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ARCHITECTURE

[Global Village](#)

The authentic buildings at Concordia Language Villages create total cultural immersion.

by [Linda Mack](#)



CONCORDIA LANGUAGE VILLAGES

MISSION – Teach languages via cultural immersion

LOCATION – Turtle Lake, Minn. (near Bemidji)

NUMBER OF LANGUAGES TAUGHT – 15

NEWEST OFFERINGS – Arabic and Portugese

NUMBER OF PERMANENT CAMPS – 6

STUDENTS – 6,000 in summer; 4,000 rest of year

WEBSITE – <http://clvweb.cord.edu/prweb>

PHONE – 800.222.4750

AFFILIATION – Concordia College, Moorhead, Minn.

Where can you find a mansard-roofed French *maison*, a Norwegian stave church and a Japanese *torii* gate all grouped around an inland lake? In central Minnesota near Bemidji, where the Concordia Language Villages have created authentic environments for their renowned language-immersion camps.

DESIGNING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTS

In 1961, Concordia College professor, Gerhard Haukebo, started a language camp where students would live the culture rather than just study it. When the German Language Camp opened in a rented Bible camp near Alexandria, the cabins were given German names.

From that simple idea has grown the country's premier language-immersion program. Along with the food and cultural activities, architecture helps create the authentic experience.

In Lac du Bois, the French village, a mansard-roofed mansion that houses the camp's kitchen, dining hall and meeting space sits on a Parisian-style square. Villagers head off to groups of cabins modeled on the vernacular style of Brittany or Provence — or to the round *boukarou*, a traditional hut from French-speaking Cameroon. In the Voyageur program, they sleep in tents and spend a week canoeing in (where else?) Voyageurs National Park.

“The buildings really set our program apart from any language camps in the country,” said Language Villages director Christine Schulze. “It’s not classroom-based but village-based. It’s 24-7 living the language experience.”

ARCHITECTURAL AUTHENTICITY

While the idea of a Norwegian *valhall* or German *bahnhof* may sound like Disney’s Epcot Center transported to central Minnesota, an uncommon attention to detail, down to the doorknobs and the way the windows open, gives the buildings authenticity inside and out.



The main building in the French village is called “Paris.”

Plus, “Disney’s buildings are props, façades,” says Amy Rutten, coordinator of building projects. “We use ours.”

It helps to hire architects who know the culture and to tap the expertise of the global staff, facilities manager Warren Schulze adds.



The Cameroon boukarou in the French village

Aki Ishida, a Japanese architect working in New York who attended the language camp and graduated from

the University of Minnesota, designed the concept for the Japanese village.

Kerrik Wessel, a Minnesota architect of Swedish descent, master-planned the new Swedish village and designed the first buildings, the boathouse (*båthuset*) and weaving studio (*vä vstugan*). He says the master plan was inspired by the streetscape of a tight-knit fishing village, and while the buildings look traditional, they use modern building techniques.



The Finnish Jyringin Talo



Opening of the Swedish weaving studio

“We don’t want it to be totally traditional,” Wessel said. He appreciates that the Language Villages welcome modern architecture as well. The most recent building in Waldsee, the German camp, is the *BioHaus*, a flat-roofed aluminum and blue stucco residence hall that is 80 percent more energy efficient than Minnesota’s building code requires.



The Spanish dormitory

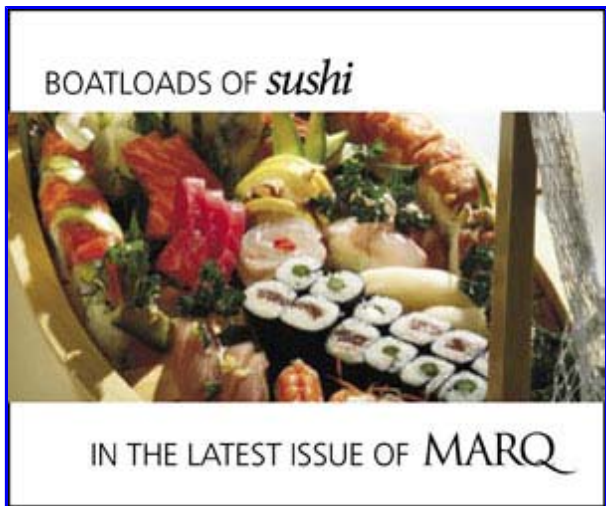
“We’re all about global issues,” says facility manager Schulze. “The Germans are doing very cutting edge work in sustainability. We want to reflect what they’re doing today.”

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