2015 ASLA Annual Meeting | Chicago, Illinois

Cuba Calling - Implications for landscape architecture in an open Cuba
[FRI-B08] E451B, Level 4, Friday, November 06, 2015

Western mountains near Viñales (K Sutherland)

Presenters

Todd Hill - Director, DTJ DESIGN, ASLA (Moderator)
Leo Alvarez - Design Principal Perkins+Will, FASLA
Juan Antonio Bueno - Professor, FIU, ASLA

Session Marketing Statement
Late 2014 brought an unprecedented and accelerated thaw in US / Cuban relations, years before it was thought possible. The intrigue and mystique of Cuba has long enticed designers imagining the possibilities of engaging the vibrant, yet isolated country. Imminent changes present both opportunities and responsibilities for landscape architects to contribute to the evolution of design and development on the island nation, while protecting and preserving its unique character.

Learning Objectives
1) Learn about the history and status of landscape architecture as an industry in Cuba
2) Gain perspective about divergent trends in design and culture between the Caribbean, Florida and Cuba during the embargo
3) Understand what an open Cuba means to landscape architects who seek to practice there, and regulatory measures both government are taking to manage change in Cuba and America
4) Learn how the broader Caribbean tourism market is impacted and adapting to commerce and development in Cuba

COURSE OUTLINE
I. Introduction: Todd Hill (5 min.)
II. An overview of the history of landscape design in Cuba: Juan Bueno (15 min.)
   a. A history of landscape design in Cuba
III. A culture frozen in time; 90 miles away but worlds apart: Leo Alvarez (15 min.)
   a. A synopsis of a half a century of embargo and its impacts on landscape architecture
   b. A divergent evolution of design in south Florida and the Caribbean
IV. A possible new beginning; present day Cuba: Todd Hill (15 min.)
   a. Based on Todd’s recent trip to Cuba; What has changed in the past year?
   b. Trends for commerce and exchange?
V. Where do we go from here: Discussion (20 min)
   a. The Miami perspective... what has really changed?
b. How to avoid exploitation of society, the culture and the environment
c. Implications for surrounding Caribbean tourist and cruise line destinations

VI. Questions from Audience (20 minutes)

Juan Antonio Bueno
Email: jabueno@fiu.edu

Impacts of the revolution on the evolution of design in Cuba and in exile

Juan Antonio Bueno is Professor of Landscape Architecture at Florida International University in Miami, Florida, where he has also served as Founding Dean of the College of Architecture + The Arts, dean of the School of Architecture, director of the School of Design, and director of the Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture. He completed his graduate education in landscape architecture at the Graduate School of Design of Harvard University and his undergraduate education in engineering at the University of Miami. He is a founding partner of the firm Falcón + Bueno, and a registered landscape architect and professional engineer in Florida.

OUTLINE

Biodiversity
- Richness of native and endemic flora
- Extent of land development
- Remnants of nature

City and its landscapes
- Architectural expression, rooted in the natural and rural landscape
- Urban agriculture

Urban grid

Leyes de Indias or Laws of Indies
- Grand plan
- Modern proposal
- Need for contemporary proposal

Expressions of spatial transition

Plaza, parks
- Promenades
  - paseo, alameda, malecón

Portico, balcony, courtyard
- portal, balcón, patio
- Grilles, blinds or brise-soleil, stained glass
  - rejas, persianas, vitrales

Continuity of expression

Modern adaptations
- Postmodern adaptations

IMAGES

San Juan de Sagua river, palma corcho
Sierra de Anafe mogotes or karstic hills
La Coca cuabales or serpentinic thickets

Havana aerial, Santiago de Cuba panorama
Valle de Viñales
Urban market, Organopónico Vivero Alamar

map of original grid, 1691
Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier, 1925–1930
master plan, Josep Lluis Sert, Paul 1956
Plaza Cívica, Havana harbor
Plaza de la Catedral, Plaza de San Francisco
Paseo del Prado, Malecón de La Habana

Palacio del Conde de Lombillo
Casa de la Obra Pía
Houses en la Plaza Vieja
Casa de Santiago C Burnham

Casa de los Siete Patios, Nicolás Quintana
Escuela de Artes Plásticas, Ricardo Porro

Leo Alvarez
Email: Leo.Alvarez@perkinswill.com

Impacts of the revolution on the evolution of design in Cuba and in exile

Leonardo Alvarez, FASLA is Design Principal for Perkins+Will Atlanta. He holds an MLA from Harvard University and is a registered landscape architect and architect. From 2000-2007 he served as Managing Principal of the Miami Beach and Atlanta offices of EDAW. In addition to practicing for over 30 years, Mr. Alvarez was a tenured faculty member at both FIU and UGA. Born in Havana, Cuba, he came to the US at the age of four. He has always dreamed of going back to a free Cuba.

