



This Stunning Refit of a Derelict School Building in Puerto Rico Was Inspired by the Surrounding Bamboo Forest

by Beverley Mitchell, 10/16/14
filed under: architecture, education, green education

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It's hard to believe when looking at it, but the underlying structure of the striking GELM Annex at the Guardería Ecológica La Mina in Corozal, Puerto Rico, had been deserted for over 20 years. But that was before [Díaz Paunetto Arquitectos](#) were commissioned to transform it into a multipurpose meeting and teacher training space and storage area for the school. To make the transformation even more remarkable, the firm only had a six-month turnaround time on the project.



The Annex refit was the second commission Díaz Paunetto had received from the school, having [previously remodeled classrooms](#) and the playground space. The Guardería serves as a Head Start and [Early Head Start](#) school of the Puerto Rican Family Institute. The derelict building was typical of the predesigned concrete modules used by the Department of Education for school expansions in Puerto Rico since the 1960s. While it was certainly tempting to demolish the structure and start over, the Guardería is an [ecological preschool](#), so it was decided that the building's footprint was to remain unchanged.

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When it came to design considerations, it was clear that the second floor of the Annex offered the potential for a view over the existing daycare and [playground space](#). Díaz Paunetto used a concrete roof slab to extend upon the existing stairs and provide a shelter from rain and sun underneath. They also designed a glass projection

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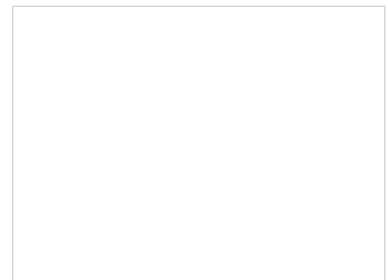
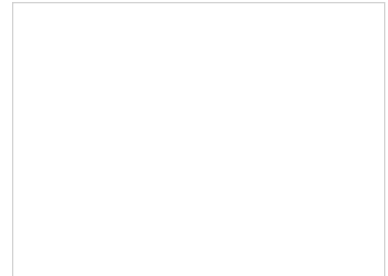
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from the building, which connects the interior space with the [surrounding vegetation](#) and the playground area.

Harmonizing the exterior of the structure with the rest of the bright and engaging school environment seemed next to impossible, so the architects decided to [clad the building](#) in long-lasting and low-maintenance corten steel. This was laser cut with a pattern evoking the adjacent stands of [bamboo](#). Colored glass was also incorporated into the steel screen in reference to the colors used in the other school buildings and allows a stunning pattern of filtered, colored light into the annex interior. The building now serves as a multipurpose room for parent meetings, seminars and teacher training sessions, among other uses, and the first floor provides essential storage space.

The firm says of the inspiring transformation: "This project aspires to be an example of how the recycling of existing structures can potentially serve as a vehicle for a [sustainable development](#) of our built environment. The challenges of demonstrating how adaptive reuse could be seen as a new model for redevelopment was intertwined with the challenges of a designer also working as the [builder with an extremely limited budget](#) and time for the execution of this project."

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+ Díaz Paunetto Arquitectos

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