High-Tech Low-Tech
Sustainable research center featuring traditional woodworking methods, Kyoto, Japan

Main authors
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Summary by the jury
The French School of Asian Studies – École Française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO) – holds an extensive library housed in a new building in Kyoto. The narrow site is surrounded by neighboring buildings on three sides. Equipped with the most advanced technological features (electrochromic glass, ecological glass-wool insulation, geothermal heat storage, solar panels, etc.), the structure offers a prime example of sustainable development in modern construction. At the same time, time-honored Japanese woodworking methods were deployed, allowing the building to be erected rapidly.

Appraisal by the jury
The jury considers the project to be an ideal example of how to combine high-tech and low-tech construction in contemporary building practice. The structure – a manifesto in its own right – merges modern state-of-the-art technology with traditional artisanship. Bringing the “old” and the “new” together requires a specific sensibility, one based on an understanding of architecture as a form of research. While looking at history, future solutions are sought, as an approach adhering to the fundamental mandate of the institution as a research center.

Further authors
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Project data
Context Architecture, building and civil engineering
Client École Française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO)
Background Private commission
Planned start July 2013
Image 3: Floor and roof plans.

Image 4: North-south and east-west sections.

Image 5: Wooden structure mounted in two days.

Image 6: Carpenters at work. Hand-cutting of cryptomeria (Japanese cedar) pillars on site.

Image 7: View to the north-west from the third floor terrace.

Image 8: Traditional beam-to-beam joint carpentry detail.

Image 9: View of the stairway and the bookshelf, under construction.

Image 10: Changing façade of the building: morning, afternoon and night (reflection and transparency).

More at www.holcimawards.org/projects/high-tech-low-tech