Place of Origin

Searching for a current vernacular for the St. Croix River Valley

Interpretation Center
Stillwater, MN
Problem Statement

How do natural and cultural context inform and coexist within contemporary design?
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CLAIM
Present day architecture grown out of its environment can embody and respect all the traditions, identity, and spirit of its place.

PREMISES
Universalization of production, knowledge, construction, and technology has changed the way we design and build our structures and buildings.

Great designers have an opportunity as well as an obligation to compliment and emphasize a given area while paying respect to its past.

True inspiration comes from every person with a story to tell, every trail with something to discover, and every idea that is worth trying.
Research

TOPICS

Theoretical
Regionalism
Globalization vs. Anti globalization
Vernacular Architecture
Contemporary Architecture
Tourism

Site
The Nature and Culture of the St. Croix River Valley
Land → Food Raw Materials → Settlement People → Land

CONSTRAINT:
Existed through necessity and was limited by distance, technology, and tradition
PLACE

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RESULTS:
Distinctive regionalism/vernacular whose inherent natural character was shaped into a cultural landscape by human activity over generations.
RESULTS:
Markers, reference points, and boundaries become blurred. Subtle natural and cultural destruction due to contaminations and contradictions.
PLACELESS MEGAPOLIS

HIGH RISE
FREeway

Industrial Capitalism  Meandering Culture
“Architecture can only be sustained today as a critical practice if it assumes a position which distances itself equally from the enlightenment myth of progress and from a reactionary, unrealistic impulse to return to the architectonic forms of the pre-industrial past.

It has to remove itself from both the optimization of advanced technology and the ever present tendency to regress into nostalgic historicism or the glibly decorative, only this has the capacity to cultivate a resistant identity-giving culture while at the same time having discreet recourse to universal technique” (Frampton, 1983).
MAIN POINTS

A cultural group has stability as people feel invested in the land because survival and well being depend on it.

Modern buildings are now conditioned uniformly by optimized technology which limits our ability as designers to create significant form.

Utopian ideals work directly against natural and cultural diversity.

Building and places are popping up all over the world with a dishonest representation of authenticity, identity and meaning defiant of surrounding context.

Architecture acts as identity confirming symbols to tourists and travelers.

Frampton’s approach suggests finding ways to compliment our normal scenic experience by retracing our tactile range of perceptions.
Site

ST. CROIX RIVER VALLEY

252 mile stretch

Glacial melt

Healthy waters and riparian zones

94 species of fish

40 mussel species
Confluence of coniferous forests, deciduous forests, and prairie

Ojibwa and Dakota tribes

Burial mounds

French Fur Trade

Scandinavian immigrants

Protected riverway under NPS

Invasive species

(2009) lower section landed #10 spot on Americas most endangered river’s list
ST. CROIX BOOM SITE

CENTER OF LOG AND LUMBERING ACTIVITIES IN THIS REGION FOR OVER HALF A CENTURY PRIOR TO 1914. HERE MILLIONS OF LOGS FROM THE UPPER ST. CROIX AND TRIBUTARIES WERE HALTED, SORTED, AND RAFTED, LATER TO BE SAWED INTO LUMBER AND TIMBER PRODUCTS. MORE LOGS WERE HANDLED HERE THAN AT ANY SIMILAR PLACE IN THIS SECTION.

2011 REPLICA OF ORIGINAL PLAQUE
LOG BOOM
Design Concept

How do natural and cultural context inform and coexist within contemporary design?
Final Design
Greywater Storage

Ground Cover

Overflow Drain

Concrete Retaining Wall

Tower Drain Pipes

Rain Garden Soil Mix (Stone, Clay/Loam Soil)

Stone Layer

Clay Liner

Filter Fabric

Perforated Pipe

Rainwater Sluice

Bioretention/filtration Cell
How do natural and cultural context inform and coexist within contemporary design?
Thank you