

Two Projects

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Sitings: Five Reflections on Architectural Domain, 1994–present

Premise

The eroding quality of our built and unbuilt landscape has become a familiar topic of the popular media as well as a concern of architects, planners and other critics of contemporary culture. Perceived examples of our environmental demise are close at hand. In city centers, the historic fabric of blocks, streets, and squares is being replaced with new construction that diminishes the diversity of scale by occupying entire blocks. Once vital streets are being stripped of their vitality with urbanized shopping malls. In the suburbs, we lament the loss of the American Dream as “close-in” buildable land becomes more difficult to find and new anonymous housing tracts, office parks, and “mini-malls” extend further into the rural landscape. Our traditional agrarian lands are being consumed by the continuing decentralization of the city, and what land we have that remains undeveloped has become a battle ground for preservationists and diverse commercial interests. Efforts to counter these forces have been led by preservation and protectionist groups whose motivations are commendable, but whose techniques and ultimate goals foster a fear of change and growth. Conversely, current ideas of growth management are based on an equally inappropriate paradigm of a romantic, idealized pre-industrial past or a utopian digital future.

The accepted role of architecture in our culture supports the attitude that buildings are simply commodities to which random values can be attached to serve personal, aesthetic, economic, or political gain. This is a limited definition of architecture, one that prohibits the built environment from responding to a much richer set of experiential concerns. This project proposes that the realm of architecture be made more exclusive in its consideration and expression so that it may re-establish a sense of domain in our environment. It is important to reduce the scope of the concerns of architecture, not in a search for essence or beginnings but to establish a new ground for expanding explorations of the built act.

Proposal

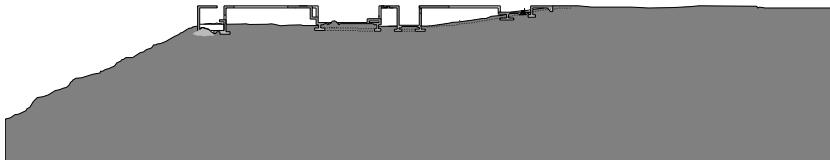
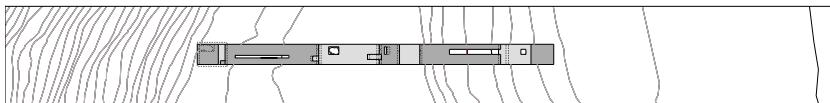
This proposed architectural project consists of small buildings designed and built for five different sites in the Pacific Northwest. These five sites have very distinct characteristics reflecting the quality of the built or un-built environment in which they are located. The five proposed sites are as follows: the high desert (the Columbia River), in forestlands (the foothills of the Coast Range), on agricultural land (a farm in the Yamhill Valley), a suburban site (public



A Forest Site, Sunset Wayside/Tillamook Burn



A Rural Site, An Intersection of Varied Farmlands



A Desert Site, section through completed project, Maryhill Museum of Art



"Experiential aperture," Maryhill Museum of Art, photo Sally Schoolmaster

space in a suburban community), and an urban site (a vertical location, such as a rooftop, in downtown Portland, Oregon).

The Sitings Project proposes to investigate architecture as a particular endeavor that produces buildings whose meaning is not assignable to, or defined by, other cultural media. The five projects will be considered as reflections on a location, architectural analysis of distinct places with unique opportunities for a built response. The design and drawing process will be critical to the project, but these locations will be made specific by the execution of the built work. The act of building on a site can and will heighten the sense of tension between the built and the unbuilt landscape, the individual, the collective, and the cosmos. These projects attempt to avoid summary notation or narrative metaphor of landscape shapes or characteristics. They are open frameworks of perception that are intended to require motion and participation to complete.

The Projects

*A Forest Site, Sunset Wayside/Tillamook Burn
Coast Range Mountains, Oregon*

The built response to the forest site is generated from the perception of the infinite field of randomly structured space that a mature forest represents. This sense of the infinite is brought into tension by the impossible reference of a built boundary, an occupiable edge. This frame wall is broken as it moves across the landscape with the topography, allowing the occupant to shift sides and experience varied measured spaces within the built path. The entire sequence is elevated to protect the forest floor from pedestrian erosion and to provide the experience of moving up and through the forest canopy. The termination of the path is a small enclosure where the walk is connected back to the earth, following the vertical flow of the collected rainwater.

