

“Postfossil Göttingen University Kindergarten” / publication in International Armstrong Newsletter 2010

Linoleum Special: University Göttingen - Day Care Centre



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- Luxury Vinyl
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- Accessories
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- Search by Performance Criteria
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- Search floors by colour
- Download Centre
- Order Samples
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DESIGN UNIVERSITY GÖTTINGEN - DAY CARE CENTRE

Dr. Urban and Mr. Hide with Art linoleum Day care centre at Göttingen University

Educational buildings have the potential to set societal changes in motion by modeling architectural and ecological qualities. Therefore, with their day care center at Göttingen University, Despang Architekten wants to develop a new prototype – post-fossil architecture considers fossil reserves too valuable simply to burn up.

Göttingen is for Germany what Cambridge is for England and Yale is for the US, i.e., provincially located and fully dedicated to research and teaching. Its new day care center will be located between the campus and an adjacent park. Under the project direction of Philip Högbe, Despang Architekten designed the building as a hybrid of nature and architecture. Architects Günther and Martin Despang elaborate saying, “The building has the working title ‘Dr. Urban and Mr. Hide’ because of its two faces – urban and hidden at the same time.” The southward-facing side of the day care center looks like a building, but the westward and northward facing sides have been incorporated into the landscape becoming unrecognizable as a building as they morph into a green hill rising out of the meadow. They add with a smile, “Even the protected hamsters are happy with this.”

The day care center is laid out in the shape of a thick 90-degree arc. The front of the building facing south toward the park has large windows, as does the flat eastward-facing side. Its north and west sides are built into a hill, and its grassy green roof helps to integrate the building into the park. The entrance is located on the east side.

“In the species-rich desert of Tucson, Arizona, we saw how living creatures go underground during the day and take advantage of geothermal cooling,” says Martin Despang, who teaches and does research at the University of Arizona. “We

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have brought these ideas to Göttingen. The building should feel comfortable and be thermally self-regulating by absorbing solar and night cooling energy, storing it and re-emitting it over time.”

The walls and ceilings of the day care center were fabricated as precast concrete components and were assembled on site using a modular construction system. Light brightens up the monolithic building and makes the cement appear satiny. The hallway is dotted with a series of skylights. The rooms are arranged in zones of increasing ceiling heights. The ancillary and utility rooms as well as the restrooms are located in the lower ceiling areas. The play area serves as a transitional space to the higher ceilings of the children’s activity and nap rooms, whose floor-to-ceiling windows provide a view of the outdoors.

“Naked” wood runs through interior of the building. Furniture, doors, and trim work are made out of light pine. “We selected the new DLW Lino Art from Armstrong because it unites tradition and innovation,” says Martin Despang. “The classic kindergarten floor covering is laced with real aluminum chips. Firmament Black gives the impression of a glittering reflection of a star-filled sky on a body of water at night.” The children’s playthings, their creativity and vitality look like colorful islands against this background.

▲ Top

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