



## **e<sup>2</sup> design “The Druk White Lotus School- Ladakh”**

### Background Essay

Ladakh is one of the most remote places in India with one of the harshest climates on earth and has been long isolated from the modern world. Now caught in the political and cultural cross-fire of neighboring countries and amidst religious strife, His Holiness the 12<sup>th</sup> Gyalwang Drukpa saw his people and their future at risk. Under increasing pressure to modernize and engage with the 21<sup>st</sup> century, His Holiness, one of the four core leaders of Tibetan Buddhism, envisioned the Druk White Lotus School. The school was conceived to equip Ladakhi children to function in a modern world while embracing the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Guided by the vision of His Holiness, Jonathan Rose and his team of architects and engineers at ARUP London designed a school that utilizes modern technology and knowledge to preserve and respect the Ladakhi culture and environment.

The master plan for the Druk White Lotus School was inspired by the Buddhist tradition in Ladakh. By laying out the school buildings in the traditional form of a mandala, a series of symmetrical geometric shapes with significant spiritual resonance, the design itself honors the culture of the community. The great innovation of the school is that it does not simply transplant Western notions of sustainable building into this remote region of India. ARUP considered the extreme climate of Ladakh and sought to understand local methods of construction, local architecture, and environmental physics in order to create an efficient design that would best address the needs of the school. The designers used construction methods based on the surrounding monasteries, which have survived up to a thousand years in the hostile conditions present. They also made full use of local materials using timber frames to reinforce the walls and roofs of the buildings. Tree plantations flourish in the valleys of Ladakh and trees grow very quickly, making them a sustainable and locally-sourced material.

For the buildings to function and last ARUP also used the natural environment. Buildings were strategically positioned to maximize solar potential according to their specific function. Classrooms face the morning sunlight to naturally heat and light them during the day. Residential buildings are built to absorb solar energy during the day and release the heat at night. These and other considerations allow the school to maintain comfortable temperatures without using money or energy.

The Druk White Lotus School demonstrates that efficient design doesn't necessarily have to be something Western or Western looking. With careful design and consideration local cultures can sustain their way of life while also utilizing technologically advanced methods. Thanks to the vision of His Holiness and the ARUP team, the world has an example to build off of. Where will this model be copied next?



For more information on the Druk White Lotus School, visit [www.dwls.org](http://www.dwls.org)

For more information on the His Holiness the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa, visit [www.drukpa.org](http://www.drukpa.org)

For more information on Jonathan Rose and ARUP London, visit [www.arup.com](http://www.arup.com)



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### PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

1. How would you define culture? List some key aspects of culture in general. Now list those same aspects of your specific culture.
  2. How do you think building design may or may not honor the culture of a community?
  3. What decisions and concerns do Western designers need to take into consideration when constructing a building in other parts of the world?
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### POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS

1. In what ways was the design for the Druk White Lotus School different than the design of buildings in other parts of the world? What factors contributed to these differences?
2. What particular decisions did the designers make in their choices of materials and energy sources to create a sustainable building in this remote location? How did they use the natural environment?
3. Why is it important to preserve culture? How is culture passed on? What aspects of culture, if lost, would be very hard to recover? How did the designers preserve the culture of Ladakh?
4. How can technology and modernization affect culture negatively? Positively? Use specific examples.