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## Faculty of Architecture and Environmental Design

Kigali, Rwanda  
S&AA

Photography by Jules Toulet, or as noted

For this new architecture school at the University of Rwanda's College of Science and Technology, several metaphors provided inspiration, as well as a healthy dose of pragmatism related to economy, construction techniques and environment. The two-storey complex is favoured by an expansive site cresting a hill overlooking parts of the city, and the parti takes full advantage, providing a 'village' of separate pavilions closely spaced and interlinked by outdoor walkways and bridges. From without, the school resembles a community cluster of buildings in a distinctive tone of earthy orange. The pavilions hark to



the surrounding landscape of hills, their mound profiles rising to prismatic peaks offset at different angles to each other. The collection of masses is roughly grouped into three subsets, with a central open pathway running down the middle axis. Bridges at the first-floor level crisscross this axis, and most of the facades open widely onto it, via large glazed apertures. The axis is thus the active circulation spine of the school.

The plan is organised with most administrative, workshop, laboratory, seminar and lecture spaces at ground level, with studios one floor up. Students can access parts of the roof territory, which, thanks to the unusual roof forms,





Photography by Edwin Seda



Photography by Edwin Seda



seems almost like a separate, abstract landscape. The scheme is high on sustainable attributes, stressing natural light and ventilation, insulated concrete walls, rainwater collection on roofs, and so on. Nary a lift or air-conditioning unit is in sight.

The stated architectural inspiration was nature itself. The four elements of fire, water, air and earth provoked the orange tone, the inner garden, natural cross-breezes, and the use of lava rock and rammed earth in many walls. Even the meandering central axis is a homage to natural valleys and crevasses in the country's terrain. Yet it seems equally obvious that the traditions of local village settlements played their part in the DNA of the design. It is impossible not to consider the school as a settlement, with the interesting and ever-changing relationships of solids and voids as one moves around the building. The construction methods and materials support this interpretation: local wood carpentry, cast-in-place concrete, rustic plaster surfaces and rugged lava rock walls among the clues. The school consciously acts as a lesson at full scale for the students studying architecture and construction technology.

The imagery is strong. As the designers put it, the building "rests halfway between traditional and contemporary architecture... simple and didactic." And that it is. No one will mistake it for pastiche, yet it links strongly to precedents its users know well. Of simple, longstanding construction methods and materials, it still tweaks form, shape and scale to pull those into 2018. It is both a simple place, and an exciting one. If students of architecture here learn these are two of the art's fundamental attributes, the building will have taught something very valuable indeed.

