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# Rothschild Doyno nabs coveted AIA award for Haiti's Center of Hope

By Lauri Grotstein



Five years ago today, a 7.0 earthquake hit Haiti. The death toll ranged from 200,000 to 316,000, the quake damaged nearly 4,000 schools and it forced 1.5 million Haitians into homelessness.

Rothschild Doyno Collaborative, an architecture firm based in the Strip District, was one of many joining the rebuilding efforts, designing Sant Lespwa, Center for Hope in Hinche. Now the American Institute of Architects (AIA) has recognized Rothschild Doyno's work with the Institute Honor Awards for Architecture, 2015.

"It's the highest distinction that the AIA awards," says Mike Gwin, lead architect on the project. And it's the first time in more than 15

years that a Pittsburgh firm has garnered this distinction on their own. (Bohlin Cywinski Jackson earned the award in 1999.)

Sant Lespwa, Center of Hope is a community center located outside of Hinche, a town of 50,000.

World Vision, the aid organization that owns the site, hired Rothschild Doyno. "We traveled to Haiti, and spent a week to learn about the culture and the people," says Gwin. "And then we designed the center with the people by providing job skills training for more than 100 residents in the building trades—so the residents helped to build the center.

"This is an important factor: we were doing more than building a

structure, we were helping people get on their feet," he adds. "It really gave them a sense of ownership."

In the summer of 2013, the Sant Lespwa, Center of Hope opened.

The center's aim is to create change by providing resources and building capacity. It has a gathering center with community rooms, classrooms, a soccer field, administrative offices and a welcome center.

Because there is little infrastructure and the site has no electricity or water, the center is built to be sustainable with water collection, passive cooling, sewage treatment, natural ventilation and maximum daylight. Local materials were used, such as river stone,



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chiseled aggregate, palm weaving and thatching, and cast concrete.

And local knowledge was essential: “We really engaged children by going into the elementary school to do an art project with them so we could see their ideas,” says Gwin. “We spoke with village elders about their heritage. We learned traditional methods of building and integrated it with modern engineering.”

There was one elderly man who would gather palm leaves in a wheelbarrow. He’d push it to the site, and the palms were used to thatch sunshades for the windows.

“We might take water for

granted,” says Gwin, but Haitians “have a hard time collecting water.”

“Water is everything” one village elder told Gwin.

The team listened to the elders’ experience on how to collect water through roof design—so the center’s roof slopes to channel water into a 9,000-gallon cistern. Rainwater is treated with carbon and UV filtration which allows sinks to have clean water.

In addition, earthquake and hurricane-resistant (up to 150 MPH wind speeds) engineering methods were used.

“What design can do and how it can build community is evident for

this climate and this community,” wrote the AIA jury. “The way this project sustainably translates energy and architecture to this community is praiseworthy.”

The AIA awarded eleven firms the Institute of Honor Award. Other winners include the Cambridge Public Library (MA), the Danish Maritime Museum, and the Wild Turkey Bourbon Visitor Center (KY).

“More than building a great building, beyond creating beautiful architecture, we helped a community be a better place,” says Gwin.