*A Rural Site, an Intersection of Varied Farmlands
Yamhill County, Oregon*

This project explores the space of the "worked domain," the constructed space of the landscape emerging from the depth of the tilled soil of the hay field, through the trimmed height of the Italian Prune orchard and beyond to the third-growth stand of Douglas Fir trees. The occupant moves on and through a series of platforms, each establishing a ground, then denying it with a "new ground," or new sense of where the built and un built distinguish themselves. The building extends into the earth, the earth is elevated into the sky, and the dimensional cross section of the space between is in constant change. The project is specifically located at the geometric intersection of these fields to



Completed Sitings project at Maryhill Museum of Art, photo Sally Schoolmaster

emphasis the seemingly arbitrary nature of mathematical divisions in this violently reconstructed landscape.

*A Desert Site, The Klickitat Hills, Maryhill Museum of Art
Goldendale, Washington*

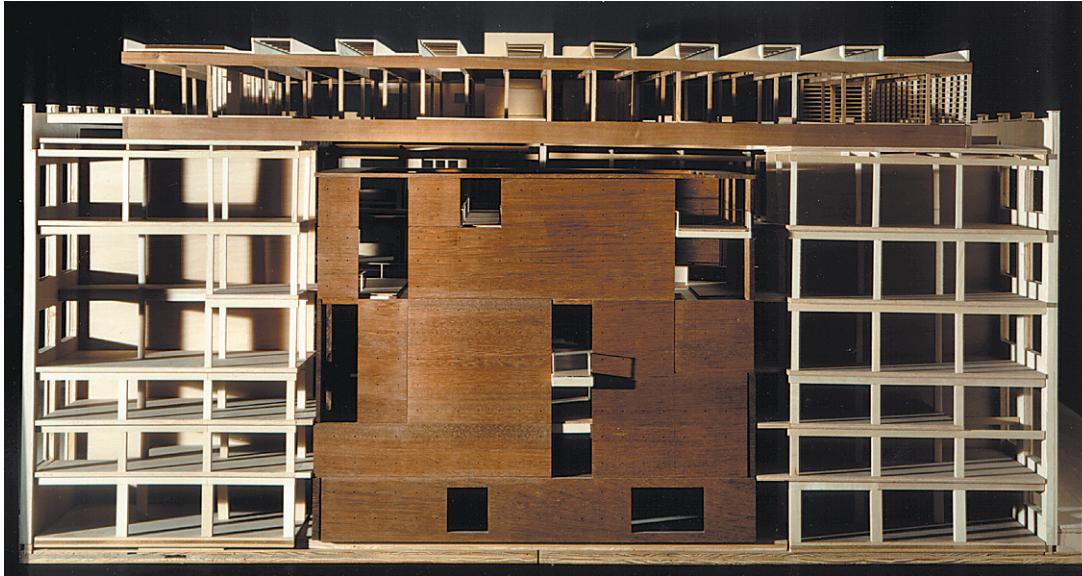
Constructed on a bluff above the Columbia River Gorge, this is the first completed Sitings project. This built response to the landscape investigates the enormity of the earth surface in this location and the perceptual impossibility of boundary. Rather than attempt to specifically control and scale space, the project marks the landscape with an “experiential aperture.” The project is constructed from a single concrete slab, 8 inches thick and 8 feet wide. The plane emerges from the earth and moves across the landscape for 150 feet, enfolding eight volumes that open and close to the sky through nine horizontal and eight vertical planes. These various surfaces are marked with openings that serve to establish specific references in the surrounding landscape. Approached from above the construction is a broken solid emerging from the earth. As one moves about the site, the building dissolves and reforms in response to the quality of light, changing point of view and the nearness of experience.



