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Photo Story

Architectural and Environmental Genius

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When one thinks of school, the same thoughts are played over and over again in one's mind, funny teachers, boring classes in a dull and dreary building. But for a school deep in the heart of Dinajpur, they can at least cross one item off that list. The Modern Education and Training Institute (METI) located in Rudrapur can offer its students something that no other school in Bangladesh can, an international award winning building. As if that was not enough in the era of environmentalism, the structures stands out as a shining example of an eco-friendly building. Not only is it environmentally friendly but the construction process was also a breath of fresh air as it involved the community and its resources in what could be called a sustainable build.



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The architects of this amazing school, German born Eike Roswag and Austrian Anna Heringer, took it upon themselves to create a space that would inspire children, rather than just a place for them to learn. The result was a beautiful airy, two storied building that was created out of the earth that the town's people trod on. The project was conceptualised over a few years and only after a battery of tests had been carried out on the soil did the architects actually try to create their school of dreams.

What makes the building so innovative is that not only is it a contemporary design but the process to construct it was very rural and one might even be tempted to say ancient. When conceiving the building the architects from Europe thought of the processes that went into building the mud huts of the early medieval ages and hoped to recreate that technique in Bangladesh. After extensive testing they found the soil of Rudrapur to be mainly silt with some clay (this type of soil is often referred to as 'Loam') and that made their job a lot easier as they were sure it could withstand a certain amount of pressure and would harden well without too much cracking. They also decided to go ahead with the plan of making a two-storied house made out of mud, something which is very rarely tried.



After the plans had been finalised it came down to actually building the school and there the architects took a hands-on approach to the construction as well. Not wishing to act as foremen merely directing the work, they got their hands dirty by actively working during the building process. Day after day they were literally up to their elbows in mud as they mixed it with straw to create the walls for the building. A common complaint with this type of construction is that rats often dig holes through the loam and straw mixed floor, but even that fear was allayed as they put a concrete foundation under the building. It took four months to construct and in that time the entire village came together helping out however they could. The process of learning started right at the very foundations of this school as labourers learned the technique of mixing the mud and straw while the architects

learned from the labourers how to put up the walls.

Four months after the foundation was set the building was completed. From the outside it looks like the ground birthed a school, something one might expect from the magical-realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez novels and in a way that is exactly what happened. The combination of the inbuilt bamboo with the mud and straw walls gives it an earth feel. Inside there are little cubbyholes the students can use to move between classes and even just take some time out to relax. With its high ceiling and natural materials it remains cool in summer and cosy in winter. After its all said and done it's a school, and what better place to be inspired than an Aga Khan Architectural Award winner. The young minds already have something to look up to, in more ways than one.



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