I, Robert F. Zerhusen II, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of: Master in Architecture

It is entitled: Entertainment Architecture: Contextually Integrated Water Park Resort in Norwood, Ohio

Student Signature: Robert F. Zerhusen II

This work and its defense approved by: Committee Chair: John E. Hancock
Gerald Larson

Approval of the electronic document:
I have reviewed the Thesis/Dissertation in its final electronic format and certify that it is an accurate copy of the document reviewed and approved by the committee.

Committee Chair signature: John E. Hancock
Entertainment Architecture:
Contextually Integrated Water Park Resort in Norwood, Ohio

A thesis submitted to the
Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture

in the School of Architecture and Interior Design
of the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning

by

Robert Francis Zerhusen II

B. S. Architecture, University of Cincinnati

June 2007

Committee Chair: John E. Hancock

Second Chair: Gerald Larson
Abstract

Entertainment architecture is becoming ever more prevalent in today’s experience economy, but usually ignores the local context and community where it is built, becoming an isolated, inward looking fantasy environment, themed to distant lands, times and cultures. Indoor water park resorts are a fast growing building type within this trend and most evoke alien themes and brands, and sit in low density suburbs amid huge parking lots. In order to critique this situation, this thesis an indoor water park as an integral part of a larger urban complex, combining elements of a lifestyle center, a destination development, a mixed-use program, and an urban brown field reclamation. It demonstrates that entertainment architecture and indoor water park resorts can be contextually integrated into higher density urban areas.

On the former site of the U.S. Playing Card Company in Norwood, Ohio, the resort will anchor a high-density development including residential units, a hotel, a public square, movie theaters, offices and other entertainment amenities that will attract both local residents and regional tourists. The overall design draws upon historical and regional themes in the Cincinnati area. The theme of the indoor water park will be drawn from the history of playing cards. Called “Queen City Commons,” the project provides a compact, pedestrian-friendly environment, with multiple uses within a few minutes walk. It recreates an urban experience that is lacking in the suburbs, but also allows for a stronger sense of community by creating a unique identity that has roots in the history of the region. Visitors, locals and residents alike will be able to enjoy immersing themselves in a fantasy experience that uses the history of the Cincinnati area as its point of departure.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................................... 1
Introduction ................................................................................................................................................... 4
List of Illustrations ........................................................................................................................................ 6
Chapter 1: Entertainment Architecture ....................................................................................................... 10
  Background ................................................................................................................................. 10
  Entertainment Architecture and Branded Experiences ................................................................. 17
  Problems with Entertainment Architecture ........................................................................... 22
Chapter 2: Indoor Water Park Resorts ........................................................................................................ 29
Chapter 3: Lifestyle centers and Urban Entertainment Districts ................................................................. 33
  Urban Entertainment Districts ........................................................................................................ 33
  Mixed Use Developments ................................................................................................................... 35
  Lifestyle Centers ................................................................................................................................. 38
  Destination Developments .................................................................................................................. 39
  Synthesis developments ...................................................................................................................... 41
Chapter 4: Site Analysis .............................................................................................................................. 44
Chapter 5: Mixed Use Destination Development Program ........................................................................... 50
  Cincinnati Theme ............................................................................................................................. 52
  Theming Imagery Precedents ............................................................................................................. 54
  Design Method .................................................................................................................................... 57
Chapter 6: Hotel and Conference Center .................................................................................................... 58
  U.S. Playing Card Building ................................................................................................................. 59
  Guest Room Wings and Hotel Design ............................................................................................. 61
  Hotel Precedents ................................................................................................................................. 62
Chapter 7: Indoor Water Park ..................................................................................................................... 66
  Precedents ........................................................................................................................................... 66
Chapter 8: Hotel and Indoor Water Park Themes and Design Strategies ................................................... 74
  Design Elements ................................................................................................................................. 76
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 79
Bibliography ................................................................................................................................................. 81
Appendix: Queen City Commons Program .............................................................................................. 85
Introduction

I have long been fascinated by entertainment architecture and themed built environments such as zoos, museums, amusement parks and of course, the Disney theme parks. The Disney theme parks are themselves a large collection of entertainment based architecture. Ever since the mid ’90s, I have been an avid amusement park and roller coaster enthusiast and have travelled to multiple parks in different states. I am interested in the history behind these parks and the fact that many of the earliest parks sprang up as pleasure places on the outskirts of large urban centers such as Coney Island, Cincinnati, which originated as a picnic grove served by steamboats.

Most entertainment architecture projects are built around the concept of telling a story and ultimately selling some sort of product, as in the case of the themed restaurants, or an experience, as in the case of the Disney theme parks. Another thing that interests me about these entertainment projects is the fact that they are generally not well received by architectural critics, yet they are becoming ever more popular with the general public and are continuing to be built at a rampant pace. Furthermore, I am interested in the intensive collaboration that is necessary to create entertainment architecture, requiring architects, scenic providers, operations personnel, lighting designers, and even ride engineers to work together to successfully design a totally immersive environment that can satisfy the needs of telling a story and selling the particular experience.

Entertainment architecture is therefore the central focus of my thesis. My research and design work have
several goals that question the predominant approaches now in the field. First, the designed development responds to the history and culture of the specific site on which it is situated. Secondly, the project will not import a foreign theme into the buildings having no connection to the local context or history, but instead, will draw upon the culture and history of the area. Third, the development will blend into the community and become a center of entertainment activity for tourists and locals alike by containing mixed uses to help create a walking experience for residents living within and surrounding the development. Finally, this higher density mixed use approach allows for a vibrant urban experience that is lacking in most suburbs today.
List of Illustrations

Chapter 1
Figure 1.3- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.
Figure 1.4- VisitingDC.com. < http://www.visitingdc.com/las-vegas/las-vegas-skyline.asp>. 16 May 2009.
Figure 1.5- Keim, Kevin. An architectural life: memoirs & memories of Charles W. Moore. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1996.
Figure 1.6- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.
Figure 1.7- Webshots Travel. 7 May 2006. < http://travel.webshots.com/photo/2210009570086031680CNktWM>. 16 May 2009.
Figure 1.9- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.
Figure 1.11- Photo by author (digital). June 2008.
Figure 1.13- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Chapter 2
Chapter 3


Figure 3.2- *City-Data.* <http://www.city-data.com/picfiles/picc22224.php>. 26 April 2009.


Figure 3.4- Photo by Corey Reinaker (digital). November 2007.

Figure 3.5- Photo by Corey Reinaker (digital). November 2007.

Figure 3.6- Flickr. 6 June 2007. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/mindbox/533629317/in/photostream/>. 16 May 2009.

Figure 3.7- Forest City Enterprises. *Station Square.* <http://mallimages.mallfinder.com/poolB/stationsquare/PG-Bessemer.jpg>. 24 March 2009.

Figure 3.8- *Panoramio.* <http://static.panoramio.com/photos/original/18798587.jpg>. 24 March 2009.

Figure 3.9- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 3.10- *Photobucket.* <http://i204.photobucket.com/albums/bb223/anadyr21/100_0808.jpg>. 24 March 2009.

Chapter 4

Figure 4.1- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.2- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.3- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.4- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.5- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.6- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.7- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.8- Photo by author (digital). March 2009.

Figure 4.9- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.10- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.11- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.12- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.13- Diagram by author. December 2008.

Figure 4.14- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.

Figure 4.15- Photo by author (digital). May 2009.
Figure 4.16- Photo by author (digital). May 2009.

Chapter 5

Figure 5.1- Logo by author. January 2009.
Figure 5.2- Diagram by author. November 2008.
Figure 5.3- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 5.4- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.
Figure 5.5- Diagram by author. March 2009.
Figure 5.6- Salerno, Ronny. KICentral.com. <http://www.kicentral.com/history/images/JungleMono_01.jpg>. 26 April 2009.
Figure 5.8- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.
Figure 5.10- Photo by author (digital). June 2004.
Figure 5.11- Image by author. May 2009.

Chapter 6

Figure 6.1- Logo by author. January 2009.
Figure 6.2- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 6.3- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 6.4- Logo by author. January 2009.
Figure 6.6- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 6.7- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 6.8- Logo by author. January 2009.
Figure 6.9- Diagram by author. April 2009.
Figure 6.11- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.
Figure 6.13- Topleftpixel. <http://wvs.topleftpixel.com/08/11/06/>. 27 April 2009.
Figure 6.14- Photo by author (digital). December 2008.

Chapter 7

Figure 7.1- Logo by author. April 2009.
Figure 7.2- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 7.3- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 7.4- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 7.5- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 7.6- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.
Figure 7.7- Photo by author (digital). January 2009.
Figure 7.8- Photo by author (digital). September 2008.
Figure 7.9- Kalahari Resorts. <http://www.kalahariresorts.com/oh/waterparks/rides/indoor/leopardslair/>. 27 April 2009.

Chapter 8
Figure 8.1- Photo by author (digital). March 2009.
Figure 8.2- Photo by author (digital). March 2009.
Figure 8.3- Photo by author (digital). March 2009.
Figure 8.4- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 8.5- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 8.6- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 8.7- Diagram by author. April 2009.
Figure 8.8- Image by author. May 2009.
Figure 8.9- Diagram by author. April 2009.
Figure 8.11- Image by author. May 2009.
Chapter 1: Entertainment Architecture

Background

Entertainment architecture is not a new concept. It has been occurring since the end of the 19th century with world expositions like the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, which was visited by over 400,000. It was at these fairs that architecture, such as Louis Sullivan’s transportation building, played an important role and became an early form of entertainment architecture.¹ Luna Park at Coney Island in New York was also an early example of entertainment architecture in America.² Another more widespread example of entertainment architecture at the turn of the 20th century was movie theaters. In most major cities, “a theater was built that celebrated Hollywood’s excesses with imaginary and often spectacular theming. Ancient Aztec or classical Roman and Greek designs were among those commonly used as decorative motifs in the interiors of these movie palaces.”³ The theming of new projects to emulate the architecture of the past or distant cultures is not just a 19th and 20th century invention either. As Diane Ghirardo states, “The Roman Emperor Hadrian erected the buildings of his villa near Tivoli in emulation of the most spectacular buildings he had found in his travels around the Mediterranean.”⁴

However, unlike the entertainment architectural venues of

---

³ Gottdiener, 33.
today, these early buildings were usually reserved for the upper classes and the well to do; these vivid fantasy experiences were not available to the middle or working classes.

