

CONTEMPORARY DESIGN IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS:

A CASE STUDY OF TWO MUSEUMS

by

WILLIAM MALLORY BROCKENBROUGH

(Under the Direction of Pratt Cassity)

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the development of contemporary architecture in historic settings by comparing the work of architect Moshe Safdie in two projects. The museums, the Telfair Museum in Savannah, Georgia and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts are both uniquely situated within historic urban cities that govern development through design review. The thesis looks at the state of contemporary design in historic settings, barriers to design, and the success or failure of the design review process.

INDEX WORDS: Historic preservation, Design review, Moshe Safdie, Telfair Museum of Art, Peabody Essex Museum, Savannah, Georgia, Salem, Massachusetts, Bilbao Effect, Chadbourne Guidelines, Design guidelines, Contemporary architecture, Historic districts, Zoning

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B.A., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1998

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2005

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Pratt Cassity, my Major Professor for his assistance and expertise, both of which made this thesis possible. I would also like to thank John Waters and the MHP faculty and staff for providing me with the opportunity to participate and further my knowledge in the field of Historic Preservation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The nature of modern culture necessitates that when we continue to grow, we are forced to do so in an environment that included the thoughts, words, buildings and history of our forefathers. In the middle of the last century, we rebelled against urban centers, seeking out a more pastoral realm, one in which we were free to stretch out legs and build anew. While we have not yet exhausted this suburban realm, we have remembered the importance of the urban environment. Architects who practice in European cities understand the fundamental role of the city as an instrument of continuity.¹ This urban environment without fail has history, and it is this history that we must acknowledge when we build in historic American cities.

Cities have existed continuously as centers of commerce, transportation, art, and culture. The latter of these functions, art and culture, represent the core of values that have in themselves shaped our historic cities, yet today jeopardize the harmony that has existed with the natural growth of urban centers. In 1983, architect Richard Meier's High Museum of Art in Atlanta ushered in a new area of building that sought to use the growing field of "celebrity" architects to make statements.² Museums and institutions engaged in an international competition that used architecture as a medium to garner attention, profit economically, and revive the image of museums as centers of culture.

¹ Muschamp, Herbert. "A Lesson Abroad: Get Comfortable With Continuity." *New York Times*, 24 February 2002.

² Iovine, Julie V. "A New Broom Sweeps a Meier Design Clean." *New York Times*, 23 May 2002.



Figure 1-1 High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia

Since Frank Gehry's famous success with the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, cities throughout the world have seen the model as a means of revitalization. The opening of the museum in 1997 has been credited with causing an economic boon in northern Spain, drawing over 1.3 million visitors during its first year. Bilbao experienced five million visitors in the first five years, and \$500 million in economic activity and \$100 million in new taxes.³ Its success was not only economic, the museum is widely hailed for its architectural significance; Philip Johnson considers the museum one of the only real masterworks of the 20th century.⁴ The lessons learned from this museum have given rise to a movement in North America that has taken the form of cities and museums attempting to draw crowds with great, contemporary architecture. The movement has become known as "Bilbao Effect."⁵ With the opening of the

³ Rybczynski, Witold. "The Bilbao Effect." *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2002.

⁴ Nobel, Philip. "The House That Bilbao Didn't Build." *New York Times*, 20 April 2003.

⁵ Lloyd, Ann Wilson. "Architecture for Art's Sake." *Atlantic Monthly*, June 2001.

Guggenheim Bilbao, a new “golden age of museums” was ushered in. The message it sent was that “if you build it, they will come, and if you build it big and bombastic, they will come in droves.”⁶ One critic has marveled at the phenomenon, saying that “It was Gehry who designed the Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain and thus proved that a museum with a nothing-special collection can become a sensation on the basis of its architecture.”⁷ The editor of *Architectural Record* explains that “Gehry’s Bilbao has conflated cultural, economic, and political interests, alerting all to what a dazzling object in the cityscape can accomplish.”⁸



Figure 1- 2 Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain

Ed Able, president and CEO of the American Association of Museums, says that 75 to 100 museums nationwide have expansions of some sort in the works or under construction.⁹

⁶ Blum, Andrew. “Pleasing the Purist, Not the Tourist.” *National Post*, 29 March 2003.

⁷ Solomon, Deborah. “Forget the Art – It’s All About the Building.” *New York Times*, 9 December 2001.

⁸ Lloyd, Ann Wilson. “Architecture for Art’s Sake.”

⁹ Swope, Brad. “Big City Museum With a Savannah Twist.” *Savannah Magazine*, 8 October 2003.

Some examples that are being designed or built in North America include; a new branch of the Guggenheim in lower-Manhattan by Gehry; in Philadelphia, a new museum by Japanese architect Tadao Ando; an expansion in Hartford, Connecticut by the Dutch firm UN Studio; three museum expansions in Boston; a new art museum in Bellevue, Washington by Steven Holl; a Denver expansion by Daniel Libeskind; another Tadao Ando in St. Louis; and countless others in cities like Dallas, Atlanta, Richmond, Savannah, and Salem. All of the expansions come at a time when state budgets for the arts are declining, and tourism nationwide is suffering from a weak economy and the threat of terrorist attacks.¹⁰

Modern architecture was historically held in high esteem by students and practitioners of design, and was more or less only criticized by persons outside of the field. It is difficult to say when the shift occurred, but Bilbao easily rises to the top as a turning point in this idea.¹¹ The idea that a museum is built solely to house art has changed, for now a building can be considered one more piece in a collection, perhaps the largest and most important piece. This brings up the idea of competition between art and the building meant to contain it.

Will people really come to see this idea transposed into American towns that may or may not be traditional centers of culture or tourism? The Experience Music Project, a museum in Seattle devoted to rock and roll, secured Gehry to design a fanciful, shimmering gold and purple museum, only to find attendance down a year after opening, leading to employee layoffs.¹²

Stephen Holl's Bellevue Art Museum in Bellevue, Washington may well be the first museum to fail under the Bilbao Effect. The museum opened in 2001 only to close three years

¹⁰ Olson, Elizabeth. "Washington's Museums Are in Expansion Mode." *New York Times*, 29 May 2003.

¹¹ Rybczynski.

¹² Rybczynski.

later under financial troubles and problems with leadership. An underlying problem however is with the building. The structure is characterized by the same attributes many buildings created in this genre of avant-garde architecture share; large open interior spaces that are ill suited to the presentation of traditional artwork. These spaces often include tall, large volume spaces with irregular walls and irregular lighting for which it is difficult to program exhibits. This obstacle proved to be insurmountable, as the museum's environment was found generally unacceptable by local audiences.¹³



Figure 1- 3 Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, Washington

While the effect of the recent museum expansions on tourist's destinations remains somewhat unclear, it has revealed a change in how museums secure their architect. Not only are some organizations seeking the biggest name possible, but they are auditioning architects in a manner reflecting a "beauty pageant."¹⁴ When in 1967 the National Gallery of Art in

¹³ Lloyd, Ann Wilson. "If the Museum Itself Is an Artwork, What About the Art Inside." *New York Times*, 25 January 2004.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *idem.*

Washington, D.C. chose an architect for their expansion, it looked at the portfolios of leading architects, and visited finalists' buildings and offices. Only after the museum chose I. M. Pei as the architect did he sit down to design the building. Today, competitions and preliminary designs are standard for choosing an architect for a high visibility project.¹⁵

Critic Witold Rybczynski, one of the first to write about the Bilbao Effect, points out that he is “skeptical that designing in the full glare of public competitions encourages architects to produce better buildings. The charged atmosphere promotes flamboyance rather than careful thought, and favors the glib and obvious over the subtle and nuanced.”¹⁶

Architectural Record noticed another problem associated with the Bilbao Effect. Large staff turnover often resulted from big expansion projects that saw the super-star architect and wealthy patron as having more authority in developing the program of the building. Curator Judith Fox noted that in these buildings “you need an exhibition designer to create exhibitions of artworks not specifically designed for these unusual, large and open spaces, to shield the light, to bring down the ceilings.”¹⁷

By their nature, buildings that are created as a result of the Bilbao Effect are unlikely to pay attention to their surroundings. The idea that an architect would design something that is to generate an “image” or “wow effect” leads to architecture that is completely new and unique without relating to its neighbors.¹⁸ This is a particular problem in historic districts, where by common practice or regulation through design review, the importance of a building fitting into context is of paramount importance. Image building and the “wow factor” make for good

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, idem.

¹⁸ Ibid, idem.

architectural reviews and even national press, but this approach does not necessarily create buildings that can stand the test of time.

Much of the new wave of museum building today is taking place in historic American cities, and may stand to jeopardize the work of over forty years of preservation efforts. We have come to accept the idea that design guidelines will help preserve the historic nature of cities; however, they must always be re-evaluated and monitored to assure success. This calls into question the way we judge our buildings and govern their placement in historic settings. Are the design guidelines in place today adequate for protection? Are historic cities under fire from the possibility of Bilbao clones or knock-offs appearing in sensitive historic settings?

In addition to the Bilbao Effect, there are cycles in the economy which benefit cultural institutions, such as museums, propelling expansion and growth. How do we navigate the “cultural-political minefield” of trying to exhibit art and support art and architecture all in one?¹⁹ Another fear that results from the Bilbao Effect is not that Gehry’s Bilbao will come to be the standard by which new works are judged aesthetically, but in terms of success in the publicity world.²⁰ It is not just museums that feel the pressure, universities, churches, government entities, and the private sector all have a need to expand, and many cases occur within historic cities.

A fundamental basis of Historic Preservation is the idea of contextualism, the idea that new buildings or additions should fit in with the old. The concept is an easy answer, for architects and the public alike can identify which building is all brick and which is all glass, and make the judgment that the glass does not fit within the row of brick buildings. Noted architectural critic Herbert Muschamp believes that the theory of contextualism has lead

¹⁹ Blum.

