

2011 New Orleans AIA Awards Program Jury Process, Presentation, and Comments

Jury: David Yocum, Jack Ford, Brad Brooks, Gernot Reither

Process

The 4-person jury convened to review 95 submissions across a broad range of project types. At the outset and with consensus, they established that each project would be judged on the basis of its own merits regardless of submission category. Particular emphasis was placed on communication of design intent, efficacy and appropriateness of proposed or built solutions, and clarity of presentation (specifically, the quality of drawings, diagrams, and photography to persuasively communicate the submission). After narrowing a larger group of meritorious projects, the jury reviewed and debated at length the attributes of each, settling on a final group of Honor and Merit award recipients. To recognize in particular one project which captured the imagination of the jury in both spirit of invention and effectiveness of presentation, the jury unanimously created a special “Jury Favorite” award to be presented at the conclusion of the ceremony.

Lee Ledbetter, Lee Ledbetter & Associates, Corporate Office, Interior Architecture, Merit Award

Presentation: “This project for the corporate headquarters office presented a uniformly crisp palette, with strong references to classic mid-century modern space planning, use of glass, and selection of furniture. The jury noted that as is sometimes the case with interiors projects, the documentation gave deceptively little clue as to either the building envelope or, by extension, the project setting, but paid an atypically high degree of attention to details, to seams and connections, to color and material palettes, as well as to the selection of building systems. Careful selection and—even more importantly— careful editing was evident in both the project and the presentation.”

Scott Bernhard, Tulane City Center, Storypod, Interior Architecture, Merit Award

Presentation: “This student led design / build project in the 7th ward neighborhood creates an intimate, inventive space for the recording, publishing, display, and sharing of neighborhood stories. The jury loved the clarity and efficacy of this installation – what could have been a plain bench, wall, and door in less inspired minds has been rendered in a handsome collection of multiple functions, transparency, privacy, honest materiality, and resourceful detailing. This is an excellent example of teaching architecture through making, and demonstrates how a design can be an artful gift to the sustenance of neighborhood culture.”

Additional Jury Comments: With a minimal budget, few materials, and simple details a system was invented that combines the complex program of architectural elements such as wall, door, shelf, table, etc. The effect of floating boxes is very convincing, but then interrupted by the door frame.

Errol Barron, Errol Barron/Michael Toups, Yoga Studio, Interior Architecture, Merit Award

Presentation: “This conversion of a historic building into a contemporary yoga studio impressed the jury for the clarity of the planning and the preservation of the existing roof structure and masonry walls. While the jury debated at length about the choice of fire-engine red for walls and ceiling in a yoga studio, we agreed that we were under-qualified yoga practitioners, but found merit in the strength of the introduction of the new exposed stair, lifting patrons up and through the roof trusses, as well as down through a clean cut in the main floor.”

Additional Jury Comments: Using the stair opening to create a vertical transparency and to connect spaces —not just through circulation but also visually— is very convincing. The detailing and the black paint of the stair allow for a very clear differentiation between new and existing.

Cordula Roser Gray, Tulane City Center, Holly Grove Growers Market & Farm, Master Planning/Urban Design, Merit Award

Presentation: “In the Carrolton-Hollygrove Neighborhood, an area in desperate need of revitalization and direct incentives for healthy living, this project is a new Growers Market and Farm, providing an inviting and accessible setting, healthy food, a demonstration site for sustainable practices, and a jobs program for the immediate community. The jury felt that this was a pitch-perfect model of collaboration between a community development group, business enterprises, non-profit foundations, and a university, to inject not just fresh food, but fresh environmental and design vitality to a neighborhood in need. The jury noted that this was not just an effective design catalyst but an elegantly planned and realized project, with an appropriate economy of means.”

Cordula Roser Gray, Tulane City Center, A.L. Davis Park, Master Planning/Urban Design, Merit Award

Presentation: “The proposal for the remaking of an existing neighborhood park takes what is a rough-and-tumble site of an open field and some basketball courts and introduces a finely textured collection of new activities, thresholds, built enclosures, canopies, and spatial definitions. The jury appreciated the feet-on-the-ground attitude of soliciting direct community involvement and design input, paired with a vision to create a community place that is greater than just the sum of its programmatic parts. The design leverages given conditions to their fullest while adding a rich layering of organization, material, and texture with a modest but coherent series of gestures.”

