

**PROJECT TEAM |** Tricia Stuth + Ted Shelton

**CLIENT |** Eastern State Penitentiary National Historic Landmark

**LOCATION |** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**YEAR |** 2005

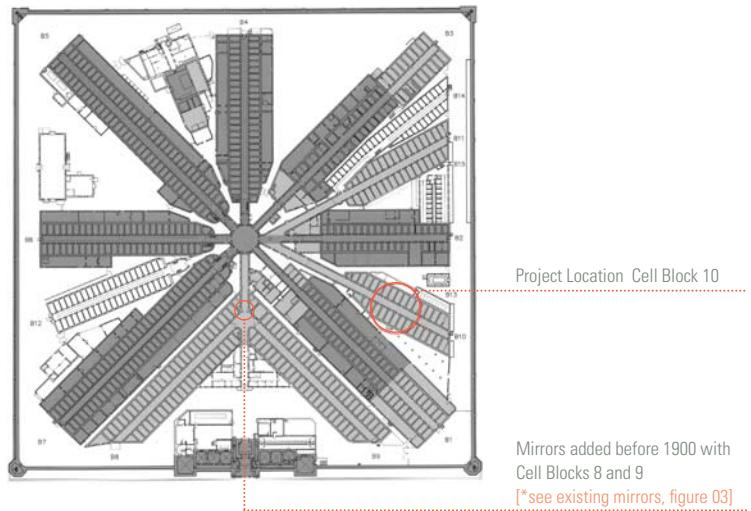
## Point | Counterpoint: a conversation with Haviland



01 | Architect John Haviland  
(1792–1852)

Point | Counterpoint is an installation at Eastern State Penitentiary National Historic Landmark in Philadelphia. Operational from 1830 to 1971, the prison is now a museum. One of the largest and most technologically advanced buildings of its day, Eastern State, “linked solitude with moral and vocational instruction, exemplified the Pennsylvania System of penology, and became a model for over 300 prisons worldwide.”<sup>1</sup> This architectural installation initiates a conversation with the prison’s architect, John Haviland (1792–1852), about Eastern State’s influential role in establishing an architectural type — the radial prison. *curb* conceived, designed, and built the work in Tennessee and installed it in the penitentiary.

<sup>(1)</sup> quotation from site historical marker outside Eastern State Penitentiary.



02 | Left: Aerial photo of Eastern State Penitentiary (USGS) montaged with plan of prison. Right: Plan of Eastern State Penitentiary, 1994. Dark grey indicates original cell blocks; light grey indicates cell blocks added subsequently. (©Marianna Thomas Architects) from *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions*, Norman Johnston.

