A Multiuse Building for Vaasa, Finland: A Design through Change for Continuity

By

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ABSTRACT

This design thesis presents an alternative way of introducing a new building into an existing urban setting.

The visibility of change through time is one of a city's most valuable assets. However, the sense of continuity is often destroyed by our obsession for change. In designing for continuity, the architect should consider the concept of continuity on two levels: the character of the city and the immediate context.

The thesis is composed of three parts. By explaining my research of the change in the city, I wish to provide tools for the reader to formulate his own image of the city. Then, I will explain my ideas on creating continuity in design. The ideas will hopefully be realized in the third part, the design solutions.

The site of this project is part of a plaza wall in Vaasa, Finland. In my design the existing, historical building on the site, becomes part of a new structure.

Old buildings should not always be considered as museums. Through new use, they can become part of the dynamic future while providing a valuable feeling of continuity.

Thesis Supervisor: Imre Halasz
Title: Professor of Architecture
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History's mark on a city should never be erased. The visibility of time is one of the most vital aspects of any city.

An architect attempting to design for continuity, will try to imagine the future. But, that is only half of the understanding of the time element. The other half is the acceptance of what has been done before, the recognition of what is there; the power and meaning of the site. The architect should find inspiration in the spirit of the place. Respecting the style of times is a less valid architectural concept, than respecting the atmosphere and image of the neighborhood.

Those walking the city streets should experience the change through times, but should accept it because of the feeling of continuity.
The concept of contextual design should penetrate deeper than merely the visual qualities of the buildings neighboring the site. The image and the atmosphere of the block, the neighborhood and the city should be reflected in the design.

Inserting a new building into an existing urban setting poses a range of questions to an architect concerned with the element of time, because he has to deal with a group of buildings that may originate from several different eras, rather than with one specific building.

Even an architect regarding historical associations as important, frequently fails to achieve a sense of continuity by making only random references that have no meaningful connection to the actual spirit/image/atmosphere of the area.

Design Project

The site of this thesis project is part of the plaza wall in the city of Vaasa, Finland. The actual program for the site calls for a bank with offices, conference rooms and employee areas. My project fulfills the requirements, but also investigates possible additional uses, such as retail and residential spaces.

The existing building on the site was designed by Carl Axel Setterberg, the architect who created the master plan for the city in the 1850s, and by designing many of its buildings had a major influence on the creation of the Vaasa atmosphere.

With the construction of several new office buildings, that atmosphere has started to disappear. I will attempt to recapture the community flavor
and display it in the design which also responds well to the context. Thus, the design in an abstract way links the past, the present and the future.

I feel that the best way to design for continuity on this site, is to preserve the old building. As today's city requires more space to fulfill its needs, than the city of the 1850s, the old building will become part of a new, large structure.

The continuity is intended to go beyond visual qualities. The old and the new space should interpenetrate in such a way, that they can be read separately, each deserving a respect of its own, but then together as one entity.

Starting with rooms in the historical house, the interpenetration will continue to combine the old space with the new through use. The history will be part of the future in linking the old house to the new, which links the history of the site to the block, which then links the block to the city.

Even though the site is small, the theory of this type of image concern can be shown, and could easily be continued throughout the whole city.

The site is surrounded by buildings from several different historical eras, which makes the context very complex. The plaza and the surrounding buildings form the core of the city. As the prime business district, it contains several banks, offices and retail outlets.

The financial situation in Finland currently encourages construction. As I do not agree with the current office building design in Vaasa, which is my hometown, I feel a sense of
urgency in discussing this topic. The city residents share my concern.

This thesis is intended as a contribution to the ongoing discussion about in-fill buildings in an urban setting. I wish to prove that historical buildings can be part of a vital, growing city.
PLAZA 1903........

.......TODAY

Change
The Beginning

The most unfortunate day in the history of Vaasa, was the day a drunken merchant fell asleep in the wooden, old city, and whose pipe most likely caused the fire that destroyed the Old Vaasa. At that time, in 1852, Vaasa was a small, but important sea trade center enjoying a most beneficial location on the West Coast of Finland.

