



The Swedish Connection

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THE SWEDISH CONNECTION

While the modern movement's premise of the plan as the generator of form is now generally accepted, its emphasis in current architectural education has resulted in relative inattention to elements in the vertical dimension. The design of a guest house addition to an existing villa is given as a studio problem to focus the student's attention on the perceptual elements of a building, the wall surfaces and the spaces they describe, rather than only the organization of activities in plan. The program for a guest house is familiar; its functional relationships are simple and are easily resolved. However the plan is seen as a conceptual tool, a two-dimensional diagram or notational device, with limited capacity to express the perceptual elements which exist in three-dimensional space. It is only by a synthesis of the conceptual plan with the perceptual elements of architecture that the value of the three-dimensional experience of a building is understood.

In 1918 the Swedish architect Gunnar Asplund designed the Snellman villa at Djursholm, near Stockholm, which subtly combines outward simplicity with an inner complexity, allowing the possibility for a play on these qualities in the design of an addition. The original design included a one-story service wing, conceived as an addition, which has been eliminated for the purposes of this problem. The program calls for a guest house consisting of a living room, bedroom, small kitchen and toilet, with a mandatory connection to the existing villa at either the first or second level, or both. The materials of the villa have been specified as ochre stucco facades and pink tile roof, with quarry tile paving indicated on the plans, so that considerations of color and texture may be incorporated in the addition.

The problem addresses itself to many general architectural issues including the investigation of connection and adjacency, solid and void, movement and privacy, the relationship of new to old and the role of traditional architectural elements in the phenomenal perception of the building.

While the villa can be seen as complete in itself, the requirement that the addition be physically connected to it raises the possibility that the villa be considered a fragment, an incomplete condition. The addition can be seen as the completion of the fragment, as its extension or as a new fragment in itself. The establishment of center in plan and elevation on the major living spaces rather than at the geometrical midpoint contributes to the reading of the villa as incomplete. This would suggest that the student could address the problem of recentring, exploiting the different aspects of center on the two major facades, within the individual interior spaces and in the system as a whole. While the fragments of villa and guest house may be seen as inherently unstable in themselves, a condition of equilibrium may be resolved in the overall system thereby setting up a tension between conditions of stability and instability.

Exploration of adjacency leads to issues of contrasting scale between the villa and the addition. There are at least two possibilities for connection to the villa—either directly, figure to figure, or employing a link, figure to void to figure. By treating the space of the linkage as positive rather than as residual the resulting void can be seen as figural and thereby used as the visual connection as a means of adjusting the scale of the addition relative to the villa.

The problem also involves the student in an exploration of privacy and of the relationship of movement to privacy. The original building can be seen as a wall in a layered system of increasing degrees of privacy from the front to the back of the site or as the private domain within a continuous field of garden. In plan the villa is organized in the manner of a fragment of the Uffizi Gallery, with the major circulation spaces separated from the living spaces which themselves allow a line of minor circulation to run through them. This leads the student to a consideration of the issues of movement within a static room versus stability in a widened corridor (established by setting up a cross-axis) and how the conditions of movement and stability are articulated within each space and within the building organization. The problem is given without identifying the rooms in the villa (except for the kitchen and toilets) allowing for interpretation by their shape and relative placement and for their rearrangement according to the demands of the solution. This gives the student the latitude to make a statement about the conditions of connection and privacy in the location and treatment of the addition.

Questions of how one's presence is identified within the procession and/or spatial pattern and how the body image is read relative to the architectural elements are critical to an understanding of architecture as a three-dimensional experience. Reference is made to the body image through the elements that are unique to architecture—such as walls, windows and doors. Such reference allows one to read the narrative of the building and to act relative to that reading. Plans are experienced only in perspective as opposed to the vertical surfaces of a building which are perceived in a frontal manner and are thus measurable relative to one's body with the greatest dimensional precision. The divisions made on the vertical elements are the registry of the bodily associations which cause aspects of the building's narrative to be understood. These divisions are derived from the ritual actions involved in the use of a building, which are translated into physical form in the architectural symbol (which may be understood as any form which conveys a meaning either by implication or by convention). Traditional architectural devices such as rustication, belt-coursing, cornice and pediment incorporate both pragmatic and symbolic functions. Rustication, for example, in classical architecture is derived from a building's literal relationship to the materiality of the ground, while it visually provides a foot for the building. This base reflects the visual acceptance of the vulnerability to the elements and the increased loading condition at the lower region of the building. The suggestion of fortification is related to the establishment of a level of privacy at the street for urban buildings. It also sets up a condition for the *piano nobile* to be relatively open, allowing for a contrast of position, form, color and texture.

