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Casting Architecture: Ventilation Blocks

Florian Schätz

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The tropics have hot and humid climatic conditions that are inexorable against any building design. Enclosed spaces without air-conditioning and cross ventilation hold the heat, and become stuffy and moldy environments. Algae grow within days on plastered and painted surfaces due to the heavy tropical rains. The introduction of industrial mechanical building systems comes with high costs for both man and nature. Architects fight a continuous battle with climatic conditions and unsuitable material in an effort to offer more comfort and better design. Faced with climate conditions, the traditional art of building ceases to exist. Yet, architects like Kerry Hill and Kevin Mark Low create added value to a tropical design by combining both traditional methods of building while employing cross ventilation as a design feature. Traditionally, ventilation blocks have been used to make living in hot and humid regions more comfortable. Mass-produced modular blocks can take over construction loads, permit cross ventilation and protect the building's interior from intense tropical rainfall. Ventilation blocks, as modular-building systems, using carefully executed designs, create richly ornamented sculptural facades. Unfortunately, with air-conditioning and the current preference for steel-glass facades, ventilation blocks are no longer fashionable. Casting Architecture rediscovers the spirit of traditional forms of buildings. This publication shows the ventilation block as an unique tropical building element. Precast concrete pieces form not only walls, but also create, wonderfully fluent forms. By combining traditional principles with new, advanced building technologies, this studio generates excitement from old ideas and new products. The results are lightweight concrete screens with minimal materials, rich with tectonic reliefs, including fascinating forms and patterns. As homogeneous facades, they create a dramatic interplay of contrast with light. With each wall, the architect shows a unique construction expression. Casting architecture is a unique process of creating the vision of architecture in a concrete structure. Casting architecture inspires design enthusiasts toward erecting futuristic ideas in cement and concrete, and enables the further exploration and creative liberation of ideas beyond the limits of classical building methods. It also adds some excitement to those who want to learn more about how things stack together. An almost forgotten art, the Ventilation block has a long history as a traditional building module in tropical regions. It provides climatic comfort, protection and architectonic a continuous application of modules. This book rediscovers the formwork's beauty in a continuous application of modules, designed by Florian Schätz and the Year 02 architecture students from the department of Architecture at National University of Singapore.

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