After the city was completely destroyed, Swedish architect, Carl Axel Setterberg, was chosen to create the new master plan for the city which would be moved about five miles closer to the coast, on the Klemetso Peninsula.

The 40-year-old Setterberg also held the position of a building inspector which meant, that the new city was mostly a one-man-job.

Following the style of times, Setterberg created a neoclassical (empiric) master plan, which is based on a grid where all the blocks are equally long. The new plan established wide esplanades, plazas and parks.
Setterberg was concerned with fire safety - for obvious reasons - and planned fire lanes in every block.

Despite the strict fire codes, Setterberg wished to create a dense, "city like" city rather than rebuilding the large "village", that had been the Old Vaasa. He allowed the building of two-storey, wooden houses and narrowed some side streets to create atmosphere. Houses enclosed the city blocks from each side leaving open spaces inside the block and creating a well-defined street edge.

Atmosphere Emerges

Vaasa was growing rapidly. By 1862 there were 371 wooden houses and 21 stucco buildings. The city fathers were sometimes categorized as megalomaniacs, for the small, atmospheric city had five prominent esplanades. "Vaasa can not become another Paris no matter how hard they try," critics maintained.

As a leading architect in the city, Setterberg designed many of its buildings and lent his touch to many others. Typical for his work are the buildings with corner towers or balconies that emphasize the street edge and create rhythm in the otherwise monotonous city scape.
Today the city government is located in this Setterberg building, which was completed in 1862. Many of the details were designed by one of Setterberg's many students, Albert Theodor Gellerstedt.

Because of the emphasized corner elements, blocks seemed coherent and appropriate in the cityscape of wide, open boulevards and parks.

Of the several public buildings designed by Setterberg, the courthouse and the church are the most prominent even today. Both represent the English Brick Gothic style. The buildings had a touch of Neoclassicism, but also displayed light elements of the New Renaissance.
Most of the wooden houses were one-storey high. The facades of the two-storey buildings were stuccoed.

When the city was officially opened in 1862, most of the Old Vaasa residents had a new home waiting for them. The people, who had built temporary homes on the site of the burned city, transferred them to the new site, closer to the ocean.

For people who could not afford new homes, the city designated a building site a few blocks south-east of the plaza. The land was owned by the city, and tenants paid no rent in 55 years.

Ignoring the strict building codes, people built small houses in this area. Some of the blocks representing the only truly vernacular architecture within the city limits, still exist today.

At the time Finland was an autonomous region of Tsar's Russia. For this reason the name of the new city was changed to the City of Nikolai. The people never accepted the change, and
the new name appeared only in post stamps and official documents. The first thing Vaasa officials did in 1917, after the Russian Revolution, -even before Finland got its independence - was to rename the city as Vaasa.

The "business district" developed in the 1860s in the center of the city where it still remains and has not grown much in size.

Plaza Development

The daily life was centered around the plaza, where farmers brought their produce for sale. The piers were also important, for you could buy fresh fish there every day.

When creating the master plan, Setterberg respected the typography by placing the most important esplanade, the Esplanade of the Church, on the highest ground of the Klemetso Peninsula. The plaza is in the heart of the city.

The plaza was surrounded by one- or two-storey shops, and became known as the market place. The shops didn't differ much from the private houses. The only difference was the entrance. The shop entrance was from the street, the private from the back yard.
The building on the site of this thesis project is part of the plaza wall. It was designed by Setterberg in 1858 in the Neoclassical style.

Setterberg's original facade drawing, 1858.

When store windows gradually started to grow in size at the end of the 19th century, many of the old shops were altered. For example, the Setterberg building lost its symmetry, when the windows were replaced by larger ones, and the entrance was modified.

The Setterberg building has always functioned as a shop. Most of the older Vaasa residents still remember it as the Finnila store. Today it houses a pizzeria and a gas station. The building is one of the very few private houses designed by Setterberg that still exist today. With the new bank project, the landmark building will be demolished probably in 1986. This thesis is a study on how to save the building.
A one-storey wooden house on the west side of the plaza was soon replaced by a two-storey stucco building with corner "towers". Shipowner Wolff wanted to show off his wealth, and the large building filling most of the block became the pride of Vaasa for years to come.