Photo Sally Schoolmaster



Photo Sally Schoolmaster



Integrated concrete room serves as seismic reinforcement

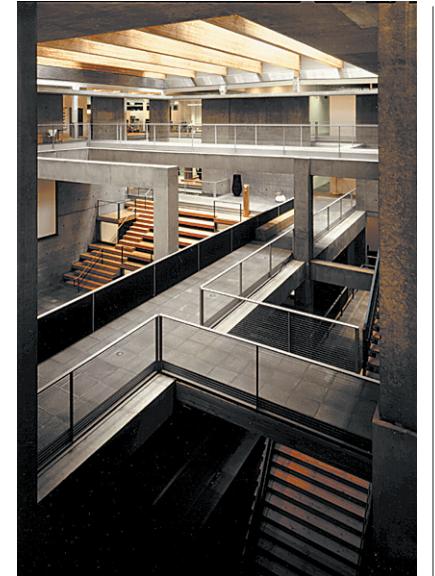


Photo Sally Schoolmaster

Wieden + Kennedy Building Portland, Oregon 1996–2000

Advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy chose an historic warehouse (1914) in Portland's Pearl District for their new global headquarters. The National Historic Registry building required substantial renovation, repair, and seismic upgrading. The project required two new buildings be created: a central collective space and a penthouse. The collective space is a concrete room that in its structure serves as the seismic reinforcement for the existing heavy timber warehouse shell. This space also houses the building functions that require larger span volumes, such as a screening room, auditorium, and gymnasium. The penthouse closes the opening created for the new central space with two opposing layers of long span glu-lam beams.

The Urban Conception: A Building Turned Inside Out

Portland is comprised of small urban blocks that are 200 by 200 feet. This small size provides a tension in the figure/ground with a near equality of built and un-built space. The existing building had no courtyard or internal openings of any kind, requiring one of the initial acts of building to be that of demolition. Space needed to be created for various collective spaces to accommodate up to 500 people for meeting and performance. In an attempt to clearly juxtapose the new construction from the historic building, the required programmatic and structural improvements were concentrated in this new void.

A Concrete House of Cards

The substantial seismic re-enforcing required large solid surfaces of concrete. The extent of those solid surfaces conflicted with the need for natural light in the new workspaces. This conflict created a wonderful tension between the qualities of solidity and porosity. In the resulting solution, the concrete box was conceived as a series of shifting seismic plates, 8 inches thick at the top to 17 inches thick at the base. The density and thickness of these plates reflect the accumulation of seismic forces throughout the structure, with their specific dimension and location determined by the need for natural light. The oculus at the top of the room unifies the most tenuous structural plates and creates a sense of closure to this essentially transparent concrete room.

Reconnecting the Floor Plates

With the void filled and recreated by the seismic box, the building functions required reconnection across the new space. To occupy this empty room, a series of transfer beams were created, spinning off of two central concrete columns. The floor plates were then woven through this new lineal structure, each level distinct from the other, creating a series of apertures that filter the natural light from the opening above.

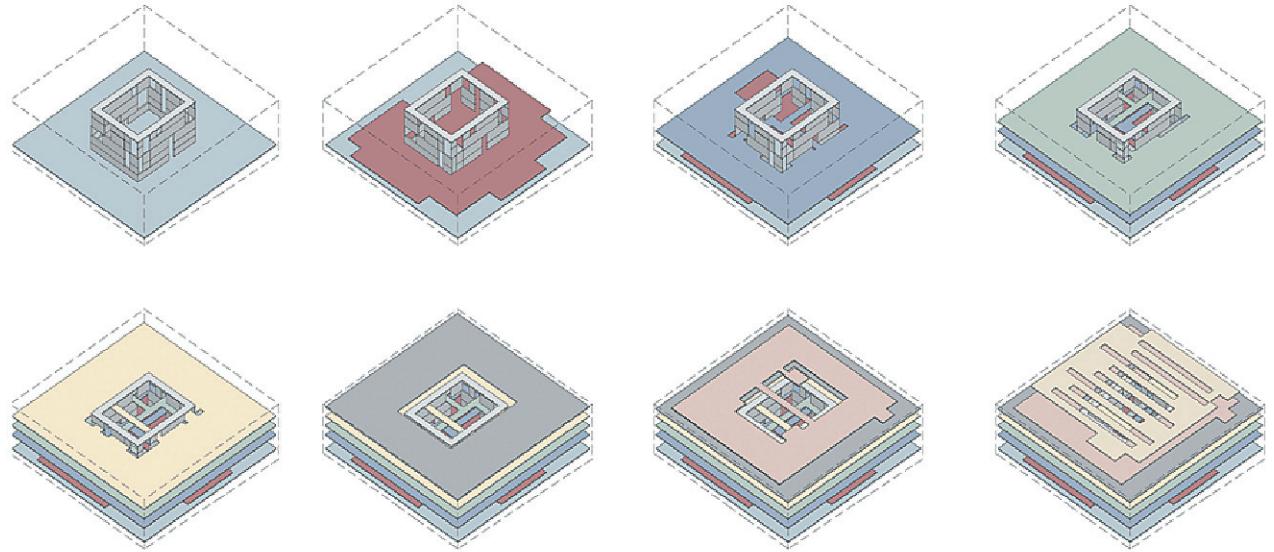


Diagram of shifted concrete floor plates

A Structural Light Louver

Closing the central volume required a clear span structure of 100 feet. This was accomplished with a series of glu-lam beams at 8-foot centers at the existing roof level. Rising vertically through the masonry and concrete shells of the building below, at the penthouse the space moves horizontally to the city. A random field of timber columns resting on the long span beams, which transfer loads from the perpendicular roof beams above, creates this new horizontal and transparent context.