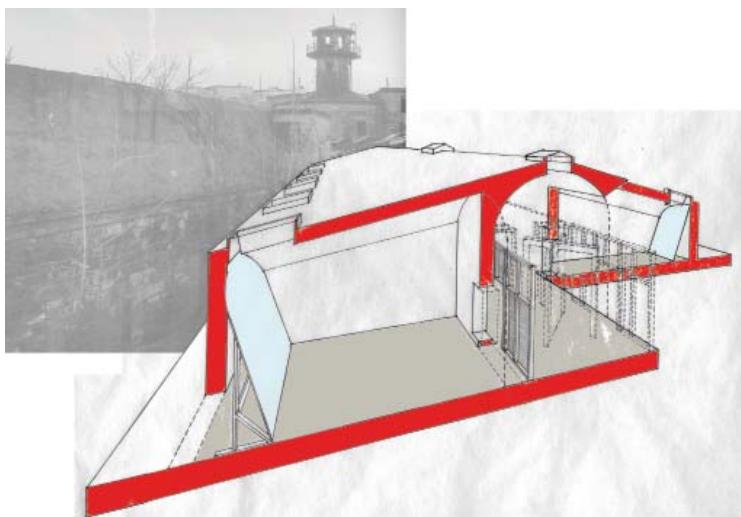
**POINT**

Haviland's radial scheme for Eastern State can be read as an attempt to control vision, and through this manipulation alternately empower or isolate the prison's various occupants. In this regard, it is undoubtedly a descendant of Jeremy Bentham's (1748–1832) panopticon, where a guard in a central tower could simultaneously survey every cell. Here, the effect is slightly different. In the cell, the prisoner's view is limited in every direction — held in by the opaque walls. The only visual outlet afforded is the single oculus, which causes the prisoner's gaze to be directed toward God if it is to be free at all. In the earliest days of the prison, this visual deprivation was heightened to the extreme, with prisoners being hooded on the rare occasions they were moved about the facility. Every sentence was one of solitary confinement. Conversely, the guard's view is extended and enhanced. Though unable to see directly into each cell as in the panopticon, the guard instead exercises his privilege along the radiating lines of the prison's plan. Patrolling the long corridors flooded with natural light, he is privy to a world that is completely hidden from the prisoner. His gaze is charged with control and power. At the central rotunda, this elevation of the power of vision is lifted to its logical apex. Here, the guard becomes all seeing—able to monitor every corridor from a single point. So central is this idea to the concept of the prison that when the radial plan was broken with the addition of cell blocks 8 and 9, the guard's view was bent and extended along these new paths by way of large mirrors (see Fig. 02-03).



**03 |** Above: Corridor at cell block 9 (1890's) from *Eastern State Penitentiary: Crucible of Good Intentions*; Norman Johnston.  
Below: Mirrors added before 1900 with cell blocks 8 and 9 were placed at an angle to reflect views so that guards could visually patrol new wings..

**04** | Above: The rotunda circa 1890's, from *Warden Cassidy on Prisons and Convicts*, Michael J. Cassidy. Below: Section perspective indicating guard's position of power in the watch tower and at the central rotunda beneath. The installation of screens and mirrors subverts relationships of the radial prison.

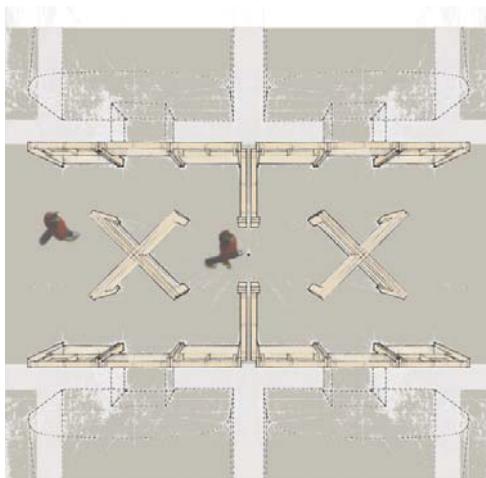
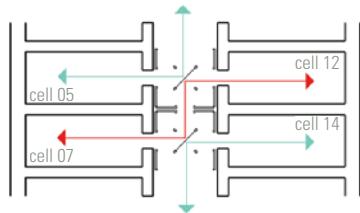


**05** | Below left and below: Photographs of the existing prison document influential spaces and details that informed the concept, design and detailing — flaking green paint, extraordinary perspectival views, light worthy of master paintings, peeling layers revealing underlying materials, and a pair of angled mirrors held by ornate wooden frames. These observations became the seeds by which to synthesize an architectural response.

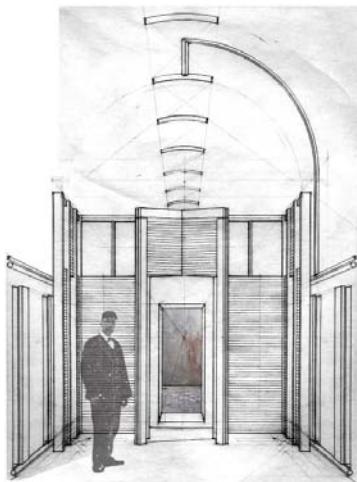
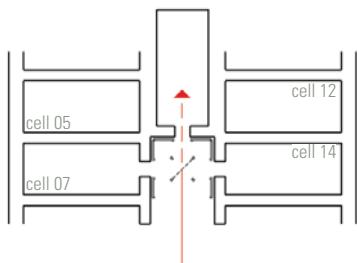


