

not
white

diversity in beginning design education



Shannon Chance, AIA, Editor

PROCEEDINGS of the
20th National Conference on
the Beginning Design Student
Hampton University Department of Architecture

Copyright 2006 Hampton University Urban Institute
/individual articles produced and edited by the authors

Printed proceedings produced by Shannon Chance, Assistant Professor of Architecture, Hampton University.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.

Published by:
Hampton University Urban Institute
Department of Architecture
Hampton University
Hampton, VA 23668
757-727-5440
fax 757-728-6680

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chance, Shannon
Not White: Diversity in Beginning Design Education
(Proceedings of the 20th National Conference on the Beginning Design Student)
compiled by Shannon Chance
1. Architecture - Diversity 2. Teaching - Architecture 3. Teaching - Diversity 4. Teaching - Design
5. Diversity - Design

ISBN 0-9785172-0-2

Designing a Pavilion for the World's Fair: Celebrating Cultural Specificity in the Twenty-First Century

Introduction:

This paper will present the work of an eight week long project developed in the first year studio class of a five year BArch program during the spring semester of 2003. Studio instructors carefully designed the studio exercise in order to expansively open the topic of cultural specificity in both Western and Non-Western Traditions in the architecture of the world. Student research for the studio was supported in the class Introduction to Architecture, a mandatory lecture class.

Background:

The intention of the project was to introduce first year students to the diversity of traditions of the architecture of the world and how each tradition is related to the culture, history, climate and building traditions of the peoples who 'make' it. For this purpose, we chose countries from the continents of Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America based on the diversity and distinctiveness of their culture and building traditions. Each student was required to undertake research in order to facilitate the design of a pavilion to represent the country.

Research:

Before the building was programmed, each student was responsible for researching (in the architectural library and on the internet), the culture and indigenous building practice of the designated country and preparing a written and illustrated report. For each country, the major research topics included culture, indigenous building practices, and the work of contemporary architects who included these two aspects.

Site:

The site for the World's Fair Project was loosely modeled after the site design proposed by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in the eighteenth century for what is now recognized as the 'ideal city' of Chaux in France. The basis of Ledoux's concept was to provide an egalitarian city layout for workers in the town designed around an industrial saltwork. The adoption of the site for the World's Fair promised an egalitarian approach to site as well as site specific orientation for each of the pavilions.

Results:

A sample of some of the highly articulate student models for the pavilions is included in this abstract. The final paper will include a more in depth discussion of the research undertaken by the students and show how the research was then translated into a design project.

Note:

It is significant that this studio class was taught at a public Historically Black University. First year students are not as articulate in knowing about "the architecture of the world". However, 'by birthright', our African American students are acutely aware of "cultural difference" and also of "cultural migration in the world". This aspect will also be discussed in the final paper.

abstract

Jill Bambury

Associate Professor
Southern University
School of Architecture
PO Box 11947
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70813
225-771-3015
e-mail: jrbambury@subr.edu

Jill Bambury, RAIC, is an Associate Professor at Southern University School of Architecture in Baton Rouge, Louisiana where she has been teaching since 1998.

Born and primarily educated in Canada, she was 'politically socialized' in the Canadian model of the 'cultural mosaic' as opposed to the American model of 'the melting pot'. By birthright and intellectual interest, Bambury (who, in addition to her BArch has an undergraduate degree in Sociology, and an MPhil in Architectural History and Theory) has always been intrigued by issues of cultural identity as related to architecture and the built environment.

She has written about the interface of race and architecture in ACSA venues and about the role of the School of Architecture in the HBCU in AIA and IDP venues. Her past funded research from the Canada Council explores the interface of biography and architecture. She is currently a recipient of a grant from the Graham Foundation for work on 'black churches along the Mississippi River'.

Introduction:

This paper presents the work of an eight week long project developed in the first year studio class of a five year BArch program at Southern University School of Architecture in Baton Rouge, Louisiana during the spring semester of 2003. Studio instructors Archie Tiner, Kestee Weir and I carefully designed the studio exercise in order to expansively open the topic of cultural specificity in both Western and Non-Western Traditions in the architecture of the world. Student research for the studio was supported in the class Introduction to Architecture, a mandatory lecture class which I taught during the same semester, the second semester of first year.

