

Live the Box

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Project Selection

Selecting a competition to participate in was really difficult, as there are so many interesting and varied competitions to choose from. What attracted me to the ‘Live the Box’ competition initially was the fact that it gave each participant the main building block with which to begin design – the ISO shipping container unit. By using this as the main element in any structure, I appreciated the constraint that it imposed in addition to the freedom it allowed for a wide variety of inventive and interpretive design solutions. The standard sizes to be used were the 20’ and 40’ containers, all with the standard width of 8’ and height of 8’6. The next thing I did before I decided to participate in this competition was to look at existing container construction precedents. The approach taken by Illy in a coffee station design convinced me that this competition would be worthwhile. The amount of detail that was put into a single container unit to turn it into something of incredible functionality, beauty, and inventiveness was very inspiring.

The potential for this project to actually be built and developed was another incentive. I find that I get the most value out of working on projects at school, as well as at work that one day are realized and built (such as the dining pavilion in school). Another attraction was the photos posted on the website. They showed the site to be dreary and desolate, illustrating the deconstruction of the old existing factory as well as empty and run down streets. This old building posed an interesting question to competitors about the value and appropriateness of restoring dilapidated buildings, as compared to incorporating them into new developments in a different way. If any area could benefit from innovative architecture, it would certainly be this one.

Newark New Jersey

Sited in Newark, New Jersey, the site was just West of the Broad Street station, which takes local business people to and from New York City. It experiences a high flow of traffic through it, and one of the intentions of the competition was to promote more



tourism in the area. A large part of the economy of Newark relies on this commuter traffic between neighboring areas and New York City. From looking at some google earth images, it seemed that north of the rail line were many more areas that included green spaces on the exterior, whereas south of the divider seemed to be made up largely of single family homes with small yards, business areas, as well as industrial buildings. To the South East was a baseball stadium, which I believe will help promote tourism to the area even more.

Site Plan Strategies

As part of the competition requirements, a plan of the proposed development was required along with two perspectives and a section. I tried to focus largely on the development of the site plan, and it ended up being a focal point of my submission. I took the opportunity that this competition presented to learn even more about different sustainability issues, and what the potential was to incorporate different design ideas into this development. I went through each individual point in the LEED checklist and tried to determine what would be plausible for this project. It's my intention to become LEED certified sometime in the relatively near future, so I spent a lot of time trying to learn

more about it. As there was not enough time to go into all of the sustainable aspects in detail, I chose to focus on one. In one of my perspectives I highlighted one of the sustainable site approaches – bioswales. After working with these on a different project, I



realized how valuable they could be for the filtration of run-off water. Parking was a component of the design, and I wanted to make sure that the runoff from these areas was correctly treated. I can see how valuable these would be in even larger applications.

The site was divided into two main sections. To the North, I created an area that featured a park, basketball court, open park space, retail space, and courtyard. These face toward the rail station. By giving commuters a view of this area, I believe that it would heighten people’s curiosity about the site and encourage them to make it a stop on their way to and from New York City. It also shields the residential portion as it faces south onto the other street. The residential component of the project I divided into two main sections. To the West, the container units are fashioned together to create single-family homes from both the 20’ and 40’ container units. Each unit is oriented to receive a view

of the park, with the main entrance from the street. The staggered layout also shields the windows from direct sunlight coming in from the East and West. To the east side, the residential area becomes a low-rise apartment complex. This makes use of one of the best inherent characteristics of the ISO container – it’s ability to stack easily. A single loaded hallway provides the entrance to each unit from the north side. Directly in the centre of this building is a large, full height space, which is used as an amenity area by all of the residence in the development.

Sustainability



The idea behind the approach to the building is not only to design a site that functions well, but also to design the buildings so that they can create and reuse much of their own energy. Also, occupant comfort was very important. As it is a climate very similar to our own, it would be impossible not to detail the ISO container units properly. With limited space on the interior, I tried to think of innovative ways in which to insulate and waterproof them. One of the strategies that has been employed is a paint coating that is put on the outside that is supposed to provide a decent R value. This sounds like a gimmick, and you would also definitely want insulation to reduce the sound transmission through the steel. Especially if you had someone living above you!

Competition Submission

As with most projects that I've worked on in the past, I have very high hopes for this project and got into it right away. Then somehow I always seem to procrastinate, or spend a lot of time on a small portion of the project without furthering the overall design and concept. This has taught me a lot about my work habits, and has given me a goal for the next term. I'm somewhat disappointed with the outcome, because there is so much additional information that I would have liked to have been able to convey and great ideas and concepts that I never had a chance to express. All in all, I very much enjoyed working on this competition and look forward to doing another, more complete one some time in the future.