On the other side of the street facing the plaza is the market hall, which was also designed in 1858. The building has clear allusions to the European brick architecture popular at the time of its construction.
Between 1852 and 1890 the population grew from 3,500 to 13,000. By the end of the century the city center was mostly developed. In addition to shipping, milling industry, textile industry and a brewery moved into Vaasa.

In Search of National Architecture

Until this time Finland had had no concept of national architecture which could be described as a style different from that in other countries. The poor economical situation combined with political oppression had provided no platform for architectural discussion.

At the turn of the century, however, when the cultural independence had largely proceeded, and the national independence was approaching, Finnish architects - also influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement - started to systematically create a concept of National Architecture.

At first, the new-born architecture dominated by historicism and eclecticism, made associations to the ancient Nordic style and
to the delicate East-Karelian architecture with its numerous wooden ornaments.

The first buildings had no great consequence partly, because the traditional Finnish building material, granite, could not be used in such a delicate way in large buildings.

Brick was then suggested as the foremost facade material, but it was soon discovered, that the industry could not yet produce material good enough for the facades, and stucco again covered buildings.

The ornamentation became more geometrical partly because of the shortcomings of the brick industry, partly because of the introduction of Art Nouveau.

When the architectural office of Gesellius, Lindgren and Saarinen at the turn of the century, won a competition with their Helsinki Railroad Station building, associations to both the Finnish heritage and the Finnish nature could be seen.

On the continent the new Finnish architecture must have appeared as primitivism full of fundamental energy. The primitivism of Saarinen's work was the link to the national tradition.
Ever since the Middle Ages all architectural styles reaching Finland had been simplified while being adapted to local conditions.

Jugend Style in Vaasa

Two of the best examples of Jugend Style in Vaasa, are located one block west from the plaza. Both buildings were built at the beginning of the 20th century.

The asymmetrical facades with projecting parts, balconies and different materials add rhythm and liveliness to the city block.
Between 1900 and 1925 most the small, wooden buildings around the plaza were replaced by four to five-storey, stucco-covered masonry buildings. The massing of these buildings made the plaza seem smaller.

On the east side of the plaza the "Commerce" and the "Unitas" create a sense of monumentality even today. The five-storey buildings are classical and compliment each other well. Decorations are minor but well-accented.

The beginning of the 20th century was the "Golden Age" in the architecture of Vaasa. As the merchant population's wealth grew, the buildings also grew in size.
The dominant building on the north side of the plaza is the Hartman building, which combines Classicism with National Romanticism. The five-storey commercial complex is decorated with granite sculptures. The second-floor terrace and the two copper cupolas were built to show off the original owner's wealth. It is also one of the first constructions in Finland to use reinforced concrete.

Image Starts to Change

Viljo Rewell's commercial/residential building, 1939

In the 30s Functionalism came to the Vaasa center with Viljo Rewell's building adjacent - and in sharp contrast - to the market hall. The facade lost its importance when the interior started to shape the functionalist buildings.

The image of Vaasa begun to change. The box-like functionalist buildings
did not conform to one specific environment and did not take into consideration the small, coastal city atmosphere so evident in Vaasa at the time.

However, the geometrical forms and the monumentality of Functionalism seem rather suited to the Classicism of the buildings around the plaza.

The Finnish Functionalism can also be considered a social movement, for with it affordable housing as well as new industrial complexes were created to benefit the working class. In the 40s Alvar Aalto designed an impressive manufacturing plant with housing to the outskirts of Vaasa, where industry was gradually moving.

After World War II the economical situation became the most important factor in all construction. The quantity was more important than the quality. Mass-produced, prefabricated buildings were built all over the city.

The "Baby Boom" was not remarkable, but it managed to increase the Vaasa population from 30,000 in 1930 to 37,000 in 1950.
Dramatic Changes

The idea of respecting and preserving old buildings was not born until the famous Wolff building was to be demolished in the 1960s. It was too late.