There were approximately thirty first-year students in the class. With the exception of one student from Barbados and one from Viet Nam, the class was comprised of African American students. Some were from urban centers outside of Louisiana. The majority of the class was from cities and rural areas in Louisiana.

Background:

The primary intention of the project was to introduce to all of our first year students some of the diversity of traditions of the architecture of the world and how each tradition is related to the culture, history, climate and building traditions of the peoples who 'make' it. For this purpose, we chose various countries from the continents of Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America based on the diversity and distinctiveness of their culture and building traditions. 'From a hat' each student in the class drew the name of a different country for which s/he was required to undertake research in order to facilitate the design of a pavilion to represent the country. Countries included: Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Columbia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greenland, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Korea, Latvia, Madagascar, Mexico, Morocco, North Yemen, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland, Turkey, United States, and Viet Nam.

Imbedded in the World's Fair Project was another major pedagogical intention. This was to replace the limited elementary formal language which first year students possess with a much more expansive and complex panacea of physical forms; forms which were derived from climate, culture and available craft and material tradition. These forms studied included both contemporary and traditional architecture of the country.

Research:

Before the building was programmed, each student was responsible for researching (in the architectural library and on the internet), the culture and indigenous building practice of the designated country and writing an illustrated report. For each country, the major research topics included:

Culture: including the history of the country, ethnic backgrounds of the inhabitants, languages spoken, religion, cuisine, everyday rituals, social celebrations, music, craft and dance traditions and other culturally specific traditions.

Indigenous Building Practices (both traditional and contemporary): including traditional materials and methods of construction, traditional structural forms and the relation of these to natural features, natural resources and the climate of the country. In some cases, building types were examined which had developed to specifically accommodate the cultural traditions. Contemporary architects whose work was culturally specific: ie. where structural forms utilized were specific to cultural activities and /or traditional craft practice or building materials were utilized in the work.

The research results were presented in a two-day forum by continent. For the forum, chairs were arranged which in a circle in a large room and students presented their research by continent. We soon began to recognize *both* common and divergent characteristics of *both* culture and building practice.

More subtle and fairly sophisticated issues were addressed in the course of discussion. Students recognized that building forms and materials were often similar because of climatic conditions and materials available. For example, although they were on different continents, both contemporary and traditional buildings in Finland and Canada had pitched roofs to shed snow and were often built of wood. Some buildings in both parts of Asia and parts of Africa had grass roofs, reflecting both indigenous craft skills and availability of materials as a result of shared climates although not necessarily culture.

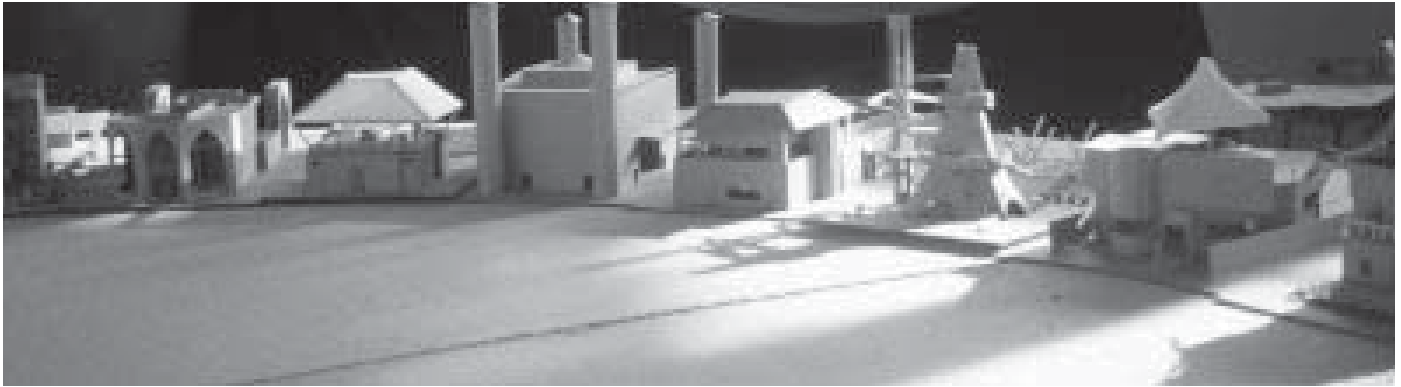


Figure 1: First year students' models on the site.

