Nueva Casita Panels

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**nuestras raíces**

Nuestras Raíces is a grass-roots organization that promotes economic, human, and community development in Holyoke, Massachusetts through projects relating to food, agriculture, and the environment.

"Tierra de Oportunidades," an urban farm along the Connecticut River in Holyoke, Massachusetts, is Nuestras Raíces' largest and most recent project. The farm aims to support a variety of initiatives around sustainable, productive farming activities. These projects include a beginning farmer training program and new business incubator; an environmental conservation and stewardship project; a youth development initiative and the development of new facilities for community celebrations, cultural exchanges, and educational and commercial activities. Our design for a new farm building is the first of many planned structures to support activities on the site.

Urban agriculture has proven to be an effective way to promote community development because it is a way for the residents of downtown Holyoke to connect with a culturally significant activity, while also passing on traditions of land use to the next generation. The members of their families grew up in the farms of rural Puerto Rico and many of these members continue to work on the farms. They also believe in the importance of a land-based occupation. In addition, they are farmers at heart. They have formed an experience in agriculture and it is part of their heritage. Projects based on agriculture, such as markets and community gardens, build on the skills and knowledge that participants already have, and are also highly valued opportunities to use to improve their community and to teach to a younger generation.

"Tierra de Oportunidades," provides a space to preserve the heritage of Holyoke's Puerto Rican community connected with New England's legacy of agriculture and natural beauty. It presents opportunities for youth and entrepreneurs from the Puerto Rican community in Holyoke to develop agricultural and business skills while providing fresh, local, and culturally important foods to the people of the city, while building an understanding and common purpose between social and cultural workers in Holyoke and the region, and improving the physical, social, and environmental condition of the city.

**research**

**puerto rican cultural identity**

"The experience of being "in between," so deeply familiar to Puerto Ricans in the United States, thus has the potential to emerge in the public sphere as a kind of phenomenonology, or philosophy of experiential space, the "break" appears as both a limit and a breaking of the limits." - José Estévez

"The absence and borders of national experience need to be understood not as absences or vacuums but as sites of new meanings and relations." - José Estévez

**urban ‘casitas’**

"Thus the casita becomes a vehicle through which their builders articulate and defend their national identity, their imagined community, their innate essence deterritorialized which they are in the urban milieu..." - Luis Alpízar-Páez

"Beyond its practical and symbolic functions for the community in which it is located, the casita stands as a highly suggestive emblem of contemporary Puerto Rican culture, and of diasporic vernacular culture in general. For people caught up in the circulatory, back and forth migratory motion and thereby subject to the constant renewal of personal and historical ties, culture is experienced as dramatic movement and change, adaptability and resilience." - José Estévez
Our goals for the design of “nueva caida” included taking an active approach to the design process by:

1. Unraveling and exploring the layers of program, use, and occupancy.
2. Developing a design that preserves important but fragile cultural connections through spaces that express a rich Latino/Hispanic identity.
3. Creating a place where the Puerto Rican community can see itself in the “casita” as an active place where the past and the future meet.

Through an interpretation of the Puerto Rican experience of being “in-between,” our project seeks to create a space of permeability and fluid boundaries between interior and exterior space—which serves as a spatial metaphor for the “in-between” created between the culture of the island and that of an urban environment. The project’s transparent screens and modulated interior/exterior spaces are meant to be concrete representations of the “change, adaptability and resilience” inherent in Puerto Rican identity and culture.

The buildings’ interior/exterior spaces provide a series of places for the formation of “Tierra de Oportunidades” to gather, learn and celebrate their cultural roots. The structure also acts as a “gateway” building for the community as they enter the “término.” Functionally, this building is an easily constructed wood structure that provides storage for a tractor and farm equipment, a multi-use interior space, an on-site bathroom, and a multi-use exterior dock.

Nuestra misión objetivo para el diseño de “nueva caida” es crear un acercamiento activo al proceso de diseño por:

1. El desarrollo y exploración de las capas del programa y uso.
2. El desarrollo de un diseño que preserva importantes pero frágiles conexiones culturales por medio de espacios que celebran su rica identidad cultural.
3. Crear un lugar donde la comunidad puertorriqueñ@ vea la “casita” como un lugar activo donde el pasado y el futuro se encuentran.

Nuestro diseño ha sido inspirado por un entendimiento de “casitas” contemporáneas y sus roles en crear espacios para la representación y poder de la comunidad. En lugar de crear una estructura que repita una “casita”, nuestra investigación ha estado enfocada en re-interpretar la “casita” como un lugar activo donde se crea un lugar activo donde el pasado y el futuro se encuentran.

Por medio de la interpretación de la experiencia Portomarina de estar “en el medio”, nuestro proyecto busca crear un espacio de permeabilidad y flexibilidad entre el espacio interior y exterior; un espacio que celebre la cultura de la isla y el de un entorno urbano. La transparencia del espacio del proyecto y los espacios interiores y exteriores modulados buscan tener representaciones del “cambio, adaptabilidad y resiliencia” inherentes a la cultura identidad Portomarina.

Los espacios creados del interior y exterior presentan seres de lugares para los residentes de la “Tierra de Oportunidades” para encontrarse, aprender y celebrar sus raíces culturales. La estructura también actúa como un “tercer espacio” para la comunidad mientras entran la finca. Funcionalmente, el edificio es una práctica estructura de materiales que provee almacenamiento para un tractor y equipo para la finca un espacio interior multipropósito, un baño, y un espacio exterior multipropósito.

**Project Team:**

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