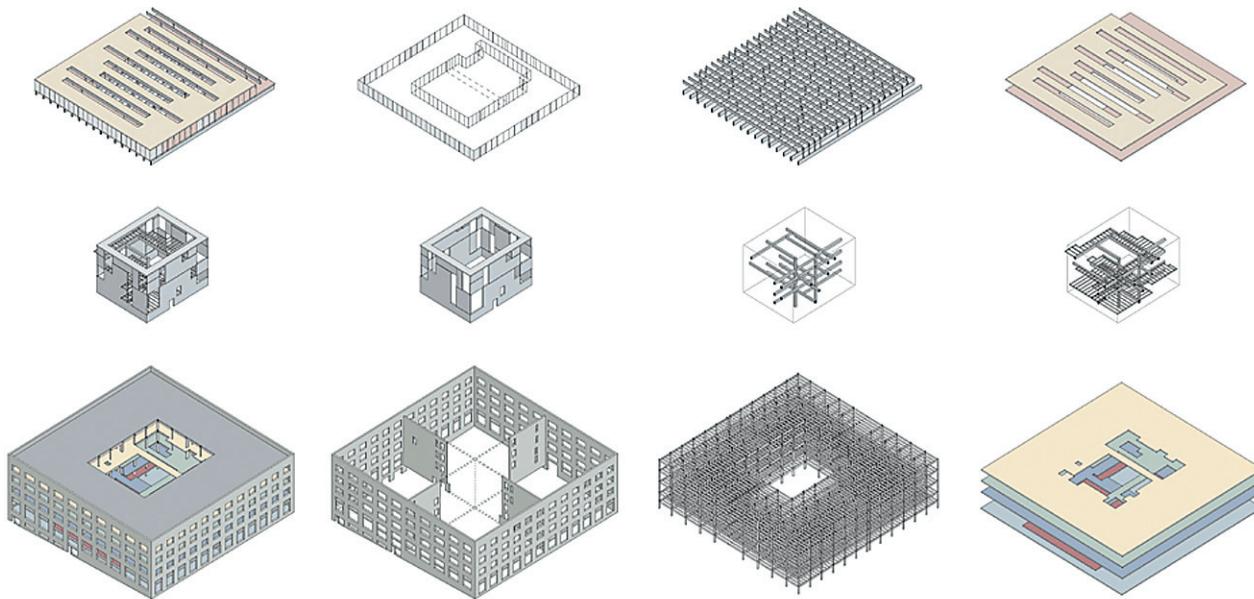
Incompletion

This building is primarily a tectonic investigation of new concrete shear walls against the existing timber columnar field. The long-span, post-and-transfer-beam penthouse was conceived to enclose the space and to filter sunlight. The building was developed in plan, floor by floor in an additive (binary process), simultaneously studied in section and model. There were few perspectives generated and those were primarily for client presentations, not design investigation.

This design process creates distinct gaps in the description and conception



View of centralized concrete shell, photo Sally Schoolmaster



Integration of concrete box into the seismic void



Photo Sally Schoolmaster

of this building. There are intervals of perception between intention, construction, and occupation. It is in these gaps between plan and section that joints are created. These joints are both spatial and technical. They contradict and reiterate the architectural dialogue at an ever-diminishing scale, each time reinvigorating the building with a new perspective.

The drawings for this building do not represent the building. In fact, it is very difficult to understand how the building looks from the drawings. The design and construction drawings were never intended to describe the perception of the project, show its shape, or attempt to explain how one might experience it. This building was formed by making a clearing and filling it with a new void, by taking apart and weaving together again. The architecture in this project is found in the intervals, between conception and construction, between drawing and building, between plan and section. It is this disjunction that allows for human occupation, movement, and experience. It is the incompleteness of the description that allows for the building to exist.