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But First, Mother Nature

GRENADIAN FIRM BUILDS TO LAST,
WITH LOVE AND RESPECT
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

GREEN BUILDING MAY BE A GLOBALLY EXPANDING TREND, BUT IN THE CARIBBEAN, BLAZING SUN, CORROSIVE SALT AIR, AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS WEATHER CONDITIONS HAVE ALWAYS GUIDED THE WAY STRUCTURES ARE DESIGNED AND BUILT.

Working with environmental conditions is a guiding principle that defines the practice of Grenadian firm Caribbean Office of Co-operative Architecture (COCOA). Across COCOA's wide body of work, you'll find age-old practices such as structures with large openings that face prevailing winds to welcome cool breezes, along with more modern elements such as energy-efficient air conditioning units paired with double-glazed windows for extra insulation.

"We look at what has worked" says COCOA's director Bryan Bullen. "Irrespective of the program of our buildings, the designs are grounded in very specific things that have always worked traditionally."

In this sense, COCOA's projects stand firm in their place, promoting traditional environmentally friendly building practices such as using wooden operable louvers to provide cross ventilation, and water features to provide passive cooling. In today's throw-away society, where consumers opt for more short-lived, disposable items, COCOA has dug in its heels, focusing instead on building robust structures that can withstand strong hurricanes and live through the seismic activity that occurs throughout the region. Building strong lends a sense of safety to occupants, it is more sustainable and it also makes for quicker, easier recovery from natural disasters. Bryan's firm has moved beyond the utilitarian by creating designs that display a contemporary beauty. They quite literally strive to ground their buildings by using native materials where ever possible. In addition to the obvious benefits of skipping long lead times and avoiding the less-than-kind to-the-environment practice of importing supplies; structures are often built with materials proffered by the island, lending an heir of reverence to its home site.

"It makes sense in terms of the economy of our projects; it roots them in their place," says Bryan. "It feels right to use local materials, whether it's timber, stone, or whatever that may be. Buildings don't look out of place when you do this."

The architect reveals a fondness for designing buildings that probe and test our perceptions of Caribbean Architecture. By referencing and expanding on existing contextual and spatial concepts, COCOA aims to re-define and re-shape modern regional building practices.

"We try to use systems which leverage craft and precision," says Bryan. "It's really about making sensible choices, by always trying to find a balance."



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