The new complex replacing the Wolff building was designed by Viljo Rewell in the International Style. The Rewell Center was to cause the biggest change in the atmosphere of Vaasa. The complex was meant to turn the small, coastal town into a metropolitan city.

On the curtain walls, the old, well-defined windows were replaced by horizontal layers of window rows. In the tripartite system the two first floors are in commercial use, floors three to eight in residential or office use, and the roof terrace provides storage space and saunas. The out-door open space inside the complex provides a place for entertainment.

Heinrich Klotz on Modernism, 1984
"A building was to remain pure, free of ornamentation, and its exterior was to reflect nothing more than its construction and internal organization. Construction alone should determine the form, and the internal organization alone should determine the exterior. Thus, for example, the power of the house to communicate was limited to our being able to distinguish the small lavatory window from the large living-room window. In the past, architecture exhibited a wealth of forms on the facade and thus presented an extremely wide range of possible content: for example, forms of dignity and power or the decorativeness of the rustic and the highly ornamental."
The prefabrication technology developments in the 60s and 70s resulted in buildings that all alike. There are few differences between apartment and office buildings. The buildings lack color and ornamentation.

A typical representative of the post Rewell Center generation is the multiuse complex built in the 70s to the south side of the plaza.

**Vaasa Today**

The box-like, uneventful massing continues in the office buildings of the 80s. The two-dimensional, plain facades are often covered with granite panels. To suggest modern "ornamentation", the somewhat exposed structure breaks the perfect horizontality of the International Style. The sloped roofs, which are more appropriate in the Finnish climate, have been reintroduced in some new buildings.

Even though office buildings are still totally colorless, some of the new apartment houses are made of yellow or red brick. Both public and private buildings have a sense of heaviness as a result of the materials.

Most of the new buildings around the plaza house retail shops in the first two floors.
The upper floors are mostly in office use mixed with few housing units and a couple of restaurants.

In my opinion, the plaza today, and for the large part the whole city, do not reflect the original atmosphere and image of Vaasa.

The festival feeling created by color, ornamentation and differences in massing of the buildings, have today been replaced by dullness that comes from buildings with uneventful massing, no color and which create a boring wall around the plaza.

The look of the plaza itself has remained the same throughout the years. Growing traffic problems have forced cars into the plaza, which provides parking on two sides. The latest planning meeting, in which I participated, studied the traffic problems and is currently proposing to keep cars away from the plaza. They also agreed that the plaza should be better defined.
The market hall creates a strong sense of continuity by functioning exactly the same way today, as it did in the 19th century. It could be described as the inside market plaza with kiosk type grocery booths where you still receive personal attention. The smell of fresh fish seems to be everywhere.

On weekday mornings farmers still bring their produce for sale as do many other types of vendors. On holidays, the importance of the plaza is emphasized, for many of the festivities are held there.

As the saying goes: If you can't buy it at the Vaasa market plaza, you don't need it.
Today the population is 50,000.
The seaside park piers are rented to boatowners. The Vaasa archipelago is unique and boating and relaxing in the islands is an inseparable part of family life.

More industries have moved to Vaasa. They include plastic, electronic and textile industries. The harbour has become a major tourist port with several daily ferries to Sweden.
Continuity
The architect's responsibility is greater than that of any other artist's, for his designs intrude the world - without invitation. One can not choose not to see a building when living in a community.

We do not live in two different worlds: one material, one spiritual. They interpenetrate fully. Too often today's architects get lost in the sophistication of their craft and forget the beauty and feeling in their designs.

Change as an obsession has become the factor that disassociates us from our environment. Architecture has lost its role as a transmitter of cultural heritage, and its role as a creator of images that help us belong and root into our environment.

Each place in its natural landscape has its own "genius loci" or spirit of the place, which is evident in its structure and which can be partially described in terms of space and
character. The most appropriate man-made environments are those that extend and enhance the genius loci.

