

Presence of absence in John Pawson works

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ABSTRACT: John Pawson is an architect, designer and photographer. His architectural work has extreme clarity and simplicity. His basic three fundamentals of designing are – light, materials and spaces¹. He worked on many projects include office, public, residential and religious buildings. He is known as minimalist architect. Objective of the paper is to study the various spaces, design methodology, use of light, materials, interiors and exteriors designed by him. To study the buildings designed by him, architectural spaces created by him, interiors and furniture designs, use of materials and utilization of light. This paper will focus on his works, comparative analysis of the interiors and exterior of buildings designed by him and will try to find out the gaps in his buildings.

INTRODUCTION: John Pawson (born in 1949 in Halifax, Yorkshire) is an architect, photographer and writer. He spent most of the time in Halifax and here was the start of his architectural career. He started noticing the architecture from here only. Firstly he wanted to find out the purpose of his life that for what he was passionate for that he found a solution he started travelling and observing people. Through his travelling and with his keen observation he actually finds himself, “ what he is interested in”? The architecture of Halifax changed his perception. He is passionate about photography. He always tries to capture different situations, changes that occur due to climate on atmosphere with his photographic skills. Most of the time he seems to capture things with his camera.

Inspiration :After leaving Yorkshire, he went to Japan and met Japanese architect Shiro Khuramata who works for interiors and furniture design. Influenced by Shiro Khuramata he started taking interest in interior designs. After that he was very much influenced by the theory of Mies Vander Rohe “Less is More”². Simplicity in Mies work lit John Pawson interest towards clean facades and simple designs with new construction techniques and implementation of glass facades for proper visualization.

THREE FUNDAMENTALS OF DESIGN: LIGHT, MATERIALS & SPACES.

Light:

For all projects he is concerned about light. He put punctures on the walls and uses glass as the main material. Use of large size windows as a main element eliminated the separation between the indoor and outdoor through which he tries to reflect natural light to spread on the overall space in the interiors.

¹ <http://www.elcroquis.es/Shop/Issue/Details/66?ptID=2&shPg=4>

² The notion that simplicity and clarity lead to good design. and a proponent of simplicity of style.

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/226400.html>

Materials:

He is not using a lot of materials on exterior facades and internal walls, only provide those things which are sufficient to show the idea of the project. It is challenging to put material just to some limit which are sufficient to show the desired effect. By using steel, glass, concrete materials he proves that only these three materials are capable of creating a great architecture instead of doing creativity with lots of materials. He used materials according to its impact on the overall atmosphere of the buildings and its surroundings.

He is very specific with the use of glass. He uses a glass on the facades so that people should look through the windows to see the interiors and imagine what they do or feel if they are inside. He tries to make people excited to live in those spaces and to give a more clear image of interiors somewhere he also provides a large glass and put punctures on walls which defines a simple linear space.

Spaces:

He has provided more and more open spaces so that people can attach to it and feel their relation with it and the motive of Pawson's idea behind providing those spaces. He believes that even a single piece of artwork has a great impact on the overall space. For us they are just loose objects but he thought that even a single object can change the meaning of a space, so he always decides the position of each object either it can be a lamp or a switchboard.

He believes that at the time of design architect should concentrate deeply on the needs of the project and due to that reason he tries to avoid doing big projects because in small projects he concentrate more on the project and its needs and it also takes less time as compared to big projects.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE:

After looking at his working style people started calling him a minimalist architect. He does only that what is required which is called a minimalism.

- Minimalism in his work
- Relation with nature

Minimalism in his work:

**minimalism is basically being or provided a bare minimum of what is necessary*.*³ His projects depict simplicity and the use of only required amount of materials. Instead of it his projects are free from clutter and atmosphere are quite beautiful and simple so that people can feel the silence of space.

Relation with nature:

He designed accordingly which should have some relation to an environment. He designs depict that building should be a part of nature and its surroundings so that people should be connected to an outdoor. He placed buildings according to its surroundings which shows that he know how to use nature to give the beautiful view of outside from inside the building. Most of his designed buildings are merging with natural

³<file:///E:/homeworks/7th%20sem/dessertation/reading%20work/How%20to%20Declutter%20to%20Have%20a%20Minimalist%20Bedroom%20%20%20eHow.com.htm>

surroundings which allow people to live with nature. By seeing his project like Casa Delle Bottere we can easily understand that how he relates his projects with nature.

