Like many architects, I have used competitions to advance ideas and new directions.

The first project undertaken in my solo practice, the HAWAI'I LOA competition was an opportunity to synthesize and apply work by other architects that I had been brooding over for a decade.

For A.R.T. STATION, I won a commission against over thirty other firms only to have the design prove so controversial that I was dismissed by the client.

The WITCH TRIALS project was an early attempt at multivalence and ambiguity: how to make a design do many things at one time, none of them overriding.

The DOLLHOUSE allowed be to apply design lessons I'd been studying in children's book author Chris Van Allsburg work.

The THURMOND TERRACE was a non-traditional way to solve some very practical problems Clemson University was having with an existing underground building; perhaps the original building already being non-traditional did not help my entry.

Finally, the first-place win in Präsenz der Zeit rewarded the application of several ideas I'd been exploring in service-learning projects with students at the CAC.

Contents

Hawaii Loa
international competition 1986

A.R.T. Station
commission winner
Stone Mountain, GA 1988

Salem Witch Trials
national competition 1990

antemillennium dollhouse
ART Papers
regional competition 1993

Thurmond Terrace
Clemson University 1993

Präsenz der Zeit
first place
international competition 2004
1986 HAWAII LOA COMPETITION HAWAII
ABSTRACT

Hawaii, with its natural and cultural setting, is aware of its design and planning heritage.

A new center between cultural activities in the area and strategic design development.

Hawaii Loa College
Pacific Center for the Media Arts
International Design Competition
This international design competition for a Pacific Center for the media arts at Hawaii Loa College was a collaboration with Mark Molen. The project brief solicited designs that worked between boundaries. Here, after all, was a site between East and West, on an island (a point of ambiguity between land and water), that, at this point in the 1980s, represented a radical juxtaposition between (commercial) media and the (cultural) arts. Moreover, the sponsors sought to juxtapose art with technology, urban and natural environments, developed culture vs. primitive ones, and the future against the past.

Accordingly, this design proposed an assemblage of formal, programmatic, and material elements that, like the project brief, was a set of oppositions:

- Selected programmatic elements were either carved out of poché, while complementary ones were sculpted as mass.
- An axial walking path through the Center (connecting other parts of the campus) was counterbalanced by a meandering path within the facility.
- A fountain (rendered in stone as a positive volcano-like cone) was set in opposition to a funnel atrium (rendered in glass as a metaphor for the ocean). Moreover, the former element shot water up into the air while the latter drained water into the building.
- This same fountain was set within a circular frame that was circumscribed, partially by a wall-basin (man-made/continuous), partially by a palm tree ring (natural/point elements). It served as a Polynesian Performance Garden, in juxtaposition to the Western Black Box Studio within the frontal mass.
- An outdoor theatre (rendered as a negative cut from the land) was set in opposition to an indoor theater (composed as a positive solid set on the land).
- A rational grid layout using linear walls was contraposed to solid and organic languages.
- Finally, on the roof of the black box studio was a garden. Here, the ballast laid over an EPDM roof membrane (Western technology) served also as the gravel of a Zen stone landscape (Eastern tradition).
A.R.T. Station was a project won in competition with more than thirty firms for a regional arts center in a town outside of Atlanta. The project was carried through preliminary design.

Devoted to the indigenous Southern arts, A.R.T. Station purchased an abandoned trolley barn for renovation as their new gallery, theatre, and offices. The building itself was scarred by numerous preceding renovations, each of which told a part of its history in a kind of indigenous building idiom.

There was the original penthouse that received the powerlines for the trolley; there were the bricked-in windows from when the building housed a department store; there were remnant tracks across the site; there were other additions and insertions. In addition, the building’s physical and historical prominence in the small town made the structure an important landmark.

There were other readings of the buildings that were equally fascinating. The trolley line housed by the structure had once participated in the segregation of Atlanta into black and white districts. Close inspection of historic photographs indicated that the building itself had been segregated—there was a separate waiting room marked for “whites.”
To add to the tale, the structure was located adjacent to the site where the Ku Klux Klan had twice been reborn and disseminated throughout the South and Midwest via church networks. Thus, the building and site were pregnant with themes related to the mission of the arts organization: the investigation of indigenous Southern culture.

