Essential Dwelling: The Archon Prize

The maker's studio
Architecture 571
Spring 2018
Carl G Lewis, Studio Critic

The Archon Prize is a design competition for a 1,000 sq. ft. “Essential Dwelling” on a 50'x120' site, with interior and exterior program spaces interpreted and defined by each student. The site selected should be a place that is memorable and significant, a place rural, suburban, or urban, a place experienced firsthand or by vision quest. Architectural decision making occurs at every scale of design, and at every phase of the building process. At the intimate scale of interior space and detail, critical decisions must be made which ultimately determine the overall quality of the architectural statement, as well as the quality of the user environment. In an ideal situation, the designer has control of the relationship between the whole (concept), and the part (conceptual detail), in order to maintain the conceptual continuity between the parts and the whole development.

In order to achieve this emphasis on detail, the usual architectural design process is reversed. Instead of approaching the subject from outside to inside, or from the whole to the part, the student designs at the intimate scale and then moves into the larger scale, or from the part to the whole.

“...I tried to make my clients see that furniture and furnishings that are not built in as integral features of the building should be designed as attributes of whatever was built in and should be seen as a minor part of the building itself even if detached or kept aside to be employed only on occasion.”
Frank Lloyd Wright

PART ONE: The Maker's Mark
Design proposition for an Essential Dwelling—A “hands on” study of the fabricating of: wood (Japanese joinery), metal (welding—fees paid), and concrete (forming).
Eight-Week Individual Project Development

PART TWO: Integration
Detailed Development and Integration of Fabricated Parts: Systems, Details+Furniture (fullscale), Landscape
Six-Week Individual Project

PRIZE COMPETITION PROCEDURE: The competition is limited to students enrolled in this studio. Each competitor will prepare detailed drawings and models of the building and the site for presentation during the final review to a prestigious invited jury, which will select the prizewinners. First, second, and third place awards will be given. Following the award announcement, a publication illustrating all of the projects will be prepared.

All my life I have dreamed of the essence of dwelling not just for oneself, but for all of humanity—to dwell in a garden, or on a hill, water’s edge, or in an open space, all with a view, near or far, simply, humbly, poetically like Thoreau on Walden Pond, joining as well in the joy, pride and well-being of community life.

A Richard Williams, FAIA, 1914-2016
Professor Emeritus and Sponsor of the Archon Prize