#### COUNTERPOINT

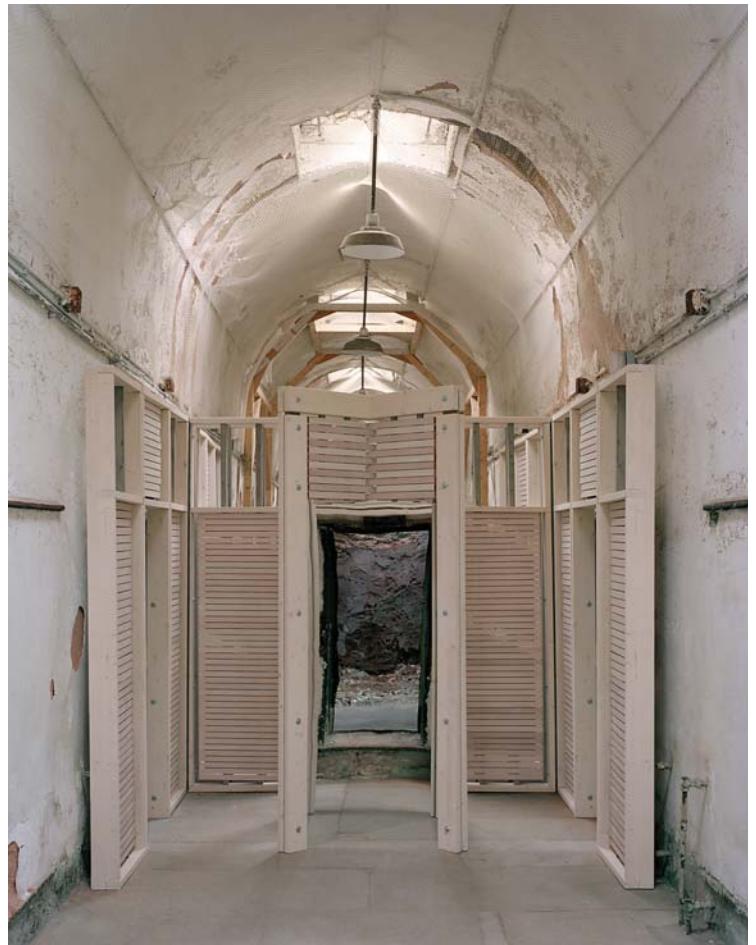
This project turns the tables. Part of Eastern State's annual arts program, it presents visitors with an alternate reading of the prison. Through an intervention of screens, mirrors, and thresholds, the view of the guard is captured and contained within a cell; meanwhile, the prisoner's view is extended and linked not only to that of other prisoners but ultimately to an implied "horizon" brought in through the oculus. While the project proposes an alternate reading, it does so within the relentless geometries and axes of the existing plan. Much like a rhetorical debate, the seeds for questioning the original thesis are found within its very logic. Though the installation is discrete, in this cell block and these few cells, it effectively reverses the power of vision of the various occupants. Creating a localized instance of a sort of anti-Eastern State may seem at one level to question the radial prison type, but it also allows Haviland to make a more emphatic statement as to the effectiveness and logic of his original plan. If architecture is seen as a humanistic discourse carried on between various practitioners over time, it is usually a conversation that is carried on only indirectly and through inference. The opportunity to interject a counterpoint into Haviland's scheme is a rare opportunity to converse directly.

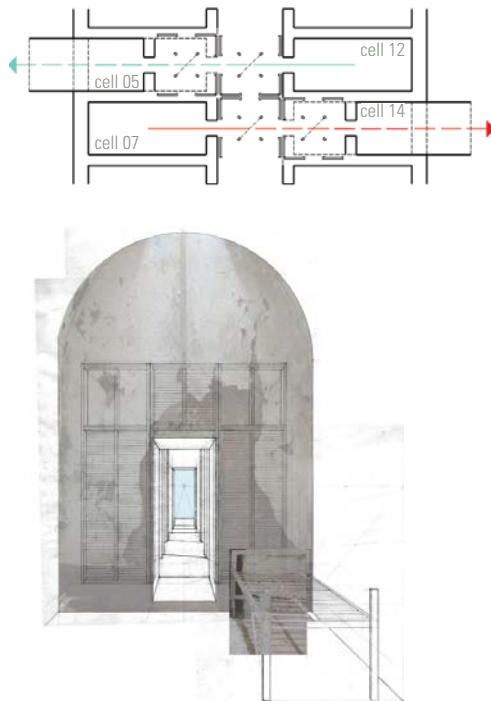


**06 | Turning the Tables - Mirrors placed at 45° to the primary axis of the corridor are concealed within the frameworks of two X shaped portals. This arrangement diverts the view of anyone looking down the length of the cell block, while also creating a visual link between two cells located diagonally across from each other. Thus, the view of the guard is captured and contained while the prisoner's view is extended and linked.**



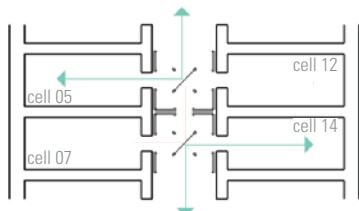
**07 | View Captured -** An observer looking down the corridor and "through" the portal is confronted with something unexpected - first cell door and then, beyond, the solid back of the cell itself. This imposition visually terminates the axis of the corridor and thus interrupts the conduit through which the guard's power is transmitted.





