
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

A night walk around the block

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, May 27th, 2020

From my balcony, under a clearing sunset sky, the pattern of lights on my street is mostly made of rectangular lit areas but for two soft edged projections of light at ground level ...

... the first are of windows reflecting the precise boundaries of private life inside rooms, while the latter are of entry doorways reflecting the diffused reaching out to public life in the street, as shown in the feature image.

What fueled my curiosity to take a walk around that block, at night, in search of images of building entrances and entry ways ...

... was the observed *contrast between a daytime image* of the entry way to the building next door, where a cluster of residents and neighbors sat on the door step of the building, as shown below...



daylight view of neighboring building entry way

... and of the *same place photographed at night*, as can be seen below, with the blinding overhead lights crudely washing the access to the doorway, from under a monumental concrete awning, and with the absence of visible activity but for the human presence suggested by the lit windows above.



night time view of neighboring building entry way

When I grabbed the camera, put on my Coriv19 mask and hurried out of my building, I had the following questions on my mind:

Do all entrances look and *feel* alike at night?

What would make the *difference* in that feeling?

From *prior experience* I could think of: The type of lighting? The landscaping treatment? The type and location of doorway and the access to it from the sidewalk? The suggested human presence such as balconies? Etc.

Examining my photographs, I came up with the following categorization of types of building entrances and access ways to be qualified in terms of the particular feeling they elicited in me.

The case of the courtyard-oriented multiple building entrances



multiple entrances to residential complex

This apartment complex of three building masses, the largest in the block, left me with a sense of mini urban village or, at best, of a residential community.

The canopies of the entries seem to touch each other yet the two facing each other are on a lower level than the one facing the street, all surrounding an upper level well-lit paved courtyard.

At a lower level a circular lawn, that delimits the paved access from the sidewalk to the building entrances, can barely be seen.

The presence of low retaining walls and of other elements that could be used to sit on near the entrances, and the presence of balconies on the two facing buildings, together with all the human scale defining particularity of materials, doors, windows, visible curtains and furnishing from the back building ... contributed to that sense of sociable place in spite of the scale of the complex, dug into the sloping site.

The case of the building entrance recessed into an articulated part of the building mass



the corner entrance in a horizontal building jog

This mid-slope entrance, located at a horizontal jog in the building between its upper part to the left and lower part to the right, sits at the crossing of two circulations axes: a main one leading to the door from the sidewalk and a minor one consisting of two exit ways converging on each side of the building entrance door.

The visibility of the entrance lobby stairs at the end of the bridge-like access walkway from the sidewalk communicate a singleness of purpose in this rather simple set up, with no other intention but to orient residents and visitors to entering and exiting the building.

My feeling was one of being welcome efficiently and simply; the presence of a safety handrail on both sides of the bridge-like walkway comforted me in this feeling of being helped to be oriented and kept safe.

The case of the building entrance located in a deep corner recess of the building mass



corner entrance in a deep building recess

The upper building mass, hovering over its hollowed-out ground floor corner, rests on a single column acting as a guardian post facing the expanse of the front and side yards.

The landscaping becomes more organized on both sides of the entry way leading, in relative darkness, to the steps and wide landing in front of the entry door bathed in light.

This building entrance presented a succession of spaces from the sidewalk through **an opening** in the thick hedge, across a **widening lawn** with its trees, up some steps to a well-lit landing, **from which to gaze far and close**, before heading for the door to the lobby with its waiting area and elevator door.

*That is what made me feel I had found a sensitively designed **welcoming entry way to a building.***

The case of the frontally located entrance, articulated with the façade.



frontally located building entrance

Shades of Beaux arts design, the effect of this entry way is all in the details and a symmetrical visual composition.

A *front lawn* frames the short and direct walkway from the sidewalk to the *front door step*, framed in turn by two planters that mark the presence of that step ahead of the *wide landing*, in turn framed by the ground floor units balconies.

Further down the landing one can consult the intercom panel and wait for the door to be opened under the protection of an awning holding two lights right over the door.

It is at this point that we become aware of the *concrete frame* inside which the fully glazed doorway allows the view of the half-level stair and second airlock door leading to the elevator lobby.

All it takes are two *bright lights* one on each side of that frame to illuminate the scene and one *incandescently lit* balcony to let one know that the place is indeed *an inhabited and welcoming one, however socially cautious*.

As I mention above, the sense of reassuring orderly entrance process, is all in the details and the symmetrical visual composition ... a classic!

End words

I chose these two verses from the poem “Doors” of Carl Sandburg’s poetic series: **“The people, yes”**

“An open door says, “come in.”

A shut door says, “who are you?”

Credits

For the end words:

Sandburg, C. : *Collected poems*, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950, New York

For all images :

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