²⁰ Kramer, Hilton. “Frank Gehry’s Syndrome Makes Museums Show Biz.” *New York Observer*, 7 February 2004.

architecture down the wrong path, and has failed as an architectural style.²¹ He goes on to clarify, however, that many styles that defined an age were regarded at the time of occurrence as failures. Victorian architecture, for example, occurred when it was believed that every civilization created its own style, while Victorian architecture relied on scavenging from previous historic periods. This idea is countered with the present concept of contextualism, so the basis by which we judge architecture has shifted from time to location. Muschamp believes that the origin of contextualism lies in the backlash that resulted from modern urban planning and architecture, which in turn gave rise to the historic preservation movement as historic architecture became threatened, and people rallied to save it. It is here that contextualism fails, for without distinctive new architecture, the “sense of place” that contextualism seeks to preserve is robbed of its effectiveness. In essence, contextualism has limited the ability of a city to create great places.²²

All phases of the design process must be looked at to understand the role of contemporary architecture in historic cities. The building that stands as a result of the design process is only the cover of the book that contains all phases of the process; planning and zoning, economics, politics, context, history, aesthetics, and ideology.²³ It seems that every museum’s website touts a grand proclamation of their just completed, or in the works, expansion or renovation. Museums today seemingly cannot be built without two features: a grand indoor space, and natural light in the galleries. To a lesser extent, of course, a museum cannot be built without the ubiquitous café and gift shop. Natural light is merely a technical obstacle that still

²¹ Muschamp, Herbert. “Measuring Buildings Without a Yardstick.” *New York Times*, 22 July 2001.

²² Ibid.

²³ Muschamp, Herbert. “The Deadly Importance of Making Distinctions.” *New York Times*, 30 December 2001.

lands in debate between curators, designers and museum boards. The idea of the grand atrium, however, has grown into a dramatic signature element of museums in the last twenty years. It is so pervasive, in fact that some examples differ little from shopping mall, to airport, to museum.²⁴ In addition, the vast amounts of money spent on expansions represents money not spent on museum acquisitions, signaling a shift in priorities.²⁵

Two examples of museums being expanded in the post-Bilbao era of architecture are the Telfair Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia, and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Both expansions were designed by Israeli born architect Moshe Safdie, whose main office is in Boston, Massachusetts. The two projects represent only a small amount of the work going on now in the field, yet provide a good example of the obstacles encountered when museums expand in historic settings, and do so in a way as to capitalize on the Bilbao Effect. In both cases, the pressures exerted on the architect during the design process affected the final design. This thesis will look at those influences, as a way to analyze contemporary design in historic settings, barriers in the design process, and the impact of local design review.

²⁴ Blum.

²⁵ Kramer.

CHAPTER 2

MOSHE SAFDIE

Originally from Haifa, Israel, Moshe Safdie moved to Canada with his family at the age of fifteen. He attended McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and graduated with a degree in architecture in 1961. After graduation, he moved to Philadelphia where he worked for Louis Kahn, an apprenticeship that would greatly shape Safdie's work and theory.²⁶

For the completion of his degree from McGill, Safdie envisioned a housing system that would address many of the plaguing problems of urban housing. This "system," which he called Habitat, was to be comprised of prefabricated units built off-site that were stacked onto a frame, creating what looks like a Mediterranean hillside village. By doing so, he thought that he could create a dense and economical alternative to the high-rise apartment block.²⁷



Figure 2-1 Habitat '67

²⁶ Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University. "Biography." *The Moshe Safdie Hypermedia Archive* [online archive]: available from <http://cac.mcgill.ca/safdie/biography/biopage/php>; Internet; accessed 27 October 2003.

²⁷ MacFarquhar, Larissa. "Truth in Architecture." *The New Yorker*. 20 January 2003.

With the coming of the world exposition, Expo '67, in Montreal, Habitat was selected to be constructed as part of the event. The project was built on a man-made peninsula on the St. Lawrence River, and immediately propelled Safdie to a position of international prominence. With the success of Habitat, an article was published in Newsweek, with an image of Safdie on the cover, and a headline proclaiming "The Shape of Things to Come." Habitat '67 would become a lasting icon of the drive for a utopian urban living.²⁸

In 1970, Safdie officially opened his Jerusalem office, and now has branch offices in Montreal and Toronto as well, with his principal office in Boston. Safdie is currently awash in commissions, including the museums in Salem and Savannah, as well as five others in Jerusalem, Punjab, Los Angeles, Tel Aviv, and Washington, D.C. In 2003, he was commissioned to design the U.S. Institute of Peace, to be built on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

Safdie and his firm have not always experienced such wide-spread success in securing commissions. For nearly ten years after his success with the original Habitat in Montréal, most of his commissions fell through. The popularity of Habitat led to some commissions in Puerto Rico, New York City, Rochester, Jerusalem, and Tehran, all of which sought a Habitat for their cities. None were ever built. The wife of the Shah of Iran commissioned Safdie to design an entire new city, but with the Shah's overthrow, plans were abandoned. With no Canadian work ever offered to him, Safdie accepted an offer in 1978 to become head of Harvard's urban design program. He did manage to secure a commission with Mort Zuckerman in 1985 to design a building for Columbus Circle in New York, only to lose the job after public outcry from critics and prominent New Yorkers that the building would cast huge shadows over Central Park.

²⁸ Ibid, idem.

Many critics see Habitat as Moshe Safdie's greatest achievement; he designed it at the age of twenty-nine. In retrospect, one critic says, "Habitat was the Guggenheim Bilbao of the moment. It was actually even more than that, because it was believed to be a solution: it was going to solve housing problems, be a symbol of community, all this stuff. Expectations got entirely out of wack with reality. Everybody expected that if you do Habitat at twenty-nine the next thing ought to be Chartres."²⁹

During the time immediately after Habitat, Safdie did contribute to his recognition, especially with the opening of his Jerusalem office and the commissions that followed in that city. This international and very tumultuous exposure appears to have had a long lasting influence on his aesthetic and design theory. When he envisions his buildings in Jerusalem, he would like for them to appear "as if they had always been there."³⁰ Among his contemporaries today, his philosophy is somewhat unique. He does not neatly fall into the category of deconstructivism or outright modernism, finding both too severe. There are principles of modernism that Safdie does hold in high regard, principally that buildings should be honest, with form following function, with a visible structure and not an applied skin. This is counter to architects like Frank Gehry, who comments that "Moshe thought my work was a jumble, he thought it was a big ego trip or a joke or something. He asked me to stop being a Stravinsky and be Sibelius. Be peaceful, he said – we need peace."³¹

Safdie's theory was plainly evident in a 1981 article he published in *Atlantic Monthly*, titled "Private Jokes in Public Spaces." In the article, Safdie accused modernist architects and

²⁹ Ibid, idem.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

planners of making private jokes, the jokes being the designs that only other architects could appreciate. This balance of a softer brand of modernism has served Safdie by making him a likely choice for clients who are not looking for bombastic architecture to feed egos and garner attention. His clients are looking for a calmer building, as in the case of the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles. The Jewish museum's president recognized this trait in Safdie and its fit with the museums program, saying that "the institution needed to be humane and hospitable. No heavy doors that say, I need to knock on them five times. Human size was very important to me. The rooms here are like rooms in your home. I wanted everybody's self-esteem to be elevated rather than reduced. I was not interested in a cathedral where everybody looks tiny."³²

Safdie's design process begins with three-dimensional massing blocks that relate to program requirements and their volume. Arranging them on a detailed site model leads to sketching and the development of an overall concept. Only after this process does the project team in his office, Moshe Safdie and Associates, become involved in the design.³³ His straightforward brand of modernism is executed in such a way as to be more broadly appealing. As an architect, he occupies a rare position among today's celebrity architects, for without being mired in post-modernism, he is able to provide a product that is exciting without being flamboyant. A frequently repeated anecdote about Safdie's theory has a client ask him, "Will you give us a modern or traditional building?" Safdie's reply: "If I succeed, you will not be able to tell the difference."³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Crosbie, Michael J. "Moshe Safdie Peabody Essex Addition." Architecture Week, 20 August 2003 [journal online]: available from http://architectureweek.com/2003/0820/design_1-1.html; Internet; accessed 2 February 2004.

³⁴ Blum.

Moshe Safdie's rise to prominence in the post-Bilbao museum environment highlights an interesting comparison between the two architects. It is widely acknowledged that Bilbao is Frank Gehry's finest work, as Habitat is Safdie's. The distinction between their two careers dwells on the fact that Gehry was 68 when the Guggenheim opened and Safdie only 29 when his work was presented in 1967. Gehry had an early career of shopping malls, experimental furniture and jewelry stores that he has put behind him, while Safdie continues to work at topping Habitat³⁵.

³⁵ Nobel, Philip. "The House That Bilbao Didn't Build." *New York Times*, 20 April 2003.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN REVIEW

Design Review in the United States refers to an authority or government process with the goal of managing change to improve the visual character of particular places. Different studies point to the prevalence of the practice, with anywhere from 78 to 90 percent of cities in the United States having some sort of architectural appearance control.³⁶

Design review can be defined as a process which “seeks to promote the orderly and harmonious growth of a community in a manner that reflects public determination of what the city or country should look like in the future.”³⁷ In most cases it is the exterior features of projects that come under review, and in a few cities interiors are regulated, too. The goal of review is to fit new development into a city’s existing context. It is widely accepted that “new buildings should respect the existing urban pattern of buildings and open space.”³⁸ Specifically, design review in historic districts attempts to maintain the visual character, architectural significance, and historic integrity in designated areas or for individual properties. The first use of design review in a historic district occurred in Charleston, South Carolina in 1931. Since

³⁶ Stamps, Arthur E. and Jack L. Nasar. “Design Review and Public Preferences: Effects of Geographical Location, Public Consensus, Sensation Seeking, and Architectural Styles.” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 17 (1997): 11-32.

³⁷ Schiffman, I. *Alternate Techniques for Managing Growth*. Berkeley: University of California, Institute of Government Studies. 1989.

³⁸ Ibid, idem.

then, the concept has been a popular and effective way of preserving historic resources, and in turn protects the character of the district.³⁹

The process usually involves the submittal of an application for a permit by a party involved with a proposed project to local planning staff. The staff reviews the application for completeness. Generally, the staff makes a report to a planning committee, preservation commission, or other type of design review board. The application can be approved as submitted, approved with modifications, or rejected entirely. In limited cases staff level review is possible.

