

Student: Sara Nisavic

Professor: Henry Hanson

Project: Research Institute of Film and Sound, Montenegro

Reviewer: Paul DeLave

Overall comments:

I found this to be a very well researched, designed and executed project, and I enjoyed reviewing it. I will be in Montenegro in a few weeks, and would for sure like to visit Ulcinj, based on how it is described. Strong in all aspects.

Suggested Grade: A (Excellent)

Research:

Very good historical background and analysis- about the right amount of research and writing for this purpose. This "snapshot" of Ulcinj was a good way to familiarize oneself with the immediate and broader context. From a strictly academic standpoint, I see that you included a research bibliography at the end, but your writing contains no references to the sources of data, which there should have been.

Program:

The program seems well-developed. You do provide a brief history of the relationship of film in Montenegro, and do point out some of your rationale for providing an economic and tourist catalyst for Ulcinj, but I would have appreciated a stronger explanation about why a Research Institute of Film and Sound is the most appropriate way to do this. You note cooperation with the School of Arts in Cetinje and the Herceg Novi film festival is noted, which strengthens the argument for introducing this program, in this place, but more concrete rationale would have been better. Your description of architectural expression was well-considered, but more research/writing/comment on the role of film and music in society, or as social/economic catalysts would have been appreciated.

Visual Execution:

Beautifully printed and presented physical booklets, with close attention to detail and high quality consideration of pattern, typography and visual composition and binding.

I do not know if casting the shadows in plan aided their understanding.

The photo-montage style of rendering is typically very effective and at times, poetic. As a very small comment, I would have recommended slightly more consistency. In some images, the human figures are slightly stylized illustrated figures, in others, they are photos, and in some images, you mix them- which I think is unfortunate, as overall, the perspectives are very evocative.

Or, on p.67 and 73, the rendering of the architecture is also illustrated, as opposed to the later ones, which have a more computerized approach.

Effective use of sepia/grayscale and muted color palette. The on-screen legibility of some of the smallest images was not that good, unless more extensive zooming was used. I did not have this same perception with the printed booklet.

Some grammar and spelling errors, but overall understandable writing. Limited, but appropriate quotations by Pallasma and others, and I would have expected more.

Architectural Design:

Your analysis of the actual site of the peninsula showed some strong sensitivity to integrating the architecture into the existing parameters of the site, and the fragmentation of the volumes, with their simple visual character seems to be the correct approach.

-Materiality and architectural expression

I found the limited choice of structural and finish materials to be appropriate for the site and purpose. The minimalist expression allows the untouched/less touched areas of the site to keep their prominence, and to not overpower the existing vegetation and trees on site. From an aesthetic standpoint, I, personally, did not find the mixing of visual motifs between arches and rectilinear openings to be contradictory, and you defended it by explaining the morphology of historical architectural expression in the region. My Czech colleagues (I am American) might find issue with this, as there is no "functional" reason to cast an arch in concrete, and they tend to use rectilinear geometries exclusively. Your renderings of the different zones of architecture evoke some feeling of "traditional" architecture, without degrading into Post-Modernist expression.

As a clearly Modernist, grid-based assemblage of architecture, I do not find issue with the strict geometry of the plans and elevations, but do wonder if you studied a less rigid approach, perhaps changing alignments of certain pieces to respond to anomalies on the site, specific views or sun conditions. You did this at the edge of the library exit for some reason, but nowhere else. This is incredibly hard to do, but even slight inflections can make for a different reading of axes or open or close views as desired.

Programmatic concerns:

Your inclusion of a summer cinema and summer theater are thematically appropriate, and I could see a great potential for them to become very popular venues for locals and tourists. I can imagine the experience of seeing a film or performance in this setting to be a very pleasurable and memorable experience, or just to simply sit on these terraces and relax. I did have something of a dilemma with them, in that it appears that you proposed to carve them directly into the existing stone? In one way, this would help to visually integrate it, directly to the site, but in another way, it gives me a slightly heavy feeling to think that this eons-old rock will be so brutally and extensively manipulated. The process of building is inherently invasive on the earth, especially for a project as large as this, so we as architects must always understand the implications of all our interventions onto the earth. Generally, you have shown good sensitivity to this, in this project.

With the outdoor theater spaces, from a strictly functional point of view, it is difficult to tell if all the logistics have been fully considered, such as where do you buy a ticket, where are the restrooms for such a large crowd of people, is there any segregation for the public from the artists in residence there, or the staff. The complexity of the plan makes it hard to discern, but certainly all of those issues are very important for the success of this project.

Due to the extraordinarily complex sloped nature of the site, it is difficult to tell if all areas and facilities are accessible to disabled persons or wheel-chair bound persons. I do see denotations for ramps, which shows an attempt for accessibility, but it's hard to tell if ALL areas are- certainly a challenge on such a site.

Technical details:

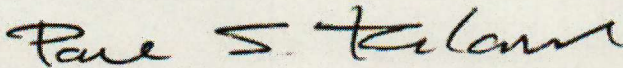
They are nicely drawn and it looks as if you consulted with structural engineers, as the reinforcing is drawn with some specificity- good to understand. You do list all the components in text, but I would have liked to see them perhaps even at a larger scale, and more definitively referred to with arrows or leaders, as I had difficulty translating the materials described in the text to the actual drawing.

I am not any expert on technical detailing, but intuitively, I would question the approach of layering what appear to be metal studs on top of concrete to get the insulation layer, especially from a long-term maintenance standpoint. Your project evokes a feeling of strength and "permanence" and this detail strikes me as somewhat "flimsy". This condition is very important in your project, as the use of roof top terraces and walkable roof surfaces is incredibly important. Did you look at the work of people like Kahn, or Ando, who use concrete extensively and sensitively? Again, it might have been extensively researched and signed off on by someone far more expert than me, but it gave me pause.

Conclusion:

A very nice piece of work. Congratulations.

Reviewer Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul S. DeLave". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul S. DeLave, Architect