PENDER HOUSE: A CONVERSION AND ADDITION TO AN EXISTING BUILDING, A STUDENT RESIDENCE, IN DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER

by

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ABSTRACT

In the pursuit of originality, some interventions consciously stand in opposition to the existing. The approach I've taken is more holistic; rather than pursue the novelty of the moment, I've taken the stance that creativity in art and architecture is part of a continuum. With that in mind, I've attempted in this project to make this evolution apparent by bridging the existing to the new without reverting to historical mimicking. My design is not a heritage preservation project. I wanted to take what exists, re-think it, and build upon it.

My proposal is for a downtown student residence for both individuals and families. It would take advantage of new developments in the area such as the new S.F.U. conference center, the new B.C.I.T. complex, and other institutions already in place such as the S.F.U. at Harbor Center, and the Vancouver Community College. This student residence would be an inter-university residence, accepting students from all of these educational institutions as well as U.B.C. and Emily Carr. Its aim would be to establish greater social and academic links between the city's post-secondary educational institutes. This project feeds on what has already started to happen in the area and can re-introduce a residential population to the city core, generating new life and new activity which in turn will contribute significantly to the wealth of the urban fabric. In short, one can imagine the formation of a lively downtown university quarter. My proposed residence would be one seed sown in this larger vision.

Besides feeling that I felt the project should be a dense urban scheme, it appeared imperative to me that my design foster a real sense of belonging, permitting the development of a small community within a community. In addition to public commercial space, the new program demanded realms of privacy, and more importantly a core, or center, around which a community could begin to form. From this organizational idea of a core the design started to take shape. The existing building opened up in the rear toward a court. A lane intersected it providing access and making it a space that could be both place and pathway for activity. The program turned towards this space marking it as the center, and animating it with the activity of daily life.

The existing urban aesthetic informed my design language. Urban context is characterized by wall as a dominant element, tall vertical spaces, steel stairs and railing, hanging wires, and a strong demarcation between front, sides and rear accentuated by a change of brick at the corners. All these elements were to some degree absorbed, assimilated and reinterpreted in the work.

The relationship of 'part to whole' became an important part of the process. Likewise, terminology in how I started to speak and think about the project. Words like old vs. new stopped being used as they aggravate the dichotomy between the parts. An effort was made not to mimic the existing building which would have produce a neo-historic building, this was not my goal. An effort was made not to objectify the existing building, rendering it a precious object. Nor did I deliberately attempt to contrast it, this would be counter-productive to the concept of the whole. Contrast aggravates the gap between then and now, disavowing integration and synthesis.

My approach was rather one of complementing and complicity. Complicity is an interesting concept because it implies that two or more parties or parts come together toward a common goal, It also implies a dialogue. This is very different from contrast, for example, that is unidirectional. A dialogue receives and gives, and both parts form and are informed.
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Student Residence
A Downtown
Pender House in context
Context model showing W.Pender St. looking south

Passage
between existing building
and proposed addition (Close-up)

Pender House
Model showing W.Pender St. looking south
Rear of Pender House
looking northwest

Rear of Pender House in context
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Pender House in context
Context model showing lane looking North
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Detail view of court staircase