

Reflection

Keywords: wall, urban pattern, reverse, industrial remnants, street corner

Studying in Urban Architecture studio is a pleasant journey for me. The studio provides me a chance to understand a given site from different scales, in which my design will be conducted logically from a complete and deep research. The topic "Spolia" inspires me a lot to push the consideration in second-hand fragments to a deep level which I have never arrived before. It refreshes my position in reuse and sustainability, as well as the cognition to the relationship among city, architecture and materials.

In my graduation project, the urban design proposal addresses the wall in the site which separates the block into two. The wall is one of the few remnants of the buried river and a defining character in the sites social manifestation. As a result of interactions with the differing segments of wall, it was renovated again and again and the qualities are variant. The wall acts as connection and separation, nature and built environment, protection and orientation, closure and openness.

The value of the old wall can be reflected from the research of urban patterns.

1. The previous urban patterns provide vertical comparison of the plot in different times, from which we found the history of the wall intertwines with the Senne river. In the research of the evolution of the block, the plot was naturally divided by the river before its cover in the 1930s, after which the buildings occupied the covered places. Later, with the implantation of residential buildings and urban green space, the rest industrial buildings and the residential area were artificially separated by a solid wall that followed the river trace. From a morphological view, the form of the walls represents the ghost of Senne. The research helps us aware that the history of the wall is important, because it reveals the relationship between local residence and industrial zoning: they are close to each other but not connected to each other. The wall works as a solid border shaped the separation of the whole plot.

2. The present urban pattern provides horizontal comparison between the plot and the traditional Brussels blocks at the surrounding, from which the value of the old wall can be further explored from its closure and openness. In the mapping research, a typical block is enclosed by a solid border. Some hidden islands inside where the possible street life happens are rarely known by the neighbors and only connected to the street through a narrow corridor. In contrast, our plot is a special one with a permeable and translucent edge due to the existence of the high-rise residential building, so it is not necessary to make our plot follow the surrounding fabric. Therefore, in urban design we reverse the traditional texture to make the inner part of the plot more accessible for people. By acting as connection and separation, nature and built environment, protection and orientation, closure and openness, the wall provides us an opportunity to intervene the plot and redefine the back and front.

The research of the urban patterns works well and helps me aware the value of the wall and find the reasons for keeping it as our "spolia". Based on that, our intention is to create a community oriented block, with the wall connect the newly added public facilities and form a linear landscape run through the whole block, thereby inverting the space along the wall from "back" to accessible "front" to serve the residents living in the neighborhood.

Three steps are taken to transfer the urban idea into our master plan: 1. The wall and the structures attached to it are kept and reused as part of the newly added buildings or landscape elements. 2. Rotor is renovated into the housing to alleviate the housing shortage, and the warehouses are removed. These industrial buildings are not necessary since they are temporarily let out by different companies and most of them are spare. What's more, the industrial area is located on the other side

of the railway so there is no need to keep some single buildings for production in the residential area. 3. Public facilities are introduced to make up for the shortage of social space in this neighborhood, which is especially meaningful for low-income group.

The program of my architectural design is a public building that consists of a library and a sports center. It not only provides studying space for students nearby but also returns a sports area which previously existed in Rotor. Making a combination of the two programs can create an interesting balance between dynamic and silent activities through visual connection, as well as share some resources, such as entrance, greenery and structure system. It is another way of sustainability.

The main wall following senne river behind Les Goujons is the spolia in the project. In addition, constructions and secondary walls attached to the main wall that are still able to operate, have been put back to work, adding and updating only where strictly necessary. They allow us to understand the industrial remnants whilst preserving their aura in a new context.

