
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art - Revolution, Baby, Revolution!

This essay examines and discusses the materiality and details of Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and Jorgen Bo & Vilhelm Wohlert's tectonic approach and design decisions, analysed and explained through experiential engagement with the site. The aim is to demonstrate the presence of continuity from the art of extending a building. Knud W. Jensen In the mid 1950s, Knud W. Jensen began planning a small museum that would exhibit his collection of artworks by Danish artists. He found an abandoned estate that was established in the 1850s. Jensen has always had an interest in art and culture. His desires to witness the growth in things have allowed Louisianan to grow as a continuous piece of architecture throughout half a century. Even though the word 'life quality' was not yet invented in the fifties, Jensen already had a dream; it was to let the general public to connect with art and culture. The key to all this success is architecture; an excellent framework can bring quality to one's life. For the clear vision Jensen had, Bo and Wohlert referred to him as the project's 'third architect'. Through the establishment of Louisiana, 'museum' has been redefined in the Danish culture. Jorgen Bo & Vilhelm Wohlert Bo and Wohlert designed all seven phases of extensions at Louisiana. There is a strong sense of continuity and unity among the different extensions throughout its evolution and expansion. They both graduated from the School of Architecture at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in the 1940's. Wohlert also had the opportunity to become acquainted with Californian Bay Area architecture.

At the turn of the 20th Century, simple and genuine regional architecture and good workmanship was highly appreciated. Bo and Wohlert's works may be seen as 'Scandinavian Modernism.' Founded on the legacy of the British Arts and Craft movement, infused with Japanese traditional architecture, and influenced by Californian Bay architects. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art Louisiana Museum of Modern Art began with a simple idea – 'It should be a place for art and man to meet. This philosophy is timeless at Louisiana through its architecture, landscape and the people. A new kind of culture and identity was what Louisiana manifest for. It has revolutionised how the Danish visit museums. Louisiana is considered as a major work of Danish modernist architecture. Just forty kilometres north of Copenhagen, Louisiana is located in a suburban setting in Humlebeak, along the coastline of Northern Denmark.

Journey – 1850's

Louisiana is renowned for its enchanting seaside setting and also being constructed around a park, the museum occupies the grounds of a nineteenth century estate. Significant route choices at Louisiana's park broaden the exploration dimension; which allows the pattern of socialisation to extend beyond and outside of the galleries. Jensen adopted the existing detached classical villa as the centrepiece of his new museum. He insisted that the villa serves as the entrance for the museum that remains today. The original house is modest in scale and charming in design. The house has painted timber panels, cornices, door pediments and bay windows; it is a building of separate rooms with openings punched through enclosing walls.

Lights – 1950's

Bo and Wohlert were commissioned to design an extension to the villa that included three galleries in 1956. The design featured exposed structures, laminated wooden ceilings, and windows that open into the surrounding landscape; which contributed to a unique architectural lightness. The bricks on the floor were selected for their slightly irregular colours and most of the other materials were left in their natural state, so that the organic colours and textures provide decorations. The exception to the rule of unfinished material is the treatment of the brick walls, which were whitewashed. A sense of simplicity and site sensitivity were found and expressed through the materials and tectonic fabrication. In this phase of extension, lights speak to me the most. The relationship between space and light, inside and outside will lead you to become more engaged with the building, in which tectonic elements are the key. In the Lake Gallery, artworks are lit by a circular skylight. A wall of double height windows at the end of the room is the iconic scene at Louisiana.

The scenery acts as the background for the arts; the intimate relationship between the gallery and the lake reminds us that the building is a direct result of the setting and could not have been designed anywhere else. To archive such calm and constant character, Bo and Wohlert incorporated a 12 cm module into their design, that is the combined width of a brick and mortar joint, they multiply the module to a grid of 60 x 60 cm. This grid determines the size of the passages, the distance between the roof beams, and the width of the windows. The scale, materiality and context responding together with light create a spatial quality that is exclusive at Louisiana. The successful interplay between lights and architectural strategy has brought out the best of the site; with a frame to emphasize its uniqueness. Creating galleries with different types of lights to suit different types of art is an important aspect that must not be overlooked when designing for an art museum. In the Lantern Gallery, Bo and Wohlert have designed bands of windows at two different heights on each side of the room.

The windows sit on and between the roof and beams that are exposed and extended beyond the exterior walls. Wohlert refers to this type of roof construction as a 'lantern'. The architects intended for light to change over the course of the day. A domestic setting is reinforced through the changes in the angle and intensity of the light. This gallery is of a brick; load-bearing structure with softwood beam and timber board ceiling. The side-lit gallery's natural light source relies on the floor-to-ceiling windows on two sides. During my visit, my observation was that it is almost impractical to have these many windows when designing for a museum; it leaves very little wall spaces for artworks to be hung and displayed. Consequently, the characteristic of the material has defined the spatial quality for displaying another type of art. The ever-changing natural daylight takes part as a form of art. Not only can visitors enjoy the journey of walking through displayed artworks, it also takes them on a journey with time: as every second and every inch the daylight moves, it creates a new experience in the moment on site. The exhibits are set so as to emphasise and bring out the spatial qualities of the architectural space. Connecting between the galleries are series glass corridors that proceed in a zig-zag form. Lights have deliberately interrupted the space with shadows that have been casted from the mullions.

