The Athletic Club

4.154
Architecture Design Option Studio
Fall 2018

Instructors:
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Daniel Marshall /Teaching Assistant

Credits: 0-10-11 G
Room: 7-434
Schedule: Thursdays, Friday 1-5pm
Prerequisites: 4.153
1. Abstract

The goal of the studio is to design a contemporary athletic club in Chicago. The students will be faced with the challenge of discovering how to improve this almost classical American typology and how to reconceptualize it for a more contemporary use.

The Club building was reinvented in America in the beginning of the XXth century. This new institution combined the traditional social rooms present in European clubs with a complete new set of spaces and programs. Spaces for culture, leisure, opulence, sport and seclusion were fused in the same building. By doing so, it truly became a social condenser.

The studio proposes to take over the typology of the club and adapt it to the present conditions of the city of Chicago. The students will investigate how the conflict between “ideal” typologies opposed to specific sites of intervention could be leveraged to reinvent the typology, preserving the uniqueness of place.
2. Conceptual framework.

**Oppositions: typology vs morphology**

Typology and morphology represent two endpoints between which architecture moves. They are opposed conditions that architecture has to deal with.

Architecture is a response to the context, to the physical and climatic conditions of a place. A project should adapt to an environment, to a material condition, to an ambiance, to an atmosphere. It is at the very end a necessary response to a very specific condition. Although architecture is a discipline, it has conforming its own history and it has generated a constellation of typologies that has been conformed in response to a variety of program necessities. A type is the result of a progressive refinement of a programmatic and constructive condition and it often establishes a base for future transformations.

The history of architecture shows how the prevalence of a typological or morphological approach into the design process has marked the architecture production. We believe that the narrative of a project should find a balance between these two opposed conditions: between the specific condition of a place and the autonomous typological nature of forms.

The studio investigates how the conflict between these opposed approaches can produce architecture. How “ideal” typologies opposed to specific sites could reinvent types preserving the uniqueness of an intervened place. Student projects should discover how to merge in the most consistent way the sheer typologies into a specific contextual condition. The aim of the studio will be to produce individual projects able to explore and reinvent a type while at the same time have the capacity of being consistent with a specific contextual condition.

3. Work methodology

In order to investigate the themes presented in the previous chapter, we have identified a series of study areas in Chicago. Some of the areas are located in Downtown Chicago, some others in more peripheral locations. Each student will have to choose one of the proposed locations. Depending on the site, each project will be faced with different morphological conditions that define the nature of the selected site. The confrontation with the density of the city, the presence of large pieces of urban infrastructure, the difference in scale, the heterogeneity of the urban fabric, or the notion of void will delineate an immediate context which will start informing each intervention.

Subsequently, each project will investigate the spatial, organizational and compositional rules of the American Club type. By looking at different Club typologies in Chicago and beyond, the projects will discover formal principles to deal with the specific physical conditions of their sites.
“Built in 1931, its 38 stories reach a height of 534 feet. Large abstract patterns of glass and brick make its exterior inscrutable and almost indistinguishable from the conventional skyscrapers around it. This serenity hides the apotheosis of the Skyscraper as instrument of the Culture of Congestion.

The Club represents the complete conquest -floor by floor - of the Skyscraper by social activity; with the Downtown Athletic Club the American way of life, know-how and initiative definitively overtake the theoretical lifestyle modifications that the various 20th century European avant-gardes have been insistently proposing, without ever managing to impose them.

In the Downtown Athletic Club the Skyscraper is used as Constructivist Social Condenser: a machine to generate and intensify desirable forms of human intercourse.”  


Downtown Athletic Club, New York
Starrett & Van Vleck 1930

4. Reference. The New York Athletic Club

The downtown Athletic Club in New York is a paradigmatic model for the American Club building. In his book Delirious New York, Rem Koolhaas describes the building as the “ultimate machine for living, encouraging desirable forms of human intercourse and the pursuit of bodily perfection” appointing it as a metaphor for “the apotheosis of the Skyscraper as instrument of the Culture of Congestion”. Conceived as a sports club, the American Club later transformed into a more complex typology able to combine spaces for sport but also for social encounter, culture, leisure and seclusion—all in the same building.
This famous section reveals the logic of the building. It shows a vertical accumulation of independent programmatic shelves, from libraries and reading rooms to restaurants and swimming pools, altogether compacted into a generic building. A building that is basically just a vertical container but that aspires to construct a world.