The larger cities that utilize design review apply it in one or more situations. Seventy nine percent use the process for historic districts, forty six percent for downtown areas, twenty five percent for neighborhood commercial districts, twenty one percent for waterfront or scenic areas, nineteen percent for residential areas, and fourteen percent for environmentally sensitive areas.⁴⁰

Looking at who staffs the review process, a national study found that only four percent of commissioners were architects. A similar study looked at the administration of design review and found that most was carried out by local planning agencies, or about seventy one percent. The rest were carried out by planning commissions or special design review boards. Of the planning staff within a local planning department, the study found that fifty-six percent had no design background. On the boards that carry out design review, the study found that forty-four percent of the organizations had no members with an architectural background.⁴¹

³⁹ Cox, Rachel S. "Design Review in Historic Districts." *Preservation Information*. National Trust for Historic Preservation 1997.

⁴⁰ Ibid, idem.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The same study looked at the basis on which they judge projects and found that twenty-two percent of the cities did not publish design guidelines and relied solely on the members' consensus. The rest of the cities did publish design guidelines, and of them twenty percent used quantifiable rules, thirteen percent only used diagrams or drawings to convey design guidelines, and twenty-one percent used general principles meant to convey their objective.⁴²

There are two general categories of design review, generally referred to as discretionary and administrative. Both are widely practiced, and while neither has been shown to be superior to the other in carrying out the design review process; however, more rigid administrative methods have been shown to be more efficient.⁴³ That said, almost eighty percent of design review in the United States is carried out using discretionary methods.⁴⁴ The problem that often arises with this method is that vagueness can lead to abuse of discretion on the part of the reviewing party.

In addition to a certain amount of vagueness within the process of design review, many of the ordinances that govern cities today were written over twenty years ago.⁴⁵ This calls into question the applicability of existing standards to the challenges of today that could not have been predicted twenty years ago. Many cities do not have the money or staff resources to re-address existing legislation and update their regulations to address these concerns.⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Nasar, Jack L., and Peg Grannis. "Design Review Reviewed: Administrative Versus Discretionary Methods." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 65 (1999): 424-433.

⁴⁴ Ibid, idem.

⁴⁵ Cochran, Christopher. "As Giants Sleep: An Assessment of United States Local Historic Preservation Commissions." (MHP thesis, University of Georgia, 2000)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

In the field of Historic Preservation, local legislation in the form of design review remains one of the most effective methods by which historic areas can be protected. In many cases, local legislation is the only line of defense, for National and State protection do not carry the same weight as design review. Because of this, the role of design review is an important tool in preserving the built environment and cannot be readily replaced by any other available method.

CHAPTER 4

THE CHADBOURNE GUIDLINES

The squares of Savannah by themselves lend the City an immeasurable charm that is rarely found in American cities. General James Edward Oglethorpe landed on the banks of the Savannah River in 1733, and with the help of Native Americans laid out his grid based on the ancient principles of City Planning. The two-hundred years that have passed through history have altered Oglethorpe's idea of a utopian community. His basic plan is still in tact today. It serves as a platform on which architecture is built, and coexists with its long history. At the basis of the plan is the district, or ward, with a public square surrounded by two trust lots to the east and west, and four tithing lots on the north and south sides. All of the lots were laid out to be 60 feet wide, a dimension that is clearly evident in Savannah today. Even in situations where a building's footprint was larger than one lot, the façade was broken into increments of 60 feet or less. This treatment was carried out as an unwritten rule for generations of Savannah architects and builders. By 1940, however, the ideal of Oglethorpe's plan was lost to the rise in demand for more square footage in urban buildings. By 1980, the ideal was lost altogether in new construction with the building of Drayton Towers and the Rose of Sharon apartment building. Today the area encompassing the Oglethorpe Plan is a National Historic Landmark District. Its importance was realized in the 1960's with the growth of tourism, and today attracts 5.6 million visitors each year.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Swope.

Any new construction that takes place in Savannah's historic district must receive approval from the design review by the Historic District Board of Review in the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), under Mayor and City Council of Savannah.

In 1973, the City Council of Savannah adopted a Historic District Zoning ordinance that outlined eleven "Visual Compatibility Factors" to be used by the Historic Review Board in judging applications for new development and alterations within the historic district. At this point in the history of the preservation movement, the concept was regarded as being ahead of its time in providing review boards with sound criteria to make decisions. A document published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development during this era used a similar method focused on residential development, and it is from this document that the Compatibility Factors were adapted. Compatibility Factors were used to make decisions regarding everything from new commercial construction to signs and streetscape improvements. It became apparent that, as revolutionary as the concept was, the Compatibility Factors allowed for ambiguity and inconsistency in the Review Board's decision making. This confusion was due, primarily, to the fact that projects were required to meet only seven out of the eleven Compatibility Factors outlined in the ordinances. Projects like the Hyatt Hotel revealed that builders and developers could manipulate the code process.

The Visual Compatibility Factors are written as follows:⁴⁸

New Construction and existing buildings which are altered should be visually compatible with existing historic structures to which they are visually related in terms of:

- a. Height;

⁴⁸ Metropolitan Planning Commission. *Manual for Development in the Savannah Historic District and Historic District Zoning Ordinance*. Savannah, Georgia. 1997.

- b. Relationship of the width of the structure to the height of the structure;
- c. Relationship of the width and height of windows and doors;
- d. Relationship of solids to voids in the front façade;
- e. Rhythm of the structures on the street (the relationship if the structure to the open space between it and adjoining structures);
- f. Rhythm of entrances and porch projections;
- g. Relationship of materials, texture and color;
- h. Roof shapes;
- i. Appurtenance such as walls and fences should form cohesive wall of enclosure along a street;
- j. The size of a structure, the structural mass and the components that make up the exterior; and
- k. The verticality, horizontal character or non-directional character should relate to surrounding historic structures.

In 1988, the nonprofit group, Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc. a longtime advocate and catalyst within the Historic District, published a report titled *Improving the Historic District Brick by Brick: Savannah Historic District Action Plan, A Process for Change*. The report was a ward by ward study of the state of the district, encompassing the built environment as well as issues regarding public safety and quality of life. The importance of the Historic District to the City of Savannah was clearly demonstrated; however, what it also revealed was that as far as Savannah had come in leading the preservation movement, it was in danger of falling short of its intended goal. Great efforts had been made since the 1950's, but the district was still vulnerable

to insensitive changes, and action was needed to ensure its continued preservation, and in turn preserve its value to Savannah, its citizens, and visitors alike.⁴⁹

In 1990, the Historic Savannah Foundation received a Critical Issues Fund Grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.⁵⁰ The grant was awarded to study the Savannah Historic District, encompassing the area originally designed by General Oglethorpe, as well as surrounding districts referred to as “edge districts.” One of the primary goals was to look at ordinances and zoning protecting the district. Also identified were the environmental characteristics of the different areas within the district, and the sustainable building envelopes for each of the areas that would allow for enhanced, yet sympathetic growth. This report would be the beginning of the development of new design guidelines for the Savannah Historic District. With additional funding from the City, as well as private sources, the Cambridge, Massachusetts based firm of Christopher Chadbourne and Associates was hired to complete the study, which cost \$45,000.

Chadbourne’s document was revised by the staff of the Metropolitan Planning Commission, with particular attention paid to adapting the report to the necessary regulatory language of the Zoning Ordinance. Staff also simplified the document with the intent of making it more user friendly. The revisions, however, languished as a draft within the MPC office for several years.

By 1996, the adoption of the Guidelines once again became a priority after a Historic District Issues workshop conducted by the City Manager. With the re-convening of the board set

⁴⁹ Historic Savannah Foundation, Inc. *Improving the Historic District Brick by Brick: Savannah Historic District Action Plan, A Process for Change*. Savannah, Georgia. February 1988.

⁵⁰ Bellinger, Howard. *MPC Zoning Recommendation*. MPC File No. 96-11487-S. Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission. 15 October 1996.

up to oversee the creation of the document, progress resumed, and in early 1997 the existing City Zoning Ordinance was amended to include what by then was referred to as the Chadbourne Guidelines. The Chadbourne Guidelines made up for deficiencies within the original zoning ordinance. The guidelines point this out, saying that the “dilemma posed by those guidelines [the original 1973 ordinance] was their reluctance to 1) define acceptable tolerances of compatibility (e.g. when is a window proportioned in a visually compatible way – does it have to match other windows?), 2) define a catchment area of compatibility (e.g. do you have to be compatible with your immediate neighbors or with the rest of the street, block, ward, etc.), 3) prioritize between the criteria (e.g. is color as important as height?), 4) to differentiate between attributes typically associated with zoning (height and bulk and placement) and those associated with design (the architectural attributes of the container).”⁵¹

With the Chadbourne Guidelines, the original ordinance was expanded from 10 pages to 20, with an additional 40 pages of guidelines that were meant to serve only as non-mandatory considerations for the Historic District Board of Review.⁵² The Chadbourne Guidelines take into account the unique situation in Savannah, the existence of Oglethorpe’s plan in its intended form. In the *Manual for Development in the Savannah Historic District and Historic Zoning Ordinance*, the standards, such as the criteria above, are written in italics, with accompanying guidelines that are not considered mandatory written in standard text.

⁵¹ Metropolitan Planning Commission.

⁵² Wilttrout, Kate. “Telfair Addition a Major Test of Savannah’s Chadbourne Guidelines, Which Protect the Scale of the Historic District.” *Savannah Morning News*, 5 September 1999

CHAPTER 5

THE TELFAIR MUSEUM OF ART

A long-time Savannah institution, The Telfair Museum of Art is sited on Telfair Square, on the Western edge of Oglethorpe's plan. Opened in 1886, the original Telfair Museum building was built by English architect William Jay for Alexander Telfair in 1819. The neoclassical Regency style building was donated to the Georgia Historical Society for use as a museum. A sculpture gallery and rotunda were added to the building in 1883, shortly before it opened to the public as the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1951, the Telfair Museum acquired the Owens-Thomas house; another William Jay building that is considered one of the finest examples of English Regency architecture in America. The Owens-Thomas House is operated as a house museum today, and is open to the public.



Figure 5-1 Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia

Today the museum houses a fine collection of furniture, art and sculpture. It has survived as a traditional museum, focusing on regional art and decorative arts, and experienced a growth in the 1990's as Savannah's downtown went through a period of revitalization and new growth. Attendance at the Telfair has increased 63 percent, and membership has increased 56 percent over the past five years.⁵³ In 1998, the Telfair Museum surveyed its members and determined that an expansion was to be part of the museum's future. With the creation of the New Building Committee, the process of expansion was underway. One of their first tasks was to select an architect.