Walt Disney is generally credited with popularizing themed architectural environments that could entertain the masses of the middle and working classes. He opened Disneyland in 1955 in California which allowed the public to experience in three dimensions the movies and characters he had produced for the silver screen. Longtime Imagineer and Disney friend John Hench, who spent more than sixty years with the Walt Disney Company, says “The concept of the ‘themed’ environment – places designed so that every element contributes to telling a story – was developed and popularized by Walt Disney.”5 While it is clear that the themed entertainment environment was around long before Disney popularized it, he was able to make it easily accessible to the masses by associating it with his animated cartoons and mass marketing techniques. Mark Gottdiener’s *The Theming of America* and John Hannigan’s *Fantasy City* have discussed the proliferation of themed environments in the United States and the impact they have had on the architectural built environment and on the larger communities and culture as a whole. Today, entertainment architecture and branded experiences are not just limited to amusement and theme parks, but have proliferated to include restaurants, museums, retail stores, shopping malls, and hotels.

---

Architects are key players in creating the experiences and storytelling elements for entertainment architecture venues; when they fabricate the themes and experiences successfully, then visitors can engage with these vivid environments as “real.” As architect Michael Benedikt explains:

Such experiences, such privileged moments, can be profoundly moving; and precisely from such moments, I believe, we build our best and necessary sense of an independent yet meaningful reality. I should like to call them direct esthetic experiences of the real and to suggest the following: in our media-saturated times it falls to architecture to have the direct esthetic experience of the real at the center of its concerns.6

The building and its theme become part of the visitor’s experience and memory. Even though the environment may be fabricated according to the architect’s and scenic designer’s vision, the guests will still have a vivid experience there, even if it is not authentic. Benedikt argues that in order for the experience to be compelling, the architect has to acknowledge that it is not authentic but a recreation of something else. But Imagineer John Hench says Disney’s intention was “always to give satisfaction to the guest. It is up to the designer to provide guests with the appropriate sensory information that makes each story environment convincing.”7 In other words, the architect of entertainment venues needs to integrate the story lines into the built environment and develop a convincing setting that will give guests a memorable experience.

---

7 Hench, 20.
Some architectural critics have praised the use of entertainment architecture. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour actually advocated this type of architecture in their 1972 book *Learning from Las Vegas*. They originated the distinction between the “duck” and the “decorated shed” advocating the latter as more mundane buildings with typical construction, but to which thematic or graphical elements are applied in order to give them a certain theme. The “decorated shed” concept could easily apply to many current themed hotels and restaurants, and even the buildings in Las Vegas today, many of which are comprised of rather typical construction with thematic elements added onto them to provide entertainment value. These decorated sheds usually are constructed with less money being put into flashy, “high” architecture; instead inexpensive basic building concepts are used to which an immersive experience for guests is added. This is why entertainment based architecture is generally not well received by architectural critics; the buildings themselves are typically not related to their immediate social or physical contexts and do not contain innovative design elements that are worthy of publication in the latest architectural journals. Instead, their standard construction techniques, techniques that can be rolled out across multiple sites throughout the country, have no need for investment in a signature architect. Money is better spent to provide for all the thematic elements that will help make the project successful for its target audiences.

Another architect with an affectionate view of architecture’s entertainment value was Charles W. Moore. His experientially driven buildings of the 1960s may be
exemplified by the University of California’s Santa Barbara Faculty Club of 1969. The exterior reflects the exuberant “baroque” vernacular of the city while the interior features a large dining room multiple stories high where incandescent lights hang below soffits that run across the ceiling and neon lighted “banners” hang from the walls on “trumpets” as in a medieval baronial hall. Many of these elements are what one would expect to see in a movie theater, club, resort, or other entertainment based building, but Moore defended his approach by claiming that allusions, whimsicality, and designing for people’s hopes and dreams were legitimate architectural aims. He states that architecture must allow for buildings to say things to people whether those things are “wistful or wise or powerful or gentle or even silly.”

However, entertainment architecture has often not been well received in the profession of architecture. As Rem Koolhaas stated “Luna Park is the first manifestation of a curse that is to haunt the architectural profession for the rest of its life, the formula: technology + cardboard (or any other flimsy material) = reality.” Oliver Herwig teaches design theory in Basel, Karlsruhe, and Linz, and in his book *Dream Worlds: Architecture and Entertainment*, he admits that many of the actual elements seem “artificial” in themed environments: “The walls have a hollow ring and the materials seem deceptively real; but these scenarios for distraction are not intended to create a sense of authenticity, but rather their highest aim is to provide the right ‘stage,’

---

8 Moore, Charles W. ”Self Portrait.” *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, (March 1976), XLV.
an atmospheric setting or the perfect ambience.\textsuperscript{9} Another common criticism of entertainment architecture, particularly of the architecture found at the Disney parks is the “timespace compression” where guests “shift within minutes from a visit to the American Wild West to an adventure in space or back to Europe during the middle ages” all within a couple minutes walking time.\textsuperscript{10} Pushing this critique of artificiality even further, the architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable discusses two types of fakes in experiential environments. The “real fake” and the “fake fake.” The real fake is where the visitors are able to see the backside of the thematic elements and can thus deduce that the elements are indeed synthetic and not authentic. The fake fake, which is “[t]he esthetic of most Disney experiences, on the other hand, seeks to hide all things fake: No one gets to see behind the curtain.”\textsuperscript{11} This fakeness of Disney architecture transports people to a different setting because it does not show them that it is indeed not authentic. Benedikt reflects on this concept of realness, while the “fake fake” view has many critics, there are also those who can appreciate its capacity to create totally immersive environments. It is typically these totally immersive environments which neglect any connection to the local context and site.

Generally, entertainment architecture is not highly regarded by critics because it is perceived as not authentic to the original experience that it attempts to emulate. But

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{An example of a “real fake” at Disney’s Hollywood Studios as guests are allowed to see the structure for the stage set buildings that reside in the studio park.}
\end{figure}

somehow this misses the point: entertainment architecture provides a fantasy “world” that allows people to momentarily escape from their hectic or mundane everyday lives. People visit these places in order to immerse themselves in a vivid experience, even if it is rooted more in artifice than in literal authenticity. At its best, entertainment architecture creates a theatrical effect in the fullest sense. As critic William Q. Hubbard discusses in his book *Complicity and Conviction*, scrims in theaters hide the actual set props and create an illusion in their painted scenes. Theater goers do not question the authenticity of this set-up illusion because people “would rather experience that illusion than have the certain knowledge of what’s behind the scrim.”12 People enjoy the experience itself, indeed immersing themselves emotionally and physically in the “world” of the play, despite the fact that it is all an artifice. Most entertainment architecture is based on this assumption that people go to these developments for the experience they offer knowing that they are not the authentic true experience. Quality in entertainment architecture, then, needs to be measured in terms other than that “certain knowledge” or literal authenticity.

In conclusion, entertainment architecture has been around for a long time. Walt Disney is the one credited with popularizing the themed environment in America and making it available to the working classes. Some critics and high profile architects have praised entertainment architecture and designed successful projects. However, the majority of architectural critics and the profession do

---


Figure 1.7
People enjoy immersing themselves in theatrical experiences, such as the Broadway production “Wicked,” even though they evoke a world of play which is not authentic.
not look highly upon entertainment architecture mainly because of its artificiality and inauthentic recreations.

**Entertainment Architecture and Branded Experiences**

Entertainment architecture has been proliferating in the last several decades, and is now used in restaurants, museums, theme parks, and retail establishments. Mark Gottdiener, a sociology professor with the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, attributes the rise in themed environments in America to the “power of advertising—its unanswering pressure to create modes of desire in the individual consumer and its relentless scouring of the American psyche.” Gottdiener is stating that the themed built environments are an extension of the mass advertising industry because retailers, theme parks and restaurants must use thematic elements in order to appeal to the consumer so that they purchase a specific good, rather than a competitor’s virtually identical product. Additionally, the owners of these venues must create a market for their product and create demand in the eyes of the consumers to spend their hard earned money for these experiences. In short, theming is based on the American philosophy of consumption with these branded environments helping companies sell and differentiate their products to the consumer as “must-have” items as opposed to luxury goods.

Another part of the draw of these venues is that the “experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way.” Whatever the functions of these

---

13 Gottdiener, 64.
14 Pine II, 12.
entertainment architecture facilities, most of them will engage guests in multiple ways creating stimulating and intriguing environments with deep and memorable emotional experiences. One of the ways in which these environments engage people is through active participation. The bystanders are also active and engaged in the environment watching those partaking in the active attractions. This element is part of the anonymity of being in a large crowd and being able to see and be seen, part of the instinctive phenomena of prospect and refuge. As a result, a prime feature of experiential environments is the fact that they can create memorable experiences for the customers. These memorable experiences cause them to want to return to the destination again and again to relive their memories and build new ones.

Another reason why themed environments are proliferating is because of the urban experiences that they are recreating. Once inside the gates of a theme park or an entertainment architecture facility, an urban motif is usually recreated. Part of the draw of the urban experience is that “the crowd is active and constantly surprising.”15 Theme parks and other branded experiences can recreate the urban experience that is lacking in the suburbs while providing a safe environment without the worries of crime that are typically associated with authentic urban areas. John Hannigan, a professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto, calls this a “riskless risk.” This sense of reassurance is part of why he claims that themed environments are so popular today, especially with the

---

15 Gottdiener, 154.
chaotic pace of today’s world. People like to feel like they are taking risks while knowing full well that what they are partaking in is completely safe and free from the dangers of the original activity or location. These environments also create a place where people can see familiar faces, and they provide a sense of community that is also lacking in the suburbs but generally present in denser urban settings.

The theming of the built environment and the need by companies to differentiate their seemingly identical products has led to the proliferation of branded experiences. Establishments such as Rainforest Café, Hard Rock Café, Planet Hollywood, and Starbucks, have all flourished because they have successfully themed the built environment. Herwig states that “nothing is left to chance since the design is all about generating good vibrations in the clients.”16 Every element is designed to enhance the experience and the recognition of the brand. Whether at a shop in Cincinnati or in Seattle, the same elements must be in place to provide brand recognition and enhance the overall experience and the sense of identification and loyalty in the consumer. *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business is a Stage*, written by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, discusses the branded experience as a way to differentiate products by charging a premium for the experience itself. The way for businesses to develop stronger profits is to transform commodities into experiences as a way to differentiate their almost identical products. They specifically cite Starbucks

---

16 Herwig, 34.
and the experience of buying coffee that has been created there.

Pine and Gilmore argue further that there are four realms of creating a true experience that engages the customers. The two active realms are the escapist and educational realms, the former drawing guests into a totally immersive experience, and the latter allowing the guests to learn something from the experience. The two passive realms are the esthetics of the experience that lures people into the place, and the entertainment which guests perceive by simply responding to the environment. Together, these four realms allow for the “creation of memories, distinct from the normally uneventful world of goods and services. Its very design invites you to enter, and to return again and again.”17 The detailing and immersive nature of these designs creates the desire for people to return often. This desire for repeat visits is a key feature to entertainment architecture. Often the design and construction of these spaces is more expensive than typical environments, so getting customers to repeatedly return is important to remain economically competitive.

