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GESAMTKUNSTWERK: Architecture/Interior Architecture
- Elemental Integration as a Pedagogical Foundation for Design Education

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The Architecture/Interior Architecture [ARIA] duel degree program at Auburn University's School of Architecture is a unique design education model that offers a holistic approach to the relationship between interior and exterior space early in the design student's education. This program's mission at a fundamental pedagogical basis incorporates Architecture and Interior Architecture within Auburn's architecture curriculum model, allowing the development of the concept of "total design" into the design mentality of students. Gesamtkunstwerk, the German word most commonly interpreted in reference to Modern Architecture historical discourse to mean "total work of art," offers inspiration to the ARIA program model via the more subtle implications within the alternative translation of the word, which is "total design." ARIA is aggressively inclusive of other non-architectural methods of cultural production in its content such as the fine arts, literature, philosophy, science, and cultural criticism. An emphasis on practice ideas in recent history that combine interior design and architecture sensibilities such as in the work of Charles and Ray Eames, of the De Stijl movement, of Eileen Gray and others forms a basis for the study of similarly functioning contemporary design practices like Office dA and Tsao + McKown architects — both fluid at scales of design from the material to the urban form. This paper will analyze the pedagogical framework of the ARIA program model by discussing the essence of the curriculum, material research emphasis, and the use of the case study method in teaching. The core of the presentation further elaborates curricular issues by examining the role of the beginning level Elements of Interior Architecture courses, the two operative paradigms for studios, and ARIA Thesis. Other significant contributors to the program include the role of the ARIA faculty, the development of the ARIA Sustainable Material Laboratory and Library, and the self-publication of work with the ARIA Press. Continued success of the duel degree has required the institution of an admissions process at the second year level due to an overwhelming interest from students. A developed sensitivity to formulating total design has allowed recent graduates of the program to function fluidly in today's current market in architecture professional practice in which architects are increasingly required to design interior spaces and operate material-driven projects. This change is echoed by the dean of Harvard Design School, Peter Rowe:

"Whether we know it or not, or whether we like it or not, today's professional work environment is increasingly concerned with existing buildings, interior spaces, and the retrofitting of various accoutrements and furnishings.

Indeed, in the United States and elsewhere, it seems unlikely that the construction of new buildings will dominate the marketplace to anywhere near the same extent it has in the past."  

Gesamtkunstwerk as inspiration requires the student acquisition of an increased set of skills in addition to the base of architecture first-professional degree skills and promotes cross-disciplinary study. These focused skills aim for an enhanced understanding by ARIA students of the experiential in design, the architectural role of materiality, the relationship of the parts to the whole or sum of parts, and a strong humanist historical foundation. Inclusive of, but not restricted to small-scale design, the program content fosters an ability to translate spatial concepts at multiple scales. Auburn School of Architecture's Interior Architecture program differs dramatically from a traditional Interior Design education (as mandated by the FIDEP accrediting agency). It is a unique program in the country because it enables ARIA graduates to be eligible for both Architecture and Interior Design licensing and provides graduates with a structure for entering the current design discourse in practice or for thinking about practice in alternative ways. This effort responds to the current state of practice in which designers, as architect Jorge Silvetti states, "...are confronting extraordinary new conditions that continue to alter the modus operandi of architecture in this society."  

Beginning in second year and continuing to the ARIA thesis, integration of the internal and external dimensions of projects parallel hands-on material research, material application, interior space design, and consideration of interior artifacts. Specific emphasis on making through developing drawing techniques, graphic design, digital media familiarity, and enhanced model-making contribute to students' abilities to conceptualize a synthesis of interior and exterior and to initiate a holistic working process. In the upper years, relevant theoretical framework as a basis for understanding the logic and rigor of conceptualizing a complete design equips students with a way to bring a critical dimension to their work and hopefully to the field of design at large.

