FROM CONTINUITY TO CONTRAST: DIVERSE APPROACHES TO DESIGN IN HISTORIC CONTEXTS

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Abstract. In the United States, the often inherent conflict between compatibility and differentiation when dealing with new design in historic contexts is embodied in Standard 9 of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

The National Park Service policy on new additions, adopted in 1967, is an outgrowth and continuation of a general philosophical approach to change first expressed by John Ruskin in England in the 1850s, formalized by William Morris in the founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877, expanded by the Society in 1924 and, finally, reiterated in the 1964 Venice Charter – a document that continues to be followed by sixty-four national committees of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). The 1967 Administrative Policies for Historical Areas of the National Park System thus states, "...a modern addition should be readily distinguishable from the older work; however, the new work should be harmonious with the old in scale, proportion, materials, and color. Such additions should be as inconspicuous as possible from the public view." Similarly, Standard 9 of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation from 1977 states the following:

New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

Three decades after the drafting of the Standards, the issue of how to intervene within historic settings remains a subject of intense debate in the profession. Interpretation of the Standards by preservation authorities and practicing architects alike has been varied and, at times, contradictory. My research as the 2011 Richard Morris Hunt Fellow will explore the range of viewpoints in France on the design of additions and new construction in historic contexts, and this paper will present projects showing a variety of attitudes toward the pre-existing context, from stylistic continuity to striking contrast. The projects—representing leading preservation architects—will illustrate diverse methodologies, approaches and degrees to which architects and preservation professionals either conform to or challenge the issue of compatibility vs. differentiation.

Preservation questions are almost always regional or local in nature, since they require judgments about historic character rather than universal or abstract forms. By exploring diverse approaches to this issue, it is possible to acquire a new perspective on how this seeming contradiction might be resolved in practice both in the United States and abroad. In addition, the most pressing issue in urbanism today is sustainability, and the re-compaction and re-urbanization of our existing cities will inevitably be part of our response. The interface between historic environments and new construction then becomes a crucial issue for architects and preservation professionals committed to a sustainable future.
Case Study No. 1

Centennial Bank / Paul Peck Alumni Center
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Voith & Mactavish Architects LLP
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Centennial Bank Building was designed by the noted Philadelphia architect Frank Furness in 1876, and opened at the tail end of the Centennial Exhibition held that year in nearby West Fairmount Park. It received a small, matching addition by Frank Miles Day in 1899, and a utilitarian, two-story “blockhouse” addition in the 1920s. Today, it is part of the Drexel University campus, prominently featured along the 32nd Street pedestrian walkway. Voith & Mactavish Architects designed the rehabilitation of this landmark structure and doubled its program area with a complementary two-story addition to create a new home for the alumni and development office, now called the Paul Peck Alumni Center.

With its 35 foot high ceiling and refined finishes, the original Furness structure is by design a public space and well-suited for ceremonial applications. The architect rehabilitated the historic banking room and carefully converted it into a fully networked conference, lecture, and reception room with custom finishes, lighting fixtures, and furnishings. It now includes a large, custom designed wooden screen that encloses a storage closet in the conference room and conceals a projection screen and whiteboard behind two large paneled doors. New custom tables and chairs accommodate board meetings or roll away into the closet when the space is used for public events. The original, top–lit Furness office space and gallery spaces to serve as formal reception rooms.

The design resolution incorporates a new glass entry at grade level, facing back to the heart of the main campus. This new entry provides a single point of entry to both the public gathering spaces, the offices, and shared restrooms, all controlled at a single entry point. A two-story, masonry addition houses the office space for the Alumni Relations Department and the elevator servicing the entire building. The next century of use for this building will be facilitated by not only current state-of-the-art technology, such as built in telecommunications and presentation capabilities, but also by substantial unused chase space to accommodate future upgrades. A centralized computer-controlled mechanical system and a discrete smoke detection and fire protection system minimize intrusion into the historic space.

The design approach used for the rehabilitation of and addition to the Centennial Bank is based on the firm’s philosophy of “innovation with a context of tradition.” Frank Miles Day helped to establish the tone with his one bay addition, which replicated Furness’ original, with only the slightest change in details. The main portion of the VMA addition maintained the same vocabulary of the original – bluestone base, wood windows with brownstone lintels, and the two-toned and corbelled brick walls. The addition is readily distinguishable from the original, however, with planar projections that are not as robust and changes in the brick patterns which identify it as being of a different period.

The new entry pavilion, however, was intended to be more distinct, so that it would clearly express that it was the modern entrance to the building, as opposed to the original entrance on the street corner. This new entry faces the campus center, providing a strong connection to the heart of the university while addressing accessibility needs in a simple and effective manner. Made of metal and glass, it is more open and welcoming, showing its presence at night.

