The Culture House is designed with the idea of convergence, or the merging of distinct cultures, users, and activities into a unified whole. The inspiration for this proposal came from mapping the diverse range of immigrants coming to Charlotte every day. With its fast-growing immigrant population Charlotte is slowly becoming a contact zone, where events and relationships can begin. This building is designed for the people, leading to inclusive and engaging public spaces inside and out. High quality design and the power of placemaking are designed hand in hand to produce bold and iconic architecture that adds civic value. The Culture House will become a place of connection that not only promotes integration but will become integral to the community fabric.
01 SITE
The selected site is located at a highly visible intersection where many roads merge. Due to the urban context, the site is only 60,000 SF and has to accommodate a program of approximately 45,000 SF. The site is located on a gradual 12 FT slope allowing part of the building to be underground, making for a highly dynamic building.

02 EXPAND
The design emphasizes a public space that creates a contact zone the community is currently lacking; by extending the program to the perimeter of the site and leaving the center space free for gathering, the building directly works to activate the street and welcome people to use this public zone.

03 OPEN
The next step is to open up this central space by putting the most public program partially underground. This opens up the access points of the building at the street level and level minus one. By opening up the building it also maximizes the views of the surrounding neighborhood and downtown.

04 ROTATE
To open up the corner and make the site more inviting the building is rotated to match the direction of the two main roads merging in the intersection. Additionally, the geometry of the building changes in the center to match this change. This also makes the sunken plaza more visible to pedestrians.

05 LIGHT
Next, the envelope is added for protection and to further emphasize the building and entrances. This skin of the building is designed with diffusion in mind with wood louvers getting closer together towards the top. This transition emphasizes the change from public to more private levels of the building. Additionally, light wells are added at the street level to illuminate level minus one.

06 ACTIVATE
The plazas, urban stair, and green areas offer a wide range of activities for users and a space to enjoy on a day to day basis. Finally, the Culture House becomes an urban hub for all of the community by maximizing human interaction and opportunities for connection and conversation.
about the BUILDING
The Culture House is a redefined immigration center that provides a space of support, community, and purpose to help newcomers integrate into the American way of life. The Culture House is designed with the idea of convergence and connectivity in mind, as the merging of distinct cultures, users, and activities into a unified whole. Through carefully designed spaces, this center reaches out to two distinct users: immigrants and host communities. Immigrants are the newcomers in these communities that need a space to ease integration, through educational and cultural initiatives to help them start their life in a new place with a sense of belonging. Simultaneously, integration is not a one-way process, with the arrival of new members, the local community must adapt as well to reach out to the newcomers with understanding and sensitivity, not preconceived notions, and cultural bias.
ELEVATIONS

NORTH ELEVATION

EAST ELEVATION

SOUTH ELEVATION

WEST ELEVATION
The layout of the Culture House follows very simple rules. The plaza is the center and hub of activity and all formal and informal program surrounds this dynamic space. The center plaza is the most public space of the site surrounded by circulation on all sides and pushing the formal program to the periphery of the site. This maintains the program simultaneously connected to the plaza and the street. The transition from public to private spaces is also applicable in section. The plaza and plinth serve as an extension of the urban environment and house the most public program on the site for all the community to use. The street level serves as a transition level between the plinth below and building above and helps connect the change of program seamlessly. The building above is the most private level on the site including the educational and economic program of the center. With this layout the building remains highly connected regardless of the activity and offers multiple opportunities for interaction.
Level minus one is a dynamic level, part of this level is underground below the entrance plaza and part of it is exposed and surrounding the central plaza. This level has a secondary entrance and is easily accessible by vehicles and pedestrians. This is an interactive level with a focus on a seamless transition between interior and exterior spaces, including a cafe, multipurpose hall, and a mezzanine overlooking the art gallery below. There are numerous lightwells and an oculus to bring light down to this level and maintain a visual connection to the street level.
Level minus two is twenty-seven feet below street level at the south end of the site and only fifteen feet down at the north side with views to the plaza. This level is used as an art gallery and a flexible space that will be used as an exhibition venue for art discussing questions of immigration and integration, prioritizing artists with migrant experience, in the hopes of starting a conversation among users. This is a two-story level and is visually connected to the plaza above through the mezzanine and lightwells that illuminate the art space. The rest of the level is used for utility purposes like storage, mechanical, and a communications room.
Level one houses the more formal program of the Culture House. This is the education level of the building that will include a variety of programs for the advancement of immigrants and the local community. To achieve this, the level includes a resource center with computers and books available for research, classrooms for English classes, citizenship classes, and extracurricular activities for children; also, a grand auditorium for meetings, plays, and performances for all the community to use. This level even includes a terrace for classes or leisure that highlight the activity as soon as you enter the building.
Level two of the Culture House is the most private floor in all the building. Even the building envelope becomes more condensed to help maintain more privacy in this level. This level includes the offices of the people working here with a break room, has access to the auditorium through a mezzanine for a more private experience, and more importantly houses the career center and immigration services for new immigrants in Charlotte. This will aid the economical advancement of newcomers and help make their transition smoother. Nevertheless, this level is still very connected to the rest of the activity in the building and the plazas.
CONNECTION

This proposal explores the importance of creating a place of connection as a tool for understanding what is otherwise unimaginable. The Culture House will work as a bridge that brings newcomers and locals together to truly accomplish successful integration into the American way of life and understanding of new cultures. Successful integration connects immigrants into the community life. This process requires a supporting framework of community outreach, resource access, and education to help the new residents adapt to their new life. Successful integration also relies on outreach and communication with the established community to build support and cultural understanding. These aspects ensure that immigrants and locals work together in building a community and recognizing the importance of integration. Ultimately, the immigration center will help break down the real and imagined barriers between communities and foster understanding.
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