

Wright was right: The design of a new mobile bar and a not so new design philosophy

“Form follows function,” is a concept that carries many interpretations, regarding both form and function individually and the relationship between the two. The various interpretations were explored, leading to a design philosophy inspired by the concept: to let function inspire form but be aware of what form can do and/or mean for the function. It was hypothesized that thoroughly exploring the relationship between form and function could lead to a more informed design process due to the careful consideration of purpose and outward expression, and subsequently to a more meaningful final product and user experience.

In the context of the design of a mobile bar for the Horst building at the University of Twente, a design process was developed that facilitated the design philosophy. The first step was identifying the primary functions that would have the most influence on form, and vice versa. This was done through an analysis of stakeholders and research into existing bars available on the market, leading to the functions of mobility, adaptability, definition of space, and reflection of surroundings. These primary functions were developed; mobility through location analysis, adaptability and definition of space through user profiles and scenarios, and reflection of surroundings through attributions and associations.

This all led to a series of requirements for the design itself, and for the process to follow during the idea generation and development stages. The purpose of the mobile bar, which can be said to be a combination of all primary functions, was also determined: “a mobile bar that can shift between spaces inside and outside of the Horst while retaining a clear association with the building; whose placement leads to a change in atmosphere from studious to social, indicating clearly where employment ends and service begins.” Ideas were generated and developed keeping the requirements and purpose in mind.

A final design was chosen using evaluative tools aimed at determining which design most embodied all four primary functions. Through designing and developing the mobile bar in line with design philosophy, it proved useful as an evaluative tool for testing the hypothesis of a more informed design process due to the careful consideration of form and function, and subsequent more meaningful final product and user experience.

The hypothesis is mostly true, some primary functions led to an improved user experience and a more meaningful product, however, some improvements were not direct results of its use.

Processes such as the stakeholder, market, and location analysis; user profiles and scenarios; and attributions and associations can be seen as replicable tools for applying the design process. It is suggested that for future applications of the design philosophy and its attached design process, the tools will need to be rearranged, new ones added, or others removed. This because the identification of primary functions and their further development were very specific to the mobile bar.

It was initially speculated that the relationship between form and function included an explicit, separate, influence on each other. As a result of developing and evaluating the design process, the simultaneous, implicit, nature of their relationship was revealed, and the perspective on the relationship between form and function was revised. It was discovered that the tools that were used aided in the development of both form and function as one. This design philosophy according to the revised perspective is not new. It is precisely what Frank Lloyd Wright suggested: “form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union.” [1] The process of designing the mobile bar for the Horst therefore led to a deeper understanding of his vision on design, and a suggested design process that facilitates it.

1. Guggenheim Museum. *Form Follows Function*. [cited 2021 April 8]; Available from: <https://www.guggenheim.org/teaching-materials/the-architecture-of-the-solomon-r-guggenheim-museum/form-follows-function>.