

Architectural Designs for East Africa

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In Tanzania I consulted with the American NGO “Africa Schoolhouse” which is building schools in the Sukuma village of Ntulya, known in the region as a healing village. The village has requested a Health Post (Kituo cha Afya) and community Resource Center (Kituo cha Elimu). I met with the community and with the construction crew to discuss ideas for the two new buildings. Local building materials include earth brick, which is fired in rice-husk fueled kilns, and thatch for roofs. Thatch has become scarce and expensive, and the Tanzanian government doesn’t approve of thatch roofs for larger public buildings, so our building proposals considered maximum use of brick without thatch. With guidance from Peter Rich, a South African architect who lectured at UF in fall 2009, and structural engineer John

Ochsendorf from MIT, we developed the building design using a low-tech brick vault roof system which can be constructed by both men and women on site.

I also visited the small town of Rugerero, Rwanda, to study the possibility for a new Health Clinic building. I was introduced to the town, a survivor’s village, by members of the UF AIM for Africa program led by Jill Sonke. The government of Rwanda is committed to staffing and maintaining new health clinics throughout the country. There is much work to be done before a new building could become a reality, but there is great potential due to the availability of local building materials and an enthusiastic labor force.

Finally, I visited the University of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, and met with professors and students at the Faculty of Architecture. Addis Ababa is a booming urban environment, and

the school of architecture is growing in order to increase the number of design professionals needed for this rapid expansion. I began collaboration with architect Fasil Ghiorghis on a joint design studio project which will involve students from University of Addis Ababa and UF.

All of the research compiled during these trips has been incorporated into the seminar I am now teaching, “Topics in African Architecture,” which is open to graduate students in all disciplines.

Our work in Ntulya and Moshi Tanzania was exhibited at Florida International University in the spring, in an exhibit entitled “Resource: Design in East Africa, recent work of Armstrong + Cohen Architecture” .

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