General program description/history

Founded in 1997, by now Professor Emeritus Gaines Blackwell with Associate Professor Sheri Schumacher, the program is a five and a half year dual degree that awards graduates a Bachelor of Interior Architecture and a Bachelor of Architecture (first professional degree). The ARIA student follows a traditional NAAB accredited five year Bachelor of
Architecture plan with the additional requirement of completing an Architecture/Interior Architecture studio in the third and fourth year studio sequence and an Interior Architecture Thesis in the summer following fourth year. Other required courses for the dual degree are Elements of Interior Architecture I and II, a (suggested) ARIA elective seminar; with Interior Architecture Pro-Practice, History of Interior Architecture, and IA Thesis Research as part of the summer Interior Architecture Thesis credit requirements. At least fifty percent of the third and fourth year ARIA studio content must address interior issues. Historically, the Bachelor of Interior Architecture degree developed as an evolution from Auburn School of Architecture's former four year Bachelor of Interior Design degree, which served as a strong foundation due to its eighty year history of high quality, proximity and long-term symbiotic relationship with Auburn's Architecture program. Since the Architecture and former Interior Design degrees had many overlapping course requirements, formulation of ARIA allowed Interior students to gain an additional Bachelor of Architecture degree by adding one more full year of study plus a summer ARIA Thesis semester to their education. Before, Auburn's Interior Design graduates were increasingly required to work on architecture-focused projects, and since their education was already inclusive of architectural issues, the formal change to ARIA allowed new graduates the freedom to move seamlessly in the workplace. The new program is not opposed to other more traditional interior decorating veins of interior practice, however it positions itself in a different light. Since Auburn's original Interior Design program was strongly rooted in architecture, the Interior Design graduates' credentials and abilities were/are misunderstood in some workplaces. The re-formulation of the degree not only benefits interior students by offering them the chance to earn an architecture degree, but it also provides architecture students the ability to expand their knowledge base as well as an interiors degree. Many successful Auburn graduates of the Interior Design program are proud of the newly formulated program that is more representative of their design philosophies and were supportive of its creation. ARIA is opening new avenues of communicating with graduates of both the former Interior Design and current Interior Architecture programs beginning with the creation of an online library database for material research. Further the ARIA degree is complemented by the Auburn student's overall curricular trajectory that provides opportunities to participate in the Study Abroad Program, the Urban Studio in Birmingham, and the late Samuel Mockbee's design-build Rural Studio in West Alabama. Typically at least half of the fifth year thesis students at Rural Studio are ARIA duel degree students.

Curriculum and Teaching

Key elements of the pedagogical framework which fuse the Gesamtkunstwerk conceptualization ability through the curricular sequence are the emphasis on material research and application, the use of the case study method for examining historical and contemporary interior architecture design models of practice, and the team-teaching approach of the three-member faculty. Sequentially Auburn students will complete first year studio or an intense one semester summer option studio, then arrive in second year with a basic understanding of drawing, composition, and elementary design. During second year, students typically spend one semester at Rural Studio design-building a "charity house" project, and one semester at the main campus dedicated to building design fundamentals through smaller scale projects. An ARIA selection process begins in second year by admitting ten students who are clearly eligible to begin additional coursework starting in the Elements of Interior Architecture core course sequence. After the first semester of third year, another ARIA selection occurs, admitting five to ten more students from that class. This staggered admission process allows third year students to join pending improvement in their design abilities or newfound interest in achieving the Interior Architecture degree. After their fourth year these fifteen to twenty students will compose the summer thesis class taught by two Interior faculty members. Elements of Interior Architecture courses and seminars may include second, third, or fourth year students — a desired condition that leads to a strong coherence and cross-pollination between year levels.

An emphasis on material research continues throughout the sequence fostered by the establishment of the ARIA Sustainable Material Library and Laboratory. The Lab will function as a tool for students, alumni, and faculty to gain access to information about new materials, traditional materials used in new ways, and sustainable materials while promoting the total design mentality. A virtual database of material properties and specifications is under construction in conjunction with a design-build student constructed material lab.

Pod to house samples and information for tactile exposure to the materials. The Pod located in the School of Architecture includes storage capacity, display walls for materials and student projects, jury space, and a database kiosk. Elements of Interior Architecture I provides an overview of materiality as a part of the course content, while Elements of Interior Architecture II is devoted entirely to material exploration and research particularly of sustainable materials. Material concerns also permeate the studio environment.

Utilization of the case study method as a teaching mechanism for the core courses is employed. This method is strongly employed in Interior Architecture Pro-Practice and History of Interior Architecture in the summer. Since the students have already completed the traditional history survey sequence and architecture pro-practice, the case study method is appropriate and effective, allowing students to jointly and independently dissect specific case practices, designs, interior objects, and historical types in an in-depth manner freed from the format of the survey-style. History of Interior Architecture actively seeks to explore important typological or spatial conditions ranging from the Primitive Hut idea to the Pantheon interior. Interior Architecture Pro-Practice implicitly aims to discover and analyze the role of the interior in contemporary architecture practices in firms like Diller + Scofidio, Machado and Silvetti, Philippe Starck, as well as material practices like
Peter Zumthor’s and Herzog + De Meuron. Our goal is to generate self-publications of the case-studies to develop a substantial body of research at Auburn on the often bypassed topic of interiors in architectural discourse and to develop the research ability of students prior to their fifth year thesis project.

