

House of Music Reflection

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Studio: Interiors Buildings Cities

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Introduction

The graduation project is about the design of a new concert hall in the City of London, called the House of Music. The context and the programme are based on a real competition which was held at the beginning of 2017. According to this competition, the concert hall, besides being a place for people to listen to music, should also be a place where people can meet each other and learn and practice music. The site is currently occupied by the museum of London, which, however will move to a new location in about two years allowing in this way the development of a new House of Music.

Landscape and music

The design of a Concert hall is a complex design task, it demands specific technical and functional solutions and at the same time it requires high quality spaces which people enjoy using. An aspect which is important to be considered while designing a concert hall is its function on the urban level. Concert halls are important public buildings and as such, they contribute to how we perceive the city, the society and our self. This public function is extremely important and therefore I start my design by studying the urban condition of the site. By studying the urban condition of the site, I can design how people will perceive and experience the building.

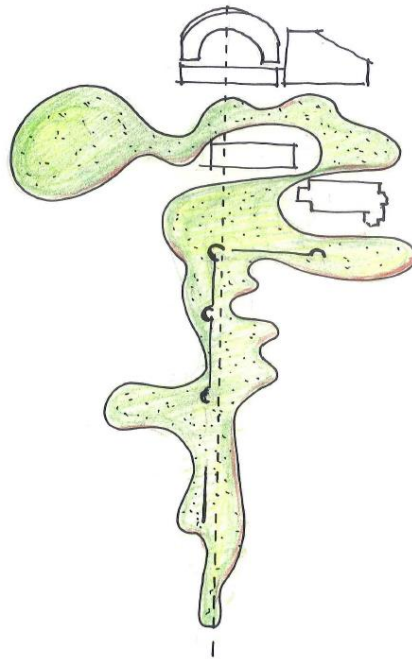
The site is located in an interesting and at the same time complex area of the City of London. At north and the north-east, the site meets the Barbican, an Estate of about 11 hectares built after the second world war in a brutalist style. The complex develops along a longitudinal central space of a series of lakes, terraces and public buildings. At both sides of this space, there is one big rectangular garden which is surrounded by long apartment blocks. East, the site is delimited by the sunken garden which develops at -6 meters from street level and is connected to the longitudinal central space of the Barbican. In the garden there are the ruins of the Roman wall which in the past served to protect the city. The ruins play an important role on the urban and on the architectural level: The Barbican's longitudinal space of lakes, terraces and public buildings is aligned to the wall and forms its symmetrical axes. The Barbican's circular façades and terrace detailing, and roof shapes refer to the shape of the towers of the ruins. South, southwest of the site, develops the financial district. This district is made out of the majority of big corporate office buildings and towers built in the last 50 years. Here and there, some older buildings still survive, such as some old churches or Victorian houses. Close to the site at a short walking distance, we find St Paul's cathedral London's most important church.

The access to the site is provided by two main streets Aldersgate and Noble Street. Both, start from St. Paul's Cathedral and move, almost parallel to each other, from south to north. The character of these two, is however very different. Aldersgate is a wide street with big neoclassical buildings and has a formal character. Noble Street instead, is a narrow pedestrian route with smaller buildings and an informal character. Along its path there are multiple small churches and parks, also here there are some ruins of the Roman wall.



In my design I chose Noble street as the major route to access the new House of Music. The informal and intimate quality of this street fits best with the informal and open character I want to create in the concert hall. At the same time there is also the opportunity to enhance the ruins of the Roman wall which at the moment are neglected, and to improve the circulation of the Barbican. This decision brings some challenges; since Noble street stops just before reaching the site, interrupted by London Wall (a busy street). The design of a passage under London Wall, allowed me to connect Noble street to the site, the sunken garden, and the longitudinal space of the Barbican. At the start of Noble street, a new path running parallel to the ruins, descends under London Wall and reaches the garden. From there it continues into the longitudinal space of lakes, terraces and Public buildings of the Barbican. Thanks to this move the site, the sunken garden and the Barbican are more accessible. Further on a larger scale a link has been created, at the south, with Tate Modern and the Southbank Centre and at the north with Whitecross street and St Luke's.

The intervention on the scale of the Barbican results in space which is comparable to a landscape. This landscape which develops in the heart of the Barbican and contains lakes, terraces, gardens, ruins and a series of public buildings, is protected by the tall buildings at its sides and has an open and informal character which is similar to that of the big parks of London. This space has been the inspiration for the design of the house of music. The building has been conceived as an extension and as a part of this landscape. A brick structure develops from the level of the sunken garden, up to the level of the street and of the highwalk. This landscape of brick, in the form of a big "staircase" bridges the height difference between street and garden. This brick structure is made of a particular construction technique. The vertical parts of the staircase are of solid masonry walls. Built of a combination of insulated clay blocks at the inside and red London bricks at the outside. The horizontal elements of this landscape-like structure are made of in-place poured concrete slabs and finished again with red London bricks.



The brick staircase function as circulation space and as tribunes for the auditorium and the chamber hall. The auditorium is placed parallel to the roman wall while the chamber hall perpendicular to it. Together, they describe, a rectangular garden, which contains a lake. The foyer is positioned at the apparent intersection of the auditorium and the chamber hall. The backstage and the restaurant are positioned at the north edge of the site.

The building has two major entrances, one at garden which relates to the new route, and one at street level which relates to Aldergate street. Both entrances lead to the foyer space. From where the Public than access the auditorium, the chamber hall, the info desk, the cloak room and the shop. Some large corridors around the auditorium provide access to the other functions of the building, like the restaurant, at garden level. The backstage door together whit the goods entrance is positioned along Aldersgate street close to the Barbican. The backstage is located at +1 and +2 and is connected, thanks to two lifts, to the stage door and the green room located at -2 .

Above the firm and solid brick landscape structure of the building develops a light and dynamic metal load bearing structure. The Columns of this structure are of steel, as the primary and secondary beams of the concrete metal floors are. The façade has a vertical division and is made of steel brushed concave panels which go from floor to floor. The façade openings correspond to the size of the vertical metal panels. The openings are place in a scattered pattern which contribute to create the illusion of lightness.

The main auditorium is a shoebox type, this typology is the oldest among the concert hall typologies but is, nevertheless, the one which ensure the best acoustic experience. Further, when considering the direct physical context of the site, composed by a series of clear simple geometric shapes, the shoebox typology, whit its regular shape, fits in harmoniously whit its context. The concert hall relates to the longitudinal space of the Barbican. The main tribune of the auditorium is part of the big staircase which as a landscape develops from garden level to street level and is made out of brick. Brick is a porous material and is thus not suitable for a space for listen to music. In a concert hall, “hard” materials which are able to reflect and scatter the sound are preferred. The bricks used

for the floors and the walls of the auditorium are therefore glazed in order to reflect the sound. The upper part of the auditorium which on a conceptual level relates to the lighter structure of the building is finished with big wooden planks which are placed vertically next to each other. The planks do not have the same length, which results in an uneven vertical texture of different depths which contrast to the regular texture of the bricks masonry. The planks' long faces are slightly green while the short faces are light grey. Because of how the planks are placed the colour which will be more present is the light grey, however close to you and when moving your head also the green will be readable resulting in a dynamic and interesting finishing which relates to the dynamic character of music which will be played in the room.

