Squirrel Cove Restaurant
Cortes Island, BC

IARC 484/584 | Assistant Professor Erin Cunningham
Spring 2012 | MWF 1:00-4:50 pm

Studio Description: Squirrel Cove is located on Cortes Island, which lies between Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia. It is a popular anchorage spot for boaters. It is also home to the Klahoose First Nation, a Coast Salish tribe. Currently, the Klahoose Nation is proposing the development of a marina with visitor facilities at this location to generate revenue as well as lessen the ecological impact of the heavy boater use on this site. Working in conjunction with Allen + Maurer Architects, the Klahoose Nation hopes to create an attractive place for boaters to come ashore that reflects the unique history, culture and use of the site. Ecological impact is a key consideration of this project and materiality, such as the use of locally sourced timber and other regional materials, is an important component of this ecological approach.

The construction of a restaurant (3000+ sf) comprises the first phase of this project. In this studio students will be developing the interior of this proposed restaurant. The restaurant’s form is designed to evoke the sail of a ship and this non-traditional shape presents a unique design opportunity. Moreover, because permeability between the exterior and interior is an important component of the larger project, students will also be asked to design the adjacent outdoor spaces, which involve an upper deck and a lower patio, the latter being the location for the site’s historic salmon bake.

The proposal to develop Squirrel Cove is not without controversy. Boaters who annually travel to the site are afraid that this development will lead to its commercialization. Lively internet forums express fears that this “paradise” will be “paved” and the serenity of the site broken by the installation of the ubiquitous “Starbucks,” or its equivalent. The design of this project will need to address these concerns and tread a careful path between economic development and sensitivity to site context. Importantly, this studio explores issues of place, cultural identity and sustainability. It investigates how a thoughtful approach to materials, color, light and form can aid in the enjoyment and understanding of a space. The overarching goal of this project is to create a detailed and distinctive sense of place that speaks to the site’s unique history, environment and use.