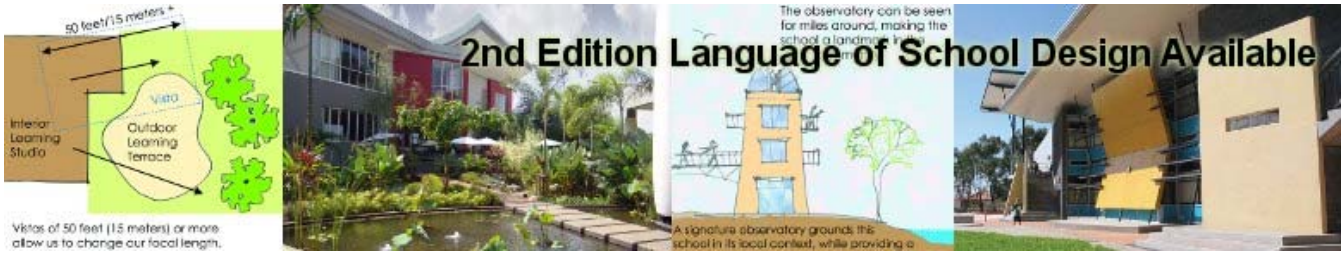

A design that shares itself

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TRILOGY
ARCHITECTURE URBAN DESIGN RESEARCH

“You are dreaming too small. If we do what we’re supposed to do, the future will not be green at all. If we do what we’re supposed to do, there will be no such thing as a green building. There will be buildings and then these stupid relics that somebody built out of poisonous stuff that wastes water and energy. “
Van Jones
West Coast Green, 2007

Personally, I don’t like the word “green” that’s become so popular in describing anything and everything that could possibly be friendly to the environment. It’s as if we are saluting ourselves for doing something special that is obvious. As a society, I think that we need to have the right environmental decisions become ingrained in the mindset of our children in order to be successful at maintaining the long-term health of our planet. We can achieve that best at home and through our schools. For schools to become good teachers of environmental health, those who determine how schools get built need to rethink their priorities. At the local, state and federal level “green” needs to become so important today that tomorrow we won’t need to refer to it anymore.

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I have said in the past that for us to “get it”, we need to see examples of what is possible. That’s where the Redding School of the Arts comes in to play. Designed as a virtual clearinghouse of eco-friendly ideas, it literally has something for everyone. Green is not an all – or – nothing proposition. If we all contribute in a small way, big improvements can occur in our planet’s health. So, this school is being designed to be copied (and improved upon) in any way possible.
But in order to make it really easy to take the ideas being offered and use them in other places, we have decided to make ourselves very obvious, whether you are an everyday user or just a one – time visitor. We want to “hit you over the head” with the proverbial hammer. It’s wonderful to build an environmentally advanced building, but its eco-friendly features need to be transparent to all those who travel through its hallways.

From the moment you enter the site, the message will be clear – here are the choices we made – and it is up to you to decide what is useful to your everyday life. Transparency will occur with windows into every mechanical space as well as windows into the classrooms. With a series of panelized doors, the galleries connecting those classrooms can be opened to outdoor classrooms surrounded by landscaped screen walls. A dual - flush toilet, low flow sink or high efficiency hand dryer turns an ordinary restroom into a teaching opportunity. Students can look through a window into the elevator shaft to see how an elevator works. We are planning for a natural water feature right at the front entry, one that operates without power by using rainwater runoff from the building’s roof. The concept of life –cycle design will be demonstrated in the use of durable materials and low maintenance building systems designed for a hundred year building, with interpretive displays for each. This building is a sort of evolving lab experiment, and as such we have to be flexible enough in our design that unforeseen developments fifty years from now can be accommodated within the structure of our building, something we call future – proofing.

While all this may look great on paper, how do you measure the success of a lab experiment? From the opening bell of the first day of school, everyone with a computer should be able to log onto an internet - based “building dashboard” to observe how efficiently the building is operating at any given moment. This dashboard will monitor the building’s energy systems and not only make the results easily accessible, but hopefully modify student and teacher behaviors with regard to more effective energy use. That’s critical to our being able to show anyone who is interested than our building was not only planned to be energy efficient, but that in practice actually can be energy efficient.

When completed, it will be obvious that this school differs in many ways from conventional building design, but that it not the goal. Ultimately, what we want to achieve is a “new normal”, a building which hopefully represents what all buildings will someday become.

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This piece is part two of a three-series article that will be featured on DesignShare in coming months. Read Part 1 here.

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