**08 | View Extended** - From the prisoners' viewpoints within cells 7 and 12, mirrors visually double the width of the corridor. Monochromatic screens slanted against the back walls of the cells receive sunlight from oculi across their surfaces. The flat, glowing, seemingly edgeless fields dematerialize the back walls of the cells and extend views beyond the prison confines. Cells are now visually linked, providing prisoners previously forbidden contact and ending their "lateral invisibility...[the] guarantee of order." (Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, p. 200)

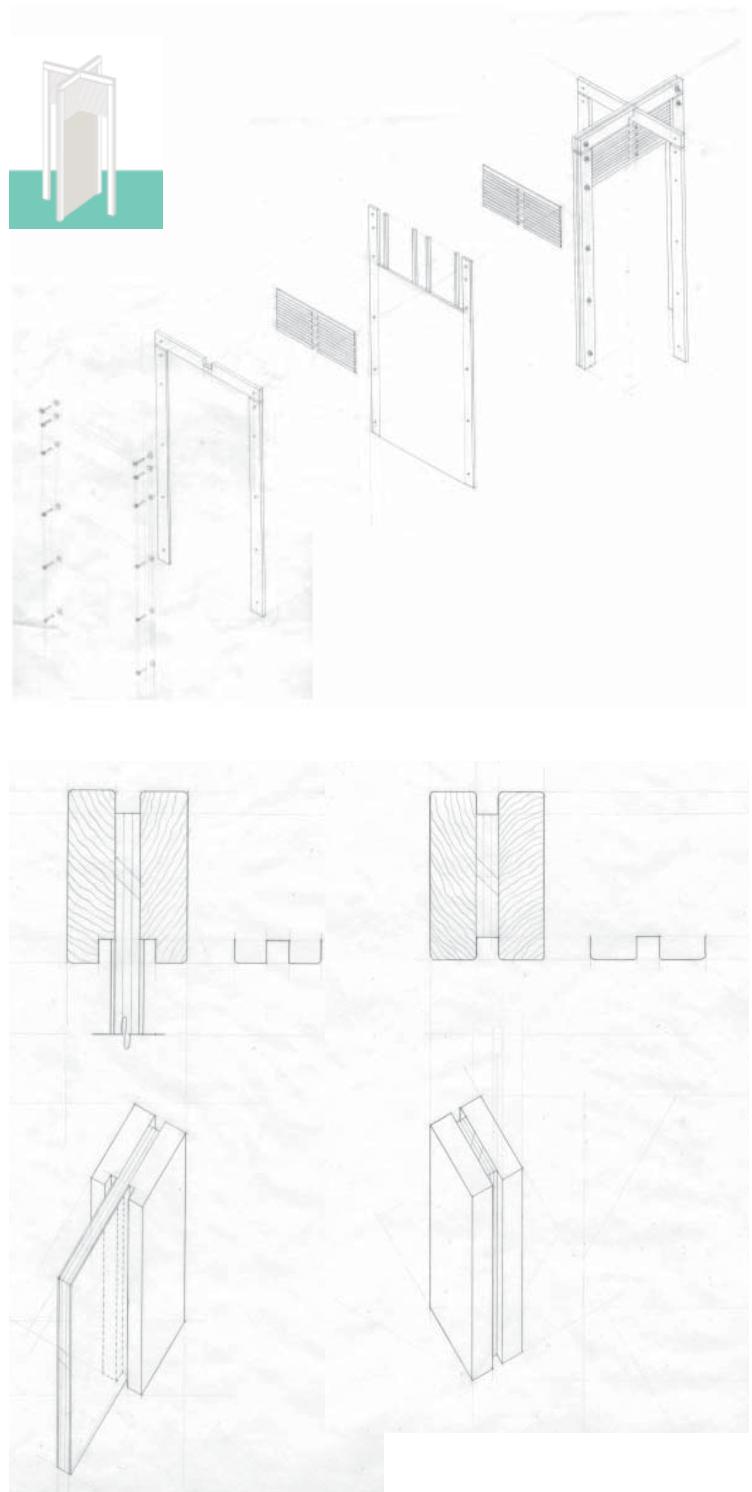


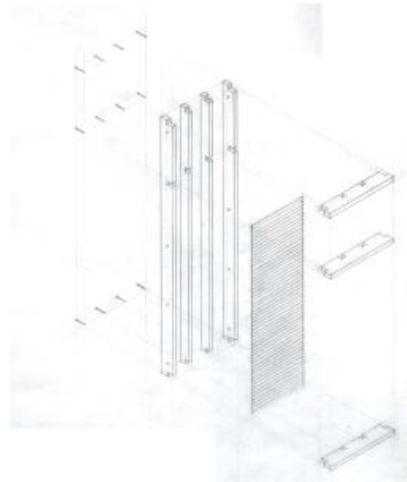


**09 | View Escaping - From within cells 5 and 14,** prisoners are granted a view of the previously unknown light-filled corridor stretching out in front of them. Depending on which cell it is seen from, this corridor leads to one of two forbidden and highly symbolic places - either the door leading outside of the prison (Fig 09 photo) or the central rotunda (Fig 14). These escaping views imply two possibilities subversive to Haviland's scheme. The first is the opportunity for the prisoner to attain a path leading away from the prison. The second is that he might somehow gain access to the rotunda and, with it, the power of privileged vision.

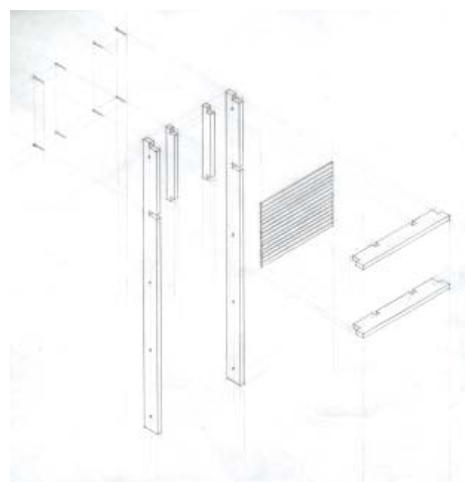


**10** | Left: Element - X, Component - portal. Below Left: column with mirror - plan detail shows column rabbeted to receive mirror. Rabbit creates a reveal that disguises the mirror. The reflection creates a perceived profile similar to the columns without mirrors, thus the mirror disappears. Below right: plan detail of column (open portal, no mirror)

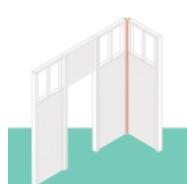
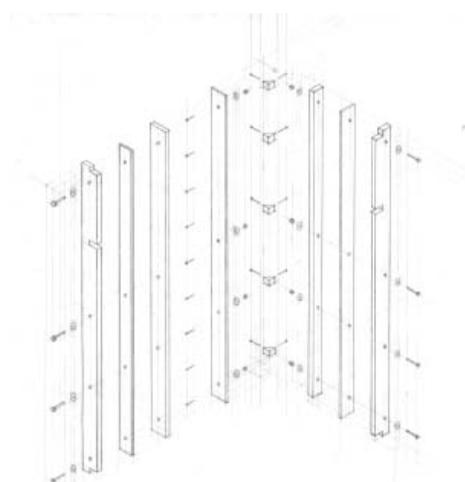