The interior continues to clearly express the history of the building, re-revealing decorative brick and a spectacular painted ceiling in the main hall. While most original trim and finishes had previously been removed, several remaining units and ghost markings for others allowed for a creative reinterpretation of what was originally there in a stained oak (as opposed to the original chestnut), without truly replicating the original. Technology was fully and discretely incorporated allowing it to be used but then concealed.

The overall goal for the project was to select materials and finishes that all felt comfortable together with the original, yet would be recognized as new by the informed visitor. Fully taking advantage of modern construction techniques, products, and technologies, while reveling in its attention to scale, craft, and beauty, it seeks to create an architecture that is simultaneously respectful, timeless, and modern.

Case Study No. 2

Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego
La Jolla, California

Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

From Continuity to Contrast: Diverse Approaches to Design in Historic Contexts

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
From Continuity to Contrast: Diverse Approaches to Design in Historic Contexts

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in association with David Singer Architect

In the early 20th century, architect Irving Gill designed a series of buildings in the La Jolla area of San Diego. This precinct included the buildings that would house the La Jolla Woman’s Club, St. James by the Sea Episcopal Church, the La Jolla Recreation Center, the La Jolla Historical Society in Wisteria Cottage, and a 1916 villa for Ellen Browning Scripps -- philanthropist and Gill’s patron.

The Scripps House, like many of Gill’s structures, was defined by its flat roofs, white concrete walls, archways, and cubic forms. In 1939, the building was purchased by an artists’ collaborative. The Art Center in La Jolla evolved through several names and missions until becoming the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. The building evolved as well: the original house was covered over by additions and alterations through the 1960s and 1970s, including an arcade across the front.

VSBA, in association with David Singer, renovated and expanded the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. VSBA’s work involved strategic interventions to make the complex more compatible with the Gill precinct, thereby creating a more effective presence for the Museum. While retaining most of the facility’s accumulation of additions, they removed the 1970s arcade to reveal and restore the original Scripps House and pergola. They then created a new architectural layer across the front of the façade -- housing a new lobby, café, and shop -- compatible with the aesthetic of the neighboring Irving Gill buildings. They also introduced a new entry pergola as a civic gesture, differentiated from Gill’s residential arbors by the generous scale of columns and the metal trellising. On the side facing the ocean, they retained and enhanced an historic garden with stone terracing, with modifications to enhance accessibility. The vine-covered pergolas of the original garden were reconstructed to form a new entrance court.

The Museum’s size and collection are impressive, but its scale feels intimate. Stylistically, the work reflects the color, proportions, and forms of Gill’s designs. The addition has plain stucco walls with arched windows analogously similar in scale and color to Gill’s facades, especially those of the Women’s Club building across the street, but differentiated through the use of aluminum window systems and the expression of the walls as planar elements. Overall, the work ties together the whole of the front façade to enhance the Museum’s identity and promote its civic nature while connecting to Gill’s other designs throughout the precinct. Inside, a new central lobby surmounted by a star-shaped clerestory serves as a kind of courtyard, providing access to a bookstore, the auditorium, and galleries. It is also used as a banquet hall for special gala events. The architect redesigned and expanded the existing Coast Room to be used for meetings, events, and educational activities. The renovations also created a larger library and reading / conference room. The garden was enhanced with additional wheelchair-accessible paths and ramps, while significant plants and vistas were preserved. In addition, Sherwood Auditorium was given a new entrance, refurbished seats and finishes, critically needed repairs, and new lighting and other systems.

A second phase of the project was to include a new gallery and art storage addition at the northwest corner of the site. Exhibition space would include four new galleries as well as smaller intermediary spaces to provide “intermissions” between the main galleries -- views to the ocean, window seats, and access to paved terraces overlooking the beautiful garden below.

Case Study No. 3

University of Pennsylvania Music Building
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Ann Beha Architects
Boston, Massachusetts

The Music Building is located in the heart of the University of Pennsylvania’s historic district and is listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The original building, along with the adjacent Morgan Building, was designed in the Italianate style, clad in brick and terra cotta, with a slate roof, wood windows, and deep overhangs with painted wood brackets. The two buildings were designed together in 1890 by Cope & Stewardson as an orphanage on an urban site that is now part of a setting of campus paths and academic buildings. Later converted into physics labs for the University, the Music Building has never been well-suited for music instruction or performance, and a century of deterioration had dulled the exterior of the historic building. The rehabilitation and expansion project paired the careful restoration and renovation of the late 19th century landmark with a comparably sized addition--housing the most acoustically sensitive programs--to provide the Department with a complete and integrated setting for events, faculty and students.
The intention, from the outset of design, was to create a single building that establishes a dialogue between historic and contemporary architecture. This project restores the Music Building exterior, rebuilding original window sashes; cleaning and repairing decorative brick, terra cotta and bluestone masonry; and restoring the ornamental wood roof brackets and overhangs. The restoration resulted in a vibrantly colored structure that represents the original Architects’ design intent, and relates to the colored brick and terra cotta facades of the adjacent campus buildings, such as Frank Furness’ Fisher Fine Arts Library. The interior was renovated and upgraded structurally, mechanically, and acoustically, to accommodate administrative and faculty offices.