The effects of intercontinental migrations of people(s) were also discussed, especially in relation to eighteenth and nineteenth century colonization. For example, it was fascinating to students that countries situated in the same continent (for example Africa) would speak different European languages in addition to multiple indigenous languages; that the Dominican Republic and Haiti would have both French and Spanish populations on the same island in the Caribbean, while the first language of Barbados was English; that the architecture of Spain, El Salvador and Mexico would share similarities; that French is spoken in Haiti, Senegal, Viet Nam, Switzerland and parts of Canada, as well as in France. Shared architectural traditions were also recognized (and problematized) for these countries, especially in relation to nineteenth century neoclassicism.

Subsequent student research on contemporary architects from each country was also very revealing as students discovered 'cultural expression' in their work. (See Figure 2 and 3.)

Overall Site Plan:

Inspired by the circular format of our forum, the site adopted for the 'World's Fair' was *loosely* modeled after the elliptical site design proposed by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in the eighteenth century for what is now recognized as the 'ideal city' of Chaux in France. The basis of Ledoux's well recognized concept was to provide an egalitarian city layout for workers in the town designed around an industrial saltwork located in the center of the city. LeDoux's plan features a large space in the center which houses the factory with worker's housing and public buildings located in two concentric rings around the periphery. The site is surrounded by countryside. Ledoux's comprehensive scheme and exquisite site drawings and perspectives were easily accessible even for first year students. Images of Chaux were discussed in the Introduction to Architecture class as a model for the site.

Like the city of Chaux, the elliptical site for the World's Fair was located in 'the ideal countryside', a landscape which had north, south, east and west orientation but otherwise no specifically distinguishing features. Following the plan for Ledoux's project, the overall site design featured a large open space (world plaza) in the center of an ellipse with a ring comprised of equally sized wedge-shaped sites for the pavilions. The idea was that parking for the World's Fair visitors would be located off-site and visitors would arrive by public transportation to be dropped off along the 'bus route' which ran around the periphery of the elliptical site. Major pedestrian paths would occur between each pavilion site which lead to the large 'world plaza' in the center of the site.

Pavilion Site Plot:

Each student was assigned an equally sized plot on the larger site plan which was roughly organized by continent. As much as possible, special care was taken to try to ensure that countries in the southern hemisphere would have south facing gardens and countries in the northern hemisphere would have gardens facing north. This was determined in order to facilitate the healthy growth of plants which were indigenous to the countries (see program which follows) as well as to provide very specific solar orientation to assist the designers.

The peripheral end of each pavilion site on the overall plan was to contain a garden/outdoor gathering space accessible from both the outer ring where the buses stopped and through the building. Although the garden was at the 'rear' of the site, it was recognized that

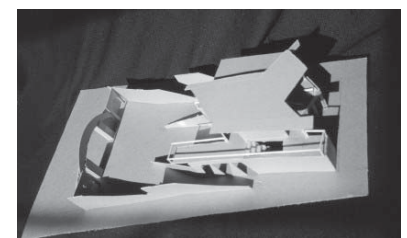


Figure 2: Viet Nam Pavilion by Trung Do.

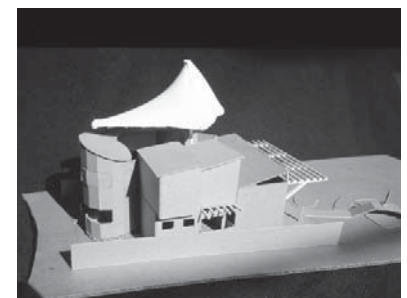


Figure 3: Finland Pavilion by Christopher Williams.

the garden would also be experienced as a forecourt to each pavilion for people arriving by bus. The 'front' end of the plot would house the building with its public façade facing the 'world plaza'.

Each student was furnished with both an overall site plan with north arrow showing the allocations of the various countries as well as how the site is connected to pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Each student was also furnished a plot plan which indicated the geometry and dimensions of the plot and the setbacks for the building footprint as distinguished from the garden/outdoor space.

General Program:

In recognition that each country would have very *specific* activities to be housed in the pavilion, the program was initially issued in a very *general* way. The *general* guidelines for the program were for a building with a building *footprint* no larger than 300 square meters, approximately 2700 square feet plus circulation space. (Here the metric system of measurement was introduced as way of discussing diversity in measuring systems.) As mentioned, the site diagram provided illustrated design setbacks for the building and garden areas. The setbacks ensured that the building would have to have at least two stories.