Section. Downtown Athletic Club, New York
Starrett & Van Vleck 1930

The unconventional combination of so many different spaces in the same Building favors the social interaction of its users. The scene depicted in “two man eating oysters wearing boxes gloves” by Madelon Vriesendorp does not show an eccentric situation, but rather it exemplifies the kind of unique encounters that the Downtown Athletic Club is able to facilitate.

Madelon Vriesendorp, Eating oysters with boxing gloves, naked, 1978
5. Influences

The Downtown Athletic Club and its vertical accumulation principle has served as a prototype to several contemporary projects by Rem Koolhaas.

The competition proposal for the Très Grande Bibliothèque in Paris is one of them. It is a simple cube that contains a series of highly singular spaces floating in a generic stacking sequence of floors. However, the impact of those spaces on the façade is barely noticeable from the exterior.
6. Chicago typologies

In The University Club of Holabird & Root a stacking principle is applied as a variety of rooms and programs are stacked onto each other in a simple slab. The revival Gothic façade wraps them around and provides a sense of monumentality to the most important ones.

In some others building the usual vertical typology is rejected in favor a more spread scheme, a more horizontal one, like the Racket club. Here the stacking system is used in a horizontal way, and the decisive document becomes the plan instead of the section. Not in the vertical, as this plan shows.
7. Program

The Athletic Club is a typology that aims to be world in itself. It is understood as an autonomous entity in the city fabric that contains a wide range of spaces devoted to satisfy every social need of the urban inhabitant.

Despite its privative character it could be understood as the ultimate public (social) space in the city. In that respect the studio proposes to develop a contemporary version of an Athletic Club without a given program but rather with a generic idea of spaces understanding that as in public space, the same solutions cannot be applied in every situation. Thus the project will have to contemplate the inclusion of spaces for the following categories:

*Spaces for culture.* Libraries and reading rooms for occasional reading and for informal work, as well as exhibition galleries to house sporadic art exhibitions and the in-house art collections.

*Spaces for sports.* Indoor & outdoor sport courts, a gym, a swimming pool for everyday exercising, locker rooms with sauna, and massage booths for wellness.

*Spaces for Leisure.* Terraces and Solariums to enjoy the sun and rest; game rooms and lounges for conversation and entertainment.

*Spaces for Gastronomy.* A restaurant for formal dining; a Café and a Bar for informal meals and after-work drinks.

*Spaces for social encounter.* Conference rooms for serious meetings; ballrooms and event spaces for amusement and celebration.

*Spaces for Seclusion.* Rooms for both visitors and members; small apartments to temporarily inhabit the city.
8. The Site

The site of the project will be the city of Chicago. In the mid-western city the American Club typology also enjoyed a flourishing period, although it did not crystallize in a “generic vertical container” as in New York but in a variety of mid-size buildings that stylistic belong to the “School of Chicago” and adapted to the different contextual conditions of the city.

That fact makes those buildings extremely interesting as they are formally still linked to the traditional language of the city, yet they hide very attractive (contemporary) ways of dealing with complex organization of programs.

9. Studio Travel

In the framework of the study program The Athletic Club, we propose a study trip to Chicago on September 20 - 23.

The trip to Chicago will allow you to have a crucial experience of the city and understand its physical qualities as well as its urban atmosphere. You will be confronted with examples of historical architecture that appraise the exceptional character of the city of Chicago, as well as visiting some of the existing Clubs through which you will get familiar with the typology and the history of it.

As part of the trip, students will be able to visit their project sites, which will be essential to gather information about them and get a sense of the different atmospheres of the context.

10. Studio Meetings

The studio will meet every Thursday and Friday. Below are the dates in which either instructor will be present.