OUTLINE

Introduction: A personal view
Broader impacts of the revolution and embargo:
quality of life, scarcity of resources, human toll, brain drain of professional class, isolation gains in literacy and medical doctors

A divergent evolution of design: in Cuba and in Exile

In Cuba
The Opportunity and the Threat

IMAGES

My Family in Cuba, MIA in 1960, Dade County in 1960
Old Havana--selective restoration
Vintage cars and imagery for tourists
Poverty and detiorating urban fabric
Cuban medical doctors and students
Wilfredo Lam’s La Jungla
Romanach’s architecture
Che and Castro at Country club golf course
National Art Schools with a focus on Ricardo Porro’s School of Plastic Arts
Soviet prefab housing
Post modern examples
Urban Farming images
Urban Framing typology diagrams from Carey Clouse’s “Farming Cuba: Urban Agriculture from the Ground Up.”
Romanach, Frank Martinez and other designers who went into exile
Seaside and the Atlantis: examples of impact on contemporary design and discourse
Aerial views of present day Havana
Sert’s Pilot Plan of Havana from 1956
Views of dense development in downtown Miami
Urban Farming in Havana
Aerial views of intact natural areas in Cuba
Fast paced contemporary international urban development

Todd Hill Moderator
Email: thill@dtjdesign.com

A possible new beginning; present day Cuba

Todd Hill, ASLA, LEED®AP, is a landscape architect and land planner with DTJ Design. After 27 years with EDAW/AECOM, Todd joined DTJ Design as Director of the Atlanta office. His work covers a range of types and scales, from large land strategies to detailed site designs. He leads the creative process to apply high-design principles to innovative sustainability strategies. His portfolio of global projects includes award recognition for community master plans, urban regeneration, destination resorts, and public park spaces. Mr. Hill’s portfolio includes projects across the U.S., from Canada to Mexico, The Caribbean Islands, and Central America to Brazil; from Europe, Egypt and West Africa, to Asia and China.

OUTLINE
Cuba Trip - First Impressions
For the vast majority of Americas, to enter Cuba is to confront a decade’s old blind spot in our understanding of our neighboring island nation. There is void in our collective knowledge about the lives of Cubans, their rich culture and the realities of their government.

- Pace of life is on island time..." mañana"
- Art is integral to the lives of all Cubans

- It is a struggling country; "Our government is poor"
- "La Lucha" - struggle for life. Yet people are optimist; they make the most of what they "Dancing is healing, laughing is healing"
- "The power of community - how people survived"
- They have a sense of humor; Comedian - "Cuban bread" (rationing bread)
- There is an overt sense of style and expression in all eras, not afraid of color
- “Need to open and bring tourism back. It used to be the place to go...”

What It Is
- The largest Caribbean island: 800 mi long, 42,426 mi², 26M pop, (2.2M in Havana), country divided in to provinces, which are divided into municipalities
- Economy based on: professionals (Drs, Scientists, Artists, Athletes), oil, tourism, cigars, rum
- Havana: a remarkable range of architectural styles exhibited, albeit eroding
- 150k “Yank Tanks" and Ladas, "Every Cuban is a mechanic"
- Roadway infrastructure developed
- Limited accessibility provisions, multiple barriers
- Unspoiled rural lush tropical environment
- Rich complex culture spanning >5 centuries
- People are resourceful; achieve with very little
- Educated, 99% literacy rate; “indoctrination"; elementary through 3 yr HS, then decide vocational/trade school or Univ, for young men mandated 1-2 Military (trade 2 yr), very competitive for top jobs, diplomat 1st >97%
- Localized healthcare system
- 85% of homes are privately owned outright, no mortgage
- Intergenerational families live together, many with a “Barbecue”, an interstitial added loft
- Tech: can use all programs w out license agreement
What It Is Not
- No Signs for American commercial companies; McD’s, KFC, Starbucks, etc.
- Very few billboards, except a political
- No apparent environmental clean air provisions
- Technology and wifi connectivity, TV satellite dish forbidden, US channels banned
- Banking and finance (currency: $.87 to 1 CUC Peso)

Current Situation
- Compensation: average range $20-40pesos/mo
  “We pretend to work and the government pretends to pay....”
- Paladar: in 1990’s Govt. began to allow private businesses (restaurant, barber) within own home; can now hire staff
- “Micro Brigade” (20-25 per team): self employment to build houses for family Dr., nursing homes... After 5 yrs they get own home or apt block as group. People give up teaching, law other to become Masons to build
- “We don't hire labor because they are the labor”
- During the Special Period, famine avoidance caused them to create urban gardens, community gardens, and organic farming – the Green Revolution
- Tourism; marked increase non-USA tourists since Obama relaxed restrictions
- 2 embargos; “US based; Internal blockade of government”
- “In four years things will turn over, but no heir apparent so replacement for when government evolves”
- Speculators waiting for market to turn
- Gaviota Tourism Group is an arm of the military
- “Today you can and tomorrow you cannot”
- Can't have anything made outside of country

MOVING FORWARD – Pandora’s Box...
Open Questions:
- What happens when the current government evolves?
- How to avoid exploitation - sustainable tourism
- Not ready for amplified increase in int'l visitors; socially, infrastructure, facilities and services?
- Do they have landscape architecture profession in Cuba?
- How do LA’s get qualified to do work here?
- How to implement finance and banking system?
- How to allow foreign investment to operate while regenerating and preserving architecture?
- Potential International funding/mgmt organizations; Unesco World Heritage, USAID, Fund for Reconciliation and Development (FRD), UN, Canadian International Dev Agency, The Cuban Enterprise Fund, others...
- Goal to keep casinos out

As we were boarding the bus in MIA heading to Airport to depart to Cuba, I overheard a Dutch woman talking about “why Cubans are so happy...?” it sounded like an absurd statement. But, at the end of my trip I feel that Cubans have an unnecessary hard life, but are proud of each other as they survived the Special Period and optimistically look forward to a better life in the years to come...