Nicholas Grimshaw & Partners LTD.

The Bath Spa Project

Introduction

The Bath Spa Project is visionary; it restores to the city its reason for being.

Take away the natural springs and Bath might still exist, but in a very different form. The celebrated layout and architecture of the Georgian era happened after the aristocracy had descended on the City, in the wake of Queen Anne, who had visited Bath in the 1690's and 1700's, trusting the healing springs of the Cross Bath to provide a cure for her gout.

For the last 20 years residents and visitors to Bath have been able to look, but not able to touch, let alone immerse themselves in the sacred spring water. Whilst this century has seen billions of pound invested in energy, health and technology, in Bath, hot healing water is issuing at over one million liters each day only to flow unused into the Avon River.

As a society, we have declared ourselves interested in preserving the environment, committed to exploring sustainable energy sources, confident in alternate medicine—the success of the Bath Spa Project in attracting national funding encapsulates all of these attitudes.

The new Spa building is the only remaining opportunity for a landmark of the twentieth Century to be created within Britain's finest city of architecture, but just as importantly it will reconnect Bath with its soul; its hot springs.

The city deserves a great building, and the twentieth Century deserves to be represented amongst the great landmarks of the Roman, Medieval and Georgian eras. The natural springs demand great expressions of architecture as their setting—the sacred qualities of the Cross Bath, the symmetry of the Hot Bath remain. Our hope is to create a sanctuary in the city—a mixture of the old and the new—the texture of Bath stone contrasted by a translucent glass enclosure.

The architects chosen for the design of the new building are Nicholas Grimshaw & Partners who are working closely with the Operator, Henk Verschuur of Thermae Development Company to design a contemporary spa facility. Nicholas Grimshaw & Partners are collaborating with Conservation Architects, Donald Insall Associates to detail the complex as well as prepare a Conservation Study of the area. Ove Arup & Partners are the building engineers and water treatment specialists.

The Design of the Spa Complex

The spa complex is made up of 6 buildings —three Grade I, one Grade II* and one Grade II centered around the Cross and Hot Baths in an area that has a long association with Spa bathing. The disused and unlisted 1927 Beau Street swimming pool will be replaced with the only new building in the complex which will form the core of the Millennium Spa facility in a contemporary design of glass and stone.

The entrance to the complex will be via 7/7a where a coffee shop will spill out onto the area around the Cross Bath. A secondary entrance from Bilbury Lane will create, in effect, a public route through the Spa. The Hot Bath will house individual treatment rooms, massage rooms and specialist water therapy. The Cross Bath will be restored as a working spa primarily for B & NES citizens who will have special access rights to the Cross Bath. Hetling Pump Room will be restored to have an Interpretative Center at ground level and staff facilities above.

The scheme for the Cross Bath has evolved from the discovery of the oval pump room designed by John Palmer in 1797 when the building first achieved its current external form. The oval of the pool overlaps the oval of the entrance to allow

the spring to emerge as the central focus of the building. The essence of the scheme is to enhance the serenity and spiritual nature of the existing space by keeping new interventions light and simple.

On the Beau Street site, changing rooms, saunas, steam rooms and plunge pool will be contained in a three story free-standing cube with walls clad in Bath Stone. The dimensions of the cube relate directly to the plan of the adjacent Hot Bath. A free-form pool at ground level will contrast with the geometry of the cube and will have grand columns emerging from it supporting the cube above in a theatrical space. The pool at ground level will cast rippling reflections onto the cube surfaces above.

In contrast, a delicately detailed glass facade will follow the street line and allow natural daylight to the main pool. The non rectilinear glazed boundary wall around the strict geometry of the cube recalls the existing curved enclosing screen walls added by Decimus Burton around the John Wood's Hot Bath. The pools, in free-flowing, organic shapes, mirror developments on the continent, where Spas have moved away from the rigid, classical forms traditionally associated with medical facilities. The balance required by the strict geometry and proportions of the existing cityscape, is provided by the exterior symmetry of the cube and its relationship with the adjoining Hot Bath.

Initial thoughts for the glass enclosure were of creating a steam wall but budget considerations have led to a more modest solution of a translucent wall onto which back projection of color will create a wondrous effect not unlike the soft glow of the water wall at the British Pavilion at Seville. The detail of these walls will be developed during the next few weeks in collaborations with the lighting designers Spiers & Major and engineers, Ove Arup & Partners. We intend to accentuate the presence of the pools as well as create changing ambience within the spa, with the imaginative use of lighting.