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<td>11-Final review</td>
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11. Detailed Studio Schedule

Sept. 6  Introduction to the studio/instructors
Studio Trip discussion

Sept. 7  Desk crits:
First notions of project ideas
Notions of site and proposals for program

Sept. 13 Desk crits:
Site analysis, program, and intervention ideas

Sept. 14  **Analysis Booklet:** site selection and graphic material
*Upload material in PDF form by EOD

Sept. 20-23 Studio travel*

Sept. 27 Desk crits: intervention proposal and context model development

Sept. 28  **Pin-Up:** Proposal of intervention in context
Deliverables and scale (TBD)
*Upload material in PDF form by 8pm EST

Oct. 4  Work day and desk crits
Context and massing models in process

Oct. 5  **Concept Booklet:** Skype discussion with FB
*Upload material in PDF form by 9am EST

Oct. 11-12  **Pin-Up:** Full project revision
Deliverables and scale (TBD)

Oct. 18-19 Desk crits

Oct. 25  Work day and desk crits

Oct. 26  **Mid Review:** Full project revision with context models

Nov. 1-2 Mid Review revisions pin-up

Nov. 8-9 Desk crits

Nov. 15-16  **Pin-Up:** Final full project revision

Nov. 22-23 Thanksgiving vacation

Nov. 29-30  **Model Deadline:** Context and intervention

Dec. 3-4 Model Documentation/Photos for final
*arrange independent of studio time

Dec. 6-7 Final desk crits

Dec. 11  **Final Review:** Deliverables TBD
12. Resources


Delirious New York: a retroactive manifesto for Manhattan / Rem Koolhaas.

Frank Lloyd Wright’s progressive suburbia / Wright, Gwendolyn University of Nebraska–Lincoln. College of Fine and Performing Arts

Daniel H. Burnham: visionary architect and planner / Kristen Schaffer and Paul Rocheleau

The Complete Architecture of Adler & Sullivan / Richard Nickel; Aaron Siskind; John Vinci; Ward Miller; Richard Nickel Committee

For members only: A history and guide to Chicago’s oldest private clubs / Lisa Holton

A History of the Chicago Club / Edward T. Blair and Emmet Dedmon

The architects and the city: Holabird & Roche of Chicago, 1880-1918 / Robert Bruegmann

13. References

The Athletic Club of Columbus, Columbus OH
Richard, McCarty & Bulford, 1915 – in operation

Buffalo Athletic Club, Buffalo NY
Edward B. Green & Sons, 1924 – under renovation

Chicago Athletic Association, Chicago IL
Henry Ives Cobb, 1893 - hotel

Chicago University Club, Chicago IL
Martin Roche, 1909 – in operation

Downtown Athletic Club, Manhattan NY
Starrett & Van Vleck’s (1930) – residential tower

Detroit Athletic Club, Detroit MI
Albert Khan, 1915 – in operation

Illinois Athletic Club, Chicago IL
Barnett, Haynes, and Barnett, 1908 – School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Minneapolis Athletic Club, Minneapolis MN
Bertand & Chamberlin, 1915 – hotel

Racquet Club of Chicago, Chicago IL
Rebori, Wentworth, Dewey and McCormick, 1923 – in operation

The Racquet and Tennis Club, New York
McKim, Mead & White, 1917 – in operation

The Standard Club, Chicago IL
Original Building: Sullivan and Adler, 1888
Current Building: Albert Kahn, 1926 – in operation

St. Paul Athletic Club, St. Paul MN
Reed & Stem, 1917 – in operation
14. Absence Criteria

Each of the design tasks in the studio will build sequentially in the dates established. Therefore, student commitment to incremental development on a daily and weekly basis is of great importance. Regular attendance in studio and for the duration of all scheduled reviews and revisions is mandatory, and all deadlines must be met satisfactorily. Greater than two absences from studio without a medical excuse could result in a failing grade for the studio. Please inform your instructors if you experience any trouble attending studio sessions.

15. Academic Integrity

MIT’s expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently: http://integrity.mit.edu

16. Evaluation

Grading will be based in the following criteria:

- Attendance to all studio meetings and sessions.
- Active participation in studio culture and discussions.
- Quality of design and development of the project from analysis, to concept, through a developed stage.
- Ability to integrate morphological and typological considerations in relation to the chosen site and programatic narrative.
- Completion of required deliverables at all scheduled revisions, and consistent development and iteration throughout studio meetings.