The genius loci, that an architect may seek to guide his design, is not a private concept. Rather, the image formulates on several levels depending on the season, the level of environmental consciousness, of time spent in a place, of personal experiences in a place, etc., etc..

Through observation and communication one can, however, realize the collective mental picture residents of an area have formulated for themselves.

The collective understanding of the city image can then provide a framework for design. But, it should not be forced upon designers as standardization. Rather, it should be voluntarily considered by the architect.

M.M. Malech on images
"People relate to where they live through a collection of images which have been recorded in memory, enhanced by senses and emotions. What is remembered is what makes the strongest impression. Certain images are represented by buildings, these images are held in time. Other images are immediate, they are people and events. Together the ceremony and the stage set make up the environment." 3

Jean Paul Carlhian on judgement, 1980
"Each situation must be dealt with on its own terms. Erecting a new building in an area with a character worth preserving is not too different from providing an addition to a significant existing building. To the architect, the difference is a matter of degree rather than of substance." 4
An architect creating four-dimensional design, must first take several steps back to history to be able to leap forward.

New buildings, however technically advanced, should be inspired by the culture, the image of the place and its atmosphere. Image in an abstract sense, as it should be in architecture, should be drawn from the surroundings and applied in design.

The most direct way of reflecting the city atmosphere in a design, is to utilize symbolism in an abstract sense. The symbols could be drawn from nature or from built elements, that are recognized as characteristic and significant.
I feel, that buildings from the past could have a critical function in today's dynamic city. They could provide the harmonious link between the past, the present and the future.

Charles N. Tseckares on adaptive use, 1980
"Once an appropriate use has been selected, the building itself is examined in depth to identify its unique characteristics. If it is an elegant place, it should remain elegant; if it is dignified, the response should be dignified. Awkward mistakes occur when an adaptive use design is approached with a preconceived notion of 'style'. Egocentric architectural intellectualization provides few or no adequate solutions for adapting old buildings." 5

The old house should not stand alone, isolated, as a reminder of the "good old days", but by new uses could fulfill contemporary requirements.
When the architect has no regard to genius loci, the result is discontinuity. An example of this modern mish-mash is at the Harvard University in Cambridge, MA.

I think a good example of how continuity is created, is the Old Recorders House in Bruges, Belgium, where the method has been sympathetic abstraction. The more recent house (on the left) was built 1535, the older 1376-1420. Despite the differences in scale and style, gothic - renaissance, there is a sense of continuity.

Reproduction or imitation is usually the easy way out, and may be valid when the existing group of buildings is strongly unified by a common architectural style. Pittsfield National Bank, two floors added early this century.

In this example from Delft, Holland, the old becomes part of the new.
When old buildings, public or private, historically significant or just plain ordinary, are maintained within city blocks, they can provide guidelines to an architect searching for the character of the neighborhood he is designing for.

However, an old building can function as an important part of the new and changing city structure only, if the essence of its atmosphere has been preserved. The solution should not be an artificial continuation of visual, superficial elements, which alone are unable to provide the link to our cultural heritage.

Even though the architect should display personal expression in his design, by respecting the character of the place, he will most likely succeed in designing for continuity.

Today's popular solution is to preserve a piece of the facade, which in no way creates continuity, because the essence of the building has been lost. A good example is the building on 101 Arch St., Boston, where a wall has been lifted up to superficially create visual continuity. The new, large office building does not reflect the qualities of the old. This is not my idea of continuity.
Michael Graves and Gary Wolff on old and new architecture, 1980

"A more probing definition of compatibility might go beyond superficial similarities between old and new to other types of relationships, or dependencies, among buildings and between architecture and the landscape. It might also address the symbolic and cultural aspects of architecture, the metaphorical and ritualistic roles that make buildings significant settings for human activity. Through such considerations, relationships of a more significant nature between old and new architecture, and between architecture and its inhabitants, may result."  

Change makes the modern city dynamic and I do not suggest disapproval of it. But, I feel history deserves the same consideration we seem to give to the future.

Possible Solutions for Vaasa

After living abroad for over six years, I feel more objective and able to evaluate the change in Vaasa. I will do that from an emotional rather than analytical point of view.