The Telfair's New Building Committee interviewed fourteen architects, including I.M. Pei, before deciding on Moshe Safdie. Each architect made a presentation to the committee, basing votes on their previous work, philosophies regarding design, and understanding of Savannah.⁵⁴ The Director of the Museum, Diane Lesko, said that "inclusive was the word we wanted communicated to the chosen architect. Often museum buildings look like fortresses."⁵⁵

In July of 1998, architect Moshe Safdie was chosen to design the Telfair expansion. John V. Luck, who chaired the New Building Committee referred to his work as "the creation of an architectural landmark and an art legacy for Savannah."⁵⁶ The Savannah firm Hansen Architects, headed by John Paul Hansen, was chosen to serve as architect of record for state licensing. The director of the museum reported that the groundbreaking for the new building would take place in 2000. The new building is 45,000 square feet and will house the museum's

⁵³ Hersh, Allison. "The Telfair's Jepson Center for the Arts will be a 'State-of-the-Art' Facility." *Savannah Morning News*, 26 April 2003.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Swope.

⁵⁶ Wyatt, Doug. "Moshe Safdie Chosen to Design New Telfair Building." *Savannah Morning News*, 28 July 1998.

collection of contemporary art, as well as an outdoor sculpture gallery, library, auditorium, café, and museum shop. The existing Telfair Museum will continue to house the collections earlier artwork.

Safdie commented on his new commission by saying that he is not interested in flashy, short term notoriety, “I want a building that 50 years hence people will still respect.” He described the new building as “vital, contemporary, appropriate to the expression of art yet to come... and a building you cannot conceive of being anywhere else besides Savannah.”⁵⁷



Figure 5-2 Telfair Museum Initial Proposal

At the May 1999 meeting of the Historic District Board of Review, Moshe Safdie presented his initial design concepts for review by its members. This was to be the first application of a two part process looking to first approve the conceptual design, including the height and mass of the proposed structure, then move on to the approval of a more detailed final design. At this first meeting, the Historic Review Board agreed to the conceptual design, granting preliminary approval for bridging the lane between York and Oglethorpe Streets, a variance of the Chadbourne Guidelines. Safdie sought this approval due to the nature of the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

tithing lots that were secured for the new building. The lots are adjacent to the existing Telfair Museum on Telfair square, and bordered by York, Barnard, and Oglethorpe Streets. Dividing the property is one of Savannah's lanes, which are considered sacrosanct under the Chadbourne Guidelines.

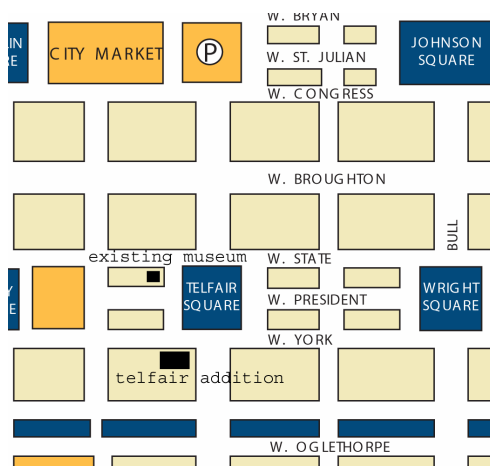


Figure 5-3 map of Telfair Site

With this approval, they sought the approval of the MPC Zoning Board and City Council to gain air rights to the lane. After the meeting, architect Paul Hansen was quoted as saying he expected zoning and city council to approve, as they were only concerned with trash collection and emergency access.⁵⁸

After this initial meeting, with only small amounts of press and little public knowledge of the new building, concern begins to arise, primarily over the idea of bridging the lane between York and Oglethorpe Streets. Noted Savannah preservationist and Crowninshield Award winner Lee Adler was invited to visit Safdie in Cambridge to discuss his opposition. Adler stood as one of the more visible leaders of the opposition, clearly stating that he did not think the building belonged in Savannah. “Lay resistance” developed to the project, based on the public’s

⁵⁸ Wiltrout, Kate. “Telfair Annex Moves on to City Council, Zoning Board.” *Savannah Morning News*, 14 May 1999.

perception that Safdie did not understand Savannah. Safdie responded to this initial criticism, saying “I think generally the discussions around the issues are interesting. The problem of building a new, major piece in a historic city... doing it harmoniously and at the same time being authentic and trying to find meaning in the buildings of our own era, is a fascinating problem.”⁵⁹

Safdie was no stranger to turmoil regarding his designs. Forty years ago he designed the Mamilla Museum in Jerusalem, a building that still remains mired in political controversy and unfinished.⁶⁰ Before he began the Telfair design, Safdie visited Savannah often, walking around to get a feel for the city. He stated “Very early in the process there was this sense of duality – the solid and transparent – that became very strong.”⁶¹ The solid and transparent concept resulted in a design dominated by a glass curtain wall. Safdie sought to extend the square into the building, in essence to remove the barriers that create the square as an “outdoor room” in the first place.

Despite the public’s resistance, all of Savannah was not united in opposition. Christopher Scott, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Historic Savannah Foundation states that “A building like this has got to represent the way that thinking has changed... and new ways in which the buildings themselves affect the cityscape.” But at the same time, Lee Adler was present to say that the building “looks like it should be in Tempe, Arizona.”⁶²

The critical debate was over how to interpret the Chadbourne Guidelines, and whether or not they were open to interpretation at all. This application becomes the first true test of Mr. Chadbourne’s work. With predictable bias, project architect Paul Hansen thought that “the

⁵⁹ Wiltrout, Kate. “Drawing Fire: Blueprints to a Conflict.” *Savannah Morning News*, 30 May 1999.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

Chadbourne Guidelines don't really leave you much flexibility to build new contemporary buildings in the Historic District. I think we've almost gone too far with some of the restrictions... I don't think we need to be replicating what was being built 150 years ago."⁶³

Telfair museum saw its first expansion since opening in 1886 as an opportunity to build a notable example of late 20th century architecture. Lee Adler saw the way they were going about their quest as a contradiction for a leading Savannah institution. In his opinion, the Telfair's new construction in the district should have served as an example of the Chadbourne Guidelines potential, and not a violation of them.⁶⁴

In June of 1999, Cecil McKithan, director of the Southeast Regional Office of the National Park Service, representing the National Register of Historic Places, began to raise questions as to whether development in Savannah, including the Telfair expansion, could threaten the City's landmark status. In the early 1990's, the City was considered for probationary status on the National Register after a series of demolitions. With the passing of the Chadbourne Guidelines, National Register status was reinstated. McKithan recommended and opened the door for more attention to the issue, including input from the State Historic Preservation Office that would include representatives from the National Trust for Historic Preservation as well as a host of other national organizations. The Telfair's response to the heightened opposition stressed that they were a museum and an important civic institution and should be "allowed to bend the rules a bit."⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Wiltrout, Kate. "Residents Worried About Telfair Annex." *Savannah Morning News*, 30 May 1999.

⁶⁵ Wiltrout, Kate. "Savannah's Historic Status Examined." *Savannah Morning News*, 3 June 1999.

At the next meeting, in which Safdie and the Telfair applied for their second stage of approval, a member of the Board, Hugh Golson, asked the City's Preservation Officer, Beth Reiter, for a motion to reconsider the earlier vote in favor of three violations to the Chadbourne Guidelines. Several reasons were cited for the reconsideration focusing on the fact that the Board members felt as if they were rushed through the deliberations. When they tried early in the meeting to delay the vote, Diane Lesko, the museum's Executive Director, did not agree to a continuation of the submittal; as a result, the members were forced to vote on the matter. This was much to the relief of opponents to the previous ruling. The fear of setting a precedent for later architects is clear; Mark McDonald, Director of Historic Savannah Foundation, stated that there was "a great architect working now, [but] what we could get , if a precedent [of breaking the Chadbourne Guidelines] is established, is a mediocre architect with a small budget and a great lawyer."⁶⁶

At the June meeting of the Historic District Board of Review the members reversed their decision, made a month earlier, on the preliminary design of the Telfair. The unanimous decision, which reversed their decision on visual compatibility, also meant that the Telfair must resubmit for a vote on height and mass. Board member Mills Lane expressed that the Board may have been intimidated by Safdie and his notoriety, and over-eager to support an important modern building in the district.⁶⁷

After the new found defeat, Safdie and the Telfair underwent an aggressive marketing campaign to get public support for their ideas for the Museum's expansion. In an effort to respond to the question of bridging the lane, he reduced the 84 foot wide bridge from his earlier

⁶⁶ Wiltrout, Kate. "Telfair Museum Goes Back for Review." *Savannah Morning News*, 9 June 1999.

⁶⁷ Wiltrout, Kate. "Telfair Loses Ground With Review Board." *Savannah Morning News*, 10 June 1999.

plans to a 34 foot bridge, a 12 foot bridge, and a thin outdoor walkway. But Safdie saw these concessions as a limited resource, stating that “at some point, I as an architect have to say, ‘That’s irresponsible. To build two buildings and put little bridges from one side to another is such a rigid interpretation of the guidelines that it’s out of balance. You want to make something that’s wonderful space while respecting the fact that it’s two lots.’”⁶⁸

The museums marketing campaign included an exhibit meant to allow the public to view the current plans before the next Historic District Board of Review meeting. They even handed out little stickers with the phrase “Have you seen it yet?” to drum up support.⁶⁹

In addition to the public element, the Telfair’s campaign included several meetings with the opposition, including the Historic Savannah Foundation, the City Council, the City Manager, and the Mayor of Savannah.

As the August meeting approached, the Telfair postponed its application to allow for more time to prepare. An idea surfaced to amend the guidelines to allow for museum buildings to be exempt from the lane crossing aspect of the Chadbourne Guidelines. The City Council would be responsible for the proposed text amendment, with the idea that it would be so specific that no other buildings other than fine art institutions would be allowed to build a bridge wider than 24 feet.⁷⁰

The plan that was prepared for the September 8, 1999 Historic District Board of Review meeting represented multiple revisions and feedback from the parties involved, including the public. Originally 120 feet wide, the façade of this version was 80 feet of glass broken up every

⁶⁸ Wiltrout, Kate. “Architect Markets His Telfair Vision.” *Savannah Morning News*, 2 July 1999.