Finally, they expand some key features that make a theme compelling and captivating to guests. “An engaging theme must alter a guest’s sense of reality.” And “the richest venues possess themes that fully alter one’s sense of reality by affecting the experience of space, time and matter.” The final result is themes that “integrate space, time, and matter into a cohesive, realistic whole.”18 The themed environment must “transport” the guests to other

17 Pine II, 43.
18 Ibid, 49-51.
times and places by altering the guests’ sense of reality. This fakeness and artificiality and the altering of realities present undermine an “honest” architecture and explain why entertainment architecture is more constructively compared to a theatrical experience.

Michel Foucault discusses this theme of “other” places and realities through his concept of “heterotopias.” This place is “absolutely real, connected with the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point.”\textsuperscript{19} He adds that “their role is to create a space that is other, another real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and humbled.”\textsuperscript{20} These heterotopias, which are grounded to a specific site, transport people to other places and even different times, such as in cemeteries or in museums where time can be rediscovered and past memories can be recalled.

Branded experiences have proliferated in America in the last decade, an extension of the mass advertising market. These environments engage their target audiences in stimulating ways that encourage people to differentiate and purchase the product and return again and again. Some of these branded experiences even simulate urban environments, as one good way to alter a mostly suburban audience’s sense of reality and provide for an entertaining outcome.


\textsuperscript{20} Foucault, 5.
Problems with Entertainment Architecture

There are several major problems with the usual approach to entertainment architecture today. One is that the actual venues are closed buildings and only inward looking, typically with no connection or tie to the local site, culture or community in which they are built. Just like fast food establishments, entertainment architecture settings, such as Rainforest Café, Starbucks, and the Great Wolf Lodges, are virtually identical whether they are located in the South, the Midwest, or on the West Coast. This sameness results in a loss of a sense of community and a sense of uniqueness about a particular place. There is a geographic disconnect with many of these projects, both locally and globally.

Another major issue with entertainment architecture is that the themed environments are not historically authentic. There is a time space collapse as themes are drawn arbitrarily from a variety of sources. As Herwig states, “Architecture becomes an interchangeable backdrop onto which are projected themes from Hollywood, our modern myths. Whole theme-towns are conjured up.”21 It does not matter what theme is transplanted to the architecture, as long as it provides a memorable experience to the visitors. In fact, part of the reason why these shopertainment, edutainment and eatertainment venues turn to recreating historical settings is because they can bring a foreign environment to visitors. The perfect example of this shrinkage of time and space can be found at EPCOT at Disney World, where country pavilions are placed a few

---

21 Herwig, 25.
hundred feet from one another. People can “experience” many different cultures in one afternoon at the park, simply by walking around the World Showcase. Similarly, many of the indoor water park resorts in America take guests to distant places as well, such as the Kalahari Resort in Sandusky, Ohio, that utilizes an African theme. Even culturally important institutions such as museums are turning to entertainment architecture and branding as a way to get paying visitors through their doors, such as the West Virginia Museum of Culture and History and the Cincinnati Natural History Museum.

Even the history that is used is distorted in some entertainment architecture. Stephen M. Fjellman discusses this edited history at length in his book *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*. He calls Disney’s edited version of history “Distory,” designed so as not to offend any park visitors or distort the perception of the parks as ‘the happiest place on earth’ for all park visitors.22 While some editing of the original history or environment is necessary when recreating a themed experience, care must be taken to reproduce authentic elements as closely as possible, because they might be providing the guests’ only interaction with a culture from half way around the world or from an earlier century.

One of the most important features which should change about entertainment based facilities is that they need to take more cues from the surrounding neighborhoods, buildings, communities and history of the area and not be thought of as only individual, isolated,

---

inward focused elements within the community. In the preface to *Gensler Entertainment: The Art of Placemaking*, Robert L. Ward, the creative director of Universal Studios, states that “Entertainment placemaking is particularly successful when the residents of the surrounding community feel that you’ve given them something very special that they wish to participate in too.” The developer and architect must create a unique and special themed environment that will attract and connect with the surrounding community so that they feel compelled to patronize the establishment as opposed to spending their limited discretionary income at competing facilities. This would also help reduce community objections to the project and help the developer get zoning approvals. Thinking about entertainment facilities in this manner will help the developments become more integrated into their communities.

Marty Borko of Gensler Entertainment in his article in the same book elaborates on the notion that entertainment used to be thought of as “a world of its own, consciously aloof from the city.” He asserts that Gensler does not “do those kinds of projects anymore. Entertainment and retail are uses that we fit into the existing fabric with the conscious goal of restoring or reinforcing vitality.” This approach remains unusual. The majority of entertainment architecture complexes built today are only concerned with their specific site and the elements of the building and are not generally concerned

\[24\] Gensler Entertainment, 29.
with any connections beyond the property lines other than vehicular access. In *The Wisdom of Cities* Henry L. Lennard and Suzanne H. Crowhurst Lennard elaborate on the lack of attention to the surrounding context:

“In many North American and some European cities, architects and developers have been allowed to build structures that have no relationship either to the surrounding buildings, or to the city’s character and tradition. Buildings compete for attention, but do not pay attention to each other. The dialogue among buildings is too often characterized by fragmentation and discontinuity, and the collage of buildings and public spaces creates a profound sense of anomie and dissociation.”

The popularity of branded environments continues to erode the few unique attributes and character traits of particular areas.

But branded environments do not need to turn their backs on the specific communities in which they are situated. Ronald Fleming illustrates this concept in his book *Saving Face: How Corporate Franchise Design Can Respect Community Identity*. He states that “When franchisees insist on using garish golden arches, it keeps them from realizing the potential value of individualizing this standard icon as a means of magnifying community identity” which can diminish the potential of community patronage.

Fleming is referring to the fact that most corporations want to have a uniform brand image, and express that brand experience in all their locations. Because of costs and ease of duplication many franchisees

---


wish to copy the prototype designs all across the country, ignoring the local context and design cues already within the community and surrounding the site. This expedient, short-sighted approach creates buildings that are indistinguishable from one city or state to the next, while branded buildings that have been tailored to the specific community generally generate higher sales and revenues in the long run despite higher initial costs.

What Fleming calls for is “contextually responsive design” that responds to the themes and elements located within the actual community. Buildings designed in a contextual manner will be better received by the community and become more valued parts of its communal life. Fleming’s book looks at how national chains, such as McDonald’s, have been able to adapt the designs of their stores to create unique buildings that can enhance the overall community and sense of place instead of increasing the amount of uniformity. This concept has had mixed success in the fast food and retail industries because this design decision is usually left up to the individual franchisee. This same concept has not at all taken hold in the entertainment architecture community; there are virtually no projects of this type that pay attention to the local site or context.

One reason for the lack of site specific design in entertainment architecture venues is the lack of repeatability. Hannigan states, “projects which are considered to be ‘site specific’ and, therefore difficult to duplicate nationally and internationally, make investors
nervous.” Thus, in order to secure the necessary funding for these types of projects, there usually has to be a substantial regional and tourist draw for the project. Additionally, developers like to roll out the same design package nationally on many sites because they save money by not having to reinvent the theming and design for every single site that they decide to build upon. Because the developers of these projects often want to maximize their profits, connecting their project with the community is not one of their top priorities. They do, however, want to appease the surrounding communities, so that they can get their project approved and built with little opposition, unlike what happened when Disney proposed the Disney’s America project near Civil War battle grounds in Virginia and was greeted with fierce opposition.

While many businesses may be afraid of the increased costs related to site specific design, there is a need among entertainment architecture venues to change the dominant design philosophy. As Fleming states, “We must understand what we need to do to educate both business and the public that good contextual design is important to both business and the community in terms of the bottom line and quality of life.” While up front design costs may be higher for a contextually designed entertainment architecture complex, it can create an experience that is more enriching because it can increase the quality of life for its community. Additionally, the owner and developer of the complex can see an increase in patronage from the local community residents if the design

---

27 Hannigan, 107.
28 Fleming, 24.
is sensitive to or helps strengthen or illuminate the unique attributes of the area.

I wish to explore an entertainment architecture project that resists the predominant design approaches that create geographic and historical disconnections or that evoke fantasy based themes and experiences offering little if any connection to the local community. I will utilize the context and history of the surrounding community in the design of the development, as well as the specific history of the site. In addition to good contextual design, the project will feature a high-density mixed use approach, so that it can recreate the urban pedestrian experience. The finished design will be integrated into the community in terms of the site design, the building design, and the thematic elements that are used. This will help foster a sense of place and a vivid, unique identity for this venture while illustrating the effectiveness of contextually based design for entertainment architecture.
Chapter 2: Indoor Water Park Resorts

A more recent phenomenon within the last fifteen years in the field of entertainment architecture, and in particular the water park and hotel industry, has been the development of the indoor water park resort. The first one of these new types in the United States opened in 1994 at the Wisconsin Dells, when Stan Anderson added indoor water park elements to his Polynesian Resort there in 1994. Indoor water park resorts had existed in Europe for years, but were “slow to catch on in the U.S.”¹ The first indoor water park in the world, World Waterpark, opened in 1985 at the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada, as part of a $1.2 billion expansion.² According to the 2008 Construction Report on water park resorts by Jeff Coy and Bill Haralson, there were just 32 indoor water park facilities in the United States in 2000. However, 33 new facilities opened in 2007 alone, bringing the United States total to 169, while another 55 opened in 2008.³ Many of these resorts include extensive thematic elements and employ the use of entertainment architecture in some form to lure guests into their properties and book their rooms. These water park resorts feature higher occupancy rates and typically generate more revenue than traditional hotels. Because of the experiential design of these complexes and the attached water park amenities that help differentiate the

---

properties from other seemingly similar ones, the hotel operators can charge a premium on room rates.

This building type has many specific requirements to successfully house all of its complex functions. One major issue is the large energy and HVAC capacity that these buildings require in order to keep their indoor air temperature at a balmy 84 to 86 degrees year round and to maintain indoor air quality in the pool areas. Chloramines, which are “a natural byproduct from chlorine interacting with organic compounds like human sweat, urine and skin,” can cause people to have respiratory problems; therefore indoor air changes are required several times per hour to avoid high chloramines levels. Indoor water parks also need additional plumbing and mechanical equipment for the many pools and slides. Some water parks even have slides that puncture the building envelope, requiring coordination between the architects and the slide manufacturers to ensure functionality. Another component of most indoor water parks is large amounts of glazing or other translucent materials to allow natural light into the space to create a more inviting environment for the swimming guests.

A current trend with hotels that are building indoor water park resorts is to develop condominiums adjacent to the water park property. The condo owners provide much needed capital for the owner and/or developer of the resort while receiving access to all of its amenities. Additionally, when a condo owner is not in residence, the hotel can rent out the unit as a hotel suite. This provides more available

---

rooms for the hotel during peak times and retains a share of the revenue to the condo owner. The Kalahari resorts in Sandusky and the Wisconsin Dells both contain a complex of condominiums adjacent to their hotels and water parks. Additionally, many of these condominiums that are attached to indoor water park developments are part of a larger mixed use development where there are retail and dining establishments within walking distance of the units.

