

The Aquatic Centre

Competition Winter 2006

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The proposed site for the aquatic centre is located in a new mixed-use development in an urban area situated in the centre of residential homes. With the quiet disposition of the area, one of the most important aspects of this research competition is to acknowledge the relationship between the building and its site to harmonize the two without offense.

A community centre is a place for the public to gather, whether for group activities, learning, social support, or public information, it is a place for people to commune and find refuge in one way or another through each other or from the everyday. A community aquatic centre such as the one proposed has the opportunity to embody a unique identity and to connect with nature directly in order to utilize it in such a way for the community to benefit from its therapeutic and healing characteristics.

The Roman bath is an example of earlier communal activity of the same nature. It is the most important leisure activity and often incorporates other facilities preceding the bathing ritual such as an outdoor gymnasium, games and



exercises. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that at the prime of the empire, baths embodied the ideal Roman way of urban life. Aside from the daily hygienic ritual, they also provide sports and recreation ¹. Their public nature and sense of community provided the ideal environment, much like a private club or a community center; it presents a playing ground for social intercourse for gossip and business transactions. Aside from recreation, the much grander baths, the *thermae*, incorporates intellectual facilities where one can attend lectures, visit libraries, colonnades, and promenades².

Drawing inspiration from the Roman Baths as an influence of a social vessel, a much earlier example from which the ambiance of the competition is drawn would be the idea of a cave-like dwelling. The idea of caves being a solid and secure structure, that it is self sustainable, and eternal are qualities that we hope to incorporate in the competition.



Caves cannot exist without a medium, whether in a mountain, cliff, earth, or in the water, it uses the medium to create a place for protection from weather and predators. It creates shelter, a dwelling where it can be used as a

place of worship, ritual, and a place of removing one's self from civilization. Since items placed in caves are protected from the climate and scavenging animals, it is only natural that people are drawn to caves and are today a rich vessel for archaeological finds and a way of learning about the people who inhabited the dwelling³. Some evidence of their dwelling would be found in friezes on the walls of the cave, an example is the *Great Cave of Niah* which contain habitation dating back 40,000 years ago⁴.

The earliest known time that the cave was inhabited is during the Old Stone Age, also known as the Palaeolithic, and occurs during the late Pleistocene era. The

Pleistocene period ends with the commencement of the Holocene era, dating approximately 10,000 from present day. During this period, there was an array of innovative changes in which humans found a way



to exist in a variety and wide range of environments across the globe ⁴. The cave exists with a calculated area of 10 hectares and a height of 75 metres in high areas and has been an intermittent domicile during the early Holocene period by mobile foragers. It was also used as a large repository of the dead from around 2000BC, in which pottery, burial jars, ceramics were found alongside with imported metals and glass ⁴.

The idea of caves being an inhabitation of space and a recreational space, such as the roman baths, is brought into consideration and application in much later and more recent works, such as Peter Zumthor's Thermal Bath in Vals, Switzerland, and Alvaro Siza's Piscinas das Marés in Laça. Both of them utilize the earth as a medium in which their building can situate themselves in an inspirational and functional purpose, while being respectful of their site.



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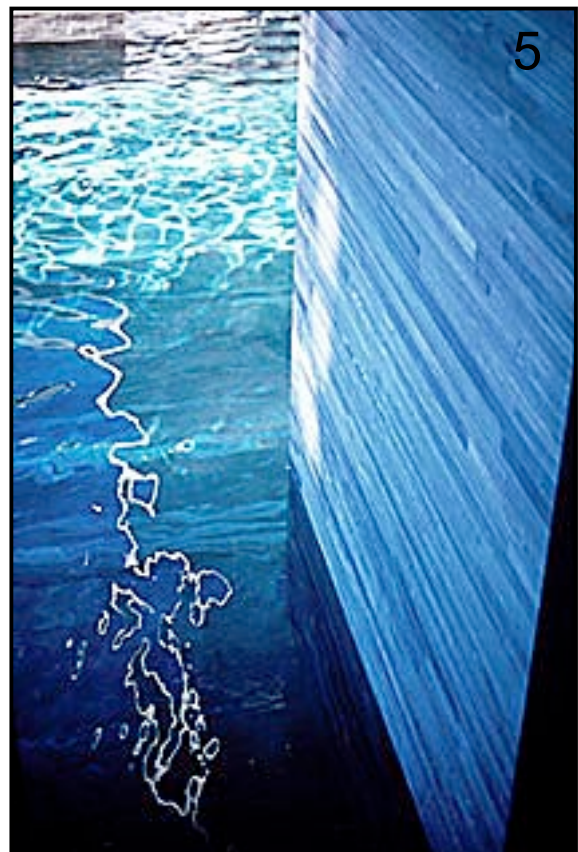
Zumthor takes influences from the natural landscape and utilizes images of quarries and free flowing water from the ground to describe the primitive atmosphere and conception of Thermal Bath.