⁶⁹ Downs, Gene. “Telfair Invites Public to Review Revised Plans for New Museum.” *Savannah Morning News*, 25 July 1999.

⁷⁰ Wiltrout, Kate. “Telfair Delays Latest Pitch to Review Board.” *Savannah Morning News*, 11 August 1999.

16 feet by steel columns. This proposal still did not meet the 60 foot requirement of the Chadbourne Guidelines.⁷¹

This mostly glass proposal still caused controversy, lacking the rhythm of solids and voids found in most Savannah buildings. Inherent in the glass's transparency is the lack of a definable edge, causing the critical walls of an outdoor urban room to be less defined.

Also addressed in this proposal is the issue of the bridge across the lane. The design included a 34 foot wide bridge on the second floor and a 56.5 foot bridge on the third floor. Both of these violated the guidelines recommendations to limit bridge width to eight feet. This was a reduction from earlier submittals where an 88.5 foot bridge was proposed. The eight foot wide bridge recommendation was just that however, a non-binding recommendation contained in the second portion of the Chadbourne Guidelines. While it was not a law, was still an issue for the City Council, and they would have to choose whether or not to give air rights to the museum.⁷²

After reducing the amount of glass, Safdie put in its place a stone wall thirty feet in width. The proposal not only cut down the amount of glass, it included a nine foot wide, two story wall that served as a transition to the townhouses next door to the museum.⁷³

When the September meeting came, the Historic District Board of Review unanimously accepted the proposal for the mostly glass façade that was to face York Street. The Board did not accept the proposal for the bridges over the lane, and Safdie and the Museum withdrew their proposal over this issue. The Board's concern centered on the precedent that would be set for

⁷¹ Wiltrout, Kate. "Telfair Addition a Major Test of Savannah's Chadbourne Guidelines..."

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Wiltrout, Kate. "Telfair Changes Come Down to Wednesday Vote." *Savannah Morning News*, 6 September 1999.

future buildings in the historic district that seek to bridge a lane, possibly compromising Oglethorpe's plan of the City.

Safdie contended that “we’ve been told actually that we must do two buildings,” and that he could reduce the size of the bridges without sacrificing the function of the museum.⁷⁴

With the January meeting approaching, Safdie resubmitted the proposal for the museum with two primary changes: a narrow bridge, and fenestrated façade of glass on York Street. The glass façade was covered with a grid of concrete or stone, creating a second façade that left 44% glass visible. The bridge was narrowed to 26.5 feet on the second and third floor, with a small 12 foot wide bridge connecting the main gallery.⁷⁵



Figure 5-4 Original Telfair Design (left), New Design (right)

Along with the redesign for the January meeting, the Telfair refined its public relations campaign by maintaining a lower profile. They held a special workshop to discuss the issue and to present the plan outside of regular meeting time. The culmination of the workshop prompted

⁷⁴ Wiltrout, Kate. “Telfair Stunned by Review Board Defeat.” *Savannah Morning News*, 9 September 1999.

⁷⁵ Wiltrout, Kate. “Telfair Resubmits Plan for Building.” *Savannah Morning News*, 14 December 1999.

Safdie to reflect on his project in Jerusalem, saying “this is less predictable. This is more like a Southern novel.”⁷⁶

Beth Reiter, who serves as staff for the Historic District Board of Review, prepared her comments on the proposal and recommended approval for both the bridges and the building’s height and mass.

The January meeting arrived, and the height and mass of the proposed annex was approved in a vote of eight to two. The cause of much surprise, however, were the Board’s recommendations for Safdie to revisit earlier versions of the York Street façade. While the recommendation did not represent an approval, it was meant to guide the architect in his next application for approval of a more detailed design. These earlier versions included a more substantial amount of glass, and due to Safdie’s read of the Board’s opinion, he reduced the amount of glass, creating a more traditional impression by adding the masonry columns. Mills Lane expressed this feeling by saying, “If you’re going to attempt a frankly bold, modern building, then it should be undiluted by empty gestures. I would urge you, Mr. Safdie, to not compromise too much on your original conception.” Board member Daniel Snyder confirmed Mr. Lane’s sentiments by saying, “rarely do we see a submission that pushes the creative limits of what the guidelines allow. It was refreshing to see a creative approach on how to interpret them.”⁷⁷

Safdie, of course, agreed with the two Board members, later saying that he “did feel that the original façade was superior... what happened is that I followed the guidelines literally (in

⁷⁶ Wiltrout, Kate. “The Telfair Hopes Latest Museum Design Calms Concerns about Spanning Historic Lane.” *Savannah Morning News*, 11 January 2000.

⁷⁷ Wiltrout, Kate. “Telfair Museum Gets Approval for Modern Building.” *Savannah Morning News*, 13 January 2000.

the latest design) and they seemed to realize that it lost something.”⁷⁸ It was with these thoughts in mind that Safdie returned to Boston and worked on his follow-up proposal.

During this meeting, and before the Board made their final vote on the bridge issue, an interesting turn of events occurred. Believing that he needed the support of Mills Lane, Safdie made an informal deal, offering to get rid of the smaller bridge and enlarge the bigger one slightly, in exchange for Lane’s support and an endorsement from the Historic Savannah Foundation. Safdie intended the concession to be a good will gesture, an effort to win broader support for the museum. But, by the end of the public comment period, most of the Board members reveal that they were not in opposition to the smaller bridge that Lane had so opposed. This negated the need for Safdie and Mill’s compromise, and the issue passed with Lane and Richard Mopper voting against.⁷⁹

In one last turn of good will, Safdie told the Review Board that he would try to convince the museum’s Board of Trustees that the smaller bridge was not necessary to the program.

By March, Moshe Safdie submitted a design for second phase approval, the next step after gaining approval for the building’s height and mass. The March meeting differed greatly from the meeting in January that Safdie and the Telfair attended. Waiting for them, and voicing their opposition in the public comment period, was a series of citizens, lawyers, and of out of town specialists who did not agree with the proposal.⁸⁰

The Board voted unanimously to delay ruling on the issue. The proposed design did not meet the Chadbourne Guidelines, but Safdie asserted that it did comply with the spirit of the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Wiltrout, Kate. “Telfair Design Hits Another Sang.” *Savannah Morning News*, 9 March 2000.

guidelines, and that it should be passed on that basis, despite its non-conforming specifics. The proposal was also consistent with the Historic District Board of Review's opinions from the previous meeting: that he should propose and submit his original design rather than the compromise that he last presented.⁸¹

This conflict highlighted ambiguity in the guidelines, revealing a weakness that had gone unnoticed since adoption in 1997. How should the Historic District Board of Review deal with designs that are contrary to the rigor of the Chadbourne Guidelines? This obviously leaves room for interpretation on both sides, and resulted in confrontation and even shouting matches.

Among the speakers at the public forum was an attorney hired by local residents who pointed out flaws in past procedure that could be challenged in court to overturn the Board's decisions. Also presenting was J. Carter Brown, the director of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. who spoke against the design while drawing on the experience gained from their own expansion. The opposition of the Adler family, Lee and his son John, added a personal plea, while Reuben Clark, an attorney, and Gerald Allan, an architect from New York, pointed out flaws in the proposed design.⁸²

In the aftermath of the delayed ruling in March, opponents of the proposed Telfair expansion began to be painted as anti-modern, stuck in some world that could only happen in Savannah. Proponents of the museum's design argued that only architecture that impersonates the existing 18th and 19th century architecture could pass the Historic District Board of Review's criticism. Safdie responded to criticism directed towards the design by saying that it "sort of confirms certain fictional images of the place. When I tell people about it, they say, 'What do

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Savannah Historic Board of Review. Minutes. 8 March 2000.

you expect? It's the South." The Chairman of the Historic District Board of Review responded to the accusation by blaming the Telfair Museum for creating the image, commenting that "the anti-contemporary suggestion is a smokescreen the Telfair people have put up."⁸³

Sixteen months into the process, in July of 2000, Safdie and the Telfair presented their design one last time. The design was much more conservative than the all glass version that the Board told Safdie to revisit, then denied at the last meeting in March. With the masonry columns in front of the glass façade, the design was almost the same that was presented in January. The same treatment was applied to the Oglethorpe Street façade, in response to the Board's comments that the elevation read as secondary to York Street. The design was, once again, recommended for approval in the Preservation Officer's report to the Historic District Board of Review.⁸⁴



Figure 5- 5 Telfair facade from square, digital rendering

With the Adler's endorsement, as well as an endorsement from the Historic Savannah Foundation that included only a few requests, the design passed five to three. The design is defined by two glass and steel bridges across the lane, meant to be as transparent as possible.

⁸³ Sabulis, Tom. "Savannah Museum Getting Tough History Lesson." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 11 July 2000.

⁸⁴ Wiltrout, Kate. "Telfair Hopes for Final Approval." *Savannah Morning News*, 12 July 2000.

The pre-cast masonry screens that sit in front of the glass façade on York and Oglethorpe Streets represent the requested ratio of solids to voids that plagued the all glass concept.⁸⁵

After the meeting, Safdie appeared undaunted by the sixteen month ordeal, saying “I think the plan is as good as it’s ever been, I don’t feel there’s any major compromise.”⁸⁶ With the Review Board dictating that the building would have less glass and more masonry, along with a more diminished scale than he would have liked, Safdie said “is it better or not? I can’t really answer that. It will be okay. I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t think so.”⁸⁷



Figure 5-6 Jepson Center interior

All of the obstacles in the way of getting the design approved for the Telfair’s expansion amounted to an increase in the buildings cost of up to seven percent, with the budget at \$18 million, possibly as high as \$22 million. Rives E. Worrel Co. was chosen as the contractor, with the projected opening of the new museum in 2003.⁸⁸ The building permit was acquired in June of 2001, allowing twenty to twenty six months for construction.⁸⁹ The official groundbreaking was delayed by the events of September 11, 2001, and eventually took place in October. The

⁸⁵ Wiltrout, Kate. “Telfair Building Clears Final Hurdle.” *Savannah Morning News*, 13 July 2000.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Lloyd, Ann Wilson. “Architecture for Art’s Sake.”