After participating in several planning meetings and reading many articles and letters to the editor in the newspapers, and after speaking to several Vaasa residents, I have come to realize the concern they share for the city image and the character that are gradually disappearing.

Recently, the Department of Architecture of Vaasa evaluated the city development. In the consequent objectives, the department expressed concern about the uncharacteristic new buildings and called for a more contextually responsive design.
It seems, that the decision makers also feel - as do most of the city residents - that few new buildings seem attached to their neighborhoods and that they lack the family resemblance to their surroundings.

The goal set by the Department of Architecture is as follows: "The city center should represent the city and its history. The existing buildings have to be taken into consideration when designing a new building." The department also encourages the evaluation of the character and image of Vaasa and reminds the designer that the image should be preserved and integrated into future building.

Several architectural historians suggest, that the concentration should be on preservation. Currently there is much opposition to the design proposal which requires, that the existing building on the site of this project be demolished in order to build the proposed bank.

Aldo Rossi on planned preservation, 1983
"It is certain that the great buildings of the past, independently of their original function, may have great importance in the dynamics of a city. The historic centres, and their architectural features, like individual buildings in the region, must be catalogued and must constitute elements, often vital ones, in an overall plan.....The historic heritage seems to be protected only when it emerges on a tourist level; in reality it represents the structure of a whole region." 7

The late awakening of preservation efforts is one of the major causes for the disappearing atmosphere in many European cities. Change in Vaasa has proven fatal to old, historical buildings. It is much easier to rid the complex context of the old to build new, than to spend time studying the underlying framework, image and presence of the older buildings that should then be used in new design.
The design chapter of this document will suggest a possible solution to this problem.

Density/Atmosphere

The coherence of the cityscape in Vaasa survived the arrival of new buildings at the beginning of the 20th century, even though the scale had started to change. But, when the master plan was modified in the 60s to create more openness, the city started to lose its original atmosphere.

Buildings were turned away from the street edge, and the enclosed blocks were converted into rows of equally high buildings that have no rhythm and no excitement. I think the street edge should have a more meaningful task than to show the end of a building.

With the set-back buildings the originally wide boulevards became seemingly wider and density disappeared. New buildings could correct that by interacting with the street life.

The openness of the master plan also led to shortage of residential space within the city limits. The biggest complaint among city residents today, is the lack of housing in the center. It seems to me, that by tightening up the master plan, the space could be utilized far better. Setterberg wanted to create a warm, city-like atmosphere in Vaasa, why change that?
The atmosphere is also disappearing with the continuing construction of uneventful, prefabricated houses. It is understandable, that after the war it was economically feasible to mass-produce houses. Today, however, the situation is improved and the economy would allow some variations and better design.

Size No Excuse for Ugliness

The size of any building in the city should not prevent it from being suited to its context and into the city atmosphere. For example, the Jugend houses were just as large as the newest buildings, but displayed elements that reflected the atmosphere and thus helped them belong to their neighborhoods.

Movements in massing could help larger buildings adapt into their small city scale context.
By varying massing, traces of the idyllic atmosphere could be recaptured.

Vaasa is the capital of the administrative district and houses many local government buildings as well as schools up to the university level.

Traditionally these were the most prominent and respected buildings. Today, however, many offices are located in the recently built office complexes that lack all the distinguished qualities of the older buildings.

The new buildings show no respect to their surroundings and could just as well be located in some modern, American or European city. This seems to diminish their importance in the minds of many residents.

I think, that by designing beautiful, contextually responsive office buildings, the proper respect could be regained.

Another way of recapturing the original city atmosphere by considering tradition, is by allowing more space for small retail shops around the city center. Instead of large shopping malls, smaller scale buildings with arcades could provide comfortable shopping during the colder months. The only arcade in the old market hall is the favorite grocery market for many families.

Texture Creates Continuity

Building material can also be used as an atmospheric medium. I suggest that wood be reintroduced as part of the texture especially in private houses. After all, several of the existing wooden houses are over 100 years old.
and still serve their purpose perfectly.

