

October 24, 2007

2007 Design Awards General Notes

- φ Scales
- φ North arrows
- φ Plan
- φ Site plan
- φ Text issues – should be able to read text or should be dismissed (too small in some cases)
- φ Composition should include informational photos
- φ Borrow entries from other chapters (Carmen asked Stephen Sharp, editor, Texas Architect to send a few examples of winning entries)
- φ Meaningful diagrams are helpful
- φ The simpler, clearer the better
- φ Bring presentation to level of photos

Juror A

First of all, I want to thank you for the honor of chairing the design awards jury for your chapter this year. Having served as a juror for your previous awards program makes me doubly honored.

On the whole, I thought the entries were remarkable in their breadth and quality, and all of the members should be proud of the work being done in your Chapter.

I thoroughly enjoyed working with my colleagues; two friends whose work and contributions to the profession I truly respect. I also appreciated the time you and James devoted to the whole process, both during the jury and prior with all the long hours of preparation. You were gracious hosts.

I thought you might want some general comments in addition to those provided by each of the jurors about the specific projects. Having served as a juror on your last awards program I can't tell you how incredible was the improvement in overall quality of the presentations since the previous program. As we all know, photographs are important tools in presenting the designer's ideas and the photography was for the most part exceptional.

If I could make generalized remarks to assist entrants in improving their presentations, it would be in the areas of graphics and editing of text. As you know some entries simply didn't provide adequate site plans, floor plans, or other drawings to explain their projects or neglected to clearly provide text information on those drawings (or it was often too small). Also, often times, the accompanying text needed thorough editing to enable a stranger to more clearly understand the objectives and solution of the stated design problem. I firmly believe a number of the submitted projects could have been elevated to award status had these portions of the presentation been on par with the accompanying photography.

I hope these suggestions will be taken in the spirit of which they are being offered. Having produced and observed many presentations on all levels over the years, I know the hardest part of assembling them is to detach yourself, remaining objective and trying to review your work as if you were an unfamiliar first time reviewer. It's a difficult task, but presentations will always benefit from that hard self-imposed critique.

Again, I was so very impressed with the projects and the improvements in presentations and encourage continued efforts to improve them (which will allow already good work to shine). I wish the chapter members all the best in upcoming efforts. Also thanks again for the honor to review the work of my peers and for all your hospitality.

Juror B

Thank you for the opportunity to jury your chapter's 2007 Design Awards. I would like to commend all the entrants for the quality of the submissions. The level of photography was very high and with few exceptions, the presentations provided the information needed to judge their merits.

In jurying a design awards program, it is necessary to examine the projects very carefully. In that process, small flaws are exaggerated in the effort to draw distinctions between projects. The result is that subtle shortcomings are discussed as if they are monumental flaws. While that discussion is appropriate for a jury, it is not an accurate representation of the quality of the projects in the context of the hundreds if not thousands of other buildings that are built each year in the valley. Even the projects that did not get an award exhibit talent and skill that set them apart from what is typical. Design awards programs are intended to identify excellence. The line between excellent and very good is a blurry one. There are certainly some very good projects that did not get honored – but very good is very good indeed and I commend all of those who submitted their work.

Project 1

I really liked this project. The interiors were particularly well developed. The simple palate of materials – concrete floors, painted steel structure, stained wood roof deck, and CMU walls were straightforward, honest and handsome. The skylight detail centered over the column was a very nice detail. In contrast to the straightforward honesty of the rest of the materials, the vaulted ceiling grid, however, seemed a little forced.

The exterior had some really nice moments, especially, the entrance but in general, didn't exhibit the same degree of restraint and elegance of the interiors.

The presentation was sufficient, however – the plans were too small. Also, the last three images almost cost the project an award. They were clearly of lesser quality and did not show anything flattering about the design.