He also designs involve the client wishes and basic geometry for proper functions. He worked on many projects which includes commercial, public, residential and religious buildings, which have offices, houses, bridges, museums, hotel, ship interiors etc. firstly he works for interiors and then he started working on the renovation and remodelling of old buildings. One of the best examples of the building renovated by him is the Monastery of Novy Dvur through this project he got a new direction in his architectural career from interiors to renovation of buildings.

ANALYSIS OF HIS REMARKABLE WORKS:

Projects which show his style of work:

Casa Delle Bottere depicts how his project implementing with nature. The De Camaret house is an example of showing his minimalist work and instead of these two styles he also started taking interest in sustainability through this also he is again concerned with the protection of the environment. A house of stone is an example of this.

DE CAMARET HOUSE:

He does it in a neo-classical style but remove all decorative elements of it and reduce it to bare minimum according to the need of the project so that it can be implemented with the design of this house. For example he is providing a pediment at the top of the elevation and removing its decorative features and other elements to make it simple as elevation of the house.

In interior he has not been provided any unnecessary furniture or other items and create a more spacious room with clean, simple walls painted in white color. Interior lighting is provided in a very good way he is making the walls of clutter free and providing just a simple lighting where he provides a concealed lighting fixture. He also hangs a few framed pictures with a simple frame and try to avoid bright colors and patterns on walls and maintained an organized look. He provides simplicity in furniture style also. Organized look of the room provides a pleasing appearance as shown in figure 1.



FIGURE 1. Interior of De Camaret house

(<http://pinterest.com/yutosan/fireplace/>)

Materials used for the construction are steel, concrete and glass. There is no bright colours are used so that the overall appearance should look elegant, simple and peaceful. He concealed even wires and plug fittings also, hardly one painting or framed photographs hanged on the walls. Windows are unobstructed and clear. It has all light filled spaces. Natural light enters in rooms through glass windows to enhance simple and spacious atmosphere. Simple lighting fixtures are used and try to avoid number of lamps in rooms. Each element of the rooms has been placed in a proper order to create the best effect. Mass and voids are created in the roof to get the light and in staircase also vertical voids are created. Each thing has clarity as it looks like the walls are just put in its place which shows very clean edges. All walls are plain or free from any kind of a decorative feature and aesthetics.

CASA DELLE BOTTERE:

The building merges with its natural surroundings. It shows an inherent relationship of people living there with its site, because exterior has an intimate relation with the nature that surrounds it which allow people to live with nature. Its elevation seems to be naturally emerging from the ground because of the courtyard at the basement which sunkened on ground which is provided to allow light enters in the basement as shown in fig 2.

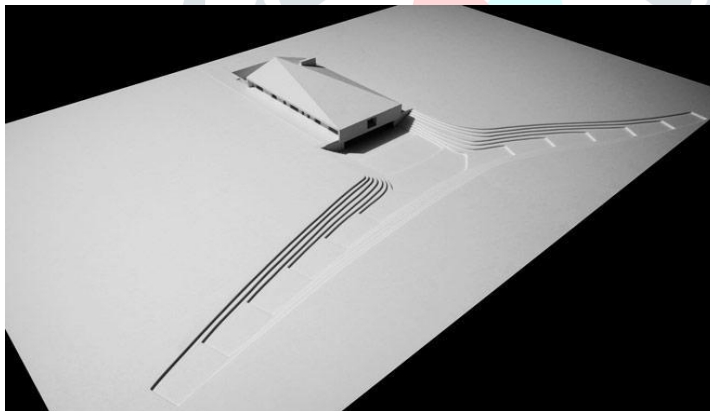


FIGURE 2.

(<http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/casa-delle-bottere>)

The building is an integral part of the landscape it is covered with greenery of trees and grass from all sides. His concept behind choosing the site is to unite nature with the built up it makes people to see and feel the spaces it clearly defines the relation between structure and nature that how a building can be an integral part of site either its base is on the ground or below the ground. He has also taken into consideration of some architectural related problems like he has been providing a solution to fight against problems related to climate. For that portico is provided at the entrance which protect it from overheating and heavy rainfall which is its attractive feature and look different when we see the building from the front, it enhances the entrance of the structure. And it shows a solid and void impression in the interior because of the use of large massive walls which he only used in this project.

HOUSE OF STONE:

Stone house responds both to the location in the double-arcaded Cortile Settecento⁴ as well as it speaks about the recycled stone material. His main purpose of design is to show the simplicity and stability with the use of stone. The site was selected on the basis to add on spirituality and calmness with the sense of light use. Initially the site was selected for the exhibition purpose but John Pawson altered it by the implementation of simple stone structure. It reflects an image of island of stone and a narrow path leading to it. John Pawson's idea is to create a spiritual atmosphere with the tiny stone hut, through which people feel comfortable and attend God in silence. This simply shaped stone house speaks thousand words with the sensible play with the light inside. Although it appears tiny in visualization but the light use in it gives a feeling of vast space within as shown in fig 3.



