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'Green' Geochemistry Building Wins Awards

Leading Climate Studies, Sustainably

The 63,000-square-foot structure is designed for high energy efficiency and harmony with its rural landscape along the Hudson River

The new Gary C. Comer Geochemistry Building at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory in Palisades, N.Y., has won three top architecture awards. Recognized for its environment-friendly features, the building houses more than 80 staff, many of whom have long been at the forefront of global climate research. Scientists in Lamont's geochemistry division study the movements and interactions of substances in air, oceans, groundwater, biological remains, sediments and rocks.

The lab has received the 2009 Lab of the Year prize, cosponsored by R&D magazine and the Scientific Equipment and Furniture Association; a 2009 Sustainable Design Award, cosponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Boston Society of Architects; and the award for Excellence in Architecture in a New Building, from the American Institute of Architects and the Society for College and University Planning. Jurors noted the building's energy efficiency, use of environmentally sound materials, and fit with its surrounding forested hillside landscape, as well as its easy-to-navigate interior. The awards go to Payette architects, the Boston-based firm that worked on the building.

Opened in late 2007, the building is named for the late Gary Comer, founder of the Lands' End company, who funded most of the construction, and lent much other support to Lamont's climate research. One side of the long structure is occupied by two stories of 15-foot-high glassed-in labs with complex, energy-intensive mechanical systems; on the other are three stories of 10-foot-high low-energy offices with operable windows.

" Honoring the challenge posed directly by Gary Comer, Payette set out to make this a truly sustainable laboratory," said Joe Ienuso, executive vice president of Columbia University Facilities. "They sought to achieve this in a holistic way, recognizing that sustainability is more than using green materials or green power. Starting with its placement on campus, sustainability was at the root of the concept."

" This has been an important step towards accelerating our efforts to understand Earth's dynamics and predict our planet's changing climate," said G. Michael Purdy, director of Lamont-Doherty. "The visionary design combines all the attributes of a great and effective building."

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