Water park resorts and entertainment architecture complexes are sprouting up in cities all across the United States. These resorts are usually located within driving distance of large population centers, and can offer a much needed weekend getaway without having to arrange an entire week long vacation. There is an “ever increasing demand for economical, frequent, flexible, and brief leisure pursuits that offer immersion, relaxation, education, and even solace away from the hectic realities of life.”

Another factor that attracts families to these indoor water park resorts is similar to why parents take their kids to Walt Disney World: not just “for the event itself,” as Pine and Gilmore state, “but rather to make that shared experience part of everyday family conversations for months, and even years, afterward. While the experience itself lacks tangibility, people greatly value the offering because its value lies within them, where it remains long afterward.”

---

Like most entertainment architecture, water park resorts share the problem of community isolation. Most of these resorts are located in suburban communities, near interstate exits, surrounded by large parking lots, and devoid of any pedestrian friendly connections to nearby residents or neighborhoods. They are typically situated in areas that do not have a high density of residents, both requiring and allowing for the large surface parking lots and adding to the lack of connection to the community. Part of the problem is that the developers will seek out empty, characterless, inexpensive land, in part so they can take what is a proven theme and solution in one community and try to apply it as economically as possible in multiple locations with a minimum of risk. A key example of this is the Great Wolf Lodge chain where all their properties feature the same wilderness lodge theme all across the country always within the same kinds of vast, disconnected exurban settings.

In summary, indoor water parks are rapidly being built in cities all across the United States in order to create differentiation in the hotel market, plus sometimes incorporating condominium and mixed-use developments as ways to help finance the expensive water parks. Popular for shorter weekend vacations within driving distance, these indoor water parks, like most branded experiences, utilize themes that have a geographic and whimsical disconnect from their local communities.
Chapter 3: Lifestyle centers and Urban Entertainment Districts

In order to help address these multiple problems with entertainment architecture and with indoor water park resorts in particular, my design project will develop a critical hybrid or synthesis among several development types. Features of urban entertainment districts, mixed use developments, lifestyle centers, and destination developments will be woven together in the design, which will occupy the old U.S. Playing Card Company site in Norwood, Ohio. To understand the potential for this blend of development types, each must be expanded upon.

Urban Entertainment Districts

A popular new trend in cities across America in the last thirty years is often called “urban entertainment districts” (UEDs). These projects are sometimes used to revitalize former industrial sites and other areas of the city that need redevelopment by combining three main elements: a “pure entertainment attraction, theme restaurants, and entertainment-oriented shops in a branded pedestrian-friendly environment that draws large and diverse audiences.”

Urban entertainment districts include theater districts, such as the one on Times Square in New York. In that particular case, Disney was involved in renovating the New Amsterdam Theater and helping to rejuvenate the entire district by attracting visitors and tourists to the area. Critics such as Gottdiener, however, cite problems with the

1 Klingmann, 89.
development, notably “the sacrifice of authentic urban culture, locally owned stores, unique subcultures, and street life to the corporate sanitizing of entire city sectors through the construction of simulations that owe their thematic appeal to Hollywood and other media industries.” Other urban entertainment districts have been developed by The Cordish Companies such as Fourth Street Live! located in Louisville, Power Plant Live! in Baltimore, Philly Live! in Philadelphia, and Daytona Live! in Florida. These urban entertainment districts are primarily pedestrian based environments that recreate the urban street scene and feature high-end retail establishments.

With varying degrees of authenticity, these projects reflect a shared interest in providing high-density urban ambience and activities. In *Making People-Friendly Towns*, Francis Tibbalds claims that the “aim is to create urban areas with their own identities, rooted in a regional and/or historical context.” This trend is also manifest in the proliferation of town centers and main streets as documented in the Urban Land Institute’s book, *Place Making*. The Jon Jerde Partnership in Los Angeles has become an important designer in developing projects that have “an amalgam of commercial, residential, retail, entertainment and communal space that the average visitor experiences as an inviting and comfortable environment.” Jerde calls his work “placemaking and experiential design,” and has designed numerous projects including Horton Plaza.

---

2 Gottdiener, 132.
in San Diego and Universal City’s City Walk in California.\(^4\)

**Mixed Use Developments**

There are other reasons for the rise in popularity of such mixed use developments. Tibbalds elaborates on one of their prime advantages:

The most attractive places offer a variety of activities and experiences. Living, working, trading, shopping, and playing all gain from being linked. Mixed uses make for lively, safe environments – whether in whole streets or individual buildings. The public realm is safe and enjoyable because it attracts different people at different times for different purposes.\(^5\)

As Tibbalds explains, part of the draw of mixed use developments and entertainment districts is that people can live, work and play all within the same environment. This creates an engaging public realm where different people use the public squares and spaces at different times for different purposes. People shopping, working, dining, and attending festivals are all part of what makes public spaces engaging to the users and helps to create a sense of place and belonging for the community – both those visiting and those who live within the development. Tibbalds explains that it is important for cities and developments to have “attractive, intricate places related to the scale of people walking, not driving. We must exploit individuality, uniqueness and the differences between places.”\(^6\) He continues by saying that the public realm is increasingly important with more emphasis being placed on “the space

\(^4\) Klingmann, 100.
\(^5\) Tibbalds, 32-33.
\(^6\) Ibid, 9.
between the buildings – rather than the buildings themselves.”7 A further goal “is to create a destination – a point of arrival, a place that must provide a shared identity for a larger region.”8 Mixed use developments provide a constant sense of activity and energy that used to reside in urban areas before the proliferation of the suburbs. People still like to experience the urban environment, and these mixed use developments are once again offering that environment to people.

Designers of these urban (and urban–like) developments must, in Jane Jacobs’ words, “recognize that they have a responsibility to a wider patronage than an individual client.”9 While the client is the immediate person the building is being designed for, the community will also have to experience and interact with the development. A facility that is integrated into the region and maintains a sense of local identity will be better received by the community than one that totally ignores the surrounding fabric. This principle can apply both to the site strategy of the resorts as well as to the development of the thematic and entertainment options. Although resort themes do not necessarily have to derive from the context itself, since part of the appeal is escaping into a fantasy environment, they can originate from the original context and be whimsically depicted so as to provide the escapist feature for the entertainment resort.

One element that a majority of historic towns and newer mixed use developments have is some form of

---

7 Ibid, 12.
8 Klingmann, 92.
9 Tibbalds, 60.
public square. These primary public places are important to the vibrancy of the city as well as for providing public gathering places amongst the private shops. One of the primary functions of the public space is to provide a setting for festivals and celebrations. These events are important “in the life of the city – in offering opportunities for social ties, in encouraging the sense of fantasy and play essential to human beings, in allowing people to be together in other than purely functional and instrumental capacities.”

These public places provide a common gathering place for the public, promoting a sense of community. They also provide the opportunity for prospect and refuge, creating places for people to “see and be seen” all within the protection of the crowd.

A water park resort that is part of a mixed use development can utilize shared public places in order to increase traffic flow to the resort, and also to integrate itself within the larger community by sponsoring special events for the general public. These public places can even extend to the outdoor water park areas of the resort in the winter months in the form of ice skating rinks and other winter related activities, making the resort an even more integral part of the community. A resort that is part of a mixed use development can attract a more varied target market than typical indoor water park resorts. For example, public “spraygrounds,” such as the one at Downtown Disney in Orlando, can attract children and families from the neighborhoods, free of charge, creating a sense of

---

excitement and interaction in the public area of the complex.

**Lifestyle Centers**

A lifestyle center is a form of upscale shopping mall and is relatively new to the retail scene. They are generally comprised of higher end retailers and restaurants. Residential units are not typically located within the retail section of the development but can be adjacent to it in the form of apartments, hotels and/or condos. All the retail elements and shops are accessed via outdoor pedestrian walkways and have storefronts similar to small town main streets. With the adjacent residential units, a lifestyle center allows residents to “live, work and play” all within a close proximity without the need for long car trips to entertainment venues, work or shopping.

Easton Town Center in Columbus, Ohio, is a typical example of a lifestyle center featuring a mixture of retail uses with urban styled gathering places, a main street, primarily pedestrian focused circulation with small streets, and parking provided on the periphery with surface lots and garages. Easton also features office uses above the retail space and two adjacent hotels with 510 rooms. The property was developed by Steiner + Associates, with phase one completed in 1999 and phase two completed in the fall of 2001.11 At Easton, other than the hotels, there are no residential units among the retail components. All the residential units have been pushed to the edge, making it difficult for nearby residents to walk to the shops, and undermining any semblance of an authentic urban

---

experience. Another shortfall at Easton is that, as its popularity has grown, many of the small streets that traveled through the retail areas have needed to be closed to vehicular traffic because of the increased number of pedestrians. Easton does successfully portray the feeling of a small urban town although it could have been an even more dynamic environment had more mixed uses, especially residences, been incorporated into the heart of the design (as for example at Legacy Town Center in Plano, Texas or Atlantic Station cited below).

Station Square in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was developed by Forest City Enterprises at the former site of a Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad station on the southern shore of the Monongahela River. It is another example of a lifestyle center. Several of the old buildings were restored and reused for retail space. The development features a 396 room Sheraton Hotel and restaurants (Hard Rock Café, Joe’s Crab Shack, and Buca di Beppo) which surround a public square that provides space for festivals and events. Additionally, the square features a small water fountain that produces choreographed light shows similar to elements that can be found at the Bellagio in Las Vegas and Disney’s Hollywood Studios at Disney World, though on a much smaller scale.

**Destination Developments**

Destination developments are similar to lifestyle centers except that they become a destination attracting visitors from outside the local communities by including

---

more tourist attractions. The tourists and non-residents are attracted to the development because of the collection of high-end shops and restaurants as well as the entertainment aspects that are offered.

One destination development is Universal’s City Walk in Los Angeles, opened in 1994, and designed by the Jerde Partnership. The 23 acre establishment is pedestrian oriented and features retail space that contains flashy neon signage and entertainment related elements along the street. The development contains restaurants such as a Hard Rock Café and NASCAR Café, retail, a movie theater and office space. It is these signature stores and restaurants that make this a destination development that attracts visitors from outside the local communities. All the visitors must drive to the complex as there are no permanent residential units within the development. Visitors must park their cars, and then they can experience the development by walking on the pedestrian oriented streets; there is no direct pedestrian connection to the surrounding community. Despite the large tourist draw of destination developments, locals still typically account for 67% of the sales in this complex.¹³

Downtown Disney, located in the Disney World park complex near Orlando, Florida, is very similar to City Walk. Downtown Disney is a pedestrian focused destination retail development that features an urban pedestrian experience for visitors with highly detailed and themed facades. The key attractions that make Downtown Disney a destination development are Planet Hollywood, DisneyQuest, an indoor Disney theme park, a Cirque du Soleil show for entertainment in the pedestrian focused destination development.