The mass of the cube will act as a thermal buffer providing warm surfaces to the activities within. Individual changing rooms at raised ground level mark the transition from clothed to robed; in other words from dry to wet circulation. Overflow changing will be a mezzanine floor above.

The floor levels in the new building are set to achieve flat floor connections to 7/7a Bath Street which has treatment rooms at first floor and a restaurant at second floor opening onto a outdoor terrace surrounding the cube. The sauna floor, at the same level will be naturally lit with shafts of light, through the rooftop pool, reflecting off a plunge pool that surrounds a circular steam room. Vertical circulation is via lifts and stairs to the north or a helical stair to the corner of Beau Street and Bilbury Lane and allows views to the main pool from varying heights. The sequence culminates in the outdoor pool and terrace at roof top level from where views of the other baths and the surrounding hills are enjoyed.

The water treatment and other plant will be housed in new basement on the Beau Street site connecting to existing services in the cellars of Bath Street and will allow intermittent access for plant via a coalhole on Bilbury Lane.

As the only working traditional spa in the country, the building will act as a showcase for the latest sustainable technology using the on-site natural thermal springs as a source of renewable energy. Under floor heating will be the source of heat and heat exchangers will convert residual energy to ventilate the building.

In order to visually reinforce the presence of the Spa within the city, it is proposed to commission a water and or steam feature around the Cross Bath which will serve to connect the complex to the nearby Roman Baths and enliven this 'lost quarter' of the city. The design teams are working with artist, Vong Phaophanit in designing the buildings, exterior spaces and water features. Vong Phaophanit will ensure that the artistic input at the Spa Complex will eventually extend to the Bath Contemporary Water Features Project.

Demolition of the Beau Street building is in progress to allow an archaeological dig to begin in late 1998. Planning & Listed Building applications are programmed for December 1998 with completion targeted for late 2000.

Nick Grimshaw's comments:

The Bath Spa Project is one of the most challenging and exciting projects Nicholas Grimshaw & Partners has faced, added to which the unique urban form of Bath, a World Heritage site, forms the backdrop. It has proved to be extremely difficult to match costs, function, and aesthetic quality. But this is what architecture is all about. So far, the projects had been a real team effort. Our discussions with the Operator, Thermae Development Company have been tough but in the end fruitful and we have now all agreed upon a scheme. I am particularly keen on the new position of the main pool at the lower level of the new building. I feel this great free-form pool, with columns emerging from the steam, will have a fantastic atmosphere. It will be a complete contrast to the roof top pool which will have great views over Bath and to the hills beyond. We now have to get down to detailing. Providing that we have no further changes, I think the people of Bath can rely on us to deliver a memorable set of buildings, a scheme that is not only popular but which will take its place in the heritage of Bath.

Lord's Grand Stand

The new Grand Stand at Lord's Cricket Ground was officially opened by Prince Philip on 18 June 1998, on the first day of the second test match between England and South Africa.

Lord's, generally regarded as the headquarters of cricket, is one of the finest of all sports grounds. It has been developed to express a "village green" rather than a stadium feel, hence the individual character of each stand.

The new Grand Stand is part of the overall development program initiated by the MCC to ensure that they continue to offer world class facilities befitting international matches. Current projects, including the Grand Stand, a media center and new scoreboard are required for the 1999 World Cup.

The Grand Stand has been redesigned to provide maximum seating with uninterrupted views and to increase its capacity from 4,000 to 6,000. This additional seating increases the overall capacity of the ground to 30,500. The stand also incorporates bars, boxes and a dining room with associated catering areas. Telephone, data and television services are provided to each box.

Uninterrupted views have been made possible by substantially minimizing the number of columns needed to support the upper tier. Motorized blinds are also provided in front of the boxes. The obscure glazed panels that run along the rear of each tier reduce the bulk of the building as well as providing transparency; the trees behind the new stand, protected by a preservation order, can be glimpsed from the seating on the opposite side of the ground.

It was important that the design of the new stand respected the scale of its surroundings, for not only is the Pavilion itself a listed building but the ground lies within a Conservation Area.

A high degree of prefabrication was used both to control quality and to allow the stand to be constructed over two closed seasons. The first phase consisted of the lower tier of 4,000 seats, which was used during the 1997 cricket season; this made it possible to maintain the original seating capacity of the ground. Most of the elements are self-finished, and neutral colors have been used throughout.

Works commenced on site in September 1996 and the Grand Stand was completed in June 1998.

Lord's Grand Stand photos courtesy of Peter Cook/View.