

Conception

After traversing the northern and central hill towns of Italy, their shared design influences became readily apparent to me. Their shared critical fabric can be expressed and used in the creation of new architecture, recovering those elements absent in many architectural works of recent creation.

For example, each small town has a central tower. Central not in its location, but in its cultural expression and protective connotation. This element creates connection and unity among the townspeople. It is also a focal element that becomes a signifier for the town's plaza, the physical location for interaction and commerce. The plaza, horizontal in its expression, is enclosed by the town, and is in a direct relation, almost opposition, to the tower's verticality and more open expression. These two in juxtaposition become the area of congregation, social activities and the terminus of the town's streets, which bring the town scale to the home, business, individual or unit scale. It is this confluence of horizontal and vertical forces that generate the town fabric.

The site chosen to demonstrate this application of integrating forces is an abandoned coal mine located in Montgomery County, Virginia several miles east of the New River and on the same latitude as Blacksburg's downtown and the northern tip of Virginia Tech's drill field. While secluded from the main access road within a densely forested ravine at the base of Brush Mountain, several surface structures are rather prominent once inside the site's tree line. The interaction of these existing, or old, structures and new elements becomes the unified structure of the village.

Renovation of existing structures through the incorporation of new elements define the challenge of synthesizing their complimentary forces, rather than their compromise.

