

landscape architecture

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URE THERE WAS PRIDE, and occasionally, prejudice. We're human. But three long days together allow the voices of reason and good judgment to prevail. In the end you do feel proud of your colleagues and your profession. But you also depart with the hope for even better work in the coming years. How else would you describe both ends of the spectrum of this year's professional awards jury experience? Proud and envious of the best work our discipline has to offer. Honored to serve with a roomful of great thinkers and designers as they collectively sorted their way through nearly 500 awards entries. And continuously impressed with the organizational excellence and directorial prowess of the ASLA staff.

A few initial impressions: This was the year that the aftermath of Katrina was manifested in remarkable contributions from the field of landscape architecture. A PBS television documentary garnered our highest praise in the Communications category. Two modest and grand Analysis and Planning proposals (the Viet Village Urban Farm and the New Orleans Riverfront: Reinventing the Crescent) were also recognized with awards. We certainly got the impression that landscape architects were central to responding professionally to one of this country's greatest recent environmental and social crises.

Another first impression: International works and internationally based landscape architecture practices were well represented in the awards submissions. About two dozen countries had a presence in the various awards categories, in many cases featuring the work of landscape architects based in those countries. Haiti, Rwanda, Switzerland, Canada, Morocco, Lebanon, China, India, Russia, South Korea, Australia, Kenya, New Zealand, France, Ireland, England, Jordan, Singapore, Japan, Spain, Mexico, and United Arab Emirates were all represented—an impressive global cross section, though we were a little chagrined that much of Western and Central Europe seemed underrepresented, especially when you consider the high quality of contemporary practice in the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, and Scandinavia. Entries from Central and South America appeared to be missing in action as well, a surprising disappointment in light of recent and rather comprehensive coverage in *Landscape Architecture*. Nevertheless we were delighted to present an award to the remarkable restoration and redesign of Mexico City's Fountain Promenade at Chapultepec Park.

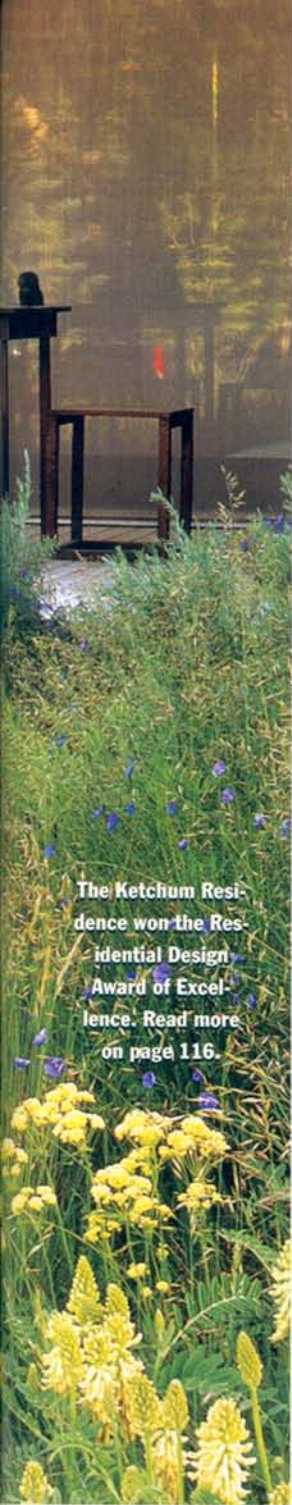
The international work was encouraging in its diversity of not only project type and scope, but its sense of local or national distinctiveness. That is, a tendency seems to be emerging to not just borrow ideas from the leading-edge designers and universities, but to truly present design and planning work that emerges from and reflects the particular geographies of their place.

A little about the awards selection process: It is incredibly disciplined and democratic. Nine voices—some louder, some gentler—all have equal weight in the voting. Despite what always seems like an overwhelming number of entries, the jury is still able to give every

project a fair review. And, as the process of narrowing the field involves multiple steps, projects that stand out (for a number of reasons—a singular powerful image, a challenging premise or idea, a truly innovative point of view or sensibility, a remarkable sense of restraint) get increasing levels of scrutiny as they make their way forward. Initially jury members—nationally and internationally recognized practitioners, educators, writers, and planners—attempt to work quietly and efficiently on their own to decide which submissions merit further review and which ones do not. The large stack of entries finally diminishes so that by the second and third rounds we have a more discrete set of projects to discuss and evaluate in greater depth. This man-



2008 ASLA awards



The Ketchum Residence won the Residential Design Award of Excellence. Read more on page 116.

ages to be both exhilarating and draining. Very fine works of design, planning, and communications emerge. Debate gets a little heated. We make final tallies. We revisit our choices to be sure of our selections. We debate things a bit more, expressing satisfaction with our final choices and rankings, mixed with emotional appeals to perhaps reconsider a project that had somehow slipped from our collective esteem.

In the final hours we reflect on the entries, the submission criteria, and the jury process. We agree that ASLA, once again, has done an excellent and thorough job of running this complex awards operation. They have made what could have been a confusing and cumbersome ordeal into a three-day session of reflection, thoughtful discourse, and celebration.

To summarize those three days in just a few paragraphs cannot do justice to the efforts of everyone involved. We know from our own experience how much work goes into each firm's or individual's awards submission. We know too often the dismay that is felt when you open those letters of rejection. But we also know the exhilaration of receiving those rare acknowledgments of a successful entry.