Soleil show, Ghirardelli Chocolate Shop, and a LEGO store. Similar to Universal’s City Walk, all the parking is located on the periphery of the development behind all the storefronts with the main retail areas focused on the urban style street.

**Synthesis developments**

Some of the newest developments combine the elements of urban entertainment districts, mixed use developments, lifestyle centers and destinations developments into one complex. These developments become a city within a city with the main streets throughout the development oriented towards pedestrians, much like the quasi urban experience found in the Disney theme parks and other amusement parks. Vehicular circulation through the streets is limited with speeds closely controlled, and parking is either located on the periphery, in parking structures, or below the buildings themselves. These developments are similar to lifestyle centers except for the fact that they do not segregate the residential units to adjacent properties, and they are like destination developments and urban entertainment districts because they include the signature entertainment venues and retail brands that can attract both tourists and locals. Many of these new combination developments feature entertainment venues such as movie theaters and other entertainment based establishments that anchor the development and serve to create a dynamic night life. These developments also contain residential units and office space interspersed within the retail. This mixing of uses allows people to live, work, and play without having to leave the property or drive. Because all the different uses are integrated within
the development, it reinforces the pedestrian oriented nature of these developments by allowing people to walk from their home to the grocery store, to a restaurant, and to a movie theater. This mixed use development creates a sense of community that is often only found in higher density urban environments.

Atlantic Station, located on the former site of a manufacturing complex in Atlanta, is an example of one of these combination developments. The development features first floor retail spaces situated below several floors of residential and office units. Parking for the entire complex is located below the buildings. The complex also features a town square for people to relax and to provide a focal point for community gatherings and festivals. An AMC movie theater is immediately to the north of the town square which anchors the entertainment offerings for the complex. Several hotels and signature restaurants provide a draw for tourists as well as locals.

In summary, there are many types of developments that attract tourists and locals. Urban entertainment districts typically feature theaters and entertainment based venues among high-end retail establishments in denser urban areas. Mixed use developments integrate retail, office and residential uses within the same complex providing a sense of community. Lifestyle centers contain retail establishments and typically have a local draw, with residential units, if any, not in the heart of the retail area but instead on the periphery. Destination developments are similar to lifestyle centers but feature higher-end stores with signature brands and have a regional draw which attracts tourists from outside the immediate communities.

Figure 3.10
Atlantic Station in Atlanta, GA, is a mixed use development with elements of an urban entertainment district, lifestyle center and destination development.
Finally, combination developments feature elements of all of these combined into one cohesive project that creates a city within a city oriented towards a pedestrian way of life.
Chapter 4: Site Analysis

The site for this project is the current U.S. Playing Card Co. factory in Norwood, Ohio. U.S. Playing Card announced in 2008 that they are relocating from the site and moving to Northern Kentucky at the end of 2009 in order to occupy a more modern and energy efficient facility. With their move from Norwood, they are taking jobs and leaving a large site with many old, yet beautiful buildings. This is not the first time this has happened here. Norwood was once home to numerous factories, including a now demolished GM car assembly plant, and the LeBlond Tool Plant which is now the site of the Rookwood Commons retail development. Many of these old factory buildings still stand today; some have received new uses, the land formerly occupied by the GM assembly plant is now home to offices, while others stand abandoned.

The U.S. Playing Card. Co. has been at this 21 acre site in Norwood since 1900 when they relocated from downtown Cincinnati. There are several four story buildings on the property, with the majority of them built in 1908, and designed by legendary Cincinnati architect Samuel Hannaford. The Neo-Romaneque bell tower was built in 1926, and at one time it was used as a radio transmitting tower. There is also a large water tower on the site with the popular Bicycle Playing Card logo painted on it that rivals the bell tower in height. Both of these structures can be seen for many blocks.¹

An important aspect of choosing Norwood and the U.S. Playing Card Site is that there have been some substantial and successful redevelopment projects in Norwood in the last twenty years. Rookwood Pavilion was developed on the former site of a machine tool manufacturer in 1994. The developers reused several features of that factory in the new retail development including the clock tower and one of the old factory buildings that was reused as a Don Pablos Mexican restaurant. An adjoining development to Rookwood Pavilion opened in 2000 to much success.\(^2\) While it is unrealistic that I will be reusing most of the buildings on the current site, I do plan to retain several of the iconic elements. The bell tower and main building that terminates the Park Avenue axis will be reused and renovated for use in the new development as the main hotel atrium. The old water tower will remain and anchor the outdoor water park portion of the site. All of the other existing U.S. Playing Card Co. buildings will be razed to make room for the new entertainment based development.

The site itself is in the city of Norwood, one of the first ring suburban cities just north of the city of Cincinnati which has been home to numerous industries throughout the years. The site is bounded on the east by the north-south running Interstate 71. Immediately to the north of the site is a main railroad line for CSX. To the northeast of the site is a Siemens engine factory. To the west of the site is Beech Street, which dead ends just north of the site before the railroad tracks. The main entrance and bell tower faces

a wide boulevard, Park Avenue, to the west which contains a large park—like median. Immediately to the west on the southern edge of the site is a large public park, Dorl Field. To the south of the site is Robertson Avenue, which crosses over I-71, allowing pedestrian and vehicular traffic to reach the site from the Cincinnati neighborhood of Oakley, which is located on the eastern side of I-71. To the west, south, and southeast of the site are single and multi-family housing units. Generally speaking, residential units are located to the south and east of Robertson Avenue and south of Park Avenue and east of Beech Street. Most of the industrial and manufacturing buildings are concentrated along the east-west running railroad lines.

To the north, the old Norwood incinerator stands on the opposite side of the railroad tracks. Also, still standing to the north is a brick archway tunnel, likely dating to the 1880s, that supports the railroad tracks above the now closed and long gone Duck Creek road. Additionally, the Norwood and Oakley train stations are still standing along the main and still active railroad lines to the north and east of the site. Most of the housing stock in this area was built for the baby boom following World War II in the late 1940s and 1950s. Many of these residences are single family homes, although there are some apartments and multi-family units interspersed among them, primarily located on the southern side of Park Avenue. Almost all of these homes are clad in brick and stand two stories tall. Brick colors vary from shades of red to shades of yellow. Because of the close proximity to all of the housing, which is generally comprised of middle class families, the site offers a perfect opportunity to look at a regional tourist experience.
destination with pedestrian and contextual connections to the local community.

The existing buildings on the U.S. Playing Card site are comprised of four story brick clad buildings. The brick used on the buildings consists primarily of tan colored brick, and the facades feature bays of windows separated by brick piers that stick out from the plane of the horizontally focused facades. The bell tower provides the terminus for the Park Avenue boulevard. On the southern portion of the site, a four-story office building provides the eastern edge to Dorl Field. The Siemens plant to the northwest contains a brick clad, two story tall administration complex. The actual factory itself is clad with typical warehouse vertical metal siding and is separated from Park Avenue to the south by a large parking lot for employees.

Site access poses some unique challenges, particularly from the interstates and major connector roads. While Interstate 71 is immediately to the east of the project site, there are no exit ramps from the highway onto Robertson Road. The closest exit off of I-71 is the Smith Edwards exit on I-71 to the south. While the Norwood Lateral is not far to the north, there is also no direct access from that expressway. The most direct major road is Smith Road, which has exits on both Interstate 71 and the Norwood Lateral (via Norwood Avenue and Montgomery Road exits). If light rail ever arrives in Cincinnati, the site could be convenient to a light rail stop along the northern boundary of the site.

Most of the streets surrounding the site are two lane residential streets. As a result, residents would not want to
see a large increase in traffic on these streets due to the new development. Some street upgrades would need to be implemented for the resort in order to handle the increased traffic volumes. Most of the vehicular traffic will reach the site via Park Avenue, which connects Smith Road and the U.S. Playing Card Building. The street itself is comprised of two one way streets, separated by a large median planted with mature shade trees. This attractive road could likely handle the increased traffic from the development with minimal modifications.

One site strategy that is critical to the design is the use of views from within and into the development. With Interstate 71 being immediately to the east of the site, I wish to take advantage of the views and free “advertising” for the resort to all the vehicles that traverse I-71 every day. Dorl Field will also provide some views into the south.
western portion of the site. Additionally, Kenilworth Avenue and Park Avenue provide long, straight axes that look directly into the site. I plan to take advantage of these axes and continue them into the site. I will be extending Kenilworth Avenue into the site as a pedestrian street along which the first floor retail and upper level residences of my design will reside.

The U.S. Playing Card site in Norwood offers a large brownfield site in which to locate a mixed use entertainment architecture development. Because of the close proximity of residential units, the rich history on the site and the Cincinnati region, there are many vibrant contextual elements and historical themes to enhance a contextually responsive design.
Chapter 5: Mixed Use Destination Development

Program

The program for this project will be a combination entertainment district, mixed use development, lifestyle center and a destination development. It will contain an indoor water park, hotel, conference center, residential units, office space, a movie theater, town square, and retail space including restaurants. The southern portion of the site will house the majority of the mixed use development with the hotel and indoor water park located on the northern portion of the site. These buildings will generally be three to four stories tall, keeping the same height as the former U.S. Playing Card buildings. The first floor of these buildings will feature street retail with the upper levels containing apartments, townhomes and condominiums. Some of the buildings immediately adjacent to the town square will also feature office space.

A design process that is used by Jack Rouse Associates (a Cincinnati design firm specializing in entertainment projects) and Disney in designing new entertainment based attractions and buildings features the use of storyboards. Taken from the movie industry, storyboarding allows the themes and elements to be planned out to develop the exact colors, mood and feel of each particular area of the resort. Jack Rouse uses storyboarding as a form of programming to understand the initial concepts and guidelines for each attraction early in the design process. This ensures that all later decisions are based off of these initial concept story boards. The goal of storyboarding the development has been to organize the
diverse experiences within the complex on the overall map of the development as well as the indoor water park resort. This process has helped clarify key experiential moments for visitors to the water park and the development. The thematic elements that are developed for this project will impact the shape, colors, layout and design of the buildings for this project.

There are many concepts and strategies used in creating experiential designs; many of these are atypical to the way architects usually design buildings. Good entertainment architecture involves storytelling and, therefore, writing scripts to the experiences is critical. In an article by the Themed Entertainment Association, architect Rick Solberg says “If you write first and then design, it is harder but the result is better design.” Additionally, David Price, son of Harrison Price who worked closely with Walt Disney states that the “careful selection and combination of design themes… can result in a dynamic sense of place.”¹ A core feature of designing themed environments is that there is typically a written narrative that serves as the basis for the design and scenic elements. By writing this script first, it impacts and focuses the design on the story that is going to be told by the theming and the building.

