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HEALTH CARE

Share Houses, Rwinkwayu Hospital

Rwinkwayu, Rwanda
Sharon Davis Design



With a firm commitment to contribute to architecture's social role, often in Africa, Sharon Davis has designed this latest building in Rwanda, a residence for doctors and nurses practising at a nearby hospital. Aimed at creating a sensible, sustainable, affordable building attuned to its hot, dry hillside site, the accommodation for 16 professionals provides bedrooms and shared bathrooms plus common spaces and a covered, screened external walkway linking them all. The structures are built of local materials – stone, wood, brick – and with local labour, much of it female; a women's cooperative from the area produced the handmade bricks for the walls. The roof has a ventilated cavity for insulation that is lined with clay tiles for better acoustic and thermal protection.

The building plan divides itself into two groups of eight occupants each – conveniently lending it to gender groups – and proffers lovely views to the surrounding landscape. Nearby indigenous trees help with shading. Due to the gentle slope of the land, the structures nestle into a low retaining wall at the back, and some of the internal spaces are stepped to act as communal gathering or meeting rooms. The brick walls, at times perforated with tiny glazed openings in random patterns, nicely contrast the twig screen walls along the walkways. Even in such a modest construction, there is a pleasing gradation of solid to transparent surfaces, with different qualities of seclusion and natural light in each.

Davis' little building is yet another in the category of philanthropic or pro bono work by architects in the 'third world', which have recently garnered well-deserved notice



from the architectural-critical community. Whether in Africa, China or South America, there is a growing catalogue of structures that, in spite of being realised with extremely modest means, stand on their own purely architectural merits. These buildings are helpful reminders that 'small a' architecture is as fulfilling and, at times, as beautiful, as the type built by superstars.