Additional Jury Comments: This is a project that takes on programmatic elements that exhibit a wide range of scale, immediate surroundings that lack the legible fabric that's typical in much of New Orleans and, of course, budget limitations.

David Waggoner, Waggoner & Ball Architects, Lafitte Greenway Sustain. Water Design, Master Plan/Urban Design, Honor Award

Presentation: “This proposal for a 3.1 mile greenway running North-South from Canal Boulevard to the French Quarter, intersecting the Bayou St. John along the way, envisions the adaptive re-vitalization of historic navigational canals and train right-of-ways into a cohesively interwoven bicycle, pedestrian, greenspace, and water-management system. The jury found confidence in the historical research, adaptation of proven Dutch principles of landscape and water design, and the celebration of a design attitude that prudently balances complex urban development with the realities of natural systems. This is exactly the type of integrated environmental and urban planning that fellow American cities need to commission, study, and implement.”

Additional Jury Comments: To use water as the main organizational element in a master plan is a very powerful idea in the context of New Orleans location and history. The project addresses the complexity of master planning and explains of how the idea of the project might change the urban space of the city on multiple levels.

One of the greatest ironies of being in New Orleans is that for a city both defined and confined by water, the presence of water remains hidden from daily experience. Given the disastrous results, repeated throughout its history, this project does far more than provide sustainable solutions for the challenges of urban hydrology. Unearthing old canals and waterways also brings back parts of the past that never should have been discarded. In doing for the city what the Mississippi does on a much larger scale, the Lafitte Greenway renews and celebrates the historic connection between the Lake and the French Quarter and—in today's terms—brings new energy to neighborhoods in need of connection and inclusion in the larger mapping of the city.

Ammar Eloueini, AED Studio, Gutenmacher Apartment, Divine Detail, Merit Award

Presentation: "This proposal is for a single flight of stairs, and an associated guardrail. The jury noted that there were really two projects in this submission – one concept and materiality for the cantilevered orthogonal wood and Corian treads, and a distinctively different proposition in the planar cellular guard screen. One jury member noted that "It's the only project that is using the potential of digital fabrication tools to inform new architectural effects" while another jury member remained skeptical of the unresolved marriage of the two systems, in particular the actual attachment of the screen to the treads. Overall, the jury appreciated the intent of the staircase to articulate not just a gradient between two floors, but also between space-making strategies and techniques of craftsmanship."

Judith Kinnard, Judith Kinnard with Tiffany Lin, SunShower SSIP House, Project

Presentation: "With limited financial means, and the challenging constraint of containerization, the architect for this project crafted a structure of appropriate scale, typology, and playfulness to meet the needs of emerging societies while adhering to smart sustainability strategies. The creation of the 'Sun-Shower' space as a place of both function and ceremony intensifies the relationship between people and nature and distinguishes this project from dozens of similar prototypes."

Additional Jury Comments: The project responds to the constraints of the competition to meet the needs of different building locations by suggesting a kit-of-parts approach that is successfully translated into a composition of elements and spaces.

One juror commented that, having seen the constraints of the competition brief and the company's existing project photos, it would be a challenge to come up with an engaging architectural solution that could still meet the needs of the various locations required. The design makes the most out of an ordinary kit-of-parts required by the program and manufacturing process, balancing that with a well-organized variety of spatial experience.

Zachary Lamb, Crooked Works Architecture, Cart CoOp, Adaptive Reuse

Presentation: "This is an exceptionally well-presented and inventive solution to two problems: one, how to house one or more chickens, and two, how to restore our relationship as humans to the land, the environment, and food production to one which is more sustainable and healthy."

"The designers demonstrated artful formal composition skills using "found" items that could be repeated with predictable results. The simple bending of a piece of sheet metal produces not only a roof surface that sheds water, rebuffs wind, and protects the chicken, but also creates a joyful counterpoint between the solid arch and the filtered texture of the shopping cart."

“This project exhibited a clear and compelling design spirit of craft and humor as evidenced in the beautiful pattern of ventilation holes drilled in the plywood that not only allow for airflow, but also produce a pleasing pattern of dappled light within the interior space of the coop. The designers, sensitively and with restraint, introduced just the right amount of energy and playfulness to the composition with their color selection of red for the solid panel.”

Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, 930 Poydras Residential Tower, Architecture, Honor Award

Presentation: “To design a mid-rise residential tower over parking on a prominent boulevard for commerce in the CBD of New Orleans is a challenging proposition. With this project, the designers created a formal object with a powerful presence that enriches the streetscape where it resides among many non-descript commercial high-rise buildings and vacant lots.

