHANGE, is located within this district in downtown Richmond.

This building was the site of one of the city’s original department stores, Julius Sycle & Sons Dry Goods, casually called “The Tower.” The store specialized in men’s, women’s, and children’s clothing, linens, and home goods. Harpers’ Department Store occupied the building throughout the mid-century.

Though the area was predominately used as a center of commerce, the Broad Street Corridor became a center for social and cultural activity. The area marked a crossroads between North and South Richmond and a division between Black and white neighborhoods; however, after suburban flight and the mass exodus of retailers and manufacturers post WWII, what was once a bustling part of town began to fall into various states of vacancy and disrepair.

Downtown Richmond subsequently underwent several decades of economic redevelopment thanks to the collaboration and contributions of community groups, corporate leaders, and bureaucratic agencies.

Though the area continues to develop, Downtown has seen a 70.7% residential growth rate between 1990 and 2010.

With incentives such as the Real Estate Tax Abatement Program [‘96] and the State Historic Credits Program [‘97], this strip offers many turn-of-the-century buildings with opportunity to be preserved and adapted as Richmond re-imagines the Broad Street Corridor as a flourishing Art District.
1. Legal and Justice Aid Center  
[123 E. Broad St]

2. Walter D. Moses Co.  
[219 N. 1st Street]

3. McCormick Barber Shop  
i.e Former Coca Cola Building  
[106 E. Broad Street]

4. Clay Market  
[200 E. Broad Street]

5. interior exposed and whitewashed brick

6. aluminum security grate

7. exterior brick

8. storefront window and reflection

9. polished granite exterior

10. polished chrome siding

11. passion flower vine

12. magnolia tree

13. magnolia pod at harvest

14. abandoned masonry/rustication

15. 201 Broad vacant interior
The Queen Anne building, built in 1890, was selected in part for its existing corner lot, large span of windows, and string of skylights maximizing access to natural light.

SUN STUDIES
EXISTING PLANS + SECTIONS
BUILDING ANALYSIS + PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

IBC TYPE III-A: Commercial

OCCUPANCY LOAD IBC 104.1 – Assembly Unconcentrated: 205

OCCUPANCY CLASSIFICATIONS:
R-2 [Hotel] Residential Occupancies; Assembly Group Spaces: A-2 Bar/Restaurant; A-3 Lounge & Workspace

GUEST ROOMS [R-2] [incl. 60 sq. feet bathroom]
- Single – 325 sq. feet [2]
- Residency Suite – 600 sq. feet [incl. 175 sq. ft studio + 80 sq. ft kitchenette] [3]

LOBBY [A-2]: 400 sq. feet [26]

RESTAURANT [A-2]:
- Front of House: 900 sq. feet [60]
- Wait Station: 12 sq. feet
- Loading Dock/Deliveries/staff access

PUBLIC BATHROOMS: ADA, 2 per Gender [approx 200 sq. feet each]

ADMIN OFFICES: 2-3; 125 sq feet each [2]

SALON [A3]: 800 sq. feet [53]

WORKSPACE [A3]: 1200 sq. feet [30]

Special Equipment: janitorial sinks/wash station, exposure closet, drying racks, supply storage, large tables w/ clamps and drawers, lockers

ELEVATOR: 40 sq. feet

MISC: Maintenance, Mechanics, Laundry

PRIVACY AND ACOUSTICS:
- STC Rating of 50+
- Special consideration to restaurant and 2nd floor accommodations [sound clouds] and between corridors and room accommodations;

PHYSICAL SECURITY: lighting should clearly direct guests to and from their rooms, provide sense of security, highlight emergency exits, etc.
THE ROOMS

SHARED BUNKS: [SOCIAL AND SAVVY] In swing with contemporary hotel trends, deluxe “dorm-style” lodging offers accommodations for the more budget savvy traveler. Designed with the Millennial demographic in mind, the space provides a more social atmosphere in which travelers meet, make connections, get out and explore, and return to exchange travel tips and experience.

SINGLE ROOM: [FUNCTIONAL, FAMILIAR, FANTASTICAL] The conventional hotel guest room is a microcosmic representation of the hotel itself and a home away from home. On the smaller scale, the entrance provides a secondary threshold between the public and private. Integrated and modulated furnishings allow for specialized organization and storage. The room is functional and familiar, but with an air of fantasy or luxury. An escape from the day to day and a retreat from the stresses of travel.