Project 2

I think that there was a general sense that the sheer literalness of the design concept was insufficient to develop a truly noteworthy design. One thinks of sophisticated, yet playful children's spaces such as Koning Eizenberg's Children's Museum of Pittsburgh as an approach that inspires imagination and curiosity. In contrast, after the initial 'ah hah' the children might experience after seeing the building blocks writ large, one imagines that the children are only disappointed that they can't crawl around and play on the colorful blocks.

Project 3

I have had the opportunity to visit and see presentations of dozens of the recently restored county courthouses. The interior restoration of the building is on par with the best. The exceptional photography really conveys the sense of the spaces that have been remarkably restored. This is truly an excellent project.

The presentation could have been much improved with the inclusion of 'before' images. Finally, the exterior lights around the perimeter should be removed as soon as possible!

Project 4

It was very difficult to understand the factors that drove the design for this residence. The steeply pitched roof appears more appropriate for an alpine structure than a valley residence. The photography, particularly of the interior, was not up to par with the rest of the submissions. Also, the images of the surrounding context were too small and did little to explain the design response that the architect made.

Project 5

Another jury may be more appreciative of this project. The house was nice, but, in the end, several nagging details made it difficult for this group to award. The massing and the elevations were well composed, however, the parapeted gables and the inexplicable white patches of stucco muddied the composition of what could have been a very elegant, simple and honest composition. The stone columns on the rear porch were another non sequitur. The project lost an opportunity to create a really memorable courtyard in the rear by dividing its space into slivers of porch, path and landscaping.

The 'green' features, especially the ventilation that was promised were appreciated, however, the effectiveness of the ventilation concept could not be deciphered from the presentation.

Finally, computer models of projects that can be shown in photographs do little to explain the project. A better use of the model images would be to illustrate sectional ideas such as the airflow pathways for the natural ventilation that are not easily shown with photographs.

Project 6

The interior finishes were indeed elegant. Beyond that, the lack of temporal interpretation would make the project inappropriate in Santa Fe. The importation of a southwestern high-desert aesthetic to the coastal climates of the valley is simply unjustifiable.

Project 7

Another jury will likely find this project award worthy. In the end, I couldn't quite bring myself to honor it – primarily because it made a big point of being sustainable by placing large windows on the north side for natural light and then carried the same windows with the same overhangs around all sides of the second floor. The valley (as do all places in Texas) needs to develop a truly sustainable design ethos. Gestures are just not sufficient.

I did appreciate the technique of casting the limestone into the exterior tilt-walls.

Finally, the cost per square foot listed was not helpful. It was not at all clear in the presentation that the low cost of the project was a result of the inventiveness of the architect. The final impression was only that, if the cost is actually correct, the contractor should be commended (or not) for getting some deals on materials and labor.

Project 8

The openness of this project to the community was the single most influential factor in its designation as a merit award recipient. Both the Owner and the Architect should be commended for resisting the rising urge toward a bunker mentality in public architecture. The design also exhibited some very nice detailing in the roof structure.

The lack of photographs of the interior (especially of the main space), lack of a site plan, and the inclusion of some rather unflattering views at the rear almost sabotaged the submission. The photos on the printed sheet also show some awkward arcing awnings along one elevation that appear clumsy and out of place beside the more elegantly detailed entrance canopy.

Project 9

The entire premise of the design concept is really problematic. There are so many urgent issues in building – appropriate response to climate, creating enlivening spaces for people, fitting into a unique social and cultural context, honestly employing the materials and technology available within a region, etc... – that there is no need to resort to ultimately arbitrary tricks to derive a meaningful basis for a design. It simply does not follow that if the floor finish pattern looks like a chip that is hidden inside the computers hidden inside the building the design is a success.

Project 10

This project may indeed be worthy of an award upon completion, however, I think the jury was unanimous in the opinion that for an un-built project to be honored, it had to be exceptionally remarkable in concept and presentation. The presentation simply leaves too many gnawing uncertainties at this point. Missing columns among other things made it difficult to be certain that the end project would be realizable as presented. I personally had a real uneasiness with the way the student dorm living areas on the ground floor opened onto the public atrium with so much glass. There was also no context shown that would allow us to judge the suitability of the proposal for the campus.