SINE FREJSTRUP

LEARNING LANDSCAPES FOR WONDER

The imaginative design of St. Andrew's Scots School in Buenos Aires Argentina evokes the Scottish landscape to encourage the youngest students to learn through play, bringing out their curiosity and creativity.

Playful learning is at the heart of St. Andrew's Scots School. With colourful and distinctive design features, the school offers a 3200 square metre landscape of wonders that lets pupils in kindergarten and primary romp, jump and play as part of their learning.

The flexible spaces of the Argentinian school are designed by Copenhagen-based Rosan Bosch Studio to evoke the school's Scottish heritage through myths and landscape features.

As a bilingual school established by Scottish immigrants in 1838, the school wanted a design that honored their traditions, while providing a modern framework for learning for the community of international students.

ROSAN BOSCH STUDIO IS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY AGENCY WORKING AT THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND DESIGN. THE STUDIO WAS FOUNDED IN COPENHAGEN IN 2011. AMONG ITS DESIGNS ARE THE RENOWNED SCHOOLS VITTRA SCHOOL TELEFONPLAN IN SWEDEN, WESTERN ACADEMY OF BEIJING IN CHINA AND SHEIKH ZAYED PRIVATE ACADEMY IN ABU DHABI

Students are invited on a learning journey through the flat beaches of the lowlands to the rocky and untamed highlands of Scotland. Bright and playful in appearance, the learning environment sparks the children's curiosity, making it clear that play and movement are welcome.

But why put play at the centre of school design? For a society always on the lookout for new ideas, play is a powerful source of innovative thinking. When children are playing, they can do anything – literally anything they can imagine – and this makes it a great catalyst for curiosity and motivation, both in education and beyond.

"When we play we are trying new things, taking risks, and experimenting – over and over again," explains creative director Rosan Bosch. "When you are playing, you collaborate and work together as a team. This kind of engagement is what is going to prepare young people for tomorrow's society."

For Bosch, this means taking play seriously when designing spaces for children.

Her studio's designs for St. Andrew's Scots School present a learning landscape where play can flourish. By having the opportunity to move their bodies, the children get more energy, become more engaged and develop the core skills needed for the future: collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

As they start their learning journeys through the Scottish landmarks, the children in kindergarten and early years are grouped around the open beach-inspired areas of the Lowlands. Grand coral sculptures in these common areas promote a playful learning atmosphere and give the spaces a clear identity.

"When you're small you need a strong connection to a place," explains Bosch. "You need a fixed base to come home to. The older you get, the more you expand your radius of where you are comfortable."

The padded surfaces surrounding the different corals are ideal for climbing and movement, so the students can move freely and improve their physical development.

Integrated lightboxes in the wooden podiums give the youngest students a place to develop fine motor control by tracing and drawing patterns on their own.

As the students grow older, they move on to the Highlands where their territory gradually expands, offering them more choice and autonomy in their learning activities.

In the differentiated learning environment of the Highlands, the students can work hands-on in the makers' lab, make presentations in the circular Nessie theatre and exhibit their work on the platforms of the exhibition forests.

Inspired by the sculptural basalt rocks along the Scottish coast, the hexagonal columns create an intriguing learning setting. Here, students can work in groups, gather for presentations or find shelter to concentrate on their own between the towering pillars.

The school day at St. Andrew's Scots School is planned as a series of destinations in the learning landscape, where the differentiated spaces can be combined in sequences to support project-based learning.

The open and shared learning areas have both bookable and unbookable spaces. This flexibility allows teachers to plan according to the needs of students – and improvise as needs arise during a project.

Overall, the new campus design gives the school a unique identity and fosters a playful learning environment developing creativity and innovative thinking. ■