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Maritime Museum: Boston, Massachusetts

Paul T. Wilhelms

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Maritime Museum

Boston, Massachusetts

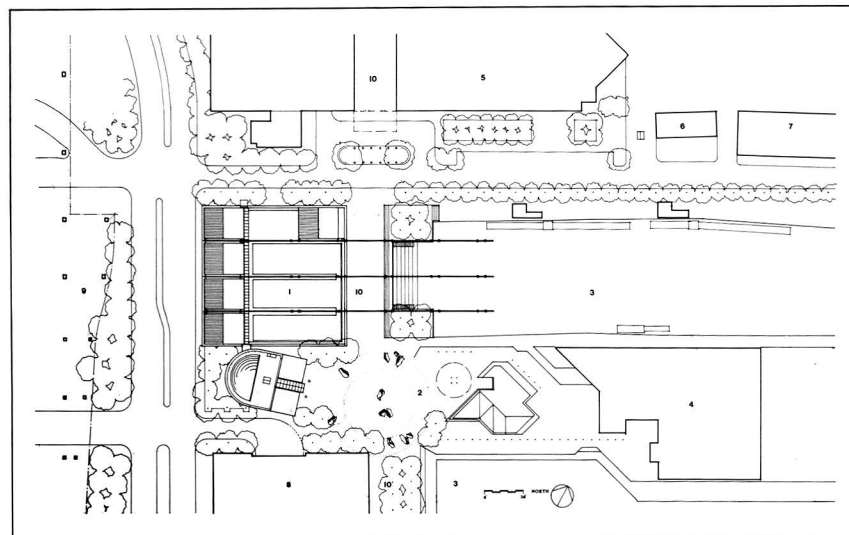
Paul T. Wilhelms

Critics: Richard Findley
Richard Pohlman

There are two significant forces shaping buildings in Boston today. First, Boston's waterfront has been in a constant state of evolution since its beginnings. The process of claiming land area for the city by filling in the bay has provided the city with considerable space for growth, particularly desirable space since the revitalization of Faneuil Hall and the new commercial development in Quincy Market. Secondly, the tension between the preservation movement and the commercial developers in Boston has led to a progressive urban attitude; allowing important structures to be saved while stressing infill sympathetic to the urban fabric.

The museum site is between Long and Central wharves. A nondescript office building was demolished and its debris used to fill in a portion of the bay. The city proper lies to the west just beyond the John Fitzgerald Expressway; to the north, a new luxury hotel and subway station; to the east, the bay and the aquarium; to the south, a parking garage and high-rise residential towers. The museum is sited so that it supports these separate elements through the reinforcement of existing pedestrian patterns and creation of a new urban public space.

The two important urban spaces are the walkway (*Walk to the Sea*) between the bay and the museum, and the public square. The walkway connects



Site Plan

the subway station and hotel thruway to the new square and aquarium. A new connection to the water is created to the east side of the walk by a system of collapsible steel steps which move with the tides and fold to allow the hoisting of the ships. The public square serves as a forecourt for the museum in addition to a bus drop-off zone and gathering space. The square is a continuation of the space on front of the aquarium, however, it is a counterpoint to the activity of that space, simply consisting of a gently mounded sphere of paving with several large, smooth rocks protruding above the surface.

The building consists of two parts. The museum proper, containing the buildings which house the collection, the workshop, and the display pool. And the ancillary building, which

houses the ticket sales, the restaurant, and the curator and administrative offices.

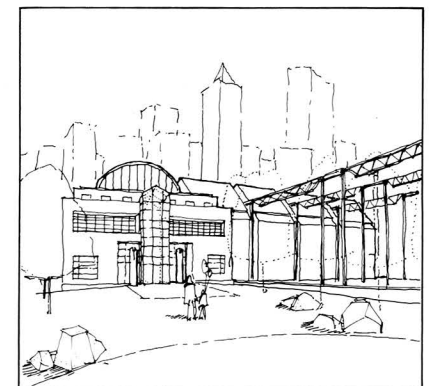
The form both defines a specific urban space and describes the nature of the uses it contains. The foot print of the plinth establishes the actual size of the museum and recalls the typical shape of a city block. By addressing the center of the new public square, the skewed ancillary building acknowledges the non-orthogonal nature of Boston's grid. Upon the plinth, the granite buildings which house the collections create a wall to screen the noise of the expressway and define the street. On the east side of the plinth the display pool faces the bay, reminding the visitor of the ships link to the sea. The glazed circulation corridor provides views of the ships and reflects the lively play of light on

