

NOT A museum; NOT A memorial; NOT A place of worship

LASRY HOUSE ARCHITECT FACED UNIQUE CHALLENGES

The Holocaust was about the destruction of dialogue, says architect Julian Bonder, explaining his work on

Lasry House, home of Clark's Center for Holocaust Studies.

"This space is about the creation of dialogue on multiple levels," Bonder says of Lasry House. And dialogue was created indeed, as the aging Victorian building at 11 Hawthorne St. underwent its yearlong transformation.

As renovations to the building formerly known as Alumni House began and the addition, with its gray, metallic covering, took shape, many observers were puzzled. What is it supposed to be? What is it supposed to represent? Perhaps the best response, Bonder suggests, is to address what Lasry House is not. It is not a memorial, not a museum, and not a place of worship. One task of this unusual architectural

project is not about representation. It would be a historic mistake, a philosophical mistake—and perhaps a moral mistake."

The architect's controversial work resulted in an extensive renovation of the 6,000-square-foot traditional structure and the addition of a contemporary, 600-square-foot attachment. Three main tasks included transforming the entry, extending the landscape and developing "multiple architectural dialogues," which include continuity, voids, materials, details and proportions, Bonder explains.

Design is no accident

The jarring contrast of the elegant, rose-colored Victorian and the stark, metal-skinned annex is no accident. In fact, the relationship between every window, wall, roofline, entry or exit in Lasry House is the result of Bonder's deeply philosophical approach to the project. "Nothing here is a one-liner," he says.

The main house holds offices, gallery space, conference and class rooms and a kitchen. The lower level of the house connects via a corridor to the Rose Library, a modern, high-ceilinged reading room and gallery. The addition's large windows allow views of trees and the Jakubowitz-Chaifetz Garden, the Victorian's windows and clapboard, the parking lot and Worcester residences.

"Sitting in the library, reading about the Holocaust, you always have a way out to the city, to the history of the house, the garden, the sky, to the present," Bonder says.

A small Japanese maple is planted at a central point outside, between the traditional and con-

temporary structures—what Bonder refers to as the "void between the two historic moments." A segment of the original stone foundation is exposed in the indoor connecting passageway. Two computer stations are there, and between them is a thin, vertical window through which the elegant maple can be seen, perfectly centered.

"Life," Bonder offers. "The project revolves around the tree, but you never touch it. It is the unattainable, a fragment of nature inserted between the two structures as a gap, or rift, between the two."

The Lasry House project posed one of the most unique challenges taken on by the firm of Bonder and Rykerson, based in Cambridge, Mass. It was developed with the assistance of firm associate David Honn.

Shared commitment

Bonder's great care and involvement with Lasry House stems from his own family, many of whom fled Europe during World War II, some to the United States, some to Argentina. "Part of my interest in the subject grew because my family didn't speak about the past."

Bonder grew up in Argentina. He studied at the University of Buenos Aires and practiced there for 10 years, teaching architecture and theory. His work included projects involving "public trauma and artistic work," including work on a memorial to 86 people killed in the 1994 bombing of the main center for Jewish life in Buenos Aires, the Association Mutuel Isrealita Argentina. He moved to the United States in 1995, and received a master's degree at the

Harvard Graduate School of Design. He currently teaches "memory and architecture" at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island, where his students were preparing a May 2000 entry for the proposed Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C.


"I share deeply the university's and Deborah's commitment to study all forms of genocide," Bonder says of Rose Professor and Center for Holocaust Studies Director Deborah Dwork, who first contacted him about the project.

A building of questions

Bonder is keenly aware that controversy greeted his work at Clark, and he welcomes questions as enthusiastically as he and the staff of the Center for Holocaust Studies welcome members of the Clark community to visit Lasry House to learn, to remember and to question. In March, the Center invited the public to a guided tour and discussion titled, "The Story of Lasry House," which featured Bonder, along with Stanford Anderson, head of the Architecture Department at MIT, and Strassler Distinguished Visiting Scholar Michael Berenbaum.

"What we get from Jewish tradition is that the question itself is at the core of humanity. Nazism forbids dialogue, questioning. The design of Lasry House and its addition is about allowing questions and exploring the 'Other.'"

"Architecture is about questions," Bonder says. "There should be a question at the end."

To view more photos of Lasry House, visit ClarkNews on the University website, www.clarku.edu. 



Lasry House

assignment, he says, was to avoid "a romantic historic moment, and to infuse the site and the existing structure with a new story—the most horrific and uncanny story of modern times," he says.

"No form of representation can encompass the Holocaust. This