

The three exterior material options that we are considering for this project were chosen with the intent of introducing a respectful and sensitive presence within the context of the University Heights neighborhood while maintaining a material affinity with the existing homes. The properties of each material vary but they all seek to establish a relationship with the site and context. The one property that is common to them all is a defining characteristic of one of most notable homes in the area. The Harold C. Bradley House, designed by Louis Sullivan on the corner of N. Prospect Avenue and Van Hise, is clad in dark stained wood siding. Just like this landmark we feel that a dark material will lend a muted quality to the house. A blackened architecture will sit quietly within the trees of the neighborhood.

Wood

Wood is the most predominant natural material on the site. The existing trees scattered across the property define its edges, provide relief from the street and carve out pockets of space in the center. The canopy overhead connects this grove with the greater network of trees throughout the neighborhood. Beyond elemental, wood most acutely defines the character of the place. The choice of a wood cladding is a material strategy of connecting the architecture with the immediate site in a literal way. It is also a deliberate reference to the predominant building material in the neighborhood. Its beauty comes from both its utility and its commonness: its humility. Untreated, it speaks to modesty and economy as much as it does to place and earth. It is a soft building material. The grain accepts the light and warms a space. Yet left untreated, it does not age well. As an exterior performance layer, it eventually degrades from moisture and light. Shu Sugi Ban is an ancient Japanese technique of burning the wood to seal it from the elements. While the essence of the material stays the same, the treatment of the wood enhances its performance. Furthermore, this technique elevates it from the everyday experience without removing any of its modesty. The quality of the wood would change in different lighting conditions, sometimes appearing to be swallowed up in the site, while at other times glowing an ashen grey. Furthermore, the connection to the Harold C. Bradley House, which is highly visible from the site, would be undeniable. Wet to dry, dawn to dusk, season to season, the material would age with quiet integrity and in visual harmony with the surroundings.

Metal

The imperfections on the surface of the metal plates that we are proposing bear a strong visual resemblance to the variegated surface of stucco, which is another common siding material in the neighborhood, as well as to the dark aged timber on the exterior of the Bradley House. The scale and patina of the metal plates also bring to mind the dark slate roofs that are visible from the sidewalks around the neighborhood. All share a dark, worked and weathered surface and would be a means of aesthetically harmonizing the architecture with that of the existing homes in the area, of anchoring it into the place. The strength and efficiency of metal often overshadows its value as a tactile and texturally rich material: its structural properties are prized over its essence. To expose the very essence of this material is how we would like to get the architecture to resonate with the site. The metal plates that we are proposing as a cladding get their character from the fabrication process—scrapes and scratches; indelible, cloudy, smudges; blotches of deep blue and black with pale pockets of shallow grey are scattered across the surface. It is these imperfections that give its beauty. When the individual plates are assembled into a grid, the singular surface is subsumed into a textural field that is indistinguishable from stucco or slate tiled roofs or aged clapboard that Louis Sullivan used. All of the traces of the process of metal fabrication that are left on the surface of the plate weave the house into the neighborhood. Furthermore, the material grounds the architecture in the site by abstractly reflecting of the wooded nature of the property—trunks and branches, light and shadow spilling through the canopy, a worked and living texture. The light and shadow from the canopy above will blend with the dappled patina of the architecture. Dark and full of bloom, the surface continues to weather (but not rust) on the site until eventually the gently patinaed palette will fade into the natural setting.

Glass

Glass is a material that is common to every house in the neighborhood. The color will recall a darkened window, a quiet house. The opacity of the material will ensure that the color is foregrounded and the visual relationship Bradley House is maintained. Glass is an ephemeral material. The glass cladding that we are proposing is about making a connection to its surroundings, both natural and built, rather than the more traditional use of glass as a plane of transparency. Instead of being literal/material reference to the site, the black back painted glass panels would absorb the natural context into the architecture. The potential for glass panels to dissolve the architecture into the site is how we see this material achieving the same sense of calm and resonance. When the wind blows in the trees or the dappled light falls across the facade, the house will reflect the changing character of the site and the greater neighborhood.