

The Spirit of Recovery:

How the architecture of a residential treatment facility can promote the spiritual awakening necessary to recover from addiction.

The world over spiritually-based 12-step programs have proven more effective than traditional clinical methods in helping drug addicts and alcoholics maintain lasting sobriety.

As a recovered alcoholic of nearly four years, having attempted sobriety through clinical, psychiatric, and legal means, I found the spiritually-centered method of AA was the only platform effective in guiding me toward long term sobriety. It's a program that suggests meditation and conscious contact with a higher power as the vehicle of spiritual awakening.

The spiritual experience is paramount in my recovery from alcoholism.

Time and time again I bore witness to the clinical, legal, and societal neglect of spirituality as an instrument of recovery. This becomes most apparent in the programmatic approach and physical design of hospitals, detox facilities and rehabilitation centers. Standing on the precipice of the opioid epidemic, with the recent closure and downsizing of local rehab centers, the need for a renewed approach is greater than ever. What is it that connects the occupant to a sense of belonging, a feeling of purpose? How can we translate spirituality through clever use of natural light and vegetation? Can the designer reform the standard model of treatment in visual, spatial form?

How can the architecture of addiction rehabilitation centers invoke a spiritual awakening and encourage spiritual growth in recovering addicts and alcoholics?

Addiction is commonly referred to as a spiritual sickness, a longing one feels for an intangible inner inequity. Addicts struggle with a sense of belonging, connection, and a higher purpose. How do such concepts manifest in architectural form? How can the place of attempted recovery become a moving center of spiritual growth, a crucial node in a patient's recovery?

I envision an architectural language in which nature and sunlight are at the forefront of rehab design.

Lets delve into the approach taken by Alvaro Siza Vieira in the design of Saint Jacques or Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in the Cathedral of Christ The Light, looking at their inspiring use of natural light. What role has vegetation played healing patients of the Wellbeing Institute by Hawkins/Brown or the Psychiatric Clinic by Boras White? While the architecture of religious buildings may produce an uplifting effect in some, others are repelled by the implied hierarchy and exclusionism of organised faith. I seek to meld the world of recovery with the realm of spirituality, creating a dialog that embraces inclusionism and rejects any single moral ideology as absolute truth. By creating spaces of quiet contemplation, meditation, and natural connection, I envision a campus that assists the patient in their own journey of spiritual recovery.