RESIDENCY SUITES: [A HOME AWAY FROM HOME] Larger efficiency-style suites offer a more adaptable home-base for the extended stay artist. Equipped like a premier studio loft apartment, the space includes a private workspace and kitchenette.

The Residency Program targets artists working and living in Richmond for 2-6 months. In accordance with their stay, the artist curates collaborative exhibitions and is involved with community outreach through the on-site art center.

THE FOYER

LOBBY: Upon entering the hotel, the space delivers the initial impression of the character and identity of the hotel. Outfitted with seating for corners and goers, the lobby also acts as a social crossroads for all activities taking place within the building as a whole.

RECEPTION: The reception desk is set back, so guests have a chance to assimilate from the outside environment to the interior atmosphere upon approach. This zone not only receives guests, but also acts as a division between public and private spaces.

COMMUNITY SPACE

STUDIO: [A PLACE TO WORK] This room functions as a space for hands-on demonstrations and classes in a variety of two-dimensional studio arts. For maximum flexibility, the offers essential equipment, modular and movable work surfaces, flat, storage, and lockers for ongoing classes. The Artists in Residence use this room to educate students in process and creative practice in tandem with their stay.

ART SALON: This jump space, inspired by the Parisian Art Salons of the 18th and 19th Centuries, has a parlor-like arrangement, allowing space for exhibition, discussion, readings, and informal meetings. When available, the room may be used as a casual co-working lounge for guests to plug in their laptops.

GALLERY: In lieu of a “white wall” setting, this exhibition space should allow for flexible display opportunities.

BAR/RESTAURANT: [INTIMATE AND INCLUSIVE]: A place to relax and intermingle, integrating the bar offers an alternative, more lively hub for socializing. The space should be intimate enough to encourage neighborly interactions, and inclusive enough to attract local residents. Infusing the space with local flavor further’s the brand ethos of providing insight unique to Richmond nightlife.

The finished design will encourage organic interactions between residents and visitors through a range of public spaces, including a hotel bar and restaurant, an artists workshop, and a community exhibition space. Guest accommodations will vary from shared bunks to single rooms to suites with private studios.

GROSS AREA [foot print]: [3460 sq. ft]

NET AREA [per floor]: [3063 sq. ft] 60% EFFICIENCY [per floor]: [2,076 sq. ft]
Preliminary concept work involved a range of explorations using various methods and media. The purpose was to experiment in a strategic way that would allow comparisons to better understand the design opportunities at hand.

2.5 and 3 Dimensional explorations of both literal and figurative methods of connection and how it may translate to pathways and spacial zones within the building footprint.
Multi-media graphic collage swatches represented alternative voices to the concept development.
Beginning with word associations and mind maps, the concept was refined by determining commonalities between five critical components of the project. Points of overlap became clear drivers for both process and design.

Exploring the project both verbally and visually continued to inform and solidify the heart and direction of the project.
As the diagramming process continued, it became clear that the majority of the active spaces would be pushed towards the front facade of the building, contrary to the [natural order] of the typical hotel program.

Further concept work involved a range of explorations using various methods and media. The purpose was to experiment in a strategic way that would allow comparisons to better understand the design opportunities at hand.
Without any internal physical drivers, such as a column grid, to inform the new design, the concentration turned to locating the primary staircases to both exploit and showcase the vertical circulation throughout the building.

Understanding this as a vital part of the project led to a new perspective in the approach to the footprint and case study selection.
Surrounded on three sides by the MoMA, the narrow plan is efficient through its use of corridors and stairs—not only as circulation paths, but also gallery opportunities. In spite of the limited area, much of the floor is cut out to open to above or below, creating staggered landings and allowing natural light from the skylights above to filter down and animate galleries throughout the day.  

The inconsistent flights of stairs and changing scale of open space provides a variety of routes and meandering avenues which lend to experiencing the space as a whole.

