

Montessori Island School

TAVERNIER, FLORIDA 1996

JERSEY DEVIL'S INSISTENCE on building their own work—and the fact that they are not licensed architects—has long kept them from doing public buildings. So the recently completed Island Montessori School, just up the highway from the Red Cross House, is notable both as their first public building (other than earlier projects that fall under the rubric of “public art”) and as the first project whose construction they have entrusted to other hands. The Miami firm of Taxis Architects was architect of record for the project, and it was built by general contractor C & E Construction. Adamson and Badanes created the schematic design and took it through design development on a consultant basis.

The school was commissioned by Ron Levy, one of the clients for the Red Cross House. Like that house, the school is designed to be cooled without air conditioning, a feat that is accomplished through the use of generous operable windows, thermal mass, ceiling fans, and a radiant barrier. The basic *parti* is a row of classrooms raised one story off the ground and set on either side of an open central corridor with a vented canvas top that acts as a solar chimney. The corridor swells in the center to make a gathering space. But because the school will be built in two phases (the fate of the second phase is uncertain), the scheme also had to work with only one side of the corridor built, as is currently the case. Until the second phase is built, the central space will remain enclosed by insect screen on the seaward side. Another temporary solution is the series of stairstepping canvas sunscreens on metal tube frames that shield the south-facing classrooms while letting the breeze through.



ABOVE: CLASSROOM INTERIOR

OPPOSITE: DETAIL OF SUN SHADES

For security reasons, traffic through the building is funneled through the administrative offices in the center. There are entrances on both sides plus a pair of ramps, with railings of chain link fencing dipped in yellow plastic.

Many of the design decisions can be traced to climatic concerns. The end walls are set at forty-five-degree angles to help channel nonprevailing winds into the central corridor, and even the raised first floor—while a code requirement—will ultimately contribute to ventilation: heated air at ground level will rise through openings in the corridor to further stir the air in the school.

The school takes the tropical color palette of the Red Cross House further, with a deep yellow and Key lime green

EXTERIOR VIEW—SOUTH SIDE



used not just as accents but for the entire elevations. The concrete floor is treated with a deep green pigmented sealer, and the canvas raised roof of the central corridor is a hot fuchsia.

Despite the more conventional architect-client-contractor relationship, the school is not especially different

in character from other recent Jersey Devil projects, suggesting that strong design ideas have increasingly become more important to Jersey Devil than onsite improvisation and labor-intensive craft.