Site Plan

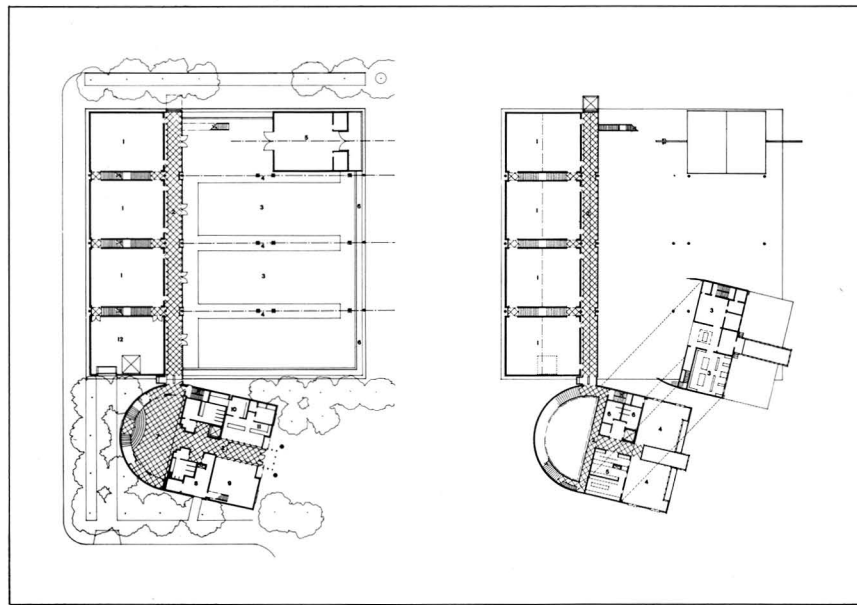
1. Museum and display slips
2. Public Square
3. Boston Bay
4. Aquarium
5. Luxury Hotel
6. Chart House
7. Custom House Block
8. Parking Structure
9. Elevated Expressway
10. Public Walkway

the display. The plinth also supports a workshop where the craft of boat building is demonstrated and the ships exhibited in displays are repaired and restored.

The ancillary building emphasizes the procession of entering the museum. The visitor proceeds through the



View from Public Court



Ground Floor Plan

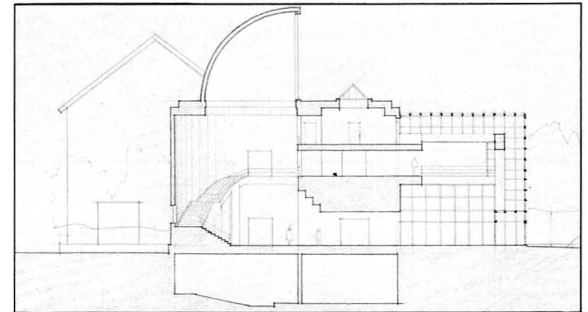
Upper Floor Plan

Ground Floor Plan

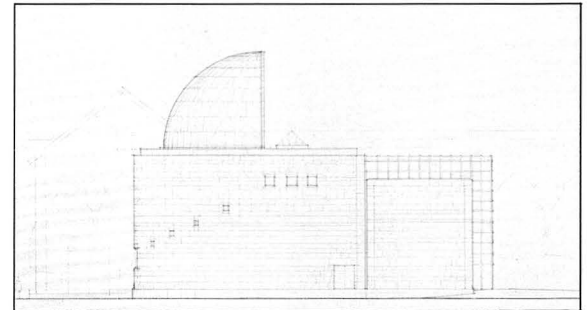
1. Display
2. Circulation
3. Display Slip
4. Crane
5. Workshop
6. Moat
7. Main Hall
8. Service
9. Shop
10. Coat Check
11. Tickets
12. Preparation

Upper Floor Plan

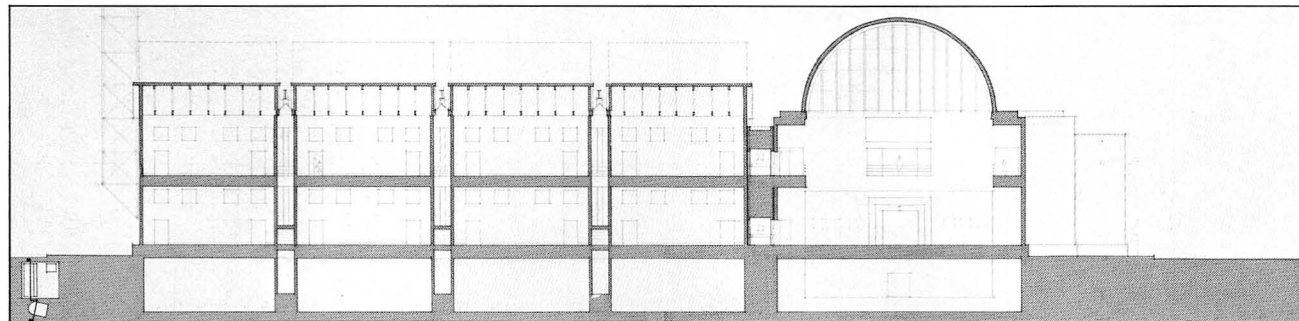
1. Display
2. Circulation
3. Offices
4. Dining
5. Kitchen
6. Restrooms