The various themes in the overall development are zoned for use in specific areas. This is not unlike traditional theme parks such as Disneyland that have separate themed areas. However, the themes in this

---

development are more concentrated than at Disneyland because of the size and scope of the project. The overall theme for the development is Cincinnati and its connection to the river. The overall development is named “Queen City Commons,” after the city’s well-known nick name, which conveniently also ties into the royalty theme found in playing cards. Following are descriptions of several themes used in the complex.

**Cincinnati Theme**

For the overall site development, I have created a whimsical fantasy allegory of Cincinnati and the Ohio River. Small passenger boats travel along the river, a movie theater overlays Newport, and a public square with a water fountain show and multiple cafés plays the role of the central business district. A streetcar barn echoes Union Terminal, servicing the streetcars that run throughout the development.

The river, complete with a river walk, is approximately twenty five feet wide with pedestrian paths on either side. Placards are placed along this walkway with historical information and pictures about life in the Ohio River valley. On the northern bank of the river, there is a lower river walk level, or quay, located a foot above the water level. This is the level where guests can board the passenger boats and take a cruise. To connect the upper pedestrian areas to the north with the south, a series of pedestrian bridges cross over the river, providing pedestrian access to all retail establishments and residential units.

The town square is lined with cafes and retail shops and features a water fountain sculpture on the northern edge which offers displays similar to Fantasmic at Disney
World, Station Square in Pittsburgh, and the Bellagio in Las Vegas. The town square will be used for special events and gatherings, and for casual use when people take a break from shopping, working, or enjoying the other amenities of the development. Some of the special events that could be held on the town square are music concerts, festivals, food tasting events, and winter holiday festivities. On the extreme southwestern portion of the site, no buildings will be developed. This area of the site will serve as the western terminus of the river, as well as an extension of the open space of Dorl Field into the site.

The movie theater that overlays Newport helps create the destination development in conjunction with the water park resort and offers people staying in the hotel and visiting the development another form of entertainment. The movie theater’s position allows it to advertise its showings directly to the highway through the architectural design of the facade. This building’s graphically rich signage will help it serve as an advertisement for movies and the destination development itself.

Another local thematic element that is tapped is the railroad. There are numerous rail lines immediately adjacent to the site, and several long—defunct train stations are still standing within miles of the site, including the Oakley train station a few miles to the east. Additionally, electric street cars were prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century in the Cincinnati and Norwood area. The development contains a network of streetcar lines and stops across the site in order to add some glitz and entertainment value, some energy and movement, and to make it easier for pedestrians to move about the twenty—one acres. The

Figure 5.4
Fantasmic, at Disney’s Hollywood Studios features a water and light show synchronized to music.

Figure 5.5
Development key plan.

Key:
A- U.S. Playing Card Building, House of Cards lobby
B- House of Cards Conference Center
C- Parking Garage
D- Retail shops and restaurants
E- Newport Cinemas
F- Fountain show, on the Queen City Town Square
G- Queen City Town Square
H- Joker’s Wild Indoor Water Park
I- King of Hearts Water Park
J- Street car barn
K- River boat Landing
L- Ohio River walk
M- Riverside Cafe
N- Royal Garden Restaurant
Red- House of Cards Guest Rooms
Yellow- Residential buildings
Green- Street car stops
Blue- Access to below grade parking garage
repair shop for the streetcars also serves as a museum for street cars in Cincinnati and echoes Union Terminal on the map allegory.

One local example of a destination development retail establishment that utilizes a Cincinnati theme is Jungle Jim’s International Market. The market started out as a local vegetable market. It has grown to an international grocery store that includes animatronic displays and other experiential features such as the award winning restrooms with Port-o-let® style entries. Additionally, the store features several artifacts from local area attractions such as some seats from the now defunct Cinergy Field, some old Coney Island bumper cars that are used as display cases, and even an old fire truck for the spices section. Furthermore, the exterior now features a working monorail, rescued from Kings Island, to shuttle guests from the far reaches of the parking lot to the store’s banquet facility. While this store is not the same building type as an indoor water park resort, nor is it part of a mixed use development, it does feature some of the same experiential elements that can be found in many shopertainment venues and destination developments. Moreover, its great popularity comes from its mix of quirkiness, functionality, diversity, and whimsicality. It also features a distinctive local connection to the Cincinnati area with all the artifacts arrayed throughout the store.

**Theming Imagery Precedents**

The Water Cube in Beijing China was built for the 2008 Summer Olympics and houses the swimming competition facilities. While the building has a very simple rectangular massing, it contains irregular crystalline
geometries on its facades. The facades are made out of the same texlon material that is used on the Kalahari resort in Sandusky. When this fabric is back lit at night, it produces a visually stunning display that can be adapted to an entertainment destination and an indoor water park building which has large expanses of straight or gently curving facades. The lighted display provides a unique light feature as both towers in the indoor water park produce similar effects. Additionally, the façade of the movie theater building may also incorporate the same motif.

The exit area for the Test Track ride at EPCOT at Disney World features an industrial theme through the use of painted exposed steel, colored lights, metal grating and a moving “assembly line.” The area is intended to resemble a GM manufacturing plant, as GM is the primary sponsor of the attraction. The industrial theme and imagery could be reproduced and emulated in various elements of the Norwood site, given Norwood’s past as home to a GM assembly plant that produced cars just a few blocks to the west of the site and Cincinnati’s rich manufacturing heritage. This industrial motif provides a stunning backdrop in the hotel lobby bar and also for elements inside the indoor water park such as in food stands and other more human scale buildings within the massive enclosed volume.

The Delta Queen was built in 1926 and is now a designated national historic landmark. The boat is essentially a floating hotel, complete with 88 state rooms, and portrays the history and visual significance of steamboat travel that was prevalent in the Cincinnati area at the turn of the 20th century, along with the related steamboat building yards in the East End neighborhood of Cincinnati.
Cincinnati. The riverboat theme has even been carried over to the smokestacks at Great American Ball Park. This imagery of steamboats and river travel is an important aesthetic that is used as one of the themes along the river walk. The riverboats feature elements of authentic riverboats, and some of the architectural elements of the buildings that surround the river walk contain detailing similar to riverboat architecture.2

The Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada features a large lagoon which is home to a synchronized fountain show that is combined with music and lights, that all visitors walking down the strip may stop and enjoy. The show is viewable from public places and free for the general public. The fountains were designed and manufactured by WET Design. The nightly closing show at Disney’s Hollywood Studios features a similar show that contains fountains choreographed to music and lights and also features projectors that display videos onto a screen of water. A dramatic finale includes fire burning on top of the water. Elements from both of these water and light shows is utilized as part of the nightly water show that attracts visitors and members of the community alike to the public square at the designated show times. Since the shows can be choreographed to different music, the shows can continuously be changed and updated to keep the local community and tourists coming back to experience new shows and insuring that the experience is always fresh.

---

**Design Method**

Due to the large size of the 21 acre site and the size and number amount of different programmatic functions of the development, I have developed only a schematic design for the overall mixed use development, delineating the layout of the various programmatic functions in relation to each other. I have focused in more detail on a select portion of the development: the hotel and associated indoor water park resort, and the outdoor water park that connects them. I am developing that portion of the site including the thematic elements and the design of the finer—grained details of those buildings.

*Figure 5.11*
An aerial view of the 21 acre development.
Chapter 6: Hotel and Conference Center

The main focus of the design project is an indoor water park resort with an attached hotel and conference center. The hotel, “House of Cards Hotel and Conference Center,” utilizes the only building on the site that is preserved from the U.S. Playing Card factory. The guest rooms radiate out from the old building in four wings. The hotel is directly connected to the adjacent indoor water park so that guests do not have to go outside in the winter months to gain access to it. The hotel also features a conference center, located to the north and immediately adjacent to the reused building, that contains more than 15,000 square feet of space. Additionally, the conference center has an additional 11,000 square feet with an attached banquet room with a commercial kitchen and several meeting rooms for breakout meetings. The conference center has its own entrance, separate from the main hotel lobby entrance, and features its own vehicular drop off circle.

There is an above-grade parking garage to the north of the hotel that is connected to the hotel through a bridge so that guests do not have to be exposed to the elements, and there are also connections to the underground parking garage in the four wings. The façade of the parking garage that faces the guest rooms is designed in a similar manner to the old U.S. Playing Card buildings so as not to appear as a typical concrete parking garage. The primary vehicular entrance and exit from the underground parking garage is located off of Park Avenue, where the main entrance to the development is located. The two-level
underground parking garage is located under a majority of the development and contains 1,700 parking spaces. Vertical circulation is achieved at various points throughout the development. Typically, these are denoted with large light wells that allow light down into the lower levels of the parking garage. At grade, these vertical circulation areas are denoted with signage and graphics in keeping with the theme of the overall development.

**U.S. Playing Card Building**

The entrance to the hotel is located along Park Avenue and utilizes the renovated U.S. Playing Card building to house all the service functions of the hotel lobby—the check in desk, restaurants, gift shops, etc. This building will be completely renovated, and the existing bell tower is to remain intact with the inner courtyard being enclosed to become an atrium for the hotel. This atrium and lobby serves as the main vertical circulation space for the hotel, featuring a grand staircase and areas for the guests to look into the atrium and see various thematic elements. In addition to the hotel offices, the renovated atrium will be home to a playing card museum, paying homage to the U.S. Playing Card. Co., and a video arcade.

**Figure 6.2**
The hotel atrium is housed in the renovated U.S. Playing Card building.

**Figure 6.3**
The House of Cards lobby contains the main vertical circulation for the hotel.
Banners are hung in the atrium depicting the suits of cards, a water feature in the atrium is in the shape of a spade and there is an animatronic show that is performed every hour. The show contains playing card characters and some of the royalty found on the playing cards. The animatronic show includes the hotel mascot, David (King of Spades). Additionally, costumed characters will include Rachel (the Queen of Diamonds), Ace of Spades, Hector (Jack of Diamonds) and Judith (Queen of Hearts). All of these names originate from the symbolism associated with these specific cards. There is also a restaurant and bar named the “Jack of Diamonds Bar” in the atrium lobby with a tall sculpture that fills some of the atrium volume in shapes reminiscent of diamonds. Another themed restaurant, the “Royal Garden Restaurant,” is also located off of the lobby and is accessible directly from the pedestrian street that faces the outdoor water park. The upper levels of the renovated building also contain guest rooms.