“The jury debated, but in the end appreciated, the decision-making design process that led to a continuous skin from parking to residential programs, thus emphasizing the formal qualities of the structure rather than the programmatic. Particularly, the jury appreciated the public gathering space which transitions the residents from parking to their homes in a way that mimics traditional New Orleans neighborhood patterns and weaves the outdoor “courtyard” through the building to a public observation space visible from Poydras. This elegant move allows this function to be read from the exterior in a contemporary way and provides relief to the solid massing of the form.

“The jury found the skin to possess a captivating quality of changing opacity and transparency depending upon the time of day and atmospheric conditions as well as an interesting play between horizontality and verticality that is so often unaddressed in the omnipresent grids of the surrounding buildings.”

Additional Jury Comments: Integrating a parking deck in an urban space is challenging. A continuous, elegant façade on the building front is used to create well developed, proportional relationships between the given program and the building block and between the block and the urban space. Introducing an elevated park between the parking deck and the apartments is a strong conceptual response to the given program.

Part of the responsibility of living in a city that has such a rich and plentiful variety of historical material, as well as complex and coherent ways of moving through it, is realizing the need to push continuously for new and even radical ways of interpreting that landscape. Situated along the city's corporate strip, the project's bold visual and formal statement “ups the ante” for high-profile projects, while respecting — even improving upon— some of the city's best traditions, ranging from the scale and proportion of windows to the subtle networks that connect social and private space.

Cordula Roser Gray, Tulane City Center, Holly Grove Pavilion, Architecture

Presentation: “On a small footprint and even smaller budget, this pavilion provides a literal expression of the various, salient features of community gardening in New Orleans, serving as both gateway and introduction to the goals of the organization. The project manages materials, details and hardware in an elegant way. Equally important is the evidence that there's a next generation of designers that realizes their role in the day-to-day needs of tomorrow's sustainable communities.”

Additional Jury Comments: A simple program that is used as an opportunity to create a highly complex space, characterized by different levels of opacity and perspective effects.

Spaces are created from a minimum amount of very carefully selected materials: wood and steel - environmentally friendly materials that are joined using a simple pallet of extremely elegant details. It's the engineer who develops green technologies - but it's the architect who in this example translates that into an aesthetic quality and into space.

Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, L.B. Landry High School, Architecture, Honor Award

Presentation: "The jury recognized this project for numerous reasons, the first of which is for the appropriateness of its design language for the time in which we live and its jettisoning of traditional school typologies and vernacular articulations.

"The jury applauded not only the massing and play between solid forms and void, but also the parti and planning organization of the school with its well-designed public courtyard - 'front yard' -- and its segregation of higher and lower levels which give each group a 'place' to identify as their own.

"The architects should be commended for recognizing that high school is a time of memories and memorable spaces contribute to this end. The main lobby with its 'theater' of stairs, light, and view provides such a space. The jury found the ceiling to be particularly pleasing and the restraint in the selection of materials and detailing to be compelling.

"Finally, the jury recognizes the architects' skilful articulation of the skin in both detail and fenestration in a way that provides a majority of the classrooms' lighting requirements with natural light and supports a strong sustainability strategy."

Additional Jury Comments: The school is organized around a courtyard. A powerful relation between court yard and the distribution of the program and circulation can be read as a successful translation of a very clear conceptual idea which also informs spatial qualities, day lighting strategies and a very sophisticated and outstanding level of detail.

Zachary Lamb, Crooked Works Architecture, Cart CoOp, Jury Favorite

Presentation: "The jury selected this project for a Special Award for two main reasons. First, the fact that it could reasonably fit into any of the categories in the Awards Brief and —given the extreme modesty of its program— do an excellent job of holding its own. Secondly, and maybe more importantly, every aspect of the presentation of this project contributes to its overall argument and design intention: setting, photography, and graphics. Where it's often the case with many projects that realities of construction prevent a faithful representation of the original intention, every instance of the Cart CoOp remains true to its vision, composed of equal amounts of dignity and humor."

Additional Jury Comments: A shopping cart probably used for buying chicken for dinner has through advanced fabrication technology been converted into a chicken coop. We clearly have lost contact with our natural environment - the most advanced technology seems irrelevant when it comes to our problematic, highly instable relationship we have with our planet. It's not quite architecture yet, but it's addressing architecture's dilemma.

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