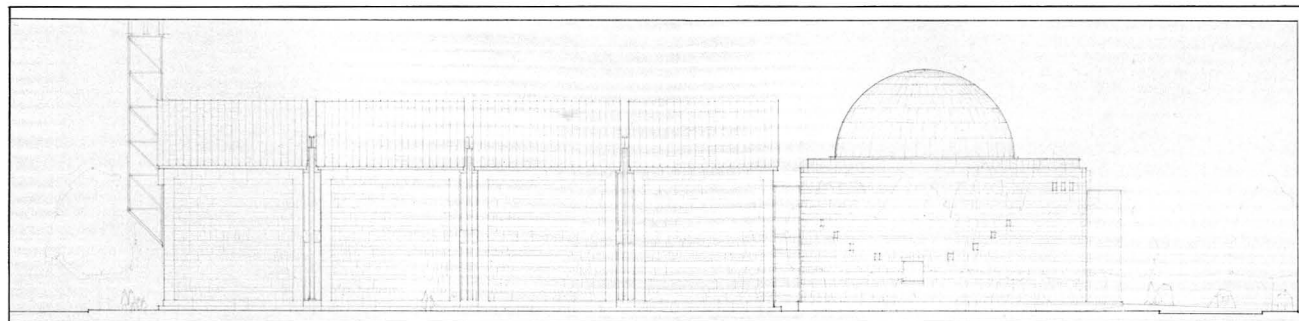
Section through Ancillary Building



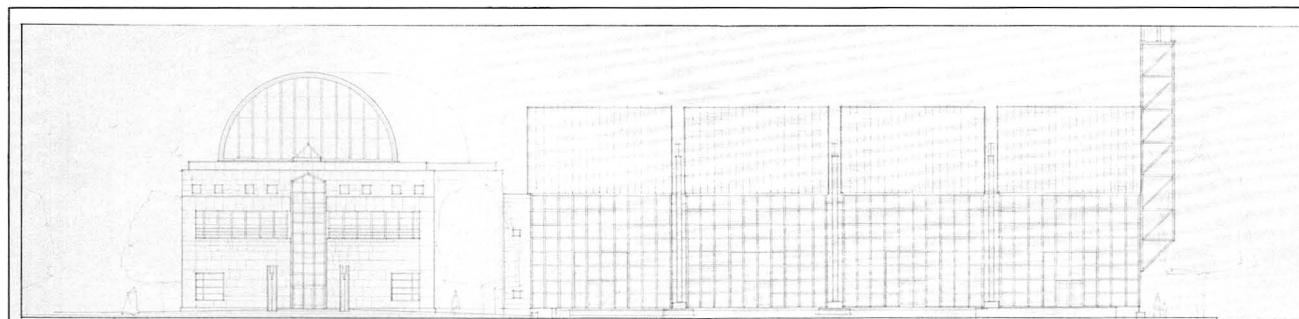
South Elevation



Longitudinal Section Showing Crane



East Elevation



West Elevation

ticket counter, the coat room, and the gift shop before entering the main hall. This grand space contains commemorative plaques honoring important people and events, records the path of movement, and prepares people to enter the museum. The spatial order of the museum is indeterminate. It is a matrix of rooms which may be experienced in any order. The visitors' path meanders between the internalized rooms and the circulation corridor which visually connects the visitor with the ships on display and the bay. The structure of the ship hoists are exposed inside the circulation area, recalling the images associated with ship holds. Similarly, the stairs ascend toward skylights to simulate the experience of climbing up to the hatch.

The buildings are constructed of granite masonry which recalls the warehouses constructed in the mid eighteenth-hundreds, typified by the Custom House Block on Long Wharf. Inside the display rooms, the simple construction is exposed, revealing brick masonry walls and wood floors and roofs. By contrast, the spaces in the ancillary building are finished with marble and smooth plaster.