

# Architectural Record

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**Icefjord Center**  
by Dorte Mandrup  
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## Devland SOWETO Education Campus

Johannesburg | William Reue Architecture

IN 2010, when Deborah Terhune pivoted from a decades-long career in private-sector real estate to one in social entrepreneurship, she founded the nonprofit Growing Up Africa, with a two-pronged education mission. The New York-based organization develops secure and technology-ready education facilities in South Africa with local labor, so that community members gain valuable

field experience in the construction trades. In addition, upon conclusion of those projects, buildings are donated to school operators to perpetuate a culture of learning. The recently completed Devland Soweto Education Campus in Johannesburg is Growing Up Africa's first foray into a higher-education program.

The 21,500-square-foot building, which

comprises administrative offices and flexible learning spaces, anchored by an auditorium in its northeast corner, was designed by New York-based William Reue Architecture, with Africa's largest firm, Boogertman + Partners, serving as architect of record. Both studios worked on the commission pro bono, and 225 companies donated materials and labor to the effort in all. These goods and professional services make up 80 percent of the total cost of the facility, which is equivalent to \$6.9 million.

The Devland campus occupies a 1.7-acre parcel overlooking a highway that connects its





The compact, low-slung volume (opposite, top) was built by the community (bottom) and has a large daylight flex room (right) and playful classroom fenestration (opposite, bottom).

namesake community—part of Soweto—to Johannesburg. Although Terhune says her expansive network of corporate sponsors and private donors are committed to Growing Up Africa's goals in principle, architect William Reue notes that givers needed a highly resolved schematic design to galvanize tangible commitments. In turn, Reue conceived a low-slung volume, parallel to the artery at its east, with a roofline that rakes upward dramatically to accommodate the auditorium within. "It was important to have a bold and dignified presence at the street to create a center of gravity, while scaling the rest of the building to the informal development that surrounds the site," he says.

The initial drawings of the school secured the donated concrete that makes up the building's superstructure, and the design evolved as subsequent gifts fell into place. Responding to an offer of more than 20,000 sandbags, for example, Reue thickened the walls to make use of their thermal and acoustical properties. When that framing prevented Reue from punching geometrically complex openings into the north and west elevations, he approximated that idea by installing donated windows in a seemingly random pattern. Alternatively, when Reue thought that the aluminum extrusions cladding a nearby Johannesburg gallery would make an evocative skin for the auditorium, Terhune was able to raise funds for a direct purchase.

Because few of these transactions took place in single swoops, Terhune orchestrated construction based on the availability of supplies and laborers. Occasionally work would pause until the planets realigned in her favor. Even so, she says, "it was important that I was on-site every day. I made a promise to the community and to everyone who committed time and resources to this project." Fulfilling that promise, in 2021 Terhune turned the campus over to the University of Johannesburg, which will run the facility as a satellite specializing in the STEAM curricula for its undergraduates and local continuing-education students. The university, moreover, has partnered with the global IT services and consulting company Accenture, so that students may be assigned to one of its projects upon completion of their coursework. *David Sokol*

