A Space for Spirituality: Dutton Park Community House
Exhibition of QUT Student Design Work for Murri Watch Men’s Shed, Dutton Park.

As designers it is important to work with communities to develop inclusive spaces and be mindful of the diversity of cultures, histories and indeed spirituality. This exhibition includes a selection of proposals from QUT Interior Design students for the adaptation of the Murri Watch Men’s Shed, Dutton Park. The designs respond to local community narratives and environmental qualities, such as site texture, landscape and light to propose a dwelling space for spirituality and gathering.

Murri Watch is a community organisation providing much needed support and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, operating out of Brisbane, Townsville, Mackay and Palm Island. The Murri Watch Men’s Shed in Dutton Park, provides a space where men can come together, in a safe, healing and supportive environment to work through issues or share time with each other through informal gatherings and community projects. Community days and larger inclusive ceremonial gatherings are also an important part of the Men’s Shed activities. Girded by parklands, Dutton Park cemetery and the Brisbane river, the Men’s Shed nestles within a rich natural setting, and is highly accessible by passing traffic and the passing eye.

The student design project represents a desire by Murri Watch Men’s Shed leader Sam Watson, Architect Mark Thomson and QUT School of Design Lecturer Marissa Lindquist, to work together to see what creative proposals could be achieved by redesigning the existing structure (formally a sports change shed) to provide a multi-use place for a range of different communities. In the first instance, the design project relied upon deep understanding and research of local community narratives of the surrounding Dutton Park/West End area, as well as an awareness of the history and natural qualities of the site. Additionally, a key task was to unpack notions of spirituality and meaning, garnered from the research to inform an atmospheric interior which could be opened up and engage with the landscape and broader community.

The writing of Swiss architect Peter Zumthor, was taken as a guide to develop the design process. In his publication *Atmospheres: Architectural environments; surrounding objects*, Zumthor (2006) communicates an understanding of how one might approach atmosphere through a design project, with strong emphasis upon direct impressions and sensing of environments in a phenomenological manner. He notes:
‘How do people design things with such a beautiful, natural presence, things that move me every single time?...One word for it is atmosphere. This is something we all know about. Our first impression of a person...it’s a bit like that with architecture. I enter a building, see a room, and – in a fraction of a second – have this feeling about it.’ (Zumthor, 2006, p.10)

Zumthor believes that atmosphere is perceived through emotional sensibility and articulates how one might approach creating a sense of atmosphere and presence within space. He notes the significance of the body, material compatibility, the sound of space, the temperature of space, tension between composure and seduction, levels of intimacy and the light of things as elements to consider when designing (Zumthor, 2006).

Themes such as these and environmental awareness through design were some of the key considerations that Architect Mark Thomson through his practice Eco Solutions, had initially proposed in a conceptual collaboration with the Murri Watch Men’s Shed (see adjacent boards on this display). Marks understanding of the impact of material reuse, not merely from an environmental but socially engaging perspective, provided a unique basis to brief the QUT design students on the potentialities of the site and context of the Men’s Shed as a design project.

The selected design work represented within this exhibition takes on board the spatial brief requirements inclusive of large and divisible congregational spaces, outdoor gathering areas, kitchen and serving areas, administration and workshop rooms, to design unique proposals for the Murri watch Men’s Shed. Significant within the selected work is the reflexive relationship between the surrounding landscape and the interior, where the landscape is drawn inward materially and the interior reformulated on the outside via intimate gathering spaces, reflection spaces or spiritual paths. The spatial journey as experienced beyond the shed, from the adjacent parklands and waterways, to intimate threshold spaces and materially rich interior spaces, are entertained in much of the work. Reflections of Zumthor’s ‘Atmosphere’s’ are played out through material selection and formal articulation; predominantly by way of apertures through the buildings skin to simultaneously let light in yet provide safe prospect to gaze out to the surrounding landscape and passersby.

The design work included here, provides an indication of how important meaning and spirituality is for the burgeoning designer, many of which are in their initial year of design studies. Individually they showcase unique and sensitive reflections upon the qualities of the local community and landscape narratives, and collectively offer convincing proposals to reshape the existing shed into a shared and engaging environment for many communities to come together.

**Words and Curation: Marissa Lindquist [QUT Lecturer in Design]**


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