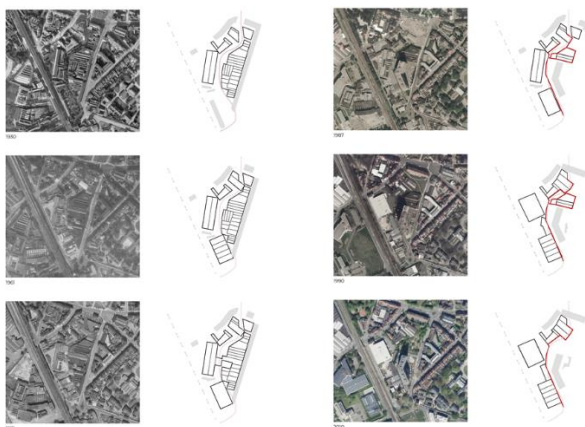
The meaning of a street corner is also taken into consideration due to my site location. It refers to the main users of the corner building. Since the newly built complex opposite to the corner will form its own community with various facilities in it, my corner building serves for the residents living in our plot. The corner plays 2 roles in the design: 1. As an continuity of the street façade, the corner building responds to both horizontal and vertical urban patterns in a given context. It gives strong visual appeal to the streetscape. 2. A street corner provides a central place of urban life, creates an attractive social meeting place and represents the best opportunity to reorient the neighborhood. Previously it is just an leftover of the warehouses but now it serves as an entrance and orientation of the plot.

Two steps are taken to transfer the architectural idea into the design: 1. The small buildings close to the railway have been demolished since the dense and small pieces do not fit the function of an interior basketball court or reading areas, while a new long volume is introduced as a replacement. The direction of the reserved walls follow the previous industrial layout: the original parking lot becomes an entrance garden shared by the library and sports center, and the vaulted warehouse becomes a bright reading room. 2. The 2 street corners at each side of the urban block work as entrances of the linear landscape along the wall. At the south corner, vertical elements are applied on the façade of the building so as to keep the streetscape being consistent with the surrounding buildings when the corner is seen from different direction. A casual and small bar is introduced at the ground floor of the corner building to make access of the alley easier and to make the library & sports center an everyday facility.

In terms of materialization, aluminum panel is selected as the main material for the newly added building. A corrugated aluminum skin draws attention and intensifies the presence of the building within its industrial context. It highlights the retained brick walls and constructions through the contrast between light material and heavy material. From the economy circulation perspective, the aluminum panel is from Rotor facade. With the full refurbishment of powder coating, it can be recolored from red to white, thus the new building can worked as a background of the reserved part. All new refurbishment interventions are made evident by the white color or by the sincerity of the materials, clearly stating where the boundaries between past and present lie. It is important to make the distinction and emphasis on the past because it gives respect on the "spolia" as well as reminds people of the historical story. In the process I've learned that the reuse of the material requires one not only to understand the quality of the material specifically, but to fully consider the role of the material in an given context. Finding a way to reuse properly and meaningfully is more important than the quantity of reuse. Besides, reuse is only one part of sustainability. For me, sustainability is not a far and deep concept but an attitude of daily life that you can start with small things.

Back to the urban proposal, the architecture design at the south corner works as an entrance of the linear “wall” space which runs throughout the whole block. Following the alley along the wall from a street corner, a vivid “front”, represents both a spiritual core of history and cohesion of the neighborhood. What I value most in my gesture is the potential of the wall: it is not a single negative element to isolate something, but a flexible boundary that provides opportunities to reorient a neighborhood by making proper intervene of it, which gives the architect a great challenge to form his/her own position on spolia. The planning for the final stage of my graduation project is to develop the interior of the building and make the “spolia” more contextualized. The climate strategy will be improved to an achievable level by the completing of the technique drawings. Besides, I plan on making a model for the P5 presentation.

In terms of the relevance of my graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework, I think the project understands a given environment from different scales, in which the design will be conducted logically from a complete and deep research. In this way, we can find some neglected phenomena in the urban public/private system, as well as take some important points, such as the street corner and the tension between dynamic and static in public space, into consideration. What’s more, the project focuses on the meaning of second-hand fragments(including actual elements and memorial motifs/styles) in a new context, which leads a position in sustainable design from both natural and cultural perspectives.



Previous urban pattern



Existing urban pattern



Collage of the reserved wall



Collage of the wall in the design



Master plan

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