

**project\_summit:** FOSTERING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS ON SNOWMASS MOUNTAIN

Mountains are sources of awe-inspiring vistas, thrilling downhill adventures, and intrinsic environmental beauty. Since the large resort corporations started dominating mountain landscapes, the connection to the wonderful terrain has been put second to increased profits, larger trails, and more invasive infrastructure. Mountain resorts are prolific across the world; from historical villages in Europe, to destination resorts in the Rockies, to brand new mega resorts in China. The mountain sport industry is more popular than ever.

Synonymous with skiing, the town of Aspen has since its founding, been on the forefront of resort design, village community life, and environmental stewardship. Among the successful mountains of the Aspen Ski Company, Snowmass Mountain is an all-around diverse mountain in terms of terrain and amenities. While Snowmass boasts a unique on slope village relationship - extending halfway up the mountain - there remains disconnect between people and the mountain. This physical and spiritual divorce from the landscape stems from a fundamental flaw in the way people participate in mountain sports. There is no interaction among users nor between people and nature, and the built environment does little to encourage appreciation of the mountain.

The mountain sport industry suffers from an 'elitist' false persona where the common person feels they have very limited access to participate. This is in fact false, as backed up by numerous surveys that suggests the number one reason why people don't go to the mountain is because they have no one to go with. The problem is clearly people connecting to people, or forgetting the reason why they participate in mountain sports: the thrill of experiencing such extreme terrain.

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Studies of Olson Kundig's shelters in the Pacific Northwest, many Chilean structures scattered across the Andes, and resorts from Whistler and Vail to Chamonix have provided valuable insight into the light-handed gestures of small architecture in extreme environments, and the old and new ways of resort design.

The purpose of Project\_Summit is to find a way to accentuate the beautiful mountain landscape through architecture and reinvigorate the mountain sport participants about the activities and environment in which they partake. Four modes of social connectivity are made possible by the architectural interventions proposed on Snowmass Mountain: connecting with oneself, one's peers, the environment, and the larger community through an enhanced digital presence. These scales of work manifest architecturally through four typologies of huts: a digital pavilion (larger community), an observatory (environment), a sanctuary (oneself), and a concessions pavilion (one's peers).

Each typology of pavilion or hut caters to a specific program use. Each structure is placed on site according to a specific set of rules, and these sites are picked with yet another set of criteria. These guidelines along with material selection, and blending with the terrain contribute to a much more harmonious balance with the environment than your typical mountain lodge. They gingerly touch the ground using a non-invasive pin foundation system. With all of these aspects in mind, it is feasible to look at Snowmass as a prototype site for this architecture. There are 6 sites, and 2 huts per site, so each site has a unique coupling of typologies. With any luck, this thesis could be applied to any environment in need of connection to its users.