⁸⁸ Wiltrout, Kate. “Slow Going.” *Savannah Morning News*, 6 March 2001.

⁸⁹ Wiltrout, Kate. “Groundbreaking for New Museum to Start.” *Savannah Morning News*, 24 June 2001.

building is named in honor of one of three chairs of the fundraising campaign, Robert Jepson, who raised \$20 million for the project. The building will be known as the Jepson Center for the Arts.⁹⁰

Some regard the building as the first successful attempt at a contemporary building in the Savannah Historic District. Safdie echoed this, saying “It’s going to be the first serious contemporary building in town. It is a building that offers the city a contemporary alternative. It’s not capricious or meant to be shocking. It is open, transparent and uses light and shade.” He went on to say, “I think that people will see that it is possible to have contemporary buildings in the historic district. Until now, Savannah has only had examples of bad contemporary architecture. I think buildings like the Hilton, the Hyatt and the Federal buildings are bad, insensitive buildings. They miss on the issue of scale, they miss on the issue of materials, they miss on the issue of picking up the themes of the surrounding architecture.”⁹¹



Figure 5-7 Jepson Center north façade under construction

⁹⁰ Downs, Gene. “Telfair’s New Building is Officially in the Works.” *Savannah Morning News*, 16 October 2001.

⁹¹ Hersh, Allison. “The Telfair’s Jepson Center for the Arts will be a ‘State-of-the-Art’ Facility.” *Savannah Morning News*, 26 April 2003.



Figure 5-8 Jepson Center bridges under construction



Figure 5-9 Jepson Center south facade under construction



Figure 5-9 Jepson Center entrance under construction

With construction currently in progress, the Telfair building will be the first major contemporary building built using the Chadbourne Guidelines. With its Portuguese limestone on interior walls and floors, and glazed white exterior, Safdie likens the building to a Southern plantation. He says that “there will be a lot of indoor/outdoor visual connections. You will feel like you are in the square. Everything is going to be very connected.”⁹² Whether or not the public comes to accept the building as part of Savannah remains to be seen, as does the reaction of the national press and reviews by architectural critics. After two years of debate in the public realm, it remains to be seen whether or not the Jepson Center will be embraced by the community. Only the building’s completion, hindsight, and time will tell.

⁹² Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

THE PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM

Founded in 1799 by Salem's merchants and sea-captains in what was then one of the busiest and most prosperous ports on the eastern seaboard, The Peabody Essex Museum is one of the foremost of its kind today. The museum was one of several of its type; displaying collections obtained abroad, gathered by those whose business took them to the far ports of the world. Originally the East India Marine Society, a group of Salem entrepreneurs whose membership qualifications were to have sailed around Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. They merged with the Essex Institute, a local repository for rare books and manuscripts, as well as owner of a dozen or so house museums, to become the Peabody Essex Museum. Today, it is one of the oldest of its kind, with a diverse collection covering natural history, art, architecture, design, and artifacts from Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, and New England.⁹³

The somewhat depressed suburb to the north of Boston has experienced a minor rebirth with the museum's notable expansion and sudden appearance in national press. The City of Salem would desperately like to re-create itself in a new image, one that does not include its current mantra of being the "witch capital" of the world. Mired in a Disneyland portrayal of the Salem Witch Trials of 1692, the City is home to numerous ghost tours, haunted houses, and tee-shirt shops. Salem's rich maritime and architectural heritage, including the large collection of Samuel McIntyre's federal style buildings and notable ancestors like Nathaniel Hawthorne, are overshadowed by the legacy of its witch-hunts. The town, originally industrially based, in recent

⁹³ Cotter, Holland. "A Bounty From Salem's Globe-Trotters." *New York Times*, 1 August 2003.

years has become one of many suburbs of Boston. Salem Mayor Stanley J. Usovicz Jr. recognizes that the museum and its expansion “is going to go a long way toward helping us transition from an industrial to tourism-based economy.”⁹⁴

The newly expanded Peabody Essex Museum opened on June 21, 2003. The \$125 million expansion added more than 250,000 square feet of new and renovated space for exhibits, as well as a café and gift shop.⁹⁵ The museum also added a late Qing Dynasty merchants house, the Yin Yu Tang house dating from 1800 - 1825, from the Huishou region of China to its collection of architecture. The house is part of a collection of twenty-four other properties, many of which represent the equivalent of the American merchant’s home during the same time period. The addition itself adds 111,000 square feet of exhibit space, including the glass-roofed atrium which covers an indoor street and serves as a central point of community. The museum claims to be among the fastest growing in the United States, going from a \$4 million operating budget seven years ago to over \$12 million today.⁹⁶ The expansion will allow the museum, for the first time, to show more of its 2.4 million works of art and artifacts.⁹⁷

In 1995, the Peabody Essex Museum sought to expand once again. Out of a field of thirty architects, including Robert Venturi and Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, Moshe Safdie was chosen to design the museum’s new wing and renovation. Executive director and chief executive officer of the museum, Dan Monroe says the decision was based on the fact that “we were looking for an architect who could do a contemporary building, but do one that was

⁹⁴ McCabe, Kathy. “Building on the Past, Peabody Essex set for Reopening.” *Boston Globe*, 5 June 2003.

⁹⁵ Peabody Essex Museum. “Fact Sheet: New Peabody Essex Museum to Open in June 2003.” Peabody Essex Museum.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, idem.

resonant with traditional Salem architecture and would fit in with the urban fabric here,” and all of this was to be accomplished without “Disneyfying Salem.” He continues to say that “We’re taking a line that a museum should be a place where lots of things occur. Yes, the building is an attraction, we hope, and we believe it will be, but the biggest attraction is the sum total. The Museum ... is not a museum that’s been seen before, here or anywhere.”⁹⁸

The existing Peabody Essex Museum is located in downtown Salem between Essex and Charter Streets, with the main building being the classical 1825 East India Marine Hall, as well as the Dodge wing, a brutalist 1970’s addition by Stahl/Bennett and Philip W. Bourne.⁹⁹ To the east of the museum, a series of row houses existed, that were either moved or demolished to make room for the expansion. These houses were across Liberty Street, which was cut off for the expansion.¹⁰⁰

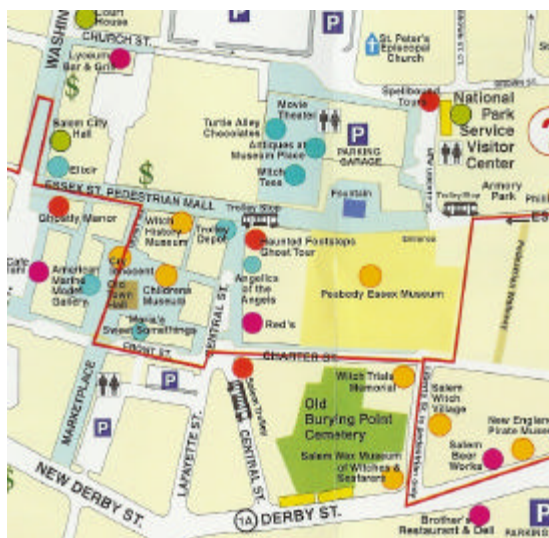


Figure 6-1 map of Peabody Essex Museum site

⁹⁸ Blum.

⁹⁹ Hoyt, Charles. “Adding-on Can Give New Productive Life to Existing Buildings.” *Architectural Record*, December 1975.

¹⁰⁰ Crosbie, Michael J. “Moshe Safdie Peabody Essex Addition.” *Architecture Week*, 20 August 2003 [journal online]: available from http://architectureweek.com/2003/0820/design_1-1.html; Internet; accessed 2 February 2004.



Figure 6-2 East India Marine Hall and Dodge Wing

The City of Salem is home to several historic districts that relate to the distinctive neighborhoods and their prevalent architecture. Salem's design guidelines are contained in ordinances that date back to 1984. They take their direction from the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. The guidelines are broken up into seventeen sections dealing with individual subjects such as masonry, fences, doors, skylights, and satellite dishes. Most sections expand on the *Secretary's Standards* by applying each treatment standard to the historic buildings in Salem.

The downtown historic district of which the Peabody Essex Museum is part has an eastern boundary along Liberty Street. New construction within the historic district in Salem comes under the review of the Salem Historical Commission. While the existing building in

which the museum is housed resides within the Historic District, the only direction available for the expansion of the museum was the northeast, across Liberty Street. This technicality meant that the bulk of Moshe Safdie's work would occur outside of the purview of the Salem Historical Commission. Liberty Street, however, is the western edge of an Urban Redevelopment Area called Heritage Plaza East. Planned in the late 1960's the area falls under the jurisdiction of the Salem Redevelopment Authority.

The Salem Redevelopment Authority governs new construction within the area with a design review process that includes aesthetic considerations, and is based on the *Heritage Plaza East Urban Renewal Plan* published in 1970. The process has two parts, with a preliminary application to review schematic plans, and a final review of construction documents.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) dated September 9, 1997 was one of the first issues of which the public was aware during the design phase. The MOU has dubious origins; it has been suggested that the City signed it under threat of the museum leaving Salem. The MOU consists of items the museum agrees to do and things that the City agrees to do. The museum agreed to:¹⁰¹

- Maintain an interior pedestrian pathway between Essex Street and Charter Street.

This pathway would run through the middle of the museum. It would remain free and open to the public until 2007.

- Provide for an alternate pathway between Essex Street and Charter Street that would be available at all hours of the day.

¹⁰¹ Historic Salem, Incorporated. "HSI Memorandum to the Museum, September, 15, 1998." *HistoricSalem.org*. [archive online] available from: <http://historicsalem.org/issues/pem/hsi091598.html>; Internet, accessed 14 February 2004.

In consideration of what the museum would do for the City, the City would agree to:

- Provide specified infrastructure improvements necessary for the museum's expansion.
- Provide a comprehensive and expedited City approval and permitting process involving all relevant City permitting and licensing agencies to facilitate Phase II Museum expansion design and construction.

While all of the items specified in the MOU became issues with the public, the possibility of the project outside the jurisdiction of the Salem Historical Commission and the Salem Redevelopment Authority was the most contentious.