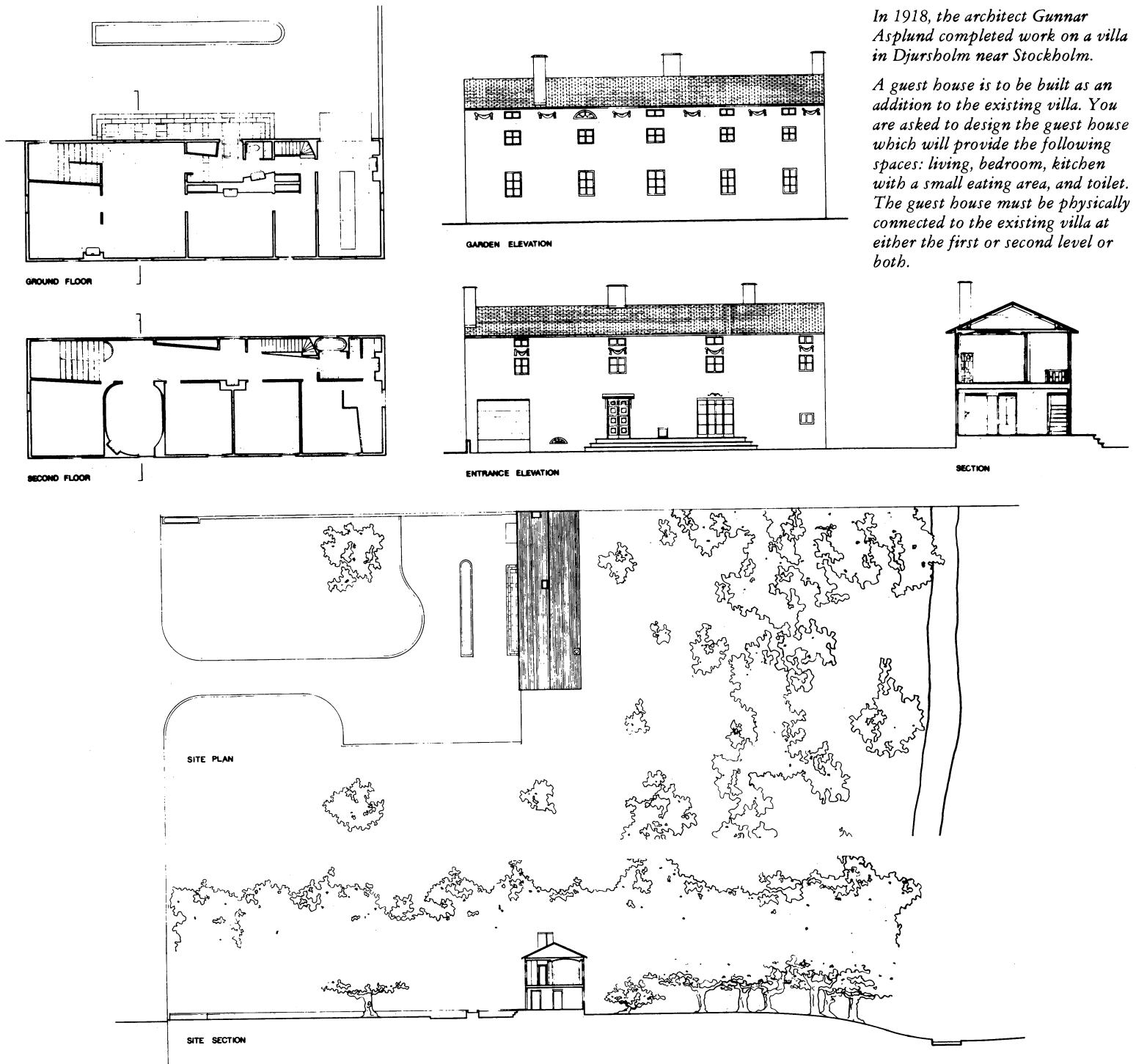
It is important that the form of architectural elements be understood in terms of their perceptual, historical and symbolic values if the plan's full potential is to be realized by the student. These elements also have a direct relationship to our body image. When Le Corbusier in his "five points of a new architecture" made the window a horizontal strip, it is true that a new form was derived, but the traditional form of the window in its vertical, body-related shape was lost. When the literal framing elements—head, sill and mullions—were eliminated from the window opening, there was a consequent loss of identification relative to our bodily equilibrium. In addition there was a loss of the understanding of boundary between inside and outside which these framing elements provided. If an architecture can be derived which uses these divergent concepts of window-making, then a third possibility exists for a synthetic condition which would utilize the horizontal relationship of the strip window to the space in conjunction with the vertical relationship to the body.

