Not your typical strip mall

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The field of progressive architecture and the role of the socially responsible architect are both evolving at a dramatic rate. It is virtually impossible to predict how the profession will transform itself due to rapid advancements in sustainable technologies, materials, systems, and contractual relationships. Any architect that thinks they have this complex system completely understood is mistaken. I believe we need to continually communicate with all parties involved in order to orchestrate a successful and innovative building. In order to communicate successfully you must understand interpersonal dynamics. One of our recent projects, The Green Circle Shopping Center, transformed from a radical idea to becoming the nation's first LEED Platinum shopping center through creative thinking and effective communication.

The typical shopping center is nothing terribly cryptic. It is a building form that has been labeled the 'decorated shed' by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. They are typically pre-engineered metal buildings with a thematic false front. The theme is typically something banal - beige tones and repetitive arches signifying a reference to historical styles - a Disney World aesthetic. This manner of building is inexpensive and translates into more profit for the developer. What if this model could be changed? What if we could spend more money on an attractive, efficient, and well thought out building, and in return charge more per leasable square foot due to savings generated from lower utility bills and enhanced occupant comfort?

The clients for the Green Circle were on board with these concepts from the beginning and the challenge came from trying to communicate these ideas to the community and potential tenants. We executed a series of simple diagrams comparing a typical strip mall, i.e. The Decorated Shed, with The Green Circle Shopping center. These diagrams were effective in representing all of Green Circle's design elements as understandable components, and communicating them very clearly to tenants and the public. Tenants reserved spaces

almost immediately and the building was leased even before ground was broken.

The owners were business minded and savvy as such. It was made quite clear from the beginning that this was to be a profitable building. However, it was also made evident that this building was to both teach and serve its community and beyond about sustainable building practices. In order for this be accomplished the building would have to be a departure from the traditions of the typology. It would have to look, feel, and perform differently. That is what was designed, a project accentuated by it's uniqueness, sustainable features, and profitability.

The building's parti is best understood in section. We carved away the typical rectangular volume of the shopping center and created a stepped and angular roof. This allowed diffused light to enter through skylights on the northern face and solar panels to be located on the opposing south side. The roof also served as a central location to collect rainwater and direct it to a cistern below grade.

Two types of green roofs were specified, one intensive and the other extensive. Glazing was analyzed and specified according to orientation. Approximately 20 trees were saved by strategically locating the building on the site. The incorporation of a detention pond was unnecessary as the parking lot was surfaced with 100% permeable concrete. The facade was clad in a recycled wood composite siding. Concrete with a

