

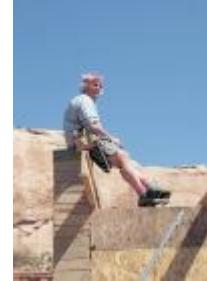
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Part of an occasional series

People we admire: Architect, his students design houses, then pound the nails

By Judy Magid

Photo Caption: Architect Hank Louis is a hands-on participant in building... (Courtesy of DesignBuildBLUFF)



Utah architect Hank Louis helps students in the University of Utah Graduate School of Architecture experience "hands-on" building guided by a simple principle: "Engaged minds, calloused hands and open hearts."

Each year, a group of eight to ten students works out of Bluff, on the edge of the Navajo Nation. Beginning semester, they design a house, following the requests of the owner. Then they spend most of the second semester in Bluff building [the house]," said Louis, founder of DesignBuildBLUFF. Students built the first house, the "Rosie Joe," in 2003-04. Last year, DesignBuildBLUFF's "Sweet Caroline" house, built in the Navajo Nation, won the People's Choice Award from the American Institute of Architects' Utah chapter, and honorable mention in the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture's 2005-06 student design competition.

DesignBuildBLUFF is as much about the client as it is the students. It is modeled on architect Samuel Mockbee's "Rural Studio" in Alabama, where students design and build houses for the poorest residents of Hale County. DesignBuildBLUFF's goal is to do the same thing for residents of Bluff and the Navajo Nation. "Each year, a project is selected from about 10 recommendations," Louis said. "Students get to see a client's needs firsthand. They discover decisions have to be made on-site. You don't just do a nice drawing and let someone else worry about building." He said he likes working in Bluff for a lot of reasons. One is that it is far enough away from Salt Lake City that students do not get distracted by going home for the weekend.

Louis did not start out to be a teacher. He did not even start out to be an architect. "I was a writer and a journalist," he said. When he and his former wife moved to Costa Rica, he spent two years building a house. "It was the most exciting thing I had ever done. I never did get it finished, but I decided that I wanted to study architecture," he said. He headed to the U. Since then, he has been the principal at 15.15 Architects and Form Fifteen, and currently is at Gigaplex, all in Park City. His design-build teaching began with bandstands in Park City. "Students were out in the parking lot working. When we ran out of time, they were surprised. And we had to finish, even after classes ended," he said. "That's what design-build is about."