Children’s Ziggurat
Locally-adapted orphanage and library, Kathmandu, Nepal

Main authors
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Summary by the jury
The Lali Gurans orphanage and library in Kathmandu addresses the needs of an under-served rural population. In a context lacking basic infrastructure, the new facility utilizes low-technology renewable energy and material resources, thus significantly reducing operating costs. Using local construction techniques and materials, the design invests in indigenous workmanship. Vertical gardens and permaculture provide thermal insulation as well as food for cooking. Aiming to overcome the image of “the orphanage” as institution, the project addresses the needs of the nearby communities by offering a library accessible to the public and a seismically stable refuge area during earthquakes.

Appraisal by the jury
The jury appreciated the simplicity and robustness of the structure, a reinforced fly-ash concrete frame establishing a three-dimensional matrix for manifold functions, including a range of public amenities. Specific spatial qualities are introduced within the structure, offering children the opportunity to discover, not unlike “Alice in Wonderland”, spaces full of surprise and mystery – roof top terraces, hanging gardens, majestic halls and hidden chambers. The building ultimately manages to combine a social framework with a physical one in a seemingly seamless way.

Image 1: The concrete structure utilizes vernacular building techniques and standardized formwork to create a seismically stable shape. This construction translates into an investment in local craft and workmanship. In contrast to local concrete buildings, which are normally finished in stucco, the orphanage’s exposed concrete accentuates and expresses the vernacular. The brise-soleil provides an armature to negotiate interior and exterior through gardens, circulation and social spaces.

Image 2: The vertical garden and permaculture is a critical component of the sustainability strategy. Vegetation is integrated into the exterior structure and circulation. The vertical structure processes waste, provides food, shades the building, purifies the air with ferns, and creates a lush outdoor environment throughout the building. Whereas this kind of interweaving of daily life with agriculture has often been proposed as a symbolic image of optimism, here it is a necessity.

Project data
Context: Architecture, building and civil engineering
Client: Seeds of Change
Background: Private commission
Planned start: August 2013

Further authors

Project data

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More at www.holcimawards.org/projects/childrens-ziggurat