



Frank Matero
<fgmatero@design.upenn.edu>
u>


03/24/2010 08:19 PM

To "Cynthia_MacLeod@nps.gov"
<Cynthia_MacLeod@nps.gov>
cc "Doris_Fanelli@nps.gov" <Doris_Fanelli@nps.gov>

bcc

Subject franklin court

History:

 This message has been replied to.

Dear Cynthia and Doris,

Again many thanks for inviting me to the consultation meeting for Franklin Court yesterday. It was informative and necessary. I wanted to clarify in writing some of my comments which unfortunately I think Carl misunderstood. I think fundamentally QE's exterior approach is a good one; that is to keep the existing brick museum façade, cut and open it up to reveal the activity within, and reinstate some form of canopy that references the original VSB awning removed. Using the space to interpret the interpretation is also timely to publically acknowledge the incredible importance of the project, now 34 years old and still going strong.

My comment about insuring the visual legibility of the original and still active interpretation had to do with acknowledging VSB's visual language for the site that remains extremely critical and allows the public to read and understand what they are looking at. That is the use of exaggerated forms of the 18th c vernacular and garden landscape (benches, trellises, planters, parterres) that references the dual nature of the original enclosed yard as a garden and working domestic landscape using traditional 18th c materials: brick, stone, wood, lead. Steel (painted) and concrete have been carefully selected as modern materials for the abstract forms that reference and access the missing originals (the ghost frames of the house and printing shop). These building forms were there and are no longer. They are ghosts. The other elements are place-defining features which make no pretense about being authentic. That is why exaggeration is necessary in the latter, and a modern material translation is needed for the former. Of course it wouldn't be a VSB landscape without real text as well. But again here, the text is authentic, drawn from historical documents and spatially situated as witness.

The QE design and material choice for the canopy owes much to current fancy for such highly detailed elements, especially in the inverted glass covering. (How you will keep that clean is beyond me.) Nevertheless it gives a modern form to the VSB removed canopy while doing double service as a curtain wall for the glass extension.

My suggestion to avoid visual confusion with the ghost frames (also of grey steel) is to color the metal, perhaps a brick red to match the brick of the surviving wall. Why draw attention to it; why not differentiate it from the other alien elements (ghost frames). The ghost frames are the stars, not the canopy. A powder coated rather than painted metal would be the most durable bet. I would also suggest extending the canopy across the façade, actually being less timid in its length (not projection).

Just some thoughts and minor ones at that. The project is tricky because the current and growing value and importance of the site is increasingly in its 1976 presentation, Franklin's association of course fixed. What you do today will dictate and shape is future viability as an important historic site associated with

Franklin and an important watershed interpretation for the NPS that still works with the public. Williamsburgh has recognized the importance to preserve aspects of its early interpretation while at the same time correcting inaccuracies and new public demands. You are doing that here with a new museum (still underground and still a viable approach) and new entrance.

It really would be a terrific idea to produce a publication once the museum is near completion to celebrate the site as was done for the Mall, but with more authors beyond the designers. Count me in.

All the best,
fgm

Frank Gerard Matero
Professor of Architecture
Graduate Program in Historic Preservation
Director, The Architectural Conservation Laboratory

115 Meyerson Hall
210 South 34th Street
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104
215.898.3169
fgmatero@design.upenn.edu