11 | Element - L, Component - Panel A



12 | Element - L, Component - Panel B



13 | Element - L, Component - Corner

**CONCLUSIONS**

This installation proposes that architecture can be responsive without being derivative—it can respond to program, history, culture, and environment without simply recreating the thing to which it is responding. In doing so, both context and intervention are enhanced. Here, a simple installation, which is materially and conceptually very different from its context, works in tandem with its surroundings to explore ideas of isolation, incarceration, and surveillance. During initial site investigations, we documented spaces and details—flaking green paint, extraordinary perspectival views, light worthy of master paintings, peeling layers revealing underlying materials, and a pair of angled mirrors held by ornate wooden frames. These observations became the seeds from which we synthesized an architectural response. Pristine lumber was set against the foil of fractured paint chips. Slatted wood screens both contrast with the monolithic surfaces of the corridor and recall the exposed lath of the barrel vaults elsewhere in the prison. Both the light conditions and the perspectival views of Eastern State serve as a bridge to link our work to that of Haviland.

While the installation was short lived and specific to cellblock 10, we posit that the critical approach to context is eminently transferable and that an approach in which architecture seeks to have such a conversation can provide one way to create designs that are unique



**2009 Award of Merit — AIA Gulf State Region**

**2009 Award of Merit — AIA Tennessee**

**2007 Award of Merit — AIA East Tennessee**

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Nashville Civic Design Center, Knoxville Museum of Art