By varying materials such as brick, stucco, granite, concrete and wood, the liveliness could be recreated.

The use of color can also make a real difference in a city, that has to endure long, wet winters, when the grey in most of the newest buildings turns into a dark, cold surface.

In conclusion, I would suggest, that the design for continuity be extended to urban planning. For example, alleys that remind us of the human scale design, should be maintained in the city center.
Design Issues

This chapter will explain how I have attempted to create continuity in my design. The examples will show a practical application of my theory of continuity.

Among the primary goals I suggested for the city development, is an increase in density and making the city more livable. To achieve this I have suggested more functions to the original program of bank and office premises. I have included the following additional functions: housing, public restaurant, and a small-scale retail arcade through the site and the block.

I decided to fill the whole site to keep the street edge defined and to create interaction with the street life. The massing highlights the currently monotonous plaza and defines...
the corner. If the existing building is left alone without any added massing, the corner becomes flat, and the old building seems isolated, not part of the growth.

To create continuity, the existing building becomes part of the new structure. It stands as a building of its right, but at the same time reads as part of the new building.

The connection should not be an artificial link, but rather a zone, where the old and the new interact and respect each other as equals. The connection should be visible, but subtle.
In my opinion the interaction between the old and the new has to continue in the interior to preserve the essence of the historical building. The atmosphere of the existing building has been respected and the new space has been designed to conform with it.

Again, the old interior reads as its own space, but together with the new space they can be read as one, a bank.

I have attempted to maintain the atmosphere of the old as much as possible, while introducing new functions to fulfill new requirements.

When entering the building through the original main entrance, the visitor will first experience the bourgeoisie qualities of the old.

Continuing to the new section,
he will realize the modern technology.

In designing the interiors, I have taken references from the Gothenburg Law Courts Extension designed by Gunnar Asplund in 1934-37.

In this project the interior connection has succeeded extremely well.
Because the building originates from the "golden age" of the merchant class and displays bourgeois qualities, I have assumed the building in its original look in my design. Also, the original centralized entrance would function perfectly as the main entrance to the bank.

To save the old building is a connection from the old to the new. The following will explain how to make the connection from the present to the past, and how to create continuity in the new.

When the mass is broken into elements, the scale becomes more adaptable to the neighborhood. Also, the massing elements separate different functions. Some of the proportions in the new respond to those in the old.

The skylight connecting the new and the old, suggests the form of the original
roof. It also makes an elegant connection and creates new, exciting light sources for the second and third floors.

For maximum space utilization, housing units are located on the roof. The houses follow the original, enclosed block organization creating an open space in the middle. Despite the obscure location, I have tried to create a traditionally residential atmosphere.

The framework for the street elevation in this element originates in the traditional street edge, where the private entrance is from the court yard inside the block. The imagery also comes from the old wooden houses.
The material is metal, which makes the housing element function as a roof for the office building.

Another reference to the Finnish culture, is the arcade in my design. Using the existing fire lanes, which no longer are necessary, the arcade further emphasizes the south to north direction of the blocks. I have assumed the use of nearby blocks for the arcade, but the length should later be studied further.

The retail facilities could vary from small kiosks to larger outlets.

The Finnish climate creates a need for more interior space and the traditional arcade would make shopping more comfortable during winter months.
To connect the two blocks, I have designed a pedestrian bridge, which also diminishes the wide street scale. The bridge emphasizes the arrival to the plaza and creates a smaller space adjacent to the larger plaza.

The restaurant on the top of the building attempts to capture the coastal villa feeling while functioning as a modern "cornice" line. It also adds to the festival feeling of the plaza.
The highlight element helps turn the corner in the block scale. The continuity of movement is better when the high element is set back from the corner.

The element takes references from the ocean. In a rather direct way, it imitates the numerous light towers in the islands.
The "light tower" also brings the presence of the ocean to the city center which now lacks the quality and indications to a coastal city.

The bank saunas are exposed from the wall to express their importance in the Finnish culture. They also help in breaking the mass and thus make the facade more vivid.
The new balcony in the corner functions as a connector between the old and the new, and turns the corner in the building scale.

