Wooden shipbuilding school
Netherlands – Amsterdam - Buiksloterham

P4 - Reflection

Di Huang
4352408
Joest_1023d@hotmail.com

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Mentors:  Eireen Scheurs, Mikel van Gelderen
Building technology mentor:  Hubert van der Meel
Delegate of the Board of Examiners:  Dirk van den Heuvel
My project is a traditional wooden shipbuilding school for about 200 students includes the craft students in Netherlands and the unemployed residents from the middle class families in the surrounding area of my site. The footprint of the building is about 4000m$^2$, and the total area is 6700m$^2$.

Before the design, to understand the skills and real values of craft, I went to a woodcraft studio and made a film that records the working space and the working status of craftsmen. In my opinion, the value of traditional craft in modern society is the uniqueness and quality of the production. It is what makes the craftsmen proud of their work from past till now. Also, modern production modes like mass production can never achieve these values.

Shipwright in the Netherlands has a long and profound history. Especially from the Dutch golden age, the Dutch Empire grew to become one of the major seafaring powers, and shipwrights then became one of the important professions in the country. Even today, according to the statistic, in Europe, Netherlands is still one of the countries that have the largest amounts of recreational ships. Most of the consumers in the Netherlands chose to buy a ship because of very personal reasons such as the pursuit of life quality, the enthusiasm of sailing, nostalgia and so on. And such people would never be just satisfied with the basic functions of a ship, which makes the quality and uniqueness even more important. That’s why a mature shipwright needs to spend at least 4 years for learning in a crafts school and extra two years for working experience.

However, currently most of the shipbuilding schools in the Netherlands cannot provide a comprehensive and complete education and students can’t develop a sense of pride for their profession in the education contexts. So that’s why I want to make a program of Shipbuilding School which can provide not only a fully education of learning and practice for wooden shipbuilding but also focus on the uniqueness and quality training of the craftsmen.

The project is located at Amsterdam Noord, the district called Buiksloterham. It used to be one of the biggest ship industrial areas in the Netherlands, and today, it is transforming into a culture industry area based on the original functions gradually, and still many ship related business can be found here.

The new building is on the intersection point of the cultural industry area and ship industry area, which face to the IJ canal, and next to the Amsterdam marina dock. For this site, and the program, I mainly have 2 challenges, 1st, how can the shipbuilding space, educational space and student activity space be organized effectively in a way that they don’t disturb each other but still have a connection? 2nd, how can this school become a showcase to promote the culture and value of the traditional craftsmanship to the public?

To achieve this, I did some research on the classification about shipbuilding spaces and the typology study of the existing wooden shipwright schools. As well as the study of the related history and the current development strategy of the district. In
the research of school’s typologies, I found that most of the wooden ship building schools are like roughly adding functions into existing, big enough industrial or office building, to meet the basic functional requirements, which is not a response to this traditional craft or skill, even worse, I think it blocks students' full understanding of the craft.

So I try to find inspirations from the working ways or spaces of traditional wooden shipbuilding activities, and I found, it was actually a process of continuous communication with outdoor environment and ships. In the process, the recognition as a shipwright was being strengthened. But today the point is nowhere to be found in the education of shipbuilding. And also many spatial elements are lost in the simplification process. Then I compared these different types of spaces and in the end extracted a simplest spatial conclusion.

I use the dissymmetrical pitched roof which transformed from the traditional shipbuilding shelter as the main element of the building, as in my former research on the traditional shipbuilding space, I found that the form of the roof and ship shelter are the representative elements of shipbuilding space.

In spatial design, as the large scale of ships and the requirement of their transportation, the circulation from the shipbuilding space to the waterfront is very essential and should be the starting point of my design. So the first thing I defined is the two main orientations for the large and medium shipyard based on the relationship between the site and the water fronts.

The overall spatial composition follows a simple principle. Basically, at the inland side is the private interior space, like studios, classrooms and offices; than the central part are the roomy shipbuilding spaces, the interior shipyard and the shipbuilding square, and then the interior spaces with semi-publicity like the library and the showroom are on the 1st floor of the waterfront edge, face to the Amsterdam marina. I believe the building can works very efficient as an integral system, meanwhile, it provides public, and the students the working way and environment of wooden shipbuilding.

For my next step, I am going to elaborate both digital models and physical models to see the practical spatial experience of my project. By this, I can understand the space clearly and effectively. Also, going deeper in detail would definitely very helpful for me to develop my project and make all aspects work in a whole system.