

## **BSA/AIA NEW YORK CHAPTER URBAN DESIGN AWARDS/2009**

### *Jurors' Comments*

This is the 22nd year the Boston Society of Architects (BSA) has administered this Urban Design Awards program, which has been co-sponsored by the AIA New York Chapter since 1999. This year we had the opportunity to review 28 submissions—nearly double the amount of entries submitted to the last round of this biennial program. For the first time, the redesigned awards program offered applicants submission in four categories—masterplanning, urban design, placemaking and time-limited installations—resulting in a wider range of entries and inclusion of smaller-scale projects.

The entries were comprised of proposed and completed projects around the globe and represented wide-ranging and divergent interpretations of urban design. There was a predominance of “mega planning” and parks projects. The influence of sustainable design practice was illustrated in many (perhaps most) of the submittals for the first time. Unfortunately, many of the projects were presented with minimal information on their context and proposed linkages to surrounding areas, making informed evaluation difficult; this could be improved through new submittal guidelines.

Specifically, we also agreed that submissions focused heavily on the process—at the expense of illuminating the vision. Jurors evaluating urban-design projects must rely heavily on contextual analysis and storytelling. We wanted to understand the problem that each plan meant to solve before considering whether the design represented a transformative urban intervention. Believing that urban design is not about an isolated design problem, we sought narratives that explored the project’s relationship to its context as a whole—including how it links to, engages and transforms its surroundings.

With all this in mind, we have recognized one submission with the Willo Von Moltke Award for Urban Design, which is the designation of the highest honor in this program. We have also identified seven other projects to honor with awards and citations.

Serving as jurors in programs such as this is an enjoyable reminder of the impact that urban design has on the quality of life lived in cities around the world. Urban design is a critical design discipline with the capacity to improve the places where people live, play, work, study and meet. We encourage planners, architects and urban designers and their clients to continue to submit to programs such as this.

### *The Jurors*

Rebecca G. Barnes FAIA of Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

Christina Lanzl of the UrbanArts Institute at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston

George Metzger AIA of HMFH Architects, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Mark E. Strauss FAIA, AICP, LEED of FXFOWLE ARCHITECTS, New York

## WILLO VON MOLTKE AWARD FOR URBAN DESIGN

### **Plaza de Convalecencia District Masterplan in San Juan, Puerto Rico for Capital City of San Juan, Puerto Rico and Hon. Jorge Santini Padilla, Mayor**

*Designed by Antonio Di Mambro + Associates (Boston)*

This masterplan for the revitalization of a 40-acre decayed section of San Juan's Rio Piedras neighborhood was an accomplished, thorough and comprehensive, model urban-design proposal. In the past decades, the neighborhood has seen a decrease in population and increases in absentee landlordism, crime, physical decay and local commercial and shopping activities. The masterplan provides a blueprint for converting the struggling communities into vibrant neighborhoods with healthy economic centers by addressing their issues, problems and opportunities practically and holistically. The strategy promotes densification, beautification, diversification of land uses and repopulation, while directing investment toward significant historic preservation and pursuing greater town-and-gown connectivity. We appreciate how the designer has been selective in identifying chunks of the existing built fabric that will be replaced by new construction; existing open spaces that are valuable and should be reinforced; and where greater density should be encouraged and where less density would be ideal. The submission also scored high marks for clarity, thanks to images of existing conditions, details on how all aspects of the plan would function and a clear implementation strategy featuring three phases over 15 years.

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## AWARD FOR URBAN REGENERATION

### **Gowanus Canal Sponge Park in Brooklyn, New York for Gowanus Canal Conservancy**

*Designed by dlandstudio (Brooklyn, NY)*

We applaud this urban-design project for demonstrating how hydro-engineering ingenuity can double as a delightful urban intervention. The project establishes that good design can raise the value of urban infrastructure from simply functional plumbing to a public realm of substantial environmental, social and aesthetic quality. Rain falling within the Gowanus watershed enters storm drains and mixes with raw sewage in the sanitary sewer system; during heavy rain falls, the combined sewage and stormwater overflow into the canal. This urban masterplan integrates landscape water-remediation strategies with a public open-space system. Programmed outdoor space and vegetated landscape slow, absorb and filter the contaminated water and reduce the input of storm water into the sewer system. The park plan knits together public and private lands adjacent to the water to create a continuous esplanade with recreational spaces running the length of the canal, while linking the system with existing historic sites, recreation areas and neighborhood facilities. We were particularly impressed with how the ends of dead-end streets are transformed into gateway parks that offer something for everyone—including dog runs, community gardens, public exhibition spaces and seasonal markets. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of this urban design is that it provides a prototype that could be introduced to clean up a polluted river in any urban environment.

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## AWARD FOR URBAN DESIGN

### **Plymouth Public Space Action Plan for the Town of Plymouth, Massachusetts**

*Designed by Carlone & Associates (Cambridge, MA) with project team members CDM/Camp Dresser & McKee (landscape architecture, Cambridge, MA), Bluestone Planning Group (urban design, Cambridge, MA), GLC Development Resources (real estate consulting, Boston) and Stantec (landscape architecture, Boston)*

This comprehensive town-center study offers a realistic, accessible approach to helping a historic harbor village address its current economic realities. The action plan, which can be implemented incrementally, shows strong visioning and promotes good stewardship of the town's assets by concentrating on improving rarely used public spaces and their linkages to one another. We particularly liked its solid advice to the town about how to practically reclaim an area that has strayed out of its historic urbanity into sprawl—including re-situating waterfront parking garages to draw visitors uphill into downtown, creating bike lanes, improving pedestrian safety and connections between sightseeing spots, and making the waterfront attractive to visitors through the creation of a seaside promenade, new piers and a marina. The plan also includes recommendations for key adjacent properties that are vulnerable to development in the future. All in all, this is an impressive integration of urban design and economic-development analysis.