The balcony also takes references from the traditional Vaasa corner balconies.

In window design I have referred to the past, while also using new, more technically advanced glass surfaces. The punched hole windows also make the building look heavier. This complies with the atmosphere of Vaasa.
The variation in window types indicates different uses.

The use of different materials makes the building more exciting. Stucco refers to the existing building, granite panels to the context and metal to the typical roofing material in the city.

The color of the building is in my opinion very important specially in the grey seasons. I have chosen variations of light, earthy colors that refer to the existing building and to the past. (Because of the technical requirements, the presentation is black and white.)

The numerous projecting parts will gather snow in the winter and thus add to the vividness of the building.
I have used a typical program for a bank of this size in Finland, which includes:

First floor: bank hall 700 m²
- 14 tellers
- exchange
- information
- guard
5 offices 12 - 24 m²

Second fl: Loan department 350 m²
- 5 desks
- book keeping
- notary
Executive offices
Reception area
5 offices 12 - 24 m²

Additional functions:
Vault/deposit boxes
Employee facilities/parking

In addition, I have included:
Rentable offices
Restaurant
Housing units
Retail arcade
FINAL DESIGN

SITE
GROUND FLOOR PLAN
& SURROUNDINGS

EXISTING BULETS
SECOND FLOOR

1. LOAN DEPARTMENT
2. OFFICE
3. EXECUTIVES
4. RETAIL
1 EMPLOYEE LOUNGE & CONFERENCE
2 DRESSING RM
3 EXERCISE RM
4 MECHANICAL RM
5 BANK SAUNAS

THIRD FLOOR

0 5 5M
1 RENTABLE OFFICE SPACE
2 FIVE HOUSING UNITS

FOURTH FLOOR

1 3 5 M
1 BANK
2 RETAIL ARCADE
3 RENTABLE OFFICE SPACE
4 PUBLIC RESTAURANT
5 HOUSING UNITS

SECTION A-A

0 1 3 5 M
CONCLUSION

With this thesis I wish to express my views, which I hope will contribute to the ongoing discussion on continuity.

My intention has been to communicate both the urgency I feel for quick decisions regarding the city image of Vaasa, and the importance of the sense of continuity in urban environments everywhere.

The best possible result would be the expansion of discussion among Vaasa decision makers and the residents of the city. Fortunately, the department of architecture already has shown concern in its study and consequent goals. But, any actions are yet to be taken to "integrate the character of the city in future design."

The design solutions are somewhat exaggerated to make a point. For example, I included functions, such as
housing on the roof, that may not be exactly appropriate, because I wanted to make my building as vivid and lively as possible.

I have not introduced a method, which would allow scientific studies of city image, simply, because my idea is to find the character of the place in an emotional rather than analytical sense. Therefore, I suggest traditional observation of the place and communication between the architect and the community.

This thesis concentrates on the problem of small towns, which may not be worldly enough for great concern, but which are rapidly being destroyed by environmentally unresponsive design.

I believe that the problem of designing for continuity has to be solved by regional considerations, not by artificial links provided by modernists and not by artificial elements from ancient history used by many post-modernists.

Both of these styles show no regard for the genius loci, and the buildings could be built anywhere.

I doubt, that there would be better architecture without specific framework, or "style", but I feel strongly for better understanding of the spirits of the place.

Design for future is at best uncertain, in an in-fill situation almost impossible. The future of the in-fill building context is more uncertain, because of the ever-changing city fabric. In an open plan situation, however, the building is more changeable and vulnerable for growth.

As I do not proclaim architects as prophets, I will suggest designing
in-fill buildings that control the present, consider the near future and maintain the ability to survive the change in their environment.

This is an area of architecture that needs more debating, discussing and solutions. For some time I have developed the line of thought expressed here, but the preparation of this document made me clarify my thinking. In that sense the thesis proved to be a great ending to my architectural schooling. Throughout the time of preparation, I was also forced to explore myself as an architect before getting out to the "real world."
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