

**FIFTH YEAR DESIGN THESIS**

**A medium custody prison  
for Western North Carolina**

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Fundamental and far-reaching changes have evolved in the systems of treating and handling of prisoners. The reform movement is well established in the United States taking light from the examples set in Sweden and Brazil. Unfortunately there has been no corresponding evolution in the design of these institutions. At present penal architecture is still in the grip of the medieval philosophy, an environment where security and social punishment is paramount.

Because this philosophy did not succeed in scaring people into compliance with the law, a new approach was sought, and current hopes lie in individualized treatment, where each inmate receives consideration according to his own needs, merits and progress.

It seems that the history of prison architecture has been characterized by too heavy a reliance upon "fashions." We may not need drawing board novelties any more than we need an undue reliance upon standard solutions, but we do need imaginative searching for new ways to solve architectural problems. Prisons built during the nineteenth century were expected to last for centuries, as indicated by cell partitions that were a foot thick and by strong walls of granite. The very solidity of such construction and the basic inflexibility of the older type of layouts have proved a great disadvantage. Correctional philosophy however is in a fluid state. Behind this cliché lurk some of our family quarrels in penology. In all frankness, we must face up to the unpleasant fact that while definite trends in correctional philosophy can be noted, the effectiveness of most of these programs has not yet been established. Honest differences of opinion among penologists reflect differences in training, experience, age and personality. The treatment approach, with its usual ameliorations of prison harshness, currently claims the most articulate and numerous spokesmen. Nevertheless, the architect may not have the satisfaction of being

able to cull out foible and fad from fact, but must instead rely on the best-informed judgments available to him at the time.

Understanding that these best-informed judgments may change, that the character of the inmate population may also change in a generation, the architect must provide a physical plant and plan which possess some flexibility. The prison of 1962 may have to take on some strange functions by 1972. Some of these functions we cannot anticipate. Pre-release housing is a good example of the latter. Already, some prisons provide separate facilities for men about to be released on discharge or parole. There are good psychological and sociological reasons to separate these men from the general inmate population. There are also good reasons that such facilities should be physically less isolated from the outside community. In some European prisons inmates work for private employers in the daytime and return to the prison enclosure at night. Whether such a housing unit is inside or outside the prison proper, serious new administrative and architectural problems appear. Another new or augmented function appears with the increased use of group therapy in its several varieties as well as with more conventional individual interviewing by professional staff. Some ingenuity will be needed to provide such activities with settings that are at the same time informal, attractive and conveniently accessible to prisoners while providing necessary dignity, separation and privacy. It is also probable that more states in the future will adopt the use of conjugal visits. When or if they do, special facilities like those in some South American countries will have to be provided.

It is my purpose to design one specific type of institution, the medium custody prison for tractable, successfully married, felons (20 percent of all prisoners in North Carolina). A classification I have myself created

based on the assumption that within the near future extensive orientation centers will be set up to test newly committed criminals. This will create a new and more efficient classification system which would place criminals in an environment most suited for their rehabilitation.

#### DESIGN GOALS

To advance an architectural solution that will establish a basis for the breakdown of mass classification and the current "cell block" environment.

To evolve a system of zones and employ the most modern methods of technology so as to lessen the feeling of security.

To introduce a new flexibility into the prison complex so as to let it breathe with new methods of penal treatment.

To create a new public image that will not see the prison as a medieval fortress where a criminal is sent to pay his debt to society.

To utilize the far reaching effects of monthly weekend visits by wives, through the employment of a network of social workers, both in the prison and at home to attack the actual source of the problem.

To create an environment that will, by its very nature, add to the educational and rehabilitation programs of the prison, so as to strengthen the main purpose of prisons that of returning its inmates to society with the willingness to accept the laws set down by our culture.

#### DESIGN CONCEPT

The service facilities will be grouped into a central core type

arrangement which will be "openly" planned in itself. The following functions will be included:

Dining and Kitchen  
Warehouse  
School, library and industrial shops  
Auditorium  
Gymnasium  
Commissary  
Barber Shop  
Chapel

Vocational training shops and the industrial shops will be located within the broad limits of the core, but on the fringes and outside the center of principal circulation.

The administration building will be strategically accessible to the central core but not in its immediate vicinity.

Housing units will be located apart from one another and apart from the central core, but well related to the core in terms of circulation. The units will have many recreational and lounge facilities of their own and they will share in the use of other larger athletic facilities.

Weekend visiting facilities will be totally separate except for mechanical and certain security links.



*Preconceived physical solution with no  
apparent analytical or conceptual basis  
where is this critical phase of the  
design process?*



Central Core, continued

Chapel (100 seats)	2,000	
Barber shop (6 chairs)	600	
Laundry	4,000	
Vocational training, industrial shops and maintenance		15,000
8 offices	1,500	
drafting and file room	400	
training classroom, 3 @ 400 sq ft	1,200	
aptitude testing	200	
communications shop	200	
woodworking shop	2,000	
paint shop	1,000	
plumbing & sheetmetal shop	2,000	
welding & machine shop	3,000	
electric shop	2,000	
tool storage	500	
materials storage	1,000	
Supporting facilities ... ..		39,290
Administration	4,900	
main entry, lobby & related facilities	1,000	
wardens suite (2 offices & sec.)	450	
business administration facilities (8 offices and sec. pool)	1,900	
conference room	300	
mail room	300	
telephone equipment room	300	
inactive records	450	
personal lounge & toilets	500	
Infirmary		3,430
4 private rooms @ 80	320	
2 three man rooms @ 200	400	
examination suite	350	
minor surgery suite	400	
doctors office & lav.	300	
nurses station	150	
pharmacy	100	
storage	250	
dentist office & lav.	150	
dentist examination ( 2 chairs)	250	
laboratory	120	
x-ray	220	
heat treatment & whirlpool	150	
darkroom	70	
waiting room	200	
Counseling center		
4 offices @ 120	480	
file room	120	

**Supporting facilities, continued**

<b>Counseling center, cont.</b>		
conference room	240	
waiting and reception	200	
toilets, M & W	200	
testing center	250	
<b>Custodial staff</b>		2,560
8 offices @ 120	960	
communications center	300	
locker & toilets	300	
<b>Visiting facilities</b>		28,400
60 efficiency apt. units @ 375	22,500	
problem center	240	
movie theater	1,500	
recreation	2,000	
commissary	2,000	

The following people have consented to be members of the Advisory Committee:

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