To explore the intricacies of this building and program, paths and apertures were diagrammed and allowed me to recognize that the large allocation of real estate to vertical circulation was not a burden, but rather a celebration that established a tapered design from top to bottom.
This mixed use building housed an arts and crafts shop on the street level and residential quarters on the top three levels. The narrow, 2.9 m wide [roughly 9.5 ft] site is typical of the city district⁶, yet the precise organization of the building evokes a spaciousness in spite of its footprint.

Conjoint and opposing open staircases direct the user through public, communal, and private spaces. The overlooks and double-height provided in necessity of the vertical circulation amplifies the sense of volume and access to light filtered through the front facade glazing.
The firm Roman and Williams have become one of the most highly sought after design teams in the Boutique Hotel industry since their 2007 redesign of Philippe Starck’s Royalton. In the subsequent years, they completed several hotel projects including The Standard Highline, The Ace Hotel, Freehand Chicago, Freehand Miami, and the Chicago Athletic Association, amongst others.

The Ace Hotel mini-chain, also is Portland, Oregon and Seattle, attracted attention in the way each seemed to capture the tenor of their individual cities and communities. To preserve the authenticity those establishments provided on a larger scale for Ace NY, the design firm turned away from contract furniture and instead scoured antique markets, exposed and showcased elements of the Breslin Hotel (the previous owner), and made what they couldn’t find. The end result is part spectacle and part nostalgia, with each hotel evoking the spirit of the experience, be it fantasy or comfort.  

“...The story of a space is just as important as the design and the objects that go into it; it all plays into the experience. We focus on a vernacular language, because vernacular is beyond design...”
—Robin Standefer, Roman & Williams

NOTES
LAKE|FLATO Architects also seek to understand site-specific cultural context by crafting personal connections within their design. Like many great architects before them, this firm sees the buildings upon which they work just a piece of a larger landscape, therefore responding to the physical locale. Many of the hotel projects they have been involved with have become a hybrid of indoor and outdoor spaces, including El Cosmico and Hotel San Jose.

El Cosmico, in Marfa, TX, was designed by Liz Lambert as “a Trans-Pecos kibbutz for the 21st century—part yurt and hammock hotel, part residential living, part art-house, greenhouse, amphitheatre and farmer’s market—a community space that fosters artistic and intellectual change.”

These hotel concepts in particular draw upon a nuanced shift in the industry: one that is less about a place to lay your head at night, and instead a “community-center/art studio hybrid.”

NOTES
The Waldorf Hotel in Vancouver, BC also departed from the traditional hotel concept and instead developed into a multi-venue performance art and community space with the hotel aspect integrated as a secondary part of the experience.

Conceived and run by artists as “social sculpture”, the 2010 renovation of the mid-century hotel aimed to maintain the history and atmosphere of the original space, but create an urban hub for contemporary art, music, food, and culture.

The end-result was an environment so lively that it no longer appealed to the conventional traveller, but turned into an extended-stay hotel with some rooms turned into a tattoo parlor, gallery space, artist and recording studios, and party space.

Through the kitsch of the tiki and atomic themes throughout, there remains a sense of validity that cannot be reproduced as a duplicated business model. The project is like a “living organism that is moving and changing all the time..." and is developed through creative relationships and the artistic endeavors that take place within the walls.

NOTES
The Visual Arts Center reopened their doors in 2007 after an extensive renovation led by architect firm 3 North. Largely modeled on the Lill Street Art Center in Chicago, the center holds fifteen working studios, with an additional seven private spaces for Artists in Residence. These private studios are small 120 sq. ft stalls left unfurnished for personal customization.

Each working studio holds classes of about 12 people, and runs the gamut from printmaking to painting to metal work, woods hop, and ceramics. The special equipment required for each medium or discipline causes special attention to safety and ventilation concerns; however, when possible, the furnishings are modular, collapsible and/or portable to provide maximum flexibility in each space.

Expanding on the teaching program, the VisArt Center’s approach to Gallery vs Exhibition is more about process and how the artwork displayed relates to the studios and the work within them. Many exhibits display the tools used to create the pieces and encourage users to touch and handle the instruments.