The proposed design sought to draw upon these themes architecturally:

- Building upon the former penthouse, the proposal would have solidified the structure’s landmark presence in the town while inserting a new entrance under this highest point of the building.

- The entrance itself—a tear in the fabric of the existing structure (and a metaphor for racism in the fabric of Southern society)—reminded entrants of their responsibility for all aspects of Southern culture.

- The roof of the penthouse was to become skylights, glass shards meant to reference, not a single signifier, but a host of possibilities: church steeples, ICBM missiles, Klan hats?

- Carefully inserted window and door openings would have preserved, and added to, the legibility of the building’s history. Former trolley tracks were traced by a line of trees; an outdoor theatre faced Stone Mountain; and other references abounded.

Although these themes were never articulated in public, the design proved controversial and I was ultimately dismissed within a few weeks of the design’s unveiling (after having witnessed Nazi-type salutes while “Dixie” played at a local fundraiser).
ROBERT MILLER, ARCHITECT  PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

SALEM

SALEM WITCH TRIALS COMPETITION

1990 SALEM WITCH TRIALS COMPETITION

SALEM
DESIGN STATEMENT:
The events of 1692 Salem have haunted the American ethos since their occurrence. Not only have the phenomena elicited myriad interpretations, but explications are proffered with every epoch. As noted in the competition program, “the forces behind the accusations and trials were complex and have challenged historians and civil rights advocates for years. Political unrest, town and family rivalries, religious conflict, and psychological and sociological forces have all been suggested as causes.” There is, and will continue to be, no definitive explanation of these Trials. The evidence will stalk the conscience of every generation who will see in the events at Salem the most difficult and tormenting issues of their own time.

It is in this light, and in keeping with the commitment of the competition sponsors to remain “open to all interpretations,” that this proposal is offered. It is our endeavor to design a structure that allows for and encourages, not a single “correct” reading, but a number of readings, all of them correct if none of them right.

Acknowledging that an “open” reading is, itself, a point of view, it is one, nevertheless, inclusive of all others. As for our bias, it remains the Twentieth Century’s contribution to aesthetics to put forward a poetics of the open work—Stockhausen, Berio, Pousseur, Kafka, Joyce, Brecht, Clader, Eco—a poetics that embraces all others yet admits of the elusiveness of truth. In this way will the proposal acknowledge the limits of its own vision while conceding to future generations their own prejudices and insights.

In proposing this solution, we offer not one but many insights into Salem, and both sides of each: the judge’s bench as the victim’s scaffold; the presence of the witch with the absence of the specter; the closed mind and the open grave; the guilt of the acquitted and the innocence of the executed.

In the end, the decision to hold a competition for the commemoration of the Salem With Trials is to put the Trials themselves on trial. (The analogies are enticing: Five judges “of regional and national renown,” charged with hanging projects submitted by a spectrum of persons, and deliberating over which ones are crafty!) Like the original Trials, this scheme seeks a reconciliation to the events of 1692; but, unlike the Court of Oyer and Terminer, it provides an opportunity to observe the 300th anniversary rather than impose a truth where none exists.
1993 ANTEMILLENIUM DOLLHOUSE
ART PAPERS, DESIGN COMPETITION
In 1993, Art Papers held a design competition around the theme of the Antemillennium Dollhouse, a completely ambiguous and open-ended solicitation. This project developed from a critical analysis of children's book author/artist Chris Van Allsburg. By carefully examining the anatomy of his illustrations, it was possible to show that Van Allsburg had created an extremely skewed world, the logic of which derived from a child's point of view. Then, working within his depiction of a dollhouse from Jumanji—and, reverse-constructing the perspectival system of his illustrations—I rigorously configured a dollhouse-as-anamorphoscope: from all views into the house through the windows and doors, the interior was helter-skelter; but, when viewed through a model scope inserted through pre-configured portals, scenes from Van Allsburg's books would reappear. Thus, the dollhouse would make clear the ideology of the illustrations and the craft underlying the otherwise comforting illustrations.
portfolio of professional practice
1993 THURMOND TERRACE COMPETITION CLEMSON UNIVERSITY, SC
COMPETITION
In response to severe leakage, Clemson University held a concept competition for the Thurmond Institute’s in-ground facility.