Analysis of the existing building and facades established the conceptual framework for the design of the addition. Drawing on the materials of the existing building, the expansion introduces a similarly colored terra cotta rain screen system, generous expanses of glass with horizontal sun shades, and a metal cornice corresponding to the broad roof overhang. While the addition is sympathetic to the existing building in its massing, materiality, and rhythms, it contrasts the existing building’s traditional solidity with lightness and transparency; and as the pedestrian moves from 34th Street into the interior of the site, the openness of the addition increases. Now, music making is seen as well as heard, and the Department’s activities are visible to the entire University community.

The addition also acknowledges new patterns of campus circulation, offering dynamic facades and new landscapes on all sides. The site design creates a new campus walkway with an outdoor terrace connecting the Engineering Green to 34th Street. This terrace and new Campus Green extend the University’s landscape tradition, linking to the historic pedestrian core of the campus and providing communal green space shared by the Music and Morgan Buildings.

This project integrates multiple sustainable design elements and is the first LEED Gold building on the historic campus. The project exceeds energy standards with efficient lighting and controls, mechanical, and plumbing systems. Other sustainable features include passive stormwater management techniques; reduced site water use with planting material selection and “smart” controls that adjust irrigation based on rainfall levels; recycling or salvaging 95% of construction waste; use of recycled and regionally produced construction materials; Greenguard labeled furnishings; and “green” housekeeping methods and cleaning products. As a new model for the re-use of historic buildings, this project demonstrates that preservation, new design, and program can together produce a sustainable result.

Case Study No. 4
Melvin J. and Claire Levine Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
KieranTimberlake
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Levine Hall is a computer science research facility that houses laboratories for robotics and computer science, faculty and departmental offices, conference rooms, an auditorium and a cyber café. The building forms a quadrangle, a new front door and central gathering place for the School of Engineering and Applied Science. It makes a significant contribution to the university’s urban design intentions to develop an outwardly focused campus of gateways; an invitation to the academic and urban communities in which the university activities are made literally transparent.

The building responds to existing site conditions and context, while establishing a forward-looking character for the School of Engineering. The footprint and massing respond to adjacent buildings, with particular attention to scale and fenestration. Levine Hall is articulated as a glazed pavilion, presenting luminous, transparent facades at the end of Chancellor Walk and within the courtyard. This strategy allows daylight to be maximized on a dense, urban site, while creating visual connections between the life of the campus and life within the building. The facades are constructed using ventilated curtain wall technology in a composition of transparent and translucent glass. While the technology is new, proportions were determined using mathematical ratios following the golden section.

Levine Hall is intended to provide long-term flexibility in the use and arrangement of space. The building contains six floors and can accommodate a seventh floor. The first floor is intended as a place of arrival and orientation. Chancellor Walk leads directly to a double-height lobby with views through to the courtyard beyond. A tiered state-of-the-art auditorium is located immediately to the south. The upper floors are loft-like in character with largely exposed structural and mechanical systems. The departmental office is located at the third floor. An open stairway provides access from the first floor to the second and third floors, thereby linking the departmental office to the lobby. At the third and fourth floors, corridors...
connecting Towne and GRW run along the eastern facade of the building, allowing views from the interior out to Chancellor Walk while activating the facade with views of people within. This arrangement maximizes the open area on each floor and separates “through circulation” from private spaces. Faculty offices are located at the perimeter of the building to the east, west and south with abundant natural light and views. Floor lounges with views of the courtyard are provided throughout the building, allowing places of meeting and orientation at each floor level.

The principal facades are highly energy-efficient curtain walls; the first active wall of its type in North America. This innovative, triple-glazed wall features a return-air system which ventilates an inner cavity, extracting solar heat gain for use in various forms of heat exchange systems to offset heating and cooling loads. The inner glass unit is a heat barrier featuring fully adjustable blinds, allowing for full shading or visibility. Since return air is at room temperature, the internal glass unit surface temperature is within 1-2 degrees of room temperature. This eliminates surface radiation effects and improves occupant comfort. The use of ventilated curtain wall technology allows the use of large expanses of glazed exterior wall surfaces providing abundant natural light and views, while providing interior comfort, minimizing energy consumption and meeting stringent new energy codes.
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Street Elevation © Julie Marquart for VSBA

Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego
Garden Elevation © Julie Marquart for VSBA

Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego
Arcade Café © Timothy Hursley for VSBA

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University of Pennsylvania Music Building
Exterior View
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University of Pennsylvania Music Building
Exterior View
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Interior View
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Melvin J. and Claire Levine Hall
Exterior View
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Detail
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LE PATRIMOINE, MOTEUR DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
HERITAGE, DRIVER OF DEVELOPMENT

Theme 2
Session 3