Because I intend to reuse the main U.S. Playing Card building, I have utilized several other adaptive reuse projects for precedents in the design of the main hotel atrium. These precedents include the McCormick Building in Dayton, OH, originally built in 1913 as a plumbing supply house. In 2004, it was renovated and became the new offices of the architectural firm Lorenz and Williams. This four story, brick façade building is similar in scale to the current buildings on the U.S. Playing Card site, and the interior of the building was designed complete with a grand stair made of painted steel that echoes the industrial feel of the building. A similar motif is utilized in the hotel atrium.
to provide for a lobby which is stunning and welcoming, yet also hints at the site’s industrial heritage.¹

**Guest Room Wings and Hotel Design**

Most hotel guest rooms are located in new structures surrounding the main building. These wings are three and four stories tall and feature 456 standard guest rooms. There are also be some condominium units to the south of the indoor water park that can be used as additional guest rooms during peak demand times. Each of the four hotel guest room wings is themed to one of the four suits of cards: hearts, diamonds, clubs and spades.

The route that guests take from the lobby through the interior spaces of the hotel to get to the indoor water park is designed to provide a stimulating journey. During the warmer months, guests will be able to walk along the main axis beside the outdoor “King of Hearts Water Park.” During the colder months, access to the second floor of the hotel via the lobby’s grand stair will lead to a second floor route from which guests will be able to view the outdoor water park, and the façade of the indoor water park. The second floor of this wing contains retail stores, a restaurant, and a coffee shop for hotel guests. The first floor of this building features street retail and cafes which are adjacent to the main outdoor pedestrian path from the hotel to the indoor water park. At the eastern end of this wing, guests will proceed down another set of stairs or down an elevator and enter the indoor water park via a private entrance for

---
hotel guests only. There is also an overlook area to see into the indoor water park. This hotel wing also has a northern extension containing a double loaded corridor of guest rooms, and forming a porte-cochere drop off point for water park guests. A covered walkway links this drop off area to the pedestrian street to the north of the outdoor water park.

**Hotel Precedents**

The Opryland Hotel and Convention Center in Nashville, Tennessee, located next to the defunct Opryland USA theme park that operated from 1972 through 1997 and owned by Gaylord Entertainment, features 2,771 guest rooms. The resort contains a 4.2 acre skylit greenhouse that has a river complete with boats that ferry people through the vegetation, restaurants, retail shops and pedestrian walkways. The addition that added the skylight to the

---

**Figure 6.9**
A plan showing the “House of Cards Hotel and Conference Center,” “King of Hearts Water Park,” and “Wild Aces! Indoor Water Park.”

---

**Figure 6.10**
The Opryland Hotel features an indoor riverboat ride, through a large enclosed greenhouse atrium.
complex is known as the Delta and was designed by Earl Swensson Associates.²

The All Star Sports, All Star Music and All Star Movies at Walt Disney World in Orlando are situated on a large amount of land and feature several independent buildings, linked by pedestrian paths, a site strategy that is to be utilized on my site. All resort guests must walk from their particular building to the pools or to the main service building which houses the check-in desk, the cafeteria, arcade, and gift shop. In addition to being pedestrian oriented, these resorts also contain several bus stops for Disney transportation to all of the parks. These resorts were designed by HKS, Inc., and each pair of buildings features a different theme, from surfing to football, to baseball to tennis. The theme of the building is carried through into the guest rooms with the selection of the wall coverings, carpets, pictures, and other amenities.³

The Dolphin and Swan Hotels designed by Michael Graves at Walt Disney World are two examples of entertainment architecture applied to luxury resorts. The resorts, opened in 1989 and 1990 feature dolphin and swan motifs throughout the complexes. They are separated from each other by a large lagoon with a pedestrian pathway connecting them. Some of the interiors of the Dolphin Hotel feature spaces that resemble canvas tents, and elements of swans, dolphins and tropical themes can be found throughout. Both hotels feature double loaded corridors of guest rooms that flank either side of the main

---
lobby. Each contains convention space that is attached to the hotel and located within close proximity of the main lobby.

The Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas is a themed hotel resort, conference center and entertainment center built in the late 1990s at a cost of more than $2 billion. Like most of the other major hotels on the strip, the Venetian relies on entertainment architecture and theming to transport visitors stepping on its property to Venice, Italy, and out of the Nevada dessert. Inside, there are two and three story building facades that line a Grand Canal waterway which stretches more than 1,200 feet. The Grand Canal features gondolas that resort guests can ride in the canal system both inside and outside the resort. The ceiling in this area is 70 feet high and painted to look like the sky. This area features more than 150 shops and retail establishments. A similar motif of shops will be located along the river walk in “Queen City Commons.”

Another hotel precedent is the French Lick Hotel and Casino. French Lick is a historical hotel that was built in this rural resort village in southern Indiana at the turn of the twentieth century. The hotel features an indoor circulation path from the main hotel lobby to the recently added casino. The circulation path features shops, seating areas, and two bridges that go over a road which connects to the parking garage and casino. The path terminates with escalators that can take guests down to ground level at the entrance to the casino.

---

In summary, a 456 room themed hotel will occupy the northern portion of the site, with its main lobby housed in the renovated U.S. Playing Card building and four new guest room wings flanking this building. Theming elements from playing cards are utilized in the hotel lobby, and each of the four guest room wings will be themed to one of the four suits. The hotel will contain a 15,000 square foot conference center with banquet facilities and themed restaurants, and will connect directly to both the indoor and outdoor water parks.
Chapter 7: Indoor Water Park

The design of the indoor water park, “Joker’s Wild! Indoor Water Park,” responds to many unique operational and design issues. The structure that houses the indoor water park needs to be tall, up to 90 feet, to accommodate the water slides, and it needs to have large unobstructed interior clear spans to provide space for all the pools and activities. Admission to the indoor water park is included for guests staying at the hotel, but secure access must be designed for members of the general public who will be able to purchase day passes to enjoy the amenities (particularly during non-peak times like weekdays and weekends in September through mid-November and from January through March). The overall indoor water park covers 118,000 square feet of space and be located in the extreme north east corner of the site allowing the huge scale of the building to be isolated from the surrounding residential-scaled context, and yet visible to the Interstate highway.

Due to all the water slides, the mechanical room needs to have a significant amount of floor area, in order to house all the systems to treat and pump the water for the attractions, and the large mechanical units needed to maintain the tropical climate and the necessary ventilation in the interior of the building. at 84 degrees year round and provide for

Several water slides exit the building on the eastern façade, becoming visible from the highway and acting as a form of advertising for the water park and the development. The indoor water park features family raft rides with four
person rafts, body slides where riders ride down on mats, individual tube slides, a lazy river, a surfing simulator attraction, a children’s splash and play structure, a wave pool, a movie pool, hot tubs, a swim up bar, and an activity pool. The central island of the lazy river is elevated four feet above the rest of the water park in order to allow guests to look out over the various other attractions and to serve as a wayfinding device and main road through the space. The main counter service food stand in the water park and the activity pool will be located on this island.

The two main attractions are a water coaster which features magnets to propel three-person tubes up hill. This slide will separate and define the indoor water park space into two halves, since most of this slide is located in the middle of the large interior volume. Finally, there is a four lane racing slide located completely within the interior of the building, located above one end of the raised island and

**Figure 7.2**
Inside the entrance of the Wild Aces! Indoor Water Park.

The four lane “Racing Aces” water slide is one of the main focal points in the interior volume.
surrounded by the lazy river; it serves as the terminus for the Park Avenue axis that runs throughout the site.

Between the “House of Cards Hotel and Conference Center” and “Joker’s Wild! Indoor Water Park,” is the outdoor “King of Hearts Water Park,” so named because the hearts suit represents summer. This outdoor water park is open from Memorial Day through Labor Day and is free for the general public to use. Changing facilities and locker rooms are located in the U.S. Playing Card building. The outdoor water park features four water slides, a wave pool, a lazy river and a zero depth “splashground” for children. The highlight attraction is the speed slide that originates from within the structure of the original U.S. Playing Card water tower. The park is surrounded on all four sides by buildings and bounded by pedestrian streets with active retail outlets and street cafes.
**Precedents**

The Great Wolf Lodge in Mason, Ohio, opened in late 2006 on thirty nine acres and was designed by Architectural Design Consultants, Inc. (ADCI) of Wisconsin. The $100 million resort features 401 hotel rooms, a 79,000 square foot indoor water park complete with 11 water slides, six pools and an indoor ceiling height of 90 feet in the water park area, called Bear Track Landing.¹ This resort was the first indoor water park resort to open in the Cincinnati area, and is a good example of a water park resort that uses themed entertainment architecture. The wilderness theme, right down to the name of the water park, and the faux log cabin façade, enables the resort to offer a differentiated product and therefore charge a premium price for their guest rooms compared to the dozens of other hotels in the immediate area. They are even able to attract guests away from Kings Island’s water park located right next door.

The Great Wolf Lodge is a successful example of entertainment architecture and is a prime example of the attention to detail that is necessary in order to lure tourist dollars to an indoor water park. There are several things, however, that the Great Wolf Lodge does not execute well. The building is not tied in any way to its surrounding community and is an inward looking building focused solely on creating a fantasy environment for its visitors. In fact, the building is surrounded on three sides by an

expansive parking lot catering to all of the tourists that use the facility while isolating it even more from the local community. The side that is not surrounded by a parking lot is open to face some of Kings Island’s back of house buildings, less than an ideal view for people wishing to relax on their mini-vacation.

While there was significant emphasis placed on the details and architecture of the guest rooms, equal attention was not paid to the enclosure for the water park. The reason for the plain, big-box approach to the water park building is that the developers and owners typically want to put their money into the things that the guests will directly notice and pay to experience, not some background element. They put a lot of details into the more intimate spaces of the Lodge such as the guest rooms because guests will spend significant time in their rooms and will be more likely to notice these elements. Such attention to detail on the building envelope is not needed in the larger indoor water park space, where the guests’ attention will be directed to all the water activities. Randy Smith, of Jack Rouse Associates, a Cincinnati based firm that designs the experiences and thematic elements for museums and theme parks across the world, stated in a lecture that the cost of the building should not exceed the cost of the ride hardware and the thematic and experiential elements of the attraction. The same holds true for indoor water park resorts.²

The Coco Key Water Resort opened in November of 2007, in Sharonville, and is the newest water park resort facility in the Cincinnati area. This facility is attached to

the Cincinnati Sheraton North and features a 50,000 square foot water park themed to the Florida Keys.\textsuperscript{3} One difference between this resort and the Great Wolf is that the water park was an addition to an existing hotel facility. Unlike the Great Wolf Lodge, where the entire hotel stay is a themed experience, Coco Key’s thematic elements are weaker and limited only to the water park area of the complex; it does not offer a totally immersive environment that tells a story. It is no more successful than Great Wolf Lodge at integrating itself into the adjacent context or community, despite being surrounded by other hotels, the Sharonville Convention Center, and other commercial properties.

Coco Key’s tourist draw is more local and not as far reaching as the more expensive Great Wolf Lodge. At Coco Key, the general public can purchase day passes to experience the water park while at the Great Wolf Lodge guests must have a guest room in order to visit the water park, called, “Bear Track Landing.” This translates into guests staying longer and hopefully spending more money on food and merchandise at the Great Wolf Lodge.

