

# ADAPTABLE URBAN SPACES

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 CHARLES LAW

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Many come to Italy expecting themselves to be awed and inspired by the great pieces of art, culture, and history of cities such as Rome and Florence – myself included. Italia Design Field School is different as it not just about where we go and what we see. It is about how we, as students of knowledge and people with respect and previous design experiences, interpret our surroundings and acquire empathy. A transcendent moment is an instant of harmony of thoughts and feelings, when time just seems to stop for a split second and we are taken back by a climax of sensory comprehension.

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One night I decided to bike to an area far away from any 'great sights,' to what looked like a small neighborhood. On my way, about an hour and a half into my peaceful but inspiring trip, I came across a large park. The multiple soccer games and youths who grouped themselves together in different areas of the park were intriguing but what caught my eye was a blue ring buried deep inside the park. What I saw and how I felt inside this park was the most Italian I had felt during the entire trip.

The blue ring that had intrigued me was actually seatings around a stage and there were people of all ages there, waiting. The show had not yet begun but I was amazed that there were small children in a park so late at night - it was ten o'clock. Five minutes later the stage lights dimmed, the crowd went silent, and a clown appeared on stage. The female clown danced around, told a joke, and everyone laughed. As the show went on I felt a sense of tingling and joy even though I could not understand the dialogues of the show. I looked around me - young children were getting a kick out of the wild antics of the different personalities appearing on the show and older couples were enjoying themselves as well, laughing to various jokes. In other parts of the park there were youths conversing, playing, older teens huddling in a circle engrossed in dance, and old men filling up bottles of water from a fountain. I turned back to the play just as the first part had concluded and the crowd started cheering. As I joined in the clapping, for a split second, I felt part of this special community.



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## Fiesole

Ever since I saw Fiesole it was a goal of mine to see how far up the mountain I could get by biking. I saw the ancient town as a physical challenge as well as a chance to see Florence from high above. On a hot afternoon, I started my ascend. The elevation was surprisingly steep as I got on the Via Di San Domenico, the road to Fiesole. An hour and a half of uphill climbing later I found myself unable to move my legs and in-between the towns of San Domenico and Regresso. By my estimation I was about thirty minutes to an hour away from Fiesole and my body would not allow me to go any further than my stop point which already had a great view. I took a moment and enjoyed the fruits of my work, an accomplishment nonetheless I was proud of.

To celebrate my achievement I had lunch back down at the small town named San Domenico. It was at the local small café in San Domenico that I had my transcendent moment. Tired from hours of biking, I ordered my sandwich in bad Italian and proceeded to grab one of the three tables in the store and decided to relax and observe what was going on around me. I noticed that this was a family run café and easily saw the bond and values the parents and daughter had as they went about their everyday work. This made me realize where I was, what I was doing, and how special this three-dollar sandwich that I was having was. I was in a small town just outside of Florence eating a sandwich after biking up a mountain and seeing the view of the cityscape. This moment of realization made me take a step back from where I was and really appreciate how this trip gave me the chance for such diverse experiences.



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## San Lorenzo Laurentian Library

The visit to the Laurentian Library located in San Lorenzo was one of my most inspiring experiences in Florence. Upon entering the dramatic entrance vestibule created by Michelangelo I was in awe at the size of the stairs in relation to the room. I understood the reasoning behind such dimensions as I walked up the stairs - all the emphasis was placed on the library and the large staircase actually created space. Walking through the library was a good experience as well, but where I had my transcendent moment was when I sat down and decided to sketch the library, partly because I was not allowed to photograph the area and the other reason being that I felt I had not done enough sketching throughout the Italia Design trip.

Sketching the Laurentian Library and then eventually the entrance staircase made me appreciate the work significantly more. It was a moment of pause and then, pure astonishment. The detail and care put into the work was absolutely impeccable and there was just no way to comprehend the care being put forth in such works. I felt remarkably more for this work through sketching than I did through photography which I had done for much of the trip, and although already over halfway into the trip, I learned that I had forgotten how to use my hands and this experience inspired me to sketch again, creating a harmony of thoughts and feelings.

