DESIGN INNOVATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

MONITOR

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DESIGN: ECKER ARCHITEKTEN
PHOTO: CONSTANTIN MEYER

Ecker Architects have designed a new building for «Dandelion Clock», a kindergarten that educates children with physical or developmental handicaps. The client's request for a maximally economical, quick-to-build solution found response in a building formed by four repetitive modules. Each of these units contains two rooms for group work and a small therapy room. During the summer months, the large overhanging roof provides shade in the classrooms, and creates exterior terraces allowing the kids to play outdoors even in poor weather. The units surround the atrium — the largest single space in the entire school. The atrium serves as a flexible meeting room, a circulation zone, an indoor playground, a communal dining hall, and the place where each child begins and ends his or her school day. Moreover, the size of the atrium permits group activities and joint celebrations, a vital part of the school's educational mission, initially considered beyond the budget.

The central part of the building is naturally illuminated and ventilated via four prominent roof monitors; together they form the so-called «jester's cap». They act as «thermal chimneys», drawing out excess warmth from the atrium. Ventilation flaps in the aluminium curtain wall facade allow a continuous, controlled stream of fresh air into the building. Even during construction works in the hot summer of 2006, the climatic concept produced a comfortable interior environment without the aid of mechanical cooling. Far from being a purely technical device, the «jester's cap» gives the kindergarten its visual identity: the building is a strong presence despite the sprawling commercial surroundings. Roof cladding in gold-anodized aluminum makes an important source of pride for the Dandelion kids.

The entire volume is built of wood frame construction, with exposed columns and beams in glued laminated timber. The nearly identical building modules enabled factory production of large framed panels; as a result, the construction period, from groundbreaking to ribbon-cutting, totaled a mere 8 months. To ensure precise construction, connections in the timber elements of the building, designed to accept aluminum curtain wall profiles, were milled with a CNC wood router. Exterior walls are clad with robust clapboard. Wood-based materials play a dominant role in the interior build-out. The colour concept reinforces the geometry of the building and assists in the spatial orientation of the young user group.

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