The door, like the window, also incorporates the pragmatic and symbolic aspects of framing and includes as well the notion of threshold which contributes to the identification of the temporal realms of porch and foyer. In terms of understanding the problem of door-making, Asplund has set up a hierarchy in the entrance facade of the villa between two existing doors of equal size. Their difference is brought out by a contrast of solid and void—the entrance doors are closed and private, while just beyond transparent French doors lead from the interior back out to the entrance porch. If the student elects to construct his addition within visual access of the existing entrance condition, it would appear that he should identify the system of entry through solid and exit through void and comment on it in his addition.

Distinctions are made in the Asplund villa between walls of various types: shallow versus deep, those that contain activity and those that separate activity, walls that register the symbolic functions that occur on them such as fireplace, those that recognize the framing possibilities in rectangular and rounded rooms and their centroidal possibilities, and walls utilizing forced perspective to underscore their connective capabilities.

In considering the placement of elements in a wall such as window or door modern architects have not generally dealt with the confrontation of the body to the wall. The usual response to an existing context has been cosmetic—by means of alignment or equality of treatment. The location of a window is often determined by superficial plan alignments rather than by sectional relationships determined by the relationship of the body to the use of the space, the framing of views or particular conditions of natural light. It is seldom understood that the cosmetic solution of similarity of new to old may provide an illusory sense of order which only devalues the

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In 1918, the architect Gunnar Asplund completed work on a villa in Djursholm near Stockholm.

A guest house is to be built as an addition to the existing villa. You are asked to design the guest house which will provide the following spaces: living, bedroom, kitchen with a small eating area, and toilet. The guest house must be physically connected to the existing villa at either the first or second level or both.

original building, while a juxtaposition of elements making comment on the original may enrich the meaning of the old relative to the new. In addition to assuming a given context the problem encompasses the imposition of a new context which not only alters the original but also produces a continuum between figure and context, with possible implications for future completion. This suggests a succession of fragments which at any stage may be considered complete. A tension is therefore set up between the incomplete fragments, their temporal completion in combination, and recognition of the possibility for future stages of completion.

For any design problem the organization of the plan is critical. However, in dealing with the relatively simple program of a guest house one is able to temper the decisions made in plan by an understanding of the three-

dimensional implications of those plan notations. Plans are two-dimensional diagrams and consequently they are conceptually and graphically incapable of fully expressing the perceptual elements of the vertical dimension. The practice that this problem provides is intended to restore the equity between the plan as conceptual notation and the perceptual understanding of experience. In terms of understanding one's self-identification relative to a building it is by the registry of our ritual actions on the elements of architecture that the narrative of a building is expressed and read relative to one's body image. For the things that we as architects make are those elements which by virtue of their tactility, their existence as three-dimensional figures, can be manipulated in order to control space. Space in itself lacks tactility. Ultimately its symbolic value is derived from the treatment of the surfaces that describe it, producing an equity between the space and the physicality of its enclosures.