One of the key players in voicing the public's opposition to the design of the museum as proposed by Moshe Safdie was the local nonprofit devoted to architectural preservation, Historic Salem, Incorporated. In August of 1998, the Museum made a presentation to the public, including Historic Salem, Inc. to present the design of the proposed expansion. In the meetings, several points regarding the design were identified as concerns to the public.

The scale of the new main entrance to the museum was an issue. Many believed the design portrayed the entrance as being too large, and therefore out of scale with the pedestrian nature of the surrounding areas. There was also consternation surrounding the height of the entrance façade; which appeared larger than the neighboring historic buildings. The façade containing the gift shop also caused concern. Without any "retail frontage" along the street, the façade was unwelcoming and seemingly impenetrable. Safdie suggested that the façade of the galleries mimicked tombstones, a representation that was not well received by the public, who

wanted to disassociate Salem from witch-craft and Halloween. An overall concern regarding the lack of penetrations within the museum's façade was seen to be anti-pedestrian as well.¹⁰²



Figure 6-3 Sketch of museum entrance



Figure 6-4 Drawing of gallery façade

Historic Salem sent a thorough memorandum to the museum to address these issues and make recommendations for remedying the problems. In the memorandum, they suggested opening the façades in question by installing display windows for the retail space and using features such as masonry openings and setbacks to lessen the impact of the proposed walls. The memorandum also addressed issues regarding the original MOU between the City and the museum, calling for answers regarding design development that occurred without public input. Also addressed were the treatment of three historic structures to be moved to make room for the

¹⁰² Ibid.

expansion, the “mallng” of a street to accommodate both vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and the proposed wall along the walkway between Essex and Charter streets.¹⁰³

On April 8, 1999, the Salem City Council held a hearing to obtain input from the public regarding the closing of Liberty Street, which the museum proposed to occupy with its new addition. Not much opposition was shown to the idea, mainly because it was not a well traveled street, and most, including Historic Salem, were in favor of the museum expanding. By this time, however, the organization had not heard from the museum regarding the concerns expressed in their memorandum sent in September 1998. Among these concerns was the statement from the City that in 2007 the museum would have the power to close the walkway that was previously Liberty Street.¹⁰⁴

By August, Historic Salem had still not heard back from the museum regarding the memorandum. That month the museum hosted a presentation that, for the first time allowed Moshe Safdie to explain his design and answer the public’s questions, though it did not address the MOU. The museum presented the plans to over twenty organizations, including City entities and community groups. It also broadcast promotional presentations on the local cable television channel. The opportunity provided allowed for some of the issues to be addressed, for Safdie had received the comments put forth by Historic Salem. Due in part to the memorandum, Safdie addressed the fact that the original design discouraged passage on the interior pedestrian walkway and lobby, saying that he had allowed for the new enclosed pathway to contain a line of sight between the two streets. Safdie also said that he had changed the Charter Street entrance to

¹⁰³ Historic Salem, Incorporated. “HSI Memorandum to the Museum, September, 15, 1998.”

¹⁰⁴ McDermet, Staley. “The Peabody Essex Museum and the Closing of Liberty Street.” *May 1999 Newsletter*. [newsletter online] available from: <http://historicsalem.org/newsletter/599/pemplan.html>; Internet, accessed 16 March 2004.

be more inviting, and seem less like a back door. The façade of the gift shop was adapted to contain window-displays as well as a window into a public area of the museum.

When asked about the façade that mimics tombstones, however, Safdie said if you prefer, call them “treasure boxes.” This gallery facade would continue to be an issue throughout the design process of the museum’s expansion. Of critical issue at this point, however, was the fact that Safdie was a year into the design process and had not submitted any preliminary plans for design review. At the August meeting that the museum held, Safdie stated that his office was already producing construction drawings for the project, and would submit them some time in the future. The Design Review Board normally receives plans for a preliminary review, which raised the concern that Safdie and the museum would postpone the submission as long as possible, forcing the Design Review Board to pass the application under pressure of time. The idea was not far-fetched, as the original MOU between the City and the museum alluded to fast-tracking the review and permitting process with the City of Salem.¹⁰⁵

In February 2000, the Peabody Essex Museum finally sent a formal reply to Historic Salem addressing the issues brought up in public meetings as well as the memorandum sent in October 1999. The detailed memo outlined each of the points that had not been addressed earlier, using photographs and rendering to outline their response.¹⁰⁶

The memo started by discussing the scale of the museum’s entrance. By comparing the entrance façades of neighboring buildings, the museum was able to demonstrate that the proposed entrance to the museum was as much as four feet lower than other facades in the

¹⁰⁵ McDermet, Staley. “Museum Architect Presents the Latest Design.” *Fall 1999 Newsletter*. [newsletter online] available from: <http://historicsalem.org/newsletter/1299/pemplan.html>; Internet, accessed 16 March 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Historic Salem, Incorporated. “Peabody Essex Museum Reply to the Board of HSI, February, 23, 2000.” *HistoricSalem.org*. [archive online] available from: <http://historicsalem.org/issues/pem/022300.html>; Internet, accessed 14 February 2004.

vicinity. In addition, the transparency of the glass façade took the place of traditional detailing or ornamentation, allowing visibility to set the scale at the pedestrian level. They argued that, because everything about the façade was visible - the entrance, atrium, and resulting passage through the museum to Charter Street - the pedestrian nature of the street was continued from the exterior to the interior. The reference to tombstones on the gallery façade was addressed by a new theory suggesting that the reference is actually to Salem architecture, and that any resemblance to tombstones stems from the fact that tombstones were often representations of architectural elements. The memo includes photographs of several examples of Salem architecture to prove this point.¹⁰⁷

To address the scale of the museum in general, the design was compared to other civic buildings in Salem, which proved consistent throughout. The memo states that “all of the elements mentioned above produce a building that is clearly contemporary – which is the museum’s intent – yet equally clearly references traditional Salem architectural styles in both forms and materials.” Historic Salem and the public agreed that the addition of architectural elements and details to the façades to mimic local architecture was important. Safdie says that he did explore the suggestions, but the idea would make the façades “too busy.” Addressing compatibility further, they went on to say, “The new Museum expansion, as we have shown, draws heavily on elements of Salem architecture. It does not, however, try to mimic Federal or other traditional architectural styles.”¹⁰⁸

The early colonial Pickman House, which is sited across Charter Street from the museum, prompted many suggestions that the scale on the fronting façade be lessened by means of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

setbacks or hip roofs. As a response, the museum pointed out that the modern, twelve-story apartment building less than a block away has, for years, already overshadowed the structure. The new museum expansion would serve to provide an intermediate height between the two buildings in this urban atmosphere.¹⁰⁹

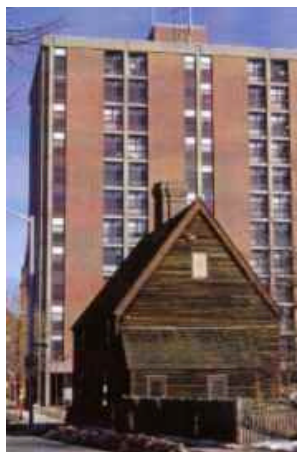


Figure 6-5 Pickman House

Other points, such as the longevity of the public access for the pedestrian passageway were also addressed. The museum pointed out that the expiration in 2007 was only as a point of review, and that the museum could not commit to the access in perpetuity, although it hoped it would be able to eventually.

Responding to the critical issue of design review and permitting, the museum issued the following statement: “Salem has one of the most thoroughly articulated permitting processes in Massachusetts. [Historic Salem] has expressed concern that the permitting process will not include design review by the Design Review Board of the Salem Redevelopment Authority. The Museum’s expansion project will adhere to all aspects of the process, including Planning Board site plan review and design review by the Salem Redevelopment Authority. The expedited

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

permitting process is simply an assurance that the City will carry out all permitting reviews in a timely manner, providing for ample public input and consideration.”¹¹⁰

The next opportunity for public input came during the Salem Redevelopment Authority’s Design Review process. As promised, the process was streamlined, but as a consequence, a number of residents were left unsatisfied. The project was submitted on May 12, 2000 and approved on October 12 of the same year. Historic Salem supported the submittal as it was passed by the Design Review Board.

The review process was governed by the guidelines published in the *Heritage Plaza East Urban Renewal Plan*, which was written for the purpose of guiding development within the area, promoting public interests, and preventing urban blight. The wording was very vague and discretionary, with standards such as “minimize conflicts between pedestrians and vehicular traffic.”¹¹¹ The main objective of the plan was to control parking and land use. The plan does touch on the subject of Historic Preservation in several areas clarifying that historic integrity should be preserved when possible.

Constructed of red brick from England and sandstone from Scotland, the Peabody Essex Museum opened with high praise from the national and international press. The first noticeable deviation came when, with heightened post-September 11 security, the interior pedestrian passage along old Liberty Street was not open to the public as promised, but open only to museum ticket-buyers.¹¹² This immediately contradicts Safdie’s design theory based on the transparent atrium, built as a continuation of a city street.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Salem Redevelopment Authority. *Heritage Plaza East Urban Renewal Plan*. Salem, Massachusetts. 1970.

¹¹² Campbell, Robert. “The New Peabody Essex Museum.” *The Boston Globe*, 20 June 2003.

Within the curved atrium that was formerly Liberty Street, Safdie created a large open space that serves as a central point connecting all of the museum's various parts. Modeled on the New England village green, the space is intended to function as a gathering point; unfortunately is devoid of art, and is dominated on one side by the façades of the gallery "houses," which have only minimal openings. The space is public by default, as opposed to public by virtue of the traditional village green or European piazza.¹¹³ The ceilings of the new galleries reflect their exterior shape on the second floor, and also allow light into the first floor galleries. The ingenious skylights that allow day-light into galleries have never fit into the programming of the permanent and changing exhibitions, and have remained curtained because of the nature of the artwork being displayed and its sensitivity to natural light.¹¹⁴



Figure 6-6 Peabody Essex Museum atrium

¹¹³ Eisen, David. "Peabody Addition Subtracts." *The Boston Herald*, 6 July 2003.

¹¹⁴ Huxtable, Ada Louise. "The New Hub of Architecture: Boston and a Neighbor Embrace the New With Fervor." *Wall Street Journal*, 31 July 2004.

