For a Clinic to Be

In the past decade, the understanding of healthcare for both professionals and the public has seen a constant shift from “a forced way of disease healing” towards “a natural approach to holistic well-being”. With the changed mentality, the conventional design that focus merely on efficiency and functionality can no longer satisfy the evolved demands. Thus innovations in healthcare design are more appreciated today than it ever was.

Unfortunately in terms of local primary clinics, most of them, especially in less developed regions, are not even specifically designed but a result of fitting clinical functions into a common commercial structure instead. Thus our project of the Foothills Family Medical Center design is to explore the potentials of how such facilities can be. The very core concept of this design is the status of being natural which is reflected by 14 design highlights with which the quality of care provided can potentially be enhanced.
FOR A CLINIC TO BE
Conceptually the need for treating diseases leads to the need for a clinic. Should there be an ideal clinic where all diseases can be eliminated, the need for a clinic is eliminated too. Thus for a clinic to be is not to be; in other words, the design of a clinic is about absence.

THE CONTEXT SAYS
The context around the site is simple yet complex. Located near the campus of SWU and surrounded by private homes, the site creates challenges for merging the commercial functions of the clinic into the local neighborhood, but it also provides chance for creating community shared space.

A GIFT OF THE LAND
Fortunately, the topography of the site provides a great chance to hide the structures beneath the ground which can possibly create a sense of absence between the building and its immediate context, the private houses.

FIGURES & GROUND
Thanks to the generosity of the campus planning department, the clinic can share a parking lot with the community outside the site on the other side of the street. Therefore the ‘ground’ area left from the constructed ‘figures’ can be made into semi-opened gardens for the public.

WALKING THE LINE
Straight lines are the simplest and most intuitive geometry to human beings. Thus linear shapes can be recognized easily and linear spaces can be navigated through without any difficulty. In a healthcare facility where efficiency is highly valued, the use of linear spaces can naturally enhance way-finding for both patients and staff.

BEING IN AND OUT
One problem brought by using the linear space is that it creates a hard boundary between the rigid shaped artificial structures and the free formed natural landscape. To tackle the problem surfaces like floors and roofs in the threshold public waiting area are curvedly divided. By applying different materials and tectonics to the divided parts and bringing in some nature inside, the boundary of indoor and outdoor can be soften.
A POD NOT A MINE

Exam pods in most clinics have no windows which means the lighting environments in the pods are totally artificial. Study shows that working in such circumstances is extremely hazardous for staff. Besides, it’s extremely hard to be turned on during daytime which consumes an amazing amount of energy. Therefore introducing natural light into the pods by opening small courtyards can significantly improve the working environment for staff while reducing operational costs by cutting down the electricity bills.

NOW YOU SEE ME?

Similar to the exam pod, the exam rooms in most clinics are ‘dark rooms’ as well. Once shared, the small courtyard opened to the exam pod can provide a great opportunity for exam rooms to have access to natural lighting and plants. But there are privacy concerns. Fortunately, that is totally avoidable by manipulating the shape of the exam rooms and the courtyards. In such case, both courtyards and pods can have large windows to the courtyard while having no issue on patient privacy in the exam rooms.
WHENEVER IT RAINS

Since the central courtyard is way below the surround ground, water will naturally flow in. This make it a great chance to have a rainwater collection mechanism under the courtyard. Water collected can be used on the water feature (a pool in this case) on site which will also work as a natural cooling method in summer.

A REASON TO GO

People have a tendency not to walk to a specific place unless there is a reason for them to go. The far end of the courtyard opposite to the main entrance is obviously not a place on the functional circulation, so people are less likely to visit there regardless the beauty of the garden. To give people a reason to go a pavilion-like structure is set up to attract people.
FOOTNOTES

11 FOOD NOT PILLS
It is not only to cure but also to prevent. A demonstration kitchen is there planted at the end of the administration building where people can learn how to cook healthy food. Conceptually it can make the clinic less to be.

12 GIVE ME SHELTER
Outside of demonstration kitchen, a sheltered outdoor space is designed to accommodate more community-based activities. When the day is nice, the space can also be used as an extension to the demonstration kitchen.

13 THE BUS IS COMING
Because the site is on the bus route, so one of the retaining walls along the entrance slope rise to form a sheltered bus stop. Plus as the building is barely seen from the road level, the bus stop with the clinic’s name on it can also work as a sign of the entrance that indicate people where to go.

14 MAN OF THE LAND
The soil covered area, including those on the roof and those on the ground level around the courtyard can be used as field for growing vegetables and herbs. The harvested vegetables can possibly be used directly for the cooking demonstration while the herbs can be used for educational purposes.