New Life for I Forti di Roma ~ “The Forts of Rome”

The Italian genius for creative adaptive reuse is probably best exemplified in the work of Carlo Scarpa and his magnificent Castel Vecchio Museum in Verona. Built into an old army barracks, this splendid museum both preserves and expands the original buildings into a new comprehensive whole. This approach, which both respects and goes beyond the existing setting will be one of the primary challenges of this terminal project. This project will address issues central to architectural design, landscape design and urban design.

The Forts of Rome are generally little known military works of defense constituting "fortified camps" numbering 18 in total which ring the city of Rome. Built to defend Rome and located on the periphery of the city (then in the countryside) they were erected between 1877 and 1891 as outposts against a possible French invasion which never materialized. The forts are remarkable “land works” that have been vacated by the military and as such have no real purpose today. The configuration of each varies but generally the type is a kind of large polygonal courtyard with thick earthen walls, and impressive bastions surrounding a lush green interior that is peaceful and surprisingly idyllic.

These installations have been abandoned for decades and present a tremendous opportunity to be reimagined for new uses. Because the forts are typically set in park -like settings (such as the Forte Bravetta which will be used as a test case) and because the city has nonetheless grown around them very closely, they are positioned to become important urban centers which can be used to revitalize neighborhoods and provide a range of public amenities. Today the city of Rome has taken serious steps to determine possible uses for these forti as part of its cultural patrimony.

This project proposes to examine the “forti di Roma” with an eye toward their contemporary use that also challenges the designer to integrate the forts into their surrounding urban context. Because the fort establishes a kind of “platform” or stage, it is imagined that new building structures can be positioned within, upon or around the fort itself—perhaps even incorporating all three strategies. The program investigation will be an integral part of the project. A recent competition to revitalize these forts listed possible accommodations:

• Theatre and performing arts center
• Community center
• School  
• Medical facility/clinic  
• Atelier and residences for artists  
• Hotel/conference center  
• Sports facility with swimming pool, tennis courts, hand ball courts, running track, etc.  
• Ecological interpretive center for sustainable research  
• Agricultural testing ground  

Students will be required to develop their own program choice in consultation with the critic and the class as a whole. The scope and size of individual projects will vary but will approximate 7,500 sq. meters.

The Winter Term will be devoted to schematic design and program definition. The Spring Term will develop architectural design in a comprehensive manner.

A possible field trip to Rome in December is contemplated. The instructor will lay the groundwork for the exercise in the summer of 2015 continuing his consultation with Roman architect, Simone Ferretti, an expert and proponent of creatively bringing to life the forts of Rome.