

# Ground up Foundation

The Aga Khan Foundation has been a key influence on the emergence of many humanitarian architects. Although known for its Architectural Award, which has publicised the work of *Francis Kéré*, *Anna Heringer* and others, the Foundation's work is much broader

Captions:



Farrokh Derakhshan is the picture of the urbane cosmopolitan when I meet him sitting, drinking coffee with his wife in the foyer of a South Kensington hotel, London. The hotel is a stone's throw from the Victoria & Albert museum, where later the same evening he will introduce and launch the twelfth and latest round of the Aga Khan's Architectural Awards. Derakhshan is the director of the Aga Khan's architectural initiatives, which have, through both its work on historical buildings and sites around the Islamic world, and its tri-annual architectural awards helped bring attention to otherwise ignored architectural and heritage work in many parts of the world which have until recently not been part of the Western architectural landscape. Some would argue that the awards, which began in 1977, have been the single most influential media instrument in drawing mainstream attention to architects identified as at the forefront of the humanitarian architectural wave. Certainly, both Francis Kéré (who won the award in 2004) and Anna Heringer (2007) trace the beginning of a much more widespread recognition to the publicity and attention that came with their awards. "Francis Kéré always phones me each time he is commissioned for a new work." says Derakhshan, between sips of coffee, before discussing the overlap between these two architects, and the most recent Chinese award winner in 2010, the Li Xiaodong Atelier. The Atelier won the Aga Khan award for the rural Bridge school in Xiashi, a village in Fujian province, also known for its traditional earthen roundhouses.

This is not to say that the award is specifically focused on humanitarian architecture. Derakhshan emphasises that the award is not about Islamic buildings as such, but is flexible in its interpretation through stating that the Foundation looks for projects in any part of the world where there's a significant Muslim seam to the culture. The projects which have won awards have been diverse as well, encompassing the Petronis Towers in Kuala Lumpur; Oslo's Snøhetta studio's; the Alexandria library in Egypt, and the 'New life for Old Structures' programme that restored a number of aging religious buildings in Isfahan and Yazd, Iran, with the award going to Iran's Urban Development and Revitalisation Corporation in 1997.

