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Building With Hope

An exciting challenge to designers today is how to create a building that responds to the individual comfort levels of its inhabitants as well as minimizing the overall impact that the building has on the environment. There are few companies that are willing to invest in this design challenge because it requires an exploration of resources as well as imagination. I think that before laying out the LEED checklists, a company has to be committed to a bigger idea—an idea about promise, hope, and inspiration. It is a commitment to these kinds of ambitions that drives designers to push the envelope of sustainability, and to build beautiful buildings.

A few years ago, as an undergraduate architecture student in Boston, I remember feeling a kind of inspiration or even architectural comradery after visiting the Genzyme Center in Cambridge. I was still clumsy in my understanding of architecture, but I started to know myself a little better as a designer after seeing what smart architecture could be. The building felt clean, light, airy, open, and energetic. It wasn't particularly sunny in the city that day, but the orchestration of tall atrium spaces, fenestration, materiality and reflection created such an optimistic place to be in.

Genzyme Corporation was founded in Boston, Massachusetts in 1981 as a company invested in the research and development of biotechnology, with a focus on rare genetic diseases. Today, their influence has expanded to over 90 countries all over the world, with many humanitarian initiatives that provide health services to patients who cannot otherwise afford medical care. Here, one can see a message of hope—hope in even the most desperate circumstances. Their company's mission statement encompasses a global social responsibility to those in medical need, as well as an investment in their local community. In Cambridge, the company's headquarters has become an icon for a happy and healthy place to work—in addition to leading the way for sustainable construction methods.

Behnisch, Behnisch and Partner executed the Genzyme Center as a living example of the company's values. The building itself uses almost half of the amount of energy used in an average office building, and more than a third less water. Thermal comfort, view, and even transportation of its employees were all taken into consideration during the design phase. Operable windows in conjunction with an advanced air-monitoring system allow individuals to manage the temperature of their workspace. Each employee has either a direct view to the exterior or direct access to one of the eighteen interior gardens.

The building as a whole is organized by a generous atrium that compliments the company's dedication to transparency, honesty, and accessibility. The atrium is flooded with light carefully choreographed by skylights and reflective ceiling panels. In addition to the advanced airflow system, the Genzyme Center incorporates a vegetative roof, photovoltaic panels, and a double-skin glass façade to minimize water runoff and thermal loads. The sustainable architectural strategies, I think, are part of a larger commitment to the building's occupants and to the social and environmental responsibility taken on by Genzyme Corporation.

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The American Institute of Architects
Knowledge Communities Corporate Architects and Facility Management Scholarship
Attn: Bruce Bland
1735 New York Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20006-5292

To the members of the CAFM Advisory Group,

Thank you for awarding me an AIA Corporate Architects and Facility Management Scholarship for the upcoming 2011-2012 academic year. This generous award will help me to continue my graduate education in architecture, as well as make it possible for me to study abroad in Buenos Aires this fall. I am excited to expand my understanding of design by exploring the architecture and culture of Argentina, and to persist in achieving the Master of Architecture professional degree from Washington University in St. Louis.

After my first year as a graduate student, I look back and see myself rediscovering the social responsibility of architecture. During my senior year of undergraduate at the University of Virginia, I participated in my first design/build collaborative studio. It was then that I started to appreciate full-scale fabrication and material research as a means to socially conscious design. Currently, I am finishing up the construction of my second design/build studio project. Eleven other architecture students and I collaborated to design, fabricate, and construct a shade pavilion in the Botanical Heights neighbourhood of St. Louis. This design/build studio project was unique because it relied mostly on digital design using Rhino script, and was only possible through meticulous digital fabrication using a 3-axis CNC router, 24 custom-made jigs, and a 36” x 36” thermoforming oven.

In the future, I hope to continue to work on similar projects that have a direct interaction with the community. As a student of architecture, I am constantly striving to create beautiful and compelling spaces, while remembering the people and resources that are involved or affected. Thank you again for choosing me as one of the scholarship recipients.

Sincerely,

Sarah A. Kott