SITE RESPONSE
To reconcile the strongly axial Cooper Library to its naturalesque axis and the Institute’s off-center drive, a series of pyramid-moguls were dispersed over the building and adjacent lawn. Covering the Institute, these structures would shade, drain, and provide solar energy; the landscape would provide a field for sunbathing, skateboarding, and picnicking.

ENTRY RESPONSE
The entries to the Institute were augmented by the addition of an overarching truss canopy, providing shelter and identification for both entrances.

AMPHITHEATRE RESPONSE
Finally, the existing amphitheatre was made usable by adding a large tent, making a bookend to the formal amphitheatre north of the Library.
THE COMPETITION
As part of its bid to become the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010, the Stadt Braunschweig held a design competition to solicit festival proposals addressing the theme “Presence of Time.” The competition was to identify and reassert Braunschweig’s urban identity through presence and time.

REBUILDING NEIGHBORHOODS
This project would re-establish neighborhood identities, mobilize local organizations, and be a tangible symbol of a longer program of urban regeneration. While Braunschweig had formed around five medieval districts, post-WWII traffic planning had cut these into fragments. The festival project sought to re-delineate five new neighborhoods and proposed creating, or re-associating, new civic realms for each.

THE BRICK PROJECT
The festival project was predicated on the staple American urban fundraiser: the personalization of public bricks. To distinguish this from commercial activity, these bricks would be made by tourists and volunteers. Workers would insert artifacts and mementos into each brick, converting them into time capsules; the public would take away a plug from the brick as a souvenir. Thus something would be given as well as taken, the participant expending some labor toward the construction of an edifice and the rebuilding of a neighborhood.

The bricks themselves would exhibit an historical presence but, upon closer inspection, be made of a contemporary material, this condition being an analogous but more precisely-ambiguous manifestation of Braunschweig’s tradition of dealing with the past.

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Much of the grade level of Braunschweig has been consumed by global capital. Grade rental rates are so high that landlords can make higher returns by leaving upper floors empty and using the area needed for stairs and elevators to shops. As shown here, Braunschweig’s architecture is cut-off at the knees, the ground level having little to do with the architecture above. The mercantile space eats away building impediments between indoors and out (even though the weather is cold!) and works to construct one continuous shopping space.
CULTURAL PATRONAGE
This proposal required the City to be a patron of the arts on an escalating schedule leading up to the festival year. It also called for Braunschweig’s participation on major anniversaries.

THE INSTALLATIONS
Each installation would be larger and more complex than its predecessor. With neighborhood sponsorship, the size of each installation would measure neighborhood activism.

THE BRICK SYSTEM
- Each Brick serves as a time capsule, allowing the insertion of artifacts and memorabilia. The position of the capsule’s access point, when stacked, would secure it.
- The Bricks, once stacked, shed water.
- To facilitate dismantling and re-installation, the Brick System must be internally stable by stacking and gravity alone—no mortar.
- To provide a system with adequate height, the System would be capable of multi-wythe assembly, allowing parallel rows of bricks, as necessary to the height.
- The Brick System could be made opaque, by tight stacking, or somewhat transparent, like a scrim, by varying the density of the stack.

SUMMARY
This design activates several themes:
- It emphasizes the importance of the 25th Anniversary of the European Cultural Capital.
- It emphasizes the City’s solidarity with other historic cities, specifically by altering the rampant commercialization of the historic and residential core.
- It is homologous to the European Cultural Capital program by recreating its structure: an ever-changing series of host sites which benefit culturally by their designation.
- It re-creates Braunschweig’s own legacy of the past by imitating the movement of structures around the City.
- It re-generates neighborhood organizations and re-delineates inner-city neighborhoods.
- The size and sophistication of the project will be a direct reflection of the social and cultural activity of Braunschweig.
2006 would see one locally- and one internationally-commissioned work for solo performance, staged on the first brick Installation in the square beside St. Magni, during a short summer season.

2007 would begin with a new year’s parade in which the first installation would be dismantled and the bricks transported to the new focus neighborhood, St. Petri. A second installation would be erected to serve as the setting for two pairs of commissioned works for duos.
2008 would begin with another parade, moving to the Wollmarkt, a longer summer season, and six works for trio performance.

2009 would be held in the Domplatz, with two-dozen commissioned works for ensembles.
On the 25th anniversary of the European Cultural Capital program, in 2010, the festival would move to the Kohlmarkt, the final and largest installation with the largest number of commissioned works.