

What is Conceptual Design in Architecture?

Worksheet

Conceptual design is the stage where an architect explores a project's core idea (the parti) through sketches, massing studies, and diagrams, translating site and program analysis into a coherent design direction before detailed drawings begin.

Questions

1. What is the 'parti' in conceptual design?
 - A) The final construction drawing
 - B) The core organizing idea of the design
 - C) The project budget
 - D) The structural engineer's calculations
2. What typically happens first in conceptual design?
 - A) Massing studies
 - B) Site and program analysis
 - C) Construction documents
 - D) Bidding
3. Why do architects use massing studies?
 - A) To finalize interior finishes
 - B) To test how 3D volumes express the concept on-site
 - C) To calculate structural loads
 - D) To write the specifications
4. Which phase follows conceptual design?
 - A) Programming
 - B) Schematic design
 - C) Construction administration
 - D) Occupancy
5. An architect is designing a museum on a waterfront site. How might conceptual design start?
6. A firm is asked to design a school on a tight urban lot. What's a likely conceptual move?
7. Why do architects sketch by hand before modeling in 3D during conceptual design?
8. Define: What is conceptual design?
9. Define: What is a 'parti' in architecture?
10. Define: What are massing studies?

Answer Key

1. B) The core organizing idea of the design - The parti is the big idea or diagram that drives the whole design.
2. B) Site and program analysis - Concept generation is grounded in understanding the site and the client's program first.
3. B) To test how 3D volumes express the concept on-site - Massing studies test how forms and volumes work on the real site before detailed design.
4. B) Schematic design - Once a concept is chosen, schematic design develops it into concrete plans and forms.
5. Site analysis: strong views to the water, prevailing winds from the north. Program analysis: galleries need controlled light, the lobby needs a dramatic entrance. Concept: the parti becomes a folded roof that frames water views while shielding gallery walls from direct sun. Massing studies test 2-3 volumes expressing the fold before one is chosen.
6. Program analysis shows classrooms need daylight but the site is surrounded by tall buildings. Concept: stack classrooms around a central light-filled courtyard. Massing studies test courtyard proportions to maximize daylight penetration.
7. Hand sketches are fast and let many ideas be tested in minutes. They keep the focus on the big idea, not construction details. Only after a concept is chosen does the team invest time in detailed 3D massing models.
8. The early phase where an architect develops the project's core idea (parti) from site and program analysis.
9. The central organizing idea or diagram that drives all major design decisions.
10. Quick 3D volume studies used to test how a concept looks and performs on the actual site.

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