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## AWARD FOR PLACEMAKING

### **Santa Fe Railyard Park in Santa Fe, New Mexico for The Trust for Public Land (Santa Fe) and City of Santa Fe Parks and Recreation**

*Designed by Ken Smith Landscape Architect (New York) and Frederic Schwartz Architects (New York) with project team members Mary Miss (artist, New York), URS (structural/M/E/P engineers, Los Alamos, NM) and Harris Consultants (construction manager, Santa Fe, NM)*

This new public park and plaza—built on the last remaining large-scale parcel of public land in downtown Santa Fe—reclaimed an abandoned urban railyard to unite several neighborhoods previously separated by a blighted, Dust Bowl-like site. The urban- design project returned the industrial property to its role as a multimodal transportation center, connecting Albuquerque to Santa Fe with a new express commuter line and also creating a 3,000-foot bike path that forms a central corridor for an emerging citywide trail network. The diverse program includes a children's play space, an alameda and farmers' market, picnic areas, a shaded pavilion, gardens, a calendar of activities throughout the year and more. A national model for water conservation, the park celebrates its innovative water-harvesting methods by making a 40,000-gallon water tank the plaza's focal point and restoring a historic *acequia* (a community-operated waterway used in former Spanish colonies in the Americas for irrigation). The design, which plays with shadows and uses retaining walls and other materials for color and texture, is both aesthetically pleasing and inspirational. We also appreciated the plan's sensitivity to universal design principles.

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## CITATION FOR URBAN OPEN-SPACE SYSTEM

### **MacArthur Park District Masterplan in Little Rock, Arkansas for City of Little Rock Parks and Recreation Department**

*Designed by University of Arkansas Community Design Center (sustainable design and urban planning, Fayetteville, AR) and Conway+Schulte Architects, P.A. (architecture and urban design, Minneapolis) with project team members oslund.and.assoc. (landscape architecture, Minneapolis), McClelland Consulting Engineers (civil engineering and landscape architecture, Fayetteville, AR), Donjek (finance for placemakers, Saint Paul, MN), University of Arkansas, Little Rock (urban studies and design), City of Little Rock and MacArthur Park Group*

By focusing on community-building issues, this masterplan for an urban landscape network works itself into the urban fabric of the city as a whole and strengthens it. In addition to creating a masterplan for an existing park, the design goes beyond its borders to use open space to mitigate some of the city's past mistakes. The new network connects tree-lined streets, boulevards, neighborhood pocket parks, active recreation facilities, plazas and pedestrian amenities in an identifiable district. It also creates a plan for layering high-density housing to inject life into the underutilized neighborhood frontage on one side of the park—creating economic-development activities that will maintain and preserve the open space for the long term. A new greenway with public recreation and park space above the interstate highway reconnects neighborhoods severed by the road's construction. Kudos to the designer for carefully thinking about when it pays to grow—and shrink—open space.

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## CITATION FOR INTEGRATED TRANSPORTATION AND OPEN-SPACE PLANNING

### **Queens Plaza Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Project in Queens, New York for the New York City Department of City Planning and the New York City Economic Development Corporation**

*Designed by Marpillero Pollack Architects (New York) with project team members Wallace Roberts and Todd (landscape architects, New York)*

This bike and pedestrian improvement project successfully untangles the industrial web of a three-mile stretch dominated by elevated transportation infrastructure. The result is vibrant new public and green spaces that attract bikers and walkers and serve as a respite for neighborhood residents. The design thoughtfully transformed a parking lot into a park, where benches designed by an artist provide tree protection and social gathering spaces. By turning an elevated structure into a bike path, the design recovers space from one transportation mode (the subway) to make it multimodal, while humanizing and returning this unused space to the public.

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## CITATION FOR COMMUNITY PROCESS AND ADVOCACY

### **Hunters Point Shipyard/Candlestick Point Alternatives for Study in San Francisco**

*Designed by Bionic (San Francisco)*

This study—essentially a critique from an open-space-planning perspective of the city’s existing plan to redevelop 770 acres and build a new football stadium—does not so much offer a definitive roadmap for the site as raise the relevant issues by putting the proposal under a community microscope. After numerous meetings with community stakeholders, a number of possibilities for the site arose, all of which could have a profound effect on the number of jobs that could be created, the relationship between housing and open space, environmental clean-up strategies and transit. The resulting advocacy piece re-invigorated the public debate about letting the stadium—a land use that is active merely 12 days a year—dominate the plan that the community is relying on to improve their quality of life. We tip our caps to this process for amplifying the important role that urban design can play in opening a dialogue within communities about transformative land use and development decisions.

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## CITATION FOR MASTERPLANNING CONSIDERATION OF CLIMATE CONDITIONS

### **Abu Dhabi University Education Park in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates for Fortune Properties/Abu Dhabi University**

*Designed by Sasaki Associates (Watertown, MA) with local architects Dar Al Handasah Nazih Taleb and Partners*

In creating a university research park, this project addressed climate concerns unique to its urban environment, including the saline content of the soil, an extreme climate, scarcity of water and a high watertable. The scarcity of naturally available water led to the creation of a system for recycling gray and black water throughout the site for irrigation and flushing. The landscape in the central public space serves as the primary filtering mechanism for the water and is celebrated as a central feature in the urban landscape, with its sub-surface wetland nurturing native grasses and wetland species. As illustrated in this submission’s fine diagrams, careful consideration of buildings’ and streets’ orientation minimize solar gain and take advantage of summer winds, while shading structures in public spaces encourage pedestrian activity.