The Kalahari Resort in Sandusky, Ohio, home to the famous Cedar Point Amusement Park, currently features the largest indoor water park in the United States, with 173,000 square feet of water activities under its roof. A unique feature is the texlon roof over the wave pool: its tetrafluoroethylene allows light and UV rays to pass into

the building while keeping the temperature and moisture out. As a result, the resort can grow vegetation in the water park area, and guests can even receive a natural tan in the middle of January. Because of Sandusky’s smaller population, this resort is relying on the increasing popularity of families taking mini-vacations, or short trips, such as a long weekend in order to escape from the larger surrounding cities of Toledo and Cleveland. These resorts are usually within a day’s drive from large population centers and can be enjoyed year round, unlike typical water and amusement parks in most areas of the country which have a very limited operating season of only a few months every year.

There are several other indoor water park resorts that feature unique architectural features and strategies. The Holiday Inn and Splash Bay Waterpark in Maumee, Ohio, features a concrete dome structure where all the water slide supports are suspended from the ceiling of the dome. This allows for more open floor space which can allow for more and larger pools. In Pigeon Forge, Tennessee there is a proposed project called “The Water Resort” which features a 43,000 square foot glass pyramid that will house an indoor water park surrounded by luxury condominiums. These complexes offer innovative features and design elements that could be incorporated into an indoor water park that is part of a mixed use

---

destination development. Indoor water park resorts can provide part of the entertainment draw of a destination development while also producing a draw for local residents.
Chapter 8: Hotel and Indoor Water Park Themes and Design Strategies

The current trend in entertainment based architecture “challenges orthodoxies held dear by architects” which include the role of the architect in the design process.¹ The architect on a large entertainment project is part of a larger team than in the past; often there are “theatrical lighting designers, real estate consultants, audio/visual technologists, food service concessionaires, fantasy character gurus and amusement ride engineers.”² The architects who can successfully adapt to this co-operative design process with the many disciplines involved will be able to create the rich entertainment complexes that distinguish one themed project from another. While I have not been working with such consultants on this specific project, I have nevertheless considered their roles and knowledge in the design process and how they would impact potential design decisions.

The architecture of both the hotel and the indoor water park buildings incorporate elements from the regional architecture in the Cincinnati area, particularly those evoking its industrial heritage such as the Baldwin Building, the P&G factory in St. Bernard, and the Old Ford factory off of I-71. The indoor water park also incorporates edgier treatments on industrial themes inspired by such designers as Eric Own Moss, and Lab Architects. Together with the playing card theme, this development is connected

---

² Ibid, 92.
to the context, geography, economy, and history of the area in ways that most indoor water parks and entertainment architecture projects ignore.

The playing card theme is utilized in the architectonic elements of the hotel guest room wings. These elements, such as the balcony detailing, are visible to pedestrians inside the lobby and also visible on the exterior facades of the building. The playing card theme is carried over into the guest rooms where the wallpapering, carpeting, and even the tiling pay homage to cards and their history. The lighting fixtures in the corridors will have elements of the playing cards as well. Some of these elements will be subtle nods to the theme, but overall the “story” will coalesce and enhance the memorable experience of the guests and their sense of place.

The counter food service stand in the indoor water park is called “Acorn Bar and Grill” since one of the German playing card suits is acorns and features green colors to represent the green spades found in German cards. This connects with Cincinnati’s rich German heritage. The food stand and the sit down restaurant, “Riverside Café,”
feature exposed steel and structural elements in the interior water park volume to bring in the industrial motif from buildings like the P&G factory in St. Bernard, and the Old Ford factory off of I-71, though in residual fragments.

On the eastern side of the water park between the exterior water slide elements and Interstate 71 is a large assembled “house of cards” that creates a transparent façade to help unify the fluid forms of the exterior water slides while still allowing them to be visible. These cards also support signage for the hotel and water park, dramatically advertising the resort to passing interstate traffic.

**Design Elements**

The main Park Avenue axis, the most distinguishing feature of the immediate urban environment, extends through the hotel lobby and outdoor water park, terminating with a racing slide, “Racing Aces,” inside the indoor water park. A series of four thresholds anchor this axis: the original bell tower entrance to the hotel atrium, the exit from the hotel atrium, the main entrance to the indoor water park, and the racing slide beneath its light tower visible from the interstate. Curved and fluid forms move playfully around this axis, beginning at the hotel atrium reception, and continuing among the bar, staircase, and other features in the hotel atrium. In the outdoor water park space, this fluid form is demarcated with a specific red color of concrete paver and becomes the pedestrian street that connects the hotel lobby with the indoor water park between the water park and retail shops. This colored wave continues into the indoor water park where it becomes the activity pool and lazy river, and then ends in the racing

---

**Figure 8.6**
Large playing cards form a screen to the water slides from I-71 and also support the sign advertising the development.

**Figure 8.7**
The Park Avenue axis continues through the site, with four tower elements located along this axis.

**Figure 8.8**
One of the “tower” elements at the exit to the hotel atrium approaching the outdoor water park.
slide. This wave helps to serve as a wayfinding device and create a focal point in the indoor water park. Based on waves of water, of course, this fluid motif is further marked by a thin strip of blue tinted pavers accentuate its unifying progress through the site.

At the end of the axis, the raised slide towers are enclosed in a large glass tower that rises above the roof of the rest of the water park building, and echoes the bell tower on the original hotel building, and acts as a lantern along I-71.

The more fluid forms in the architectural treatment of the plans and façades of the indoor water park contrast with the more contextually integrated elements of the rest of the development. Inspiration for these fluid forms came from several sources including some of Eric Owen Moss’s work which contains lots of fluid and dynamic forms, often with an industrial aesthetic comprised of exposed, fragmentary steel and structural systems. Another source was Federation Square, a series of cultural and commercial buildings, in Melbourne, Australia designed by Lab Architects. A series of fractal geometries create an undulating and dynamic aesthetic for the facades of the building with simple triangular geometric shapes. The façade utilizes sandstone, glazing and zinc in both solid and perforated panels.3

The plan of the “Joker’s Wild! Indoor Water Park” features organic and fluid forms reminiscent of the fluid forms of water. The elevations of the water park enclosure that faces the outdoor water park, the river walk, and the

---

The southern portion of the Interstate 71 façade features a dynamic and fluid façade that is wavelike in nature, picking up the water theme and curved elements from the plan. The façade is made up of an approximately five-foot grid of round metal tubes in a fluid form infilled with patterns that admit natural light while also providing views into and out of the water park. Texlon is used on portions of the roof to allow natural light to permeate the water park to provide a more pleasing environment for guests, and enable plants to grow.

The architectural elements used in the “House of Cards Hotel and Conference Center” and “Joker’s Wild! Indoor Water Park” present a dialogue, or a spectrum of treatments between a contextually integrated response to the specific site and existing building, and more innovative, adventurous architectural elements. The Park Avenue axis organizes this transformation, and ties these buildings to the site and the surrounding community. Industrial themes are brought into the interior space of the water park, tying to the industrial heritage of Cincinnati. Finally, the fluid forms of the plan and elevations of the water park façade provide an architectural enclosure that is more dynamic and engaging than the simple big boxes that are typically found with most indoor water parks.

Figure 8.12
Water and waves inspired the fluid façade for the indoor water park.
**Conclusion**

This entertainment architecture complex is designed to be site specific and integrated into the regional context. As a result of the contextually integrated design, the project can become a more vital part of the community and a place for residents to meet, shop, eat, drink, and have social gatherings. Unlike suburban water park resorts that are often surrounded by seas of parking, this water park resort is in a more densely built, mixed-use, urban environment, providing the region with a new and desirable urban experience. Because of the high-density, mixed-use approach, people will be able to live, work and play within the development, and because the themes are locally based, there is no loss of character for the city of Norwood or Cincinnati, and no time-space disconnect with the context. The development can become a point of civic pride as it celebrates some of the heritage of the area and offers a unique experience that can draw tourists and locals alike to its unique amenities.

This facility will attract families and tourists as well as local residents for the experiential elements of the themed environments, the indoor water park resort, and the adjacent retail, dining and public spaces that are associated with it. It is crucial that the hotel and indoor water park be directly connected to the surrounding retail, residences and public places so that “the park and the people in it are sources of entertainment” for the pedestrians and motorists of the complex.¹ People are looking for “the chance to be

---

¹ Gottdiener, 124.
part of the crowd, sample the banter (and contribute to it),
shiver and shake with the best of them.”

This research and design work provides a process
that critiques the usual approaches to entertainment projects
because it takes cues from the local context. While some
destination developments are beginning to turn to the local
history and context of the area for design strategies, this is
often not the case for entertainment architecture. Such
community relevance is virtually non-existent with indoor
water parks, where the themes are typically wilderness
related, or highlight warm weather locations such as Africa
or the Florida Keys. By being a contextually integrated
development, the project can offer a better sense of place
for the community, can enhance the overall identity of the
community as well as its economic vitality, and can offer
valuable new insights to the popular concept of
entertainment architecture.

---

2 Gensler Entertainment, 29.
Bibliography


Foucault, Michel. "Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces (1967)." *Foucault Info.*


"History- West Edmonton Mall." *West Edmonton Mall.* 2008.


## Appendix: Queen City Commons Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building:</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Total Size: (S.F.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>House of Cards Hotel &amp; Conference Center</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Conference Center</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small conference rooms (in U.S. Playing Card and Diamonds wing)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Conference Center:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>27,138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Playing Card Building</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>239,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Rooms:</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Spades Wing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>54,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Rooms:</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clubs Wing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Rooms:</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Diamonds Wing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Rooms:</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hearts Wing</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Rooms:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>90,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Area:</td>
<td>24,680</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Guest Rooms:</strong></td>
<td>456</td>
<td>488,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Hotel Area:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Aces! Indoor Water Park</td>
<td></td>
<td>118,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of Hearts Water Park</td>
<td></td>
<td>32,380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covington Building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>54,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Building:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>45,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport Building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie Theater:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>43,393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devou Park:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensgate:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail:</td>
<td>8,650</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>17,300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brewery District:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail:</td>
<td>6,300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>12,600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Auburn:</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>18,930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Adams:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail:</td>
<td>8,440</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail:</td>
<td>9,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>8,440</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential:</td>
<td>21,520</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Retail Area:     | 88,561 |
| Total Residential Area:| 223,512|
| Total Building Area:   | 895,313|

**Required Parking Spaces per code:**

- Movie Theater (10 spaces per 1,000S.F.): 238
- Retail (4 spaces per 1,000S.F.): 354
- Residential (1.5 spaces per 1,000 S.F.) 335
- Hotel: (1 space per unit) 456
- Water park: (3 spaces per 1,000 S.F.) 454

**Total Required:** 1,838

- Above Grade Parking Garage: 150
- Below Grade Parking Garage 1,700

**Total Parking Spaces:** 1,850