FIGURE 3.

(<http://www.dezeen.com/2010/05/06/house-of-stone-by-john-pawson/>)

It is enclosed but open to the sky and the choice of material gives an impression of a unique pattern on the wall. It has no visible light fixture inside, all lighting is concealed LED⁵ in a linear manner which emphasis on the vertical and the horizontal panel of the structure and consumes less energy. It acts as a meditation space for its silence and spirituality. The framework is done in steel and a simple line cut out is provided for the inlet of light. Waste material like scrap stone used in a very exquisite manner and the impression of the stone respond architecturally beautiful. It is placed in the center of the courtyard and the cut in its black body gives a visualization of light blades inside.

Analysis of different typologies of his works:

LOS ANGELES HOUSE:

Los Angeles house is one of the great examples of majestic minimalism. The house is located in the hills and in the beautiful surrounding. The house symbolizes a tree and greenery as its roots. The house is designed for a purpose for peace and nature lovers. The greenery adds on a peaceful environment that the person can

⁴ Cortile settecento – surrounding building of house of stone

⁵ LED – its an energy efficient lighting fixtures.

achieve with the surroundings. The house has a multi-functional activities like tennis court, pool house etc. The house gives a royal look with a relaxed environment and the perfect example of proportions; proper utilization of space, materials and to catch the light. The windows give an impression of photo frame to the surrounding view. The elevation is having two boxes one above the other as the lower one is recessed and it is partly hidden below ground. The upper box slides over the lower as if it floats.

The overhang box shades the walls underneath. The lower floor is clad with limestone and the upper volume is clad with the vertical panels of red cedar. Each wall is designed in a manner to keep the sense of linearity. His building reflects a strong relationship with the nature and use of light in a sensible manner.

SACKLER CROSSINGS:

Sackler crossing is located in Kew royal botanic gardens in London in the curve of the river Thames. The design reflects the visible components of a structure due to repeating horizontal and vertical members. Elements are properly detailed out having intricate details of form, colour and textures and materials are chosen for the construction by keeping in mind the durability and tactile⁶ property of a material such as bronze vertical battens on the bridge are made of bronze. The sense of using lighting fixtures between the battens gives a pleasant reflection in the water and the pattern of light and shadow in the water at night. Bridge surface is set at a minimum distance from the surface of water so that people can feel that they are walking on water by seeing their own reflection in the water and they enjoying the glimpsed view of water beneath their feet as shown in fig 4.



FIGURE 4.

(<http://blog.adrianshort.co.uk/category/architecture/>)

MONASTERY OF NOVY DVUR:

It is a chapel⁷ renovated by John Pawson its not only having a prayer hall also includes a guest house, lay chapel and workshops. The exterior walls replicate the finish of the traditional stone base courses. An interior space has an elegance of modernism with hidden sources of light which are able to evoke a feeling of

⁶ Tactile property means materials which are feel by touch, feel of texture and fabric.

⁷ Chapel is a religious place where prayer and worship associated with Christian.

believing and makes a person to pray and meditate in these kind of spaces. The main prayer hall is very simple and without any furniture in interior. Many openings are provided to experience the natural lighting effects in the interior. The design aims to reflect the incredible energy. Through this building he emphasizes the links between minimalism, spirituality and simplicity.

MARTYRS PAVILLION:

It is a cricket pavilion in St. Edwards school, Oxford. The two most legible elements are there one is plinth and other is a roof. Its roof is cantilevered as it looks like a sandwich wall are appearing as a filling in between two slices of bread i.e. plinth and roof. Materials are used in a very proportionate way to give a rich appearance. Its design began with the idea of elevating walls which look like grown from the mound on the ground as shown in fig 5.



FIGURE 6. glass used on facade of design museum

FIGURE 5.

(<http://www.detrnk.com/node/8865>)

Its cantilevered roof helps to protect its walls and interior from the effects of weather because the materials used to make walls are made of wood which is easily damaged by water and cantilever main purpose is to protect it from water. The level of the plinth is not so high it is decided on the basis that if people want to spend time outside the pavilion they can sit on it. It has a large sitting room for the players which is reached by the recessed staircase on the mound which is the dominating feature of the pavilion.

