

Crafting Tallinn

Programmatically, this project joins both maker and artisan communities in one location. This location will act as a craftsmanship hub, catered to both artisans who sell their designs, and makers who share their knowledge with the community. Combining these two users stems from the idea that they can work as a complimentary unit. The artisans provide a sense of inspiration, demonstrating the beauty that can come from handcraft skills. While the makers can provide the knowledge and expertise behind how things can be crafted or repaired. The value behind creating this kind of community is that it allows for an environment of knowledge exchange, and co-creation. Both program types act as nodes of inspiration for the local community to engage with skillful designers and traditional masters that remind people of the value of the handmade and the beauty that can result from it.

The goal of the project is intended to be a celebration of craftsmanship at every aspect. The program, the design, the detail and the construction. It is meant to be an architecture that reflects the mastery of craft and the ingenuity of the makers.

The formation of the project was a mixture of personal interest and onsite interviews and investigations within Tallinn. I have always harbored a fascination for the crafting and detailing of objects and furniture, especially those that are handmade and I was very fortunate to find a rich culture of handcrafters within Tallinn. While visiting the city I was able to visit and interview various makers and artisans that were scattered throughout and from these interviews I was able to piece together this project. This was a very rewarding experience because it gave the project a solid foundation to back onto. The creation of a new maker space was approved of by one of the organizers of a maker pilot project in Tallinn who told me that more maker spaces were being built within the city in the next few years. Also, all the secondary and supporting programs of the project were derived from interviews with artisans in Tallinn based on the types of spaces that they felt they were in need of.

The project is located in the historic part of Tallinn on Katariina Kaik, a small passageway that connects two of the main roads and has a 280m² courtyard. The proposed interventions occur in the passageway as well as the various ground floor rooms of the 10 buildings that are within the passageway. This site was chosen for a variety of factors, starting with the rich character of the courtyard and the ruins of the Katariina church that face onto the courtyard. A guild of artisans are already located on this street, so this became the perfect opportunity to locate my proposed craftsmanship community. The project builds off the existing Katariina Guild and uses the courtyard and passageway as covered communal space. My reasoning for

locating the site in the old town was done to provide a new cultural location into Old Town Tallinn. One that will ideally encourage more use from the locals while still accommodating for the tourism traffic that Old Town Tallinn has.

Reflecting upon my process throughout the project, one of the longer topics of conversation was addressing what my role was within in the project. Given my past experiences and my hesitation to continue down the road to becoming an “Architect” with a capital “A” I initially was trying to approach the project from the smallest scale possible. My early proposals were all focused around the idea that since I was working in an existing building then my project could be more of a “Furniture” approach. The question continued to be asked then, what really is my role in this project? Am I the furniture designer? Or the interior designer? Should the role of architect really be left out all together? In the end my role and approach to the project was formed in different stages. Each stage requiring more involvement than the next. First, I acted as a consulting planner. Interviewing the existing users of the guild allowed me to devise a list of programs that would help better the functionality of their community. The next role was that of a preservationist. I had to identify the conditions and heritage status of each of the buildings that would be interacted with to understand the challenges they had to overcome in order for them to operate as a single project. The final role was that of the architect. Even though the existing buildings are functioning, they lack a sense of continuity between them. As the architect, I offered various interventions within the existing buildings and surrounding exterior spaces that resulted in a cohesive craftsmen community. My takeaway from this process is that this diversity of roles throughout the project gives me the opportunity to accomplish the same project at different degrees of execution. I can use this process of differentiating my role in a project to better suit a client’s needs. Although my vision for the project has resulted in various interventions of the architecture, there is also the scenario that the artisans or makers may only want to be consulted on the types of programs that could better suit them.