Scale, as it was addressed by Safdie, is one of the overwhelming successes of the design. An addition of its size is a challenge to fit into a small space in a historic city. Safdie recognized this, saying, “I saw that the problem was one of scale. Salem is very delicate in scale, very domestic. So I broke the building down to the idea that these are pavilions that are like houses, and added to that the idea that light is coming between the pavilions,” referring to the brick façade of the museum that he derived from the headstones in one of Salem’s famous cemeteries. “There was a wonderful charm about these shapes, and they were domestic, they were like architecture in small scale.”¹¹⁵ For the atrium, with its glass roof, Safdie sought to overcome the challenge of distinguishing it from the atrium of a shopping mall. To accomplish this, he added geometry to the structure, suggesting a whale’s backbone, or the hull of a ship, both of which were integral to the history of Salem and the museum.¹¹⁶ They are curved along the shape of the interior street; a visitor, upon entering, cannot view the atrium that is just out of sight.



Figure 6-7 Aerial view of Peabody Essex Museum

¹¹⁵ Blum.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.



Figure 6-8 Peabody Essex Museum interior street and galleries

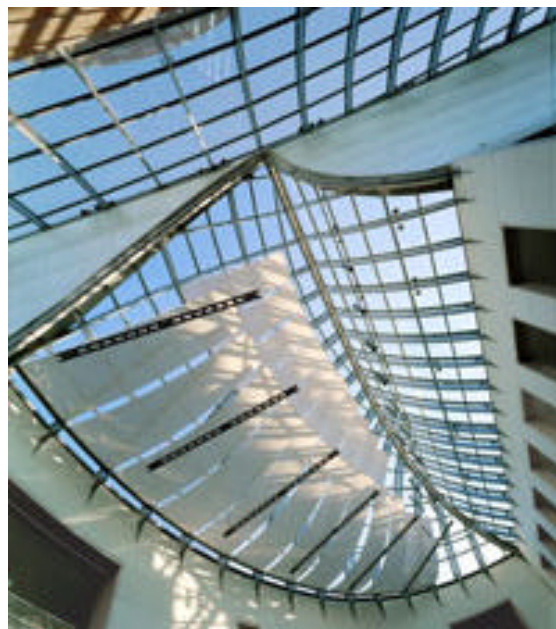


Figure 6-9 Peabody Essex Museum atrium roof



Figure 6-10 New entrance to Peabody Essex Museum



Figure 6-11 Peabody Essex Museum gallery wall and walkway

In all, the museum functions well, creating an essential draw of museum attendees, and succeeding in transforming the City of Salem from witch capital to cultural center. Salem's proximity to Boston, about thirty minutes by car, puts the museum on a national stage. The questions remains as to whether the Peabody Essex Museum will withstand the test of time, and remain a vibrant scene long after the press stops appearing.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

One of the glories of architecture is that its interpretation is very subjective, and as Herbert Muschamp says, “even stupid people get to have an opinion about it.”¹¹⁷ The Telfair Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum were both designed to be successful. They were both designed under the public’s critical eye using local criteria. The Peabody Essex Museum stands out as being a successful product that is sympathetic to the architecture of Salem. While there are still dissenters in Salem, they have generally rallied around the success of the building. Architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable calls the Peabody Essex Museum one of Safdie’s best buildings, and goes on to say that “Wow is not the New England style. But the Peabody Essex has gone beyond spectacle to bring the past into the present; it has used architecture to recast a City’s image and heritage.”¹¹⁸ The Peabody Essex Museum stands as a success in the light of the Bilbao Effect, for the architecture is stunning, yet not gaudy, and the public reacts positively to the space as a museum. Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the museum, Dan Monroe proclaims that “we didn’t go after Frank Gehry – intentionally.” Monroe sums up the dilemma of expanding a museum in today’s climate by saying, “people seem to fall on one of two sides of a divide: they go for the signature building, which becomes the major draw and is, in a sense, the museum; or they go for ... architecture designed to really expand and amplify the

¹¹⁷ Muschamp, Herbert. “It’s History Now, So Shouldn’t Modernism Be Preserved, Too?” *New York Times*, 17 December 2000.

¹¹⁸ Huxtable, Ada Louise.

museum and its programs. Some museums have made the building the collection, but that's not a strategy we're pursuing.¹¹⁹

The lesson from cities like Savannah may well be that the Bilbao phenomena can be applied to cities that are in need of a cultural identity as Bilbao was, but may not apply to cities that already have strong identities. Savannah's strong Southern identity and the perceptions about contemporary architecture in the South had a large impact on the design of the Jepson addition to the Telfair Museum. The Southern United States in particular has tried to overcome stereotypes by putting their museums in the national spotlight. Joseph B. Schenk, Director of the Mobile Museum of Art, recognizes this position; "There's a kind of breaking out of the shell of that inferiority complex we might have had. We're behind the curve of museums in New England or the upper Midwest or California. But during the 1990's people here realized they were doing well enough to begin concentrating on quality-of-life issues. There was also a fair amount of reverse migration from the North, which brought with it not just people and ideas but also art collections."¹²⁰ This is true of the situation in Savannah, as more and more money from the Northeast arrives with transplants; even the namesake of the Jepson Center is not a Savannah native. This also raises the concern of whether there is art to fill the spaces that the money builds.

It is difficult today to determine whether the Telfair Museum will be a success on par with the Peabody Museum. Safdie, of course sees success; "I feel very good about the scheme as it is emerging. Now that it is partially constructed, one can see how it will fit into its surroundings. I think that the design that came out of the prolonged review process will work

¹¹⁹ Blum.

¹²⁰ Kinzer, Stephen. "From Virginia to Louisiana, a Building Boom for Museums." *New York Times*, 18 December 2001.

well for Savannah. Debates over designs in historic cities are commonplace. I have experienced them in Quebec City, Ottawa, Jerusalem and Salem, Massachusetts.”¹²¹

The Design Review process that governed in each of the two case studies varied greatly. Savannah has, in place, one of the most vigorous ordinances in use today, while the City of Salem is working with an urban renewal plan from 1970. Safdie’s work in Savannah was greatly altered by the process, while he had the ability to work almost unencumbered in Salem. In both cases there was public opposition to his design, however, there was little recourse available to the citizens of Salem.

Other factors, however minor in appearance, may have also played a role in the outcome of the two projects. The initial design for Salem may have been the result of his knowledge of the region and his proximity to the museum. Safdie’s large architectural firm would have been divided up into teams to work on the project, and perhaps there was a difference in the aptitude of the two teams. Looking at the Preservation Officer for Savannah, it is evident that she approved of the project and pushed the design to the best of her ability. This also brings up the role of the Board of Review at that period in time. As board members rotate, so do the capabilities and design aesthetics of the board itself.

The dramatic course of events that conspired in Savannah outlines the role of design review in giving the public a voice, and protecting historic resources with concrete law. New buildings in the context of historic settings are unavoidable; therefore leaving these areas without protection is unwise.

Understanding the role of contextualism in design review is paramount to using the process to the best advantage in historic cities. Muschamp candidly explains that, “by now,

¹²¹ Swope.

everyone who's not a complete chucklehead understands that the context for architecture is not confined to the microrange of a building's immediate surroundings. It extends to the macroscale of global urbanization. Rather than turning architect into street mimes, "contextualism" should stretch their imaginations toward the far horizons of technological innovations and cultural difference."¹²²

With the passage of time, modern and contemporary architecture are becoming important topics in historic preservation. An entire sub-group has developed around the idea of preserving modern landmarks; therefore, it is no longer acceptable to regard contemporary architecture as the enemy of historic preservation. Conversely, we cannot view contemporary modern architecture as an appropriate solution in every city. It is obvious in the new urbanism movement and success of neo-traditional towns like Celebration, Florida that more traditional styles have a large following.¹²³ It is possible that a broader understanding of contemporary modern architecture as it developed out of the 1930's, coupled with an understanding of what makes a successful city, will lead to a sensitive perspective of how we should allow our cities to grow, both inward and outward.

The newly expanded Peabody Essex Museum reveals that some amount of discretion in the hands of qualified architects can produce a design that is equal to, if not better, than one built under strict guidelines. While this may be the case with an architect of Safdie's caliber, one cannot be certain what would result with a less educated, sub-par architect, or even an ego-building celebrity architect. It is for this reason that Design Review in historic settings must continue as a process by which we protect the built environment. The case studies also point out

¹²² Muschamp, Herbert. "Assembling a Montage of Images in Glass and Steel." *New York Times*, 27 January 2004.

¹²³ Muschamp, Herbert. "It's History Now, So Shouldn't Modernism Be Preserved, Too?"

that much of the legislation in place is antiquated, and needs to be updated in order to maintain effectiveness. We assume that historic preservation ordinances are in place to produce good architecture; however, it is evident that guidelines do not guarantee this. We cannot become complacent in thinking our historic built environment is safe because it is protected by ordinances. Many of the ordinances in place today could not have foreseen the challenges that the future would bring, and should be updated to reflect this new thinking. The case studies also point out the critical role of not just the review board members, but the staff in charge of the review process.

The outcome of the design review process in Savannah suggests several future research directions. There is a need for a massive review of existing historic preservation ordinances. As this thesis has outlined, these ordinances need to be adapted to accommodate the new role of contemporary architecture in historic settings. Future research should look at how to accommodate this idea, as well as how to give more weight to the recommendations as outlined in the Chadbourne Guidelines. Also in need of research is the role of the review board, their composition, as well as their training.

Cities and their architecture are central elements of our American culture. The loss of the World Trade Center in the attacks of September 11, 2001 indicates that architecture's role in representing and defining our civilization is of utmost importance to us.¹²⁴ The loss of such landmarks also demonstrates that, even if we do not think of buildings as great architecture, they are important to our sense of place and sense of ourselves.¹²⁵ In effect, to ensure we have the perspective to guide the future development that will define our cities and towns, we have to

¹²⁴ Muschamp, Herbert. "The Deadly Importance of Making Distinctions." *New York Times*, 30 December 2001.

¹²⁵ Gray, Christopher. "The MetLife Building, Originally the Pan Am Building Critics Once Called It Ugly; Now They're Not Sure." *New York Times*, 7 October 2001.

protect the buildings and monuments that tell us who we are. The evolution of architecture reflects progress and change in both our global perspective and local experience; the theory and practice of design review must be constantly evaluated and amended to accommodate this broader context.

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