ABSTRACT

With a special focus on experience in place, this project is seen to embody an alternative to the standard hotel experience of business travel and accommodation. The building is a small hotel for business serving the Vancouver public and visitors. It provides four major services: meeting and office space, hotel accommodation, a street-front restaurant and bar, and computer services.

The site is located on the South-West corner of Haro Street and Thurlow Street on the rise of the gentle hill which defines the West End of Downtown. A portion of the site is occupied by an existing and fairly typical brick-faced three-storey walk-up designed in 1927, the St. Margaret. The re-use of this ordinary building is significant in that it demonstrates the potential of buildings which are not specifically historical to inspire a reinhabitation. The depth of experience is largely related to the reuse of this building and the particularities of site and orientation. Three main goals created a framework for decision making throughout design. 1. Depth of experience, 2. Simplicity of environmental strategy, and 3. Economy of means.

The connection between the old building and the new tower structure is focussed on a double-height clearing on the ground floor encompassing the restaurant and bar. This is bordered by intermediary and more finely scaled spaces providing a thoughtful buffering to site and orientation which goes beyond simple programming.

The apartments of the existing building have been valued for their aspect and quality, opened spatially according to the demands of their new use as dining and meeting spaces. They permit, through finishing, the discovery of their history through subtle marking and traces of previous use. These rooms have a scale and character distinct from the typical black-box of hotel meeting rooms. Linking these floors to the new portion of the hotel is the computer services facility. The connection allows for access to various outside terraces including the roof of the St. Margaret.

The design of the suites explores an alternative to the normalization of regular hotel design which tends to deny a total embodied experience. The suites are organized four per floor on a single loaded corridor. The tower is oriented South-East for better year-round performance through common sense passive strategy for natural light and ventilation. The rooms are defined as a series of zones from North-West to South-East: the hall, the adjacent workspace, a sleeping space, a living space and a naturally ventilated bathroom brought to the periphery. This layering provides enriched thermal and social variation and potential. The primary exposures, for
example, due to their orientation suggested close relationships between thermal quality and use. The living space and washroom take advantage of the South-Eastern warmth, light and view. The cooler North-Western exposure on the other hand encompasses the hall and work spaces allowing for thermal distinction from the more cozy environment of the room. The sleeping area is defined by the nook created between these two zones. The private retreat of the room is complimented through design by the potential for informal meeting in the halls and collaborative extension of the workspace.

In arriving at this end the process of design interwove ideas of environmental response and experience with the aim of inspiring value in place through a variety of meeting spaces and the creation of a unique hotel environment. Environmental guidelines are woven into architectural intentionality based in experience with a view towards longevity. As such they are linked together and not left as unitary concerns. The hope being to demonstrate the necessary potential of environmental considerations in architecture to proceed with design issues as a matter of course and not as a special issue.
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