Our faculty is comprised of three fulltime tenured or tenure-track professors each with teaching and research interests related to interior architecture. Since we spend much of our time on the Architecture faculty teaching other history, theory, drawing, and design studios, a team approach is taken to both the administration and teaching of the ARIA program. For example in the spring, all three faculty cover two courses — the Elements of Interior Architecture I and a research, furniture design, or lighting seminar — dividing the semester into three five-week mini-sessions with each professor focusing on their strength or research interest in the respective course. This allows a shifting five-week period where one faculty member is free from teaching those courses to administer the program focusing on the selection process, development of the web-page, materials library, and publication or research projects. Two faculty are dedicated to the Interior Architecture thesis studio, thesis research, pro-practice, and history in the summer session.

Course content
Early in the Auburn student’s education the Elements of Interior Architecture sequence ignites an awareness of the integration of architecture and interior architecture as a cohesive Gesamtkunstwerk idea and remains a popular class among students. “I’d rather work on Elements than studio,” says third year ARIA student Kelly Fitzgerald. Elements I isolates and studies the subject matter and its blurred boundaries with a strong basis in Modern Architecture history, in three five-week sessions. The first session isolates and studies the following elements of interior architecture in a lecture format: form, function, spatial composition and transformation, spatial perception and sequencing, light, program, experience, proportion, and scale. Mini-session two focuses entirely on issues of elemental typologies. While session three provides an overview of materiality, which is later expanded in the second Elements course. A photography project, Intelapture or interior-elements-capture, insists that students begin to alter perception of their environments by seeking out qualities of space that are specifically contributing to interiority and/or to light and materiality. Most of the projects are three-dimensional explorations given as a challenge to extract and develop a strong sense of spatiality from two-dimensional sources. The ubiquitous El Lissitzky Proun project as a bridge between art and architecture challenges students to translate a Proun painting into the third dimension by extracting space. Resultant projects are capable of fluctuating scale, appearing simultaneously as an object and a city. Students are required to contemplate the base (possibly the landscape) and its relational space-creating capacities in the context of the whole composition. Similarly the Drawdel project explores issues of space, representation, and adds the goal of analyzing an existing interior by fusing a drawing and a model together in one composition. Perhaps the most difficult task is the written Manifesto project which forces students to begin to formulate in writing their personal vision of design. In the core sequence, Elements 2 is devoted entirely to material study, particularly in reference to sustainability. Students are exposed to issues of new materials, new uses for existing materials, sustainable materials, and research through projects such as the Suitcase. Design-build projects often find their way into the course. Other container projects like the found object suitcases, house entire specific material libraries in their interiors as the project requires not only the collection, but also the critical reformulation. Moving library furniture pieces further extend the idea of containment, as introductory theoretical ideas such as nomad, skin, domesticity, gender, alternative programming, and issues of sign versses image (as extension of the wallpaper concept) begin to structure a critical basis for the work and a basis for future studio exploration.