The program for *indoor space* had to include the following *maximum* areas:

- 1200 sf gathering place for 36 persons to gather in celebration of a cultural event
- 400 sf interactive room to house 5 computer work-stations and film screening for 18 persons
- 200 sf life museum for several people to partake in the celebration of everyday rituals (to be visible from the large gathering space)
- 200 sf administration area
- 300 sf washroom facilities
- 600 sf for *two different* areas for the display of artifacts
- 150 sf food sampling area

The total enclosed area was 3600 square feet with up to 550 sf added for circulation.

The program for *outdoors* included:

- a partially enclosed hard surfaced area for outdoor celebrations
- two separate outdoor areas which 'showcased' plants indigenous to the country
- a discreet place for the bus at the periphery of the site for the bus to stop bringing fifty people from the parking lot (waiting for the bus was also to be accommodated)

Specific Program:

The basic concepts of programming were covered in a lecture in the Introduction to Architecture course. Based on the *general* programmatic requirements, each student was required to write a *specific* program responding to culturally specific activities related to each country. The program was developed by answering questions about each space in the pavilion as follows:

gathering place for celebration of a cultural event; What is the event to be celebrated for your designated country? Fully describe all of the activities which will take place in the space (there may be more than one). Describe all of the special furnishings required and the numbers of each. To which areas should the space be adjacent and why? What kind of natural lighting is required? What kind of artificial lighting is required?

life museum for several people to celebrate everyday rituals; What is the ritual to be celebrated? Fully describe all of the activities which will take place in the space (there may be more than one). Describe all of the special furnishings required and the numbers of each. Describe adjacency and lighting requirements.

artifacts display; Which artifacts from your country are you planning to display? Describe any special built in furnishings or space requirements to accommodate these artifacts. Describe adjacency and lighting requirements.

food sampling; A very small amount of space has been designated for food sampling. In consideration of this, what kinds of food from your country will be featured? Describe all of the special furnishings and/or equipment required to prepare and serve the food. To which areas should the space be adjacent and why? What kind of natural lighting is required?

What kind of artificial lighting is required? (Remember that this particular activity could be housed outdoors).

a partially enclosed outdoor hard surfaced area for outdoor celebrations; What is the event to be celebrated? Fully describe all of the activities which will take place in the space (there may be more than one). Describe all of the special furnishings required and the numbers of each. Describe adjacency and lighting requirements.

outdoor areas which 'showcase' indigenous plants Which plants indigenous to your country will be featured? Describe all of the special planting areas which will be important for their display. What kind of natural lighting is best for the plants?

Results:

In the course of completing this project, the students in the first year studio at Southern University School of Architecture extended their understanding of the role of culture, language, politics, climate, and natural building materials in the making of culturally specific architecture. Because I was teaching both Studio and the Introduction to Architecture course, I was able to facilitate a fairly comprehensive research process to inform the design process in close consultation with Archie Tiner and Kestee Weir, the other studio instructors.

We celebrated both Western and Non-western traditions and developed a critical conversation about the collusion of the same and *the fact that often these categories of understanding are contrived*. This was especially powerful in our forum where students' *particular* identity, primarily as Americans of African descent often lead to focused on issues related to the African Diaspora.

For example, we spent a lot of time discussing slavery in Haiti, the current political oppression and Haitian migrations to Louisiana. (The overwhelming sentiment among students was how much "better off" they were as Americans!) Students were very intrigued by the fact that Latin American countries often had a fairly large percentage of people of African descent as well as good number of Asians. Our student from Barbados, also of African descent, shared his cultural traditions which, like his accent and demeanor, are a mixture of English and Carribean.

Conversations about colonization and migration continued in discussion with our student who was born in Viet Nam, a professor who had spent time in Senegal and I, a Canadian from Acadia, the part of Eastern Canada from which the French were expelled by the English in 1755 primarily to Louisiana. We discussed how French surnames in Acadia are shared with the names of some of our students; for example, Comeaux, Etienne, Pitre.

Borrowing the site from Claude-Nicolas LeDoux, was important; in the end, not so much because of its' egalitarian ordering principles, because it allowed us to assemble and arrange our models (both in the 'parti' phase and in the final design phase) as exciting parts of a collective whole. (See Figure 4 and 5.)