The fabrication of the corridors adds depth and layers to the rustic brick tiled floor. Or a direct translation of the surrounding onto a whitewashed brick wall, that itself became art. Trees from the park on the other side of the threshold casting a dark shadow onto the white walls present itself as an abstract sensation; and when one look up to the Columbian pine timber ceiling, it all

make sense as the landscape, architecture and light grow into becoming a whole. The ways architectural fabrication echoes with its surrounding context from centuries ago make this spatial experience more compelling.

Revolution – mid 1960's to mid 1970's

In contrast to the last extension, where light and spatial quality is the focus; Louisiana's ethos is the core to this extension. Between 1967 to 1976, the museum conducted its second phase of extension that included a cafeteria and a concert hall for musical performances, public debates and lectures, leading Louisiana to evolve into a cultural centre. This extension has changed the culture of museums; the concept was ground breaking at the time. In the sixties, museums were like cathedrals, to go in you had to keep quiet and be well prepared mentally. Louisiana was one of the first democratic museums; it is open-minded and inviting.

Wohler designed a square room with seats on two sides, so that the performers are surrounded by audiences and the audiences can see each other, creating a sense of community. By integrating a room with 250 timber weaved seats and matching dark timber floor, with whitewashed brick walls and the shore and Sweden set as the backdrop, ample daylight filling the space, the inclusion of a concert hall in the museum has shined a spotlight onto issues in the social condition to appreciating arts and culture freely during the sixties. Above the concert hall is the cafeteria. The cafeteria's interior materials are consistent with the existing extension promoting continuity in its tectonic qualities. Bricks in the outer leaf of the wall are laid in a staggered diagonal pattern. On sunny days, the brickwork is thrown into high relief by a pattern of shadows that shifts with the time of day in the season. Bo and Wohler designed the first exhibition building using a grid that determines the constructions of the place.

At the end of the building they have rotated the room by thirty degrees to improve the views, while drawing, they have also rotated the external materials. What might seem to be the architect's invention is simply two sets of brick meeting at a thirty-degree angle. The roof construction is another tectonic detail that one would not miss. Gold anodised aluminium plate covers and protects the end of the soft wood beam from rainwater. The gold colour is earthy, it doesn't compete with the bricks or timber but instead it suggested how simple joints of materials could add a hint of poetic feel. The contrast of two totally different tectonic quality materials joining together to meet and compliment each other is inspiring experimentally. The extension for a concert hall and a cafeteria is an example of how architecture develops in our society. Not from a stylistic point of view, but about architecture as a cultural discipline. Deciding politically how we build our society.

Scale – 1980's

Louisiana was the first significant commission of its architects, their approach to tectonic and spatial quality has evolved during the past quarter century. In this phase of extension, there are different heighted ceilings, which step up from one gallery to the next giving each room a different proportion and character. Even though the white brickworks is familiar from previous extensions in the museum, but the walls were plastered to reduce their texture, and the floor is covered with grey limestone, which avoid any spatial illumination. To the end of the hall, a staircase would lead visitors up to an open space that offers a panoramic view of the nature and the sea. A strip of window is extended horizontally at eye levels to display a moment in

landscape. Human scale became the focus of the room. Bo covered the floor with mahogany board that provides the sensation of standing on a wooden deck. At an urban scale in Humlebaek, Louisiana has always been referred to as its 'genius loci'. Throughout the planning process, site sensitivity was a primary objective. Louisiana presents itself as a horizontal and modest building. When Louisiana needed more galleries and was short on land, an underground gallery was proposed; in order to preserve the experience of the park and views of the sea. The use of geometry and a simple palette of materials have joined mutual spaces together. In a curved gallery, the floor is covered with bricks that follow the curves, the suspended ceiling has lights in it at two different levels that make the gallery seem slightly larger than its actual size. Within a well-designed spatial context, proportion can be manipulated into better visual effects.

Cultural and Community – 1990's

Despite designing quality spaces that meets the visions Louisiana has, the brief must also be extensive to carry out the mission it wish to pursue. The final extension includes a Children's room, designed in 1994 and a Graphic wing during 1997. These two functional rooms maintain a sustainable environment for the society on a social and cultural ground. Louisiana believes in the power of art, they encouraged a 'Children self-healed' scheme. The children's room is not a temporary baby-sitting area; its purpose is to inspire real creativity from a young age. The main feature is a curving brick wall that rises from the natural typography on the site; and the form of a serpentine stairs, which made the journey more adventurous. Louisiana carries a kind of social restorability that educates the community. In the Graphic wing, all the walls are painted black complemented with dark floor tiles. It exhibits works that must not be exposed to daylight such as videos, textiles and light artworks. Louisiana has grown from a small-scale gallery, into a place for seminars and performances, and at last incorporated facilitates that foresees the future. The details and tectonic elements that have evolved to adapt to the growth of Louisiana is a reflection of our society throughout the last half a century.

Modernisation – 2000's

During the 1990's, Louisiana's concept had come to a complete realisation; for the 21st century, several technological improvements were demanded. A modernisation was carried out from 2003 to 2006. There was one principle that guided the process when addressing these requirements, the modernised system for heating, insulations, ventilation and security should not be visible or disturb the buildings' aesthetic integrity.