CONCLUSION:

After seeing his projects, I feel that his basic concern during design is a relation between building and nature and due to this he is very specific about the use of materials through which he shows an interconnection between indoor and outdoor. For example in Design Museum is an example where glass is a main material used for the treatment of the facade and he also tries to evolve museum with the surroundings and it also gives a beautiful and elegant look and a touch of simplicity to its elevation as shown in fig 6.



(<http://www.dwell.com/slideshows/london-design-museums-time->

But the kind of glass detail that he used is only applicable for that vary region because of its heat gaining property and transparency. If it is to be used in countries like India the details have to be modified specially in case of the house because in Indian houses privacy is the primary concern and the use of big glass facades is very difficult. Even if we are able to give a full glass facade, the climate of India will not let us do so because it has cold as well as hot regions so it will not be successful. It can be used but the methodology of using it will change, it can be like if we used double glazing which has an air gap in between which acts as an insulator but then the sense of space that John Pawson wants to create will not be a reality or accomplished, because the sense of space that he creates in countries like Europe might not remain the same. So this means that the work of John Pawson will be different for different regions which also depends on its cultural and social aspects. This is why the projects of John Pawson are made in accordance of site and region. His projects are chosen to be constructed on certain conditions of a site like it should have proper view, beautiful surroundings and calmness. It cannot be proposed everywhere.

Another most dominating part of his work is minimalism which means whatever is used only if it is necessary there is no ornamentation and it have a clarity of form and structure. What you see is what you see⁸. It emphasizes the spaces. Every aspect of John Pawson works reflects minimalism. He started working on minimalism by inspiring from theory “Less is More”⁹ introduced by an architect Mies Vander Rohe. When we look at his work it makes you think about it which depends on the feeling of a person. To understand the Mies’s philosophy of Less is More stated that in his case it is a clarity of each aspect, to provide an open spaces he have an idea to detach the internal walls from each other so that open spaces are emphasized more. But in case of Pawson’s work the philosophy is something more, it has a sense of an absence intentionally embedded so that you can connect to his work. To understand this aspect better let us take an example, suppose if we have taken a photograph of something it gives a clear picture but if in case picture is blurred we try to capture its surroundings and try to think about that. The image creates in your mind is depend on the perception of a person looking at it. This phenomenon in John Pawson works has the same philosophy. By looking at it, it seems that something is missing or absent. This absence may or may not clear anything by now and then and that can be felt by your own perception. Let we considered a perception of two people in two different situations. If someone who is happy is supposed to live in those spaces it will make him happier because an absence in the spaces filled by his own perception of happiness it relaxed his mind and make him feel comfortable and really enjoy it. But if a person who is sad is supposed to spend time in same spaces it will make him more disappoint rather than make him feel relaxed and this is because of an absence that will likely fill those spaces with loneliness and could also force him to leave that place instead of spending time here. There can be a possibility that spaces begin to motivate him it depends what he is looking for that space. He has created a space to give a feeling of calmness but it hides the emotions of people because at times it is more inconvenient. It clearly shows that spaces defined by his force everyone to think about it. It gives a chance to feel the spaces and think deeply so that everyone can imagine it in its own perception in a different manner. And moreover people love to see colours, uniqueness around them if we suggest them to live in a space which don’t have any colour and textures majority of the people don’t like to live there. Similar in Pawson works there is a lack of colors, textures and aesthetics which fails to create a good impression on

⁸ Frank stella - http://www.sfmoma.org/exhib_events/exhibitions/160

⁹ The notion that simplicity and clarity lead to good design. and a proponent of simplicity of style.

<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/226400.html>

everyone and giving a feeling of becoming unwelcoming. The unique design of minimalism has an absence of interest which is a major part of art and architecture.

He also tries to attain the proportions and minimalism forcefully in furnitures which he designed which are more or less pictorial but not a good users of everyone. For example chairs designed by him in the De Camaret house (refers fig 1) is too small in height that might be uncomfortable for a taller person to sit on it, here the segregation sense occurred due to furniture design by him. It has an absence to unite all categories of people in one kind of spaces.

One thing, I have been observed that he believes in reducing as if he adopt any other style of architecture he keeps those decorative features, aesthetics, and carving but only minimum and the good thing about that the value of detail increase and spaces are enhanced more. He just left with simple and clean elements which gives a feeling of emptiness like something is missing in the element what is standing in front of us and the reason is that his work has a lack of dynamism and it is still from the start of his architectural career till now. It also gives an example of being a mechanical on people who live with because all the spaces are desired to follow one strict line of action. His work has lost an area of interest because of his strict style of doing work which completely shows an absence of interest in a present unique style of architecture from starting of his architectural career till now which is tending to be boring.

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