Hotel of Memory: Interpreting Neuroscience to Design in a Memorable Guest Experience

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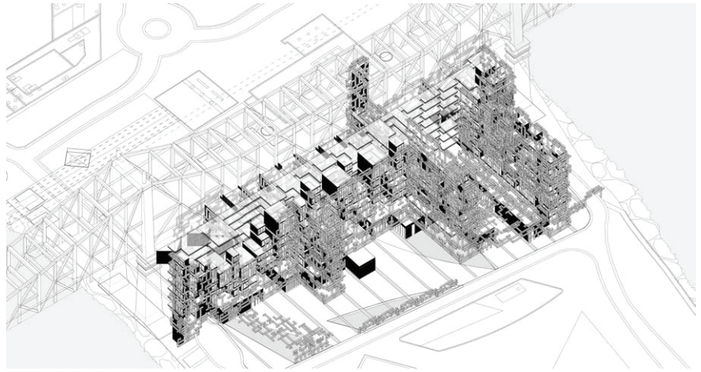
I. ABSTRACT

Our hippocampus is extremely important in spatial memory - any time we enter a new place, our brain interprets our environment and takes physical cues to assemble a mental field map. This map remains archived in the deep recesses of our mind and is retrieved when, if ever, we enter the same space again. It makes perfect sense to test this notion in a hospitality setting, where guests are encouraged to remember their lodging experience for years, often with only a single-night stay.



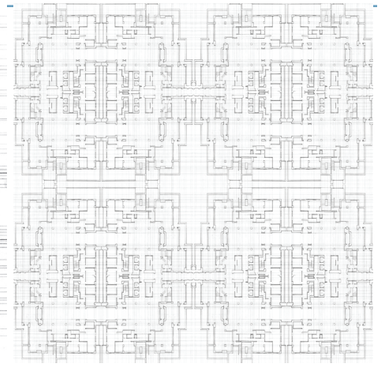
Hotel Proposal Below Queensboro Bridge, New York

This thesis challenges architecture to learn from spatial memory and navigatory relationships to design with more careful, corporeal considerations. The hotel operates as a testing field for memory since guests often get a limited time to become familiar with their environments, pressuring design to offer an experience that will remain in the user's mind long-term. Through the graphic abstraction of architectural informational present in the Queensboro Bridge in New York and Statler Hotel in Ithaca, this embodied hotel design engages guests with the site through experiential, both physical and mental, cues.

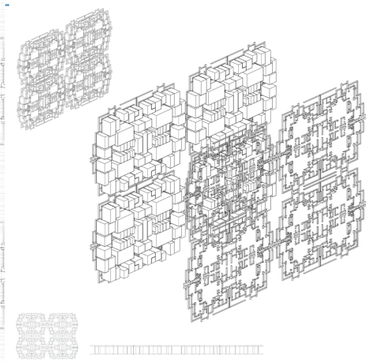
After analyzing the hippocampal research relevant to memory, I concluded that there are five physical cues that can make a space more memorable: Depth, Complexity, Landmark, Symmetry, & Repetition. Architecturally, based on the strong relationship between memory and navigation, I identified a hotel guest's purest sequence of circulation: Entrance, Lobby, Elevator, Hallway, & Guestroom. I used these ten concepts as an index to derive design. To translate neurological information into an architectural language, it is crucial I push the hotel design process through many mediums of representation: photography, hand-drawings, physical models, and 2D & 3D modeling software. The final building proposal is a result of integrating site (Roosevelt Island in New York City) and program (a hotel servicing the new Cornell Tech Campus), with physical concepts meant to enhance the guest's memory.

Hotel Proposal Beer Garden

1. Floor Plan of Typical Hotel Reception



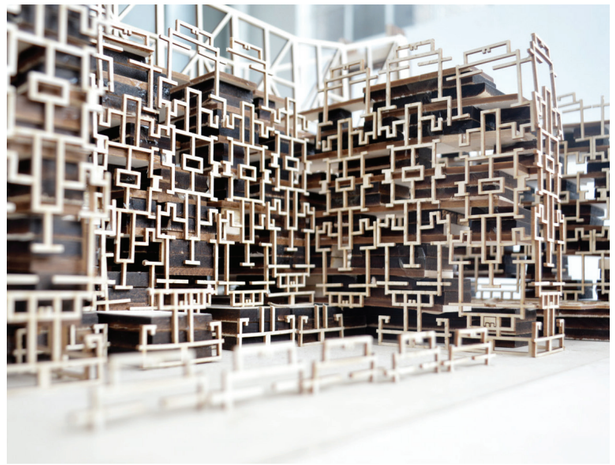
2. 2D Re-Interpretaton of Floor Plan



3. 3D Manipulation to Generate Space

The Cornell University faculty and critics welcomed the integration of the two fields. During one of the presentations, however, they questioned why I was so interested in neurological information and asked why I was attempting to be a scientist. I responded that interpreting relevant information is essential to generate meaningful architecture and improve a user's experience. Interpreting the mind and body is as equally important as interpreting landscape, program, or conceptual form - a response they accepted.

Now, as a practicing architect, it is my goal to take neurological information to a built-phase through a real project. Hotel of Memory is a starting point, the work of an individual designer; it is my hope that this thesis shows the enormous potential behind neuroscientist and architect collaboration, and the untold innovative opportunities for spatial experiences.



Physical Model

Hotel Proposal Lobby

2. BIOGRAPHY

Alvaro Alvarez is an architectural designer with the Rockwell Group in New York City, responsible for hospitality, residential, and interior projects. Originally from the border region of San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico, he graduated from Cornell University with a Bachelor of Architecture in May 2015.

Please visit AlvaroAAlvarez.com for full project details and bibliography