

The Future Radiance of Copley Square – Erika Kulbach

Competition Description

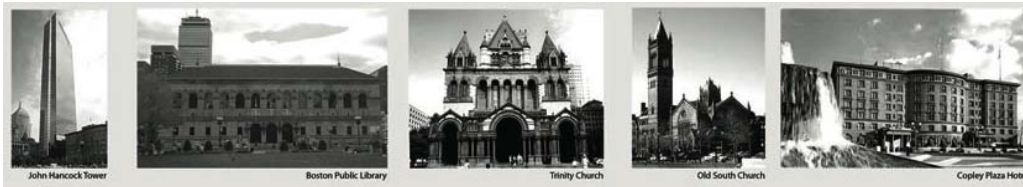
The Velux competition inspired us to look closely at our surroundings in the urban context of Boston Massachusetts. The competition required us to look at how daylight and sunlight play a determining role in how buildings are perceived and used. We looked at how daylight has a major influence on people and is crucial for their comfort specifically in major public spaces. We focused on the rethinking of daylight conditions in an urban living context with regard to city densification and area shortage. Copley Square was our site and we looked at the successes of its current conditions, and what issues might arise in the future with densification. This led us to review other successful public spaces as well as various means of creating enjoyable, unique day lighting schemes and ways to use daylight as a part of urban infrastructure. These included Dundas Square in Toronto, Steven Holl’s Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City Missouri, and the Campus Martius in Detroit MI. We then designed a proposed infrastructure and public space scheme of roadways, walkways, and eventspace with daylight as the central issue.

Site Analysis

We began by looking at Copley Square as it exists; a gap in the city’s urban fabric. The square is inhabited by people of all ages and all socioeconomic levels, and is active at all times of the day. Tourists and locals alike flock to the square. It is currently successful in its



access to daylight and the dramatic lighting conditions that are created by the surrounding buildings. Copley Square has quite the situation in that Boston’s beautiful public library, the colonnades of Trinity Church, and the glassy spears of the John Hancock Tower frame it. Copley Square itself is large in urban scale compared



to its context of narrow one-way residential streets and tightly placed apartment buildings.

Precedents

In considering future concerns and issues that might encroach upon this space we decided that the need to create a unique element of attraction in the space, the influence of traffic and public transportation access, potential densification, and the improvement of the Boylston retail facade should all be addressed. Having just recently attended a Steven Holl lecture at MIT we were inspired by his use of underwater skylight 'lenses' to light an underground parking garage at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City Missouri. We were intrigued by the quality of light produced and the sectional experiential effect of a pool at grade complimented by a space underground lit by sunlight and water.



We thought this unique way of creating dual public spaces might be an effective way of dealing with the circulation space that we were hoping to put underground, and the event space we wanted to create with glistening pools in the square.

We also looked at Toronto's Dundas Square and its designated use as a public open space and as an event venue that can accommodate events of various including community celebrations, theatrical events, concerts, receptions, and promotions – events that appeal to residents and tourists alike and provide a showcase for local businesses. Similarly, Copley Square already hosts public events, but we thought that removing the traffic would make it even more accommodating, just as Dundas Square has the ability to close off a street when events occur. Dundas Square also houses a unique water feature along its southern edge. Its interactive qualities animate the square and create a focal point. We were hoping to do the same with large size pools along the edges of Copley Square.



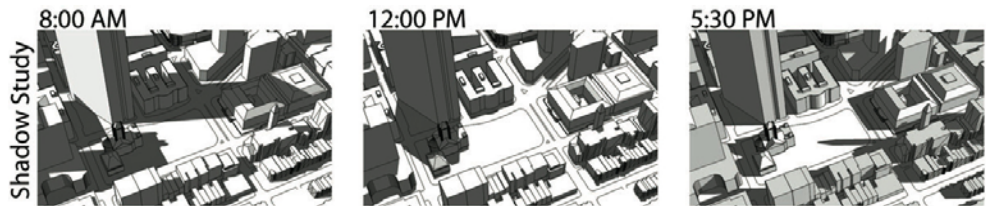
Another public square we came across was Campus Martius in Detroit MI. This square has the same type of setting with buildings similar in scale and character to those around the perimeter of Copley Square. It is also in a central location and is considered Detroit's "gathering place". In its design, it was thought to be a piazza or central square that would revitalize the downtown. In order to maintain the vitality of Copley Square within Boston's urban situation we decided that future densification would ideally occur on the northeast side of the site.



The Final Product

In the rethinking of the daylight conditions of Copley Square, we looked at successful precedents that might have elements that would be applicable to the issues that we deemed as priorities. We looked at the existing square's functions and typology and considered the future conditions and goals of the space. We wanted to be unobtrusive in our interventions, so as to not take away from the city square sensibility that already exists.

In considering the future densification and building up of the city, the location to carry density but impact the square the least would be to the northeast of the site. This move would also allow for the opportunity to improve the lower level retail facades and create a character more conducive to a clean, pleasant retail and outdoor dining atmosphere.



With respect to the issue of traffic, and the trend of increasing car sales, the streets and their vehicles would be moved underground giving all the open space at grade back to pedestrians. Further to this idea, we wondered about including a pedestrian and cyclist pathways underground that would be part of a citywide network. This would promote walking and cycling even in Boston's often inclement weather.



In order to create an unusual and bright underground world under Copley Square, 70-foot wide strips of reflecting pools would be infused with glass lenses just under the surface of the water. These would let bright daylight, magnified by the water, ripple along the pathways. Heated in the winter to avoid snow and ice build up, each lens would act as an underwater skylight.

With regard to public transit, all transit stops would be elegantly incorporated into the city above ground. There will be no dark, worrisome, places where one might wait for a train or streetcar in the middle of the day. Though rails may run back underground, all stops will be daylight and at or above grade.

The level at grade in the square is now larger for people, and their events. Mature trees march along the broad boulevard on the library's edge as they provide shading in the summer and structure the square around a large 'village green'. Copley Square will remain a beautifully daylighted gap in the city's grid. A gathering space, stage for life and promoter of environmentally friendly transit, this inviting city square will thrive in the future urban living context.



Bibliography

1. www.stevenholl.com
2. www.ydsquare.ca
3. www.campusmartiuspark.org
4. www.aviewoncities.com
5. www.friendsofcopleysquare.com