Geometrically, the building strictly resembles an eruption of a large rock embedded in the mountainside ⁶. Because of the building's site, it is only natural for it to establish a close connection with it, its geological substance and impressive

topography. The project takes its appearance by subtracting voids in its monolithic form in order to create spaces. The building is divided into different sectors cut from one block to accommodate their different functions such as, sweat stone, shower stone, message block, drinking fountain stone, etc ⁵. Taking in all the elements of the site, Zumthor wanted to create a building that would give off its primitive and original nature as if the thermal bath had always existed as an element of the mountainside.

“ Mountain, stone, water, building in stone, building with stone, building into the mountain – our attempts to give this chain of words an architectural interpretation, to translate into architecture their meanings and sensuousness, guided our design for the building and step by step gave it form” –Zumthor ⁶.

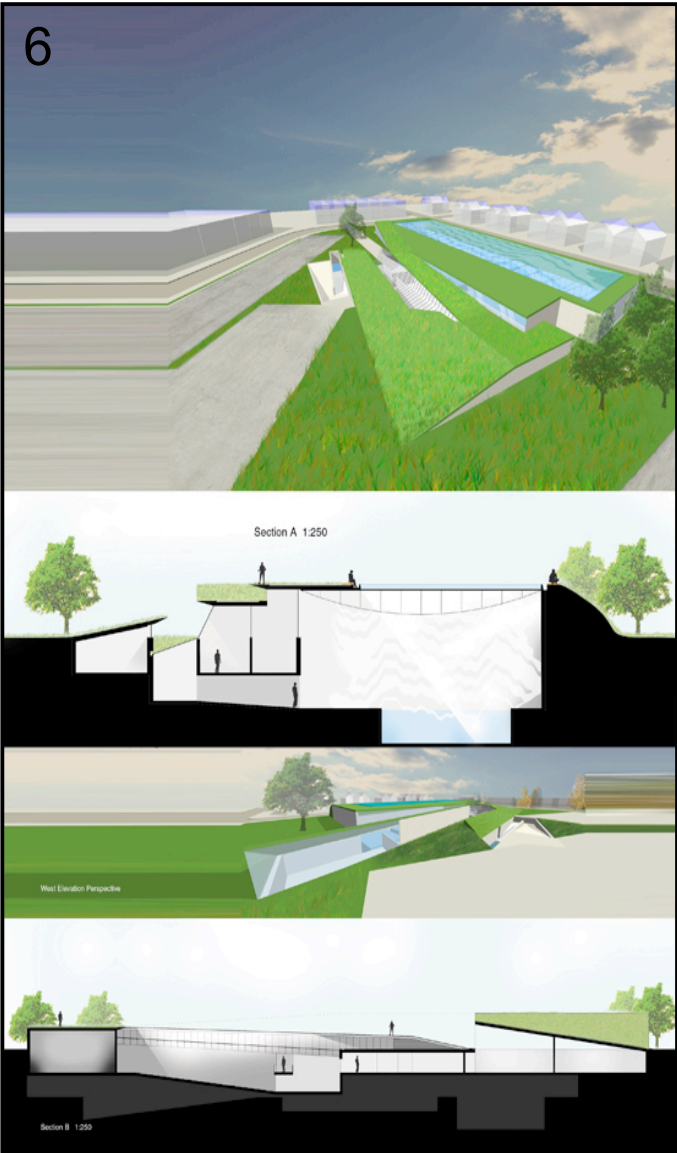
When thinking about the building and the qualities he would like for people to view and perceive his building, he is mainly concerned with the presence of the building, the atmosphere, recollection of memories and images, permanence, and concentration, where these qualities need to be felt and absorbed through the experience of the space ⁷. “He emphasizes his wish to create spaces with soul, which become part of everyday life and stand against the general artificiality of the world. For him, the language of a material itself is more important than its



form, as only simplicity and clarity of the building will attract us to choose it for our comfortable dwelling”⁶.

His assertion of emotions expressed in his building is apparent in Thermal Bath. His careful placement of each sector of the building function in procession and the restraint on plan, forces the experience to be a more intellectual one, where the integration of non-material aspect, play of light, and what is of the earth and what is of the building, plays with the senses. His success is due to his ability to recall these experiences as the senses draw from memory better than experiences that is purely just visual because it involves your whole body⁷.

The competition asks us to explore the different uses of steel manipulating it in creative and innovative ways. Instead of creating a steel structure that is visible from the surface, we created a park that is visible with the building resting below. This entry proposes not a tall or overpowering building that tests the limits of steel engineering, rather it attempts to investigate the more subtle ways steel can be manipulated to achieve a more



inconspicuous type of architecture. A type of architecture that reflects the natural inhabitation of elements and uses them to benefit the proposed building, much like the examples discussed above, we wanted to create a building that is both functional and natural. When viewed from the street, it is a structure hidden by a view of the hillside with only shards of the building erupting from the ground. From the front, you are faced with two entrances, one ramp to enter the park above the ground, the other to enter the building where nothing is at right angles. The reason for this is to disorientate your senses in order to feel that there is no rigidity but that you will rely on your natural senses and intuition to guide yourself through the building.

The aquatic centre in itself is an experience of how nature would propose itself to be, using natural lighting by the cracks from the earth above, creating rays of light that hit the water at precisely the right angles to create a ripple effect on the walls. This is a space that is away from the urban traffic and away from the noise above ground, a space simply for meditation, relaxation, and recreation.

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