Finally, the models produced in the first year design project at Southern University School of Architecture for the World's Fair, speak to the success of our carefully planned project. The models illustrate successful extension of the formal and spatial expression usually accessible to first year design students. This is also true for some of the architectural detail. For example, Brian Holmes' China Pavilion illustrates an understanding of the formal walled courtyard and gate, the possibility of inhabiting a wall and the articulation of the structure in Chinese roof construction. The exuberance of Chilean culture is well expressed in the building and site design of Valencia Thomas' project where the main activity to be housed is a wine tasting and dancing celebration. (Ms. Thomas cannot wait to visit Chile!) The use of very particularly formed Islamic arches in 'thick walls', but also a poetic architectural interpretation of 'veiling'; through the non-symmetrical opening and closing of 'secret spaces' inspired by the Persian garden are apparent in Jarrett Davis' Iran Pavilion. Here, one of the programmed activities to be observed and shared is the making of Persian carpets. The crazy and exciting urban cacophony which is life in twenty-first century Viet Nam is expressed in Trung Do's pavilion for his homeland, where one of the main activities is a loud 'television coffee house'. The architectural form and detail of Christopher Williams' Finnish pavilion which houses a sauna and beer drinking facility, was inspired by careful study of the work of Alvar Aalto. (See Figure 6.)

Around the World and Back; Bringing Cultural Understanding Home:

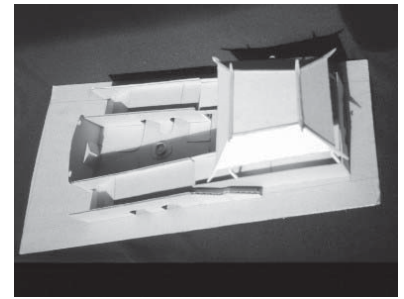


Fig. 4. China Pavilion by Brian Holmes.

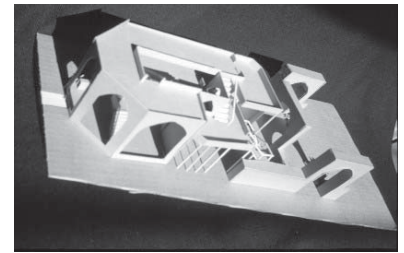


Fig. 5. Iran Pavilion by Jarrett



Fig. 6. Chile Pavilion by Valencia Thomas

While the first project for the semester took us around the world. The second project celebrated *'being home again'*. This was a project for a reception center and sculpture garden for Southern University Museum of Art (SUMA) located on campus adjacent to the museum. The designs drew inspiration from the African and African American artifacts in the museum. The semi-enclosed building and garden was also intended to enhance and celebrate the site located on a bluff with magnificent west facing views of the Mississippi River.

The site is layered with history. Once part of a plantation, it has direct views to a point on the other side of the river called "Free Slaves Point". Both local myth and a sculpture of a 'red stick' by Frank Hayden mark of the site as a Native American settlement named Red Stick (Baton Rouge) by French Explorers. In 1972, during a civil rights demonstration, two Southern University students Denver Smith and Leonard Brown were killed in front of the building which is now the museum.

The Program for SUMARC and the sculpture gardens was for a 'semi-enclosed' and 'convertible' Great Hall to house fifty persons, with at least three scales of space (for a public event, for small gatherings, and for individual reflection) as well as kitchen, washroom and storage areas to service the main space. In addition, there was a requirement to integrate sculpture gardens, which were three dimensional and enhanced the view.

The project was also to draw formal inspiration from the art in the museum. For this purpose, students did figure/ground studies of the works in the museum as well as considering the influence of African Art in the works of African American artists, Picasso and to a lesser extent of Le Corbusier. This was presented in a lecture by Dr. Eloise Johnson, curator of the museum, and myself. The form and space of the resulting buildings and site design were configured by working with the figure/ground studies.

Conclusion:

The World's Fair project and the reception center designed by first year students at Southern University School of Architecture in the first year studio involved careful consideration of cultural traditions. This included analysis of 'cultural forms' and their integration into the design process.

It is significant that these alternative approaches (which incidentally facilitated knowledge of non-western traditions) were 'layered upon' more traditional approaches to architectural design. They did not eclipse or supersede more 'time tested' approaches. For both projects there was site analysis, programming according to user groups and consideration of climate. However, the student work shows that by utilizing study of forms and practices found in specific cultures or in African Art, the language of form was also greatly expanded in the beginning design studio.