Thank You to Jordan Brown of the Visual Arts Center for the interview and tour!
1. Hand painted wood panels at 2016 Richmond Street Art Festival

2. Mixed media collage [at casual_thinker]

3. Unknown Artist painting at Artworks RVA

4. Custom wood and steel benches [at dunnypurdygood]

5. Vinnie Gonzales' studio at Richmond's Planet Zero

6. Metal and pearl curtain hooks in gallery at Visual Art Center of Richmond

7. Art-in-place sculpture and mural at 2016 Richmond Street Art Festival by Dennis Mcnett [at wolfbat]

8. Photo booth stage at Studio Two Three

9. Embossing samples from Studio Two Three

10. Screen print by Partridge Textile [at partridge.printandtextile]

11. Screen print by Thomas Dean [at lostwoodsprint]

12. Artworks studio/gallery suite. Artist Unknown
Inspired by classic and retro wallpapers, I designed two patterns for potential wall treatments. The first, influenced by Beverly Hills Palm Martinique motif, I played with exaggerating color and scale of the Magnolia tree (both indigenous and symbolic) in a vintage reproduction fashion.

Also harking to the atomic/tiki era of 1950s wallpaper, I adapted a pattern board displayed at the VMFA as a base for a more lively design, along giving a nod to the original inhabitants of the area.

Influenced by the geometries detailed on the front facade of the building, I mocked up ironwork or steel details to be used for hand railings, the elevator cage, and specialty windows throughout the interior.
Throughout the design development process, several iterations of schematics shuffled the space planning of the project. The pivotal moment of progress was centering the heart of the project—the studio/workshop—to the heart of the building, and then shifting and residency suites accordingly.

Moving the restaurant to the basement and the workshop to street level also allowed for natural light in the studio and an acoustic buffer to the now more speak-easy restaurant environment.
10-15 abstract concept statements:

- take three personal drivers:
- leads inspiring about the place (i.e. meaning)

**Design Pointers**

**Line**
- Integrity vs. integrity: maximum

**Form**
- natural

**Shape**
- curve

**Volume**
- transparency vs. decoro: boundaries

**Opacity**
- high contrast / neutrality in materials w/ color

**Color**
- how to transition between two disparate notions

**Harmony**
- how vs. hard: balanced

**Unity**
- visual support as men and women:

**Texture**
- the word last junctions, actually happening
- patterns of regular continuum
- how visual motion

**Balance**
- rhythm

**Scale**
- reduce back

**Propotion**
- new

**Variety**
- program

**Density**
- waviness

**Hierarchy**
- ups and downs

**Pattern**
- categories against Robert Luek

**Mood**
- feel

**Vibe**
- support as men and women

- Liquid vs. nature: liquid against concrete:
- clear, clean

- Emerson:
  - The whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind.
  - Transcendentalism.

*DO NOT READ TOO FAR INTO THIS METAPHOR.*

- There are two separate ideas that one going on here.
- Which speaks to the hospitality (down) space which speaks to the "up" i.e. high energy
- Where does this lead?
The flourish articulated in section begins as a canopied projection screen in the dining seating of the restaurant and continues through floor cut outs in an evolving form of metal and glass and then plaster embellishments.
While each space calls for specific atmospheric requirements, overall, the interiors are overtly saturated and eclectic. I theorize that in response to the exhausted feel of “refined industrial” spaces, there will be a resurgence in maximalism. I believe that this “Art Nouveau Redux” stylistic trend is also reflected in the revival of psychedelics in research and psychiatry, and will be well suited in an atmosphere dedicated to the arts.
The color palettes are loosely based on local city and landscapes, and derivative of common Virginia building materials, such as Virginia slate, timber and clay. Graphic inspiration incorporates an exaggerated color scheme and contemporary driver for the overall appearance of the spaces.
RESTAURANT DINING
All spaces will maintain a balance of old and new, showcasing some of the details of the existing building and overlaying in others. The restaurant will be warm and intimate; the rooms predominately cooler with some contrasting accent colors, and the studio and workshop pared down, whiter, and brighter.
section model built at 3/32"
PER|SPEKTIV(z)
A SPACE ODYSSEY

INTERIOR DESIGN I MFA SHOW

AT THE DEPOT APRIL 25TH - MAY 15TH 2016

OPENING RECEPTION:
4.29.2016 6-9PM
THANK YOU!
what a ride!
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congratulations to my studio mates and the graduate class of 2016!
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