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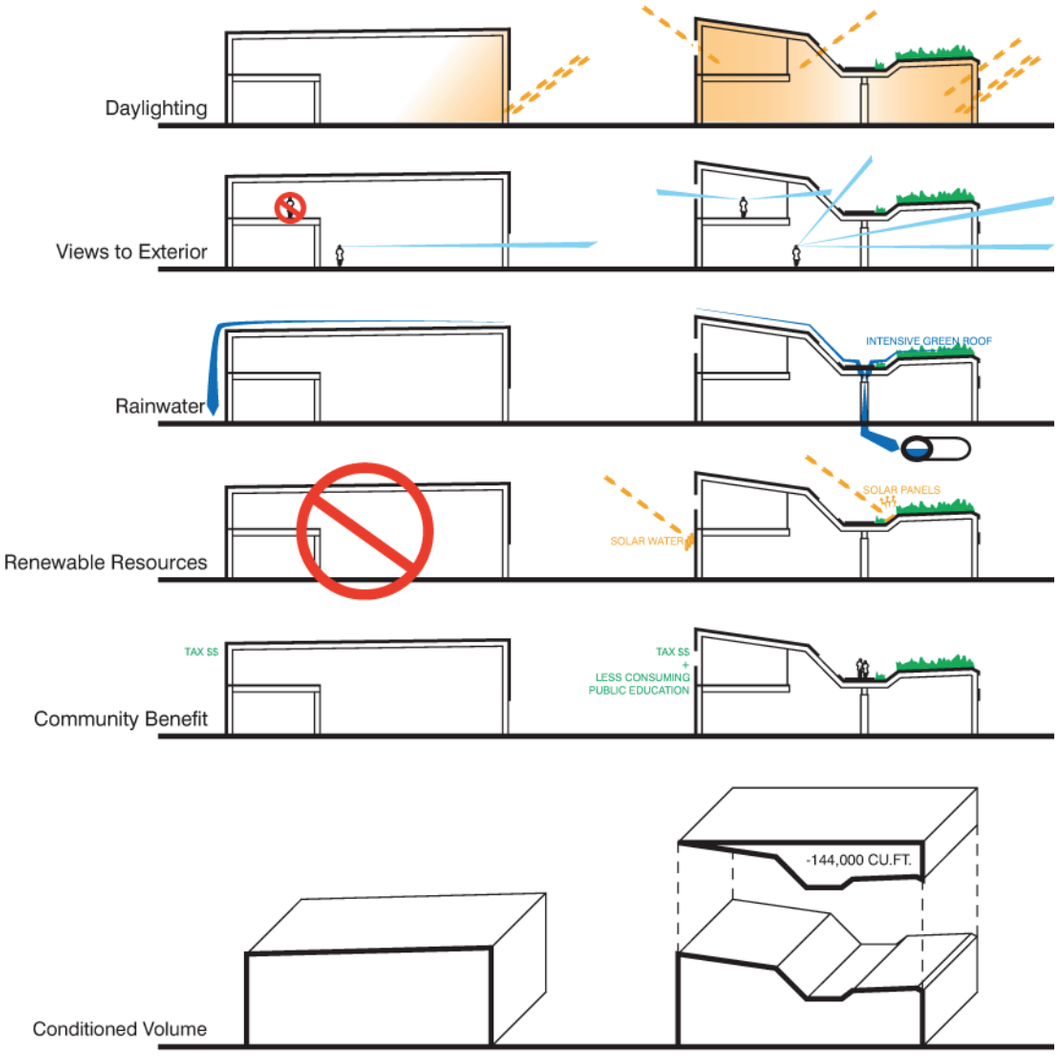

high fly ash content was utilized as well. Providing public access took advantage of its vegetation and views activated the roof. All of these efforts were departures from conventional means and methods.

A big challenge was communicating design intent and important design features to consultants, the project's engineers. This was achieved with black and white data. The LEED scorecard, with targeted goals, was constantly circulated in communications. Every consultant was assigned specific credits and held responsible for successfully executing the specific requirements. The communication of the project's goals was also facilitated by the use of descriptive 3D digital models and studied vignettes. Finally, what is termed "synergy" by advocates of Integrated Project Delivery was achieved through frequent team meetings that were mandatory and all inclusive. The civil engineer had to communicate with the plumbing engineer, vice versa, and so forth. In order to achieve the project's innovative goals a great deal of collaborative effort was required.

Finally, in what proved to be one of the most challenging aspects of the process, we had to sum up all of our ideas and details and explain them not only to the general contractor, but also to every sub-contractor and material supplier. The first step in achieving this was this was a mandatory pre-bid meeting. Here we clarified the technicalities of the building in addition to the ideas that generated its form. Many of the detailed conditions were unique and it was important that the team responsible for executing those details understood the intent. We wanted collaborators to understand "the why" of what they were constructing so as to remain excited about the work.

After the bids were accepted we started the process of placing signs around the job site. There were signs with instructions on the protocol for recycling. There were signs communicating that smoking was not allowed on site. Visual communication at the job site was key to maintaining the project's high standards. In order to hold everyone accountable we had to remove excuses, and signage did this by clearly stating the do's and don'ts associated with achieving a LEED Platinum rating. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we placed large posters in the job trailer depicting the building and its innovative concepts. Visits to the job site trailer often made reference to one of the 3D renderings or diagrams hanging from the wall. These visualization exercises helped to convey to the construction team concepts that 2D details alone could not achieve.

In the end, we did it! The Green Circle Shopping Center is one of the nation's first LEED Platinum Shopping centers. The successful collaboration of the entire project team, the clear and direct communication of the project's goals, and the embracing of a forward thinking sustainable mindset provided a shopping center which reshapes the conventions of the typology.