Studio
Implementation of the design of Interior Architecture is taught following and inclusive of two paradigms for practicing Interior Architecture in the studios. Model one is expressed through the design of interior space within and responsive to an existing architectural enclosure and can include issues of adaptive reuse and renovation of existing spaces. Historical examples of operating in this paradigm include Carlo Scarpa’s Castel Vecchio, Charles Mackintosh’s Willow Room de Luxe Tea Room, and Adolf Loos’ American Bar. Contemporary examples of the design of the interior within an existing enclosure include Office dA’s Chapel at Northeastern University, Diller + Scofidio’s Brasserie Restaurant in the Seagram Building in New York, and Philippe Starck’s hotel interiors in Manhattan. Herzog and De Meuron’s new Tate Gallery, and La Pena and Torres’ monastery are examples of this design model applying adaptive reuse issues with a culture of materials. Model two is expressed through the simultaneous design of the interior and the exterior including the entire building and spatial environment (furniture, lighting, materiality, spatial and contextual relationships.) Historical examples include many projects by Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Eileen Gray, and Frank Lloyd Wright. A specific historical project is Garret Rietveld’s Schroeder House. Contemporary examples include Peter Zumthor’s Bath at Vals and Raimund Abraham’s Austrian Cultural Centre in Manhattan. In the studios these models of practicing interiors are the format for the projects. Third year studios typically follow Model two, completing two projects, one in an urban infill context and the other in a ubiquitous suburban condition. Fourth year studios on the room in the city apply Model one in an urban context, providing students with the chance to design an interior in an existing shell — allowing more time for the development of interior artifacts, surfaces, systems, and material experimentation. Additionally all studios are sponsored by a larger conceptual framework, thus the project type is simply the vehicle for exploring the overriding studio subject matter.
As an example, Spring 2002 ARIA studio, “Foodspace,” is designed around an investigation of the relationship of food to architecture. Course content involves the historical, sociological, cultural, ecological, political, and economic presence of food as a motivator for spatial constructs. In this investigation, the process travels from the small-scale interior artifact, to the room in the city, to the room in the city in the building. After a student-cooked meal, the first project required the design of an Eating Apparatus for a specific meal made under the influence of one food item. Eating Apparatus interior artifact designs were then composed into Ritual Aggregations in order to make spatial conditions through the relationship of the objects and the ritual of interacting with them. Then the original type was transformed into Type Variants to accommodate different relational situations. In the next project phase, a critical examination of foodspace and urban interior issues of design was positioned through the room in the city project under the influence of the previous exercises. Students designed a restaurant project for New Orleans in shell space of the exact size of Diller and Scafidi’s Brasserie restaurant in New York, a fact that was not immediately apparent to students until later in the project although they are very familiar with the restaurant. By making this size relationship with an existing interior, the choice insinuates that this is a very “real” project similar to projects they will later work on in a firm, also requiring the design of lighting strategies for a raw space with very little natural light and a conceptual logic to motivate the design. Lastly, the final phase of the project, currently underway, progresses on the insular design of the restaurant “room” through the design of a small culinary institute and restaurant in the shell of an existing corner building in New Orleans’ French Quarter. At least half of the building is new construction and the rest is within an existing building envelope. In contrast to the usual way of working beginning with the large scale then progressing down to the scale of the detail, this pedagogy reverses the project — beginning with the space-making qualities of a furniture piece, the Eating Apparatus and expanding it to an entire building. The final transition to the building in the city is the culmination of the project, and students are encouraged to extend their material and conceptual strategies to the design.

Thesis

Interior Architecture summer thesis forms the essential ingredient to the success of the ARIA education in the integrative model. Building on the work done in the beginning design Elements courses and studios, the thesis semester allows a semester for focusing entirely on interior architecture issues following either model one or two depending on the specifics of individual projects. As mentioned, interior’s support courses, pro-practice and history, are taught by the case study method and form a rich offering in the thesis context. Typically the semester begins with a short design-build project as the students narrow their research interests, followed by the thesis project dealing with interior issues in the global context. Traditionally the projects involve international sites of natural, economic, social or political disasters in order to expand the scope of the student’s vision for solutions at a humanistic micro-scale. Students choose different responses to the given site context and issue. Past projects were completed for cities in Turkey after the earthquake, Sarajevo after the war; and for Venice with its impending fate of drowning. ARIA student, Andrea Ray, designed a Hydroponics Research Station for Venice that proposed possibilities for new agricultural industry with increased self-sufficiency in the city, for ecological space uses, for interior adaptive reuse possibilities, for education, and ultimately to promote on a small scale a rebirth in the city which is gasping for air. More immediately the project established re-connective tissue in the city fabric with the creation of interior public spaces, the reframing of exterior public space, and a programmatic link to underused canal portions. Morphological studies of the various site cities are an integral part of understanding the interior aspects of the thesis. Pedagogically, the studio promotes the idea that student’s thesis hypotheses and subsequent interventions at the level of interior architecture may possess powerful implications for the structure of the macro issues in the chosen cities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Auburn’s Architecture/Interior Architecture dual degree proposes that integration is essential to the contemporary design education of students. Recent ARIA graduates are in demand nationally because of their qualifications and expertise in the discipline of interior architecture. Some firms have even begun to establish fellowship scholarships to support the academic program, in hopes of attracting more ARIA students to their offices. The program is formulated to allow for modifications and experimentation in teaching. Seminars respond to changing research interests of the faculty and students. The degree begins in the second year of the curriculum and increases its influence in each year level progressively promoting a “total design” mindset and spirit of exploration for students.

NOTES


REFERENCES