So what really determines an award winner? This might be answered more directly by addressing *how NOT to win an award*: (1) photographing the work poorly, unprofessionally, and noncomprehensively; (2) failing to recognize that often just a few powerful, stunning images can be enough to catch the attention of the jury; (3) failing to recognize that there has to be some substance, some depth of thought behind the project; (4) thinking that a well-executed, even beautifully detailed project that doesn't really advance the profession should somehow still receive an award; (5) not comprehending or being aware that there are already works out there (research, planning, design, communications) that have addressed the issues or qualities of the project in more depth or with greater innovativeness; (6) not showing restraint; (7) writing too much and writing poorly; (8) overreliance on jargon; (9) overwhelming the project with trendy design moves; (10) drawing or rendering poorly or

unimaginatively; (11) appearing to disregard sustainability; (12) embracing sustainability, but forgetting that a place must also lift your spirits and might be designed to be simultaneously sustainable and beautiful.

Take a closer look at this year's award recipients. We believe they represent the best current thinking in the profession. They are national and international, urban and rural, large and small, ambitious and modest. Sustainability is at the heart of much of what we recognized, perhaps defined in different ways. Landscapes that help teach us something we did not know

are also central to the awards. This may be in the form of planning or communication documents (here I'm reminded of the *So What?* video tracking paper use and recycling from one firm over time, or the *Bird-Safe Building Guidelines* booklet). In the General Design category this educational emphasis rose to inspirational levels of expression in such projects as the Lurie Garden in Chicago and the James Clarkson Environmental Discovery Center in Michigan.

Finally, a few notes about restraint. We expressed special appreciation for the nuanced designs of such projects as Lost Dog Wash Trailhead in Arizona; the new security measures designed for the Washington Monument grounds; Porchscapes: An Affordable LEED Neighborhood Development in Arkansas; the painterly naturalized Ketchum garden in Idaho (particularly poignant in relation to the more conventional suburban yards of the surrounding neighborhood); the clever simplicity of the Unfolding Terrace roof garden in Manhattan; the uncompromising honesty, fit, and modesty in the Beach House on Long Island; and the exquisite conciseness and elegant modernity of the Passage to the Lake in Maine.

Perhaps the ultimate testament to brilliant economy in design comes in this year's selection for the Landmark Award: the Tanner Fountain at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is truly an iconic work: a place fashioned from minimal materials that encourages multiple interpretations, expressions, and uses. Water and rock. Landscape architecture doesn't get much more essential than that.

—WARREN T. BYRD JR., FASLA
Chair

2008 ASLA Professional Awards Jury

The 2008 professional awards jury included Warren T. Byrd, FASLA, of Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects in Charlottesville, Virginia, chair; Mary Ellen Cowan, ASLA, of MESA in Dallas; Robert A. Ivy, editor in chief of *Architectural Record*, New York; Niall Kirkwood, ASLA, of Harvard Graduate School of Design in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Steve Martino, FASLA, of Steve Martino/Cactus City Design in Phoenix; Elizabeth Miller, ASLA, of National Capital Planning Commission, Washington, D.C.; Dennis Pieprz, Affiliate ASLA, of Sasaki Associates in Watertown, Massachusetts; W. Gary Smith, ASLA, of W. Gary Smith in Austin, Texas, and Toronto, Canada; and Kongjian Yu, International ASLA, of Peking University Graduate School of Landscape Architecture and Turenscape in Beijing, China. Bill Marken, Honorary ASLA, editor emeritus of *Garden Design* magazine in Los Altos, California, joined the panel for the residential category and the panel to select the Landmark Award.





A

GENERAL DESIGN, Honor Award

LAGOON PARK: LIVING AT THE EDGE OF WILDERNESS, Santa Barbara, California
Van Atta Associates Inc., Santa Barbara, California

FORMERLY THE SITE of a gravel parking lot, this park on the UC Santa Barbara campus created new wetland habitat and serves as an inviting place for university students as well as a system that filters and cleans runoff. Commissioned primarily to fulfill wetland preservation requirements on a minimal budget, the landscape architects envisioned the site as a place where students would be immersed in nature and encouraged to appreciate the subtle beauty of wetlands while overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Lagoon Park is now six acres of restored native California grassland along with vernal pools, meadows, and marshes. The site features diverse coastal sage scrub and coastal bluff vegetation. Research for advanced degrees has been based around the monitoring of the project, including the effect of wetlands on nutrient levels in water runoff and native grassland planting techniques. Students have adopted portions of the park to create new habitats. "Proof that you don't have to have a huge budget to do fabulous things," jurors said.

GENERAL DESIGN, Honor Award

WASHINGTON MONUMENT, Washington, D.C.
Olin Partnership, Philadelphia

B

THE REVITALIZED Washington Monument articulates the 72-acre site's character and identity within the context of the National Mall while demonstrating the art and craft of landscape architecture in a highly prominent place. The landscape architect won the competition for the commission with an elegant security solution and in the process successfully proposed much-needed landscape improvements to revive the monument grounds. The design is bold and clear: a minimalist solution that turned a project originally funded to prevent terrorism into a handsome civic amenity. Low, 30-inch granite finished walls are configured in a graceful pattern. They safeguard against automobiles and trucks entering the site and also provide a resting place without distraction from the view. Also, regrading and the realignment of pathways preserved the majority of the plantings, including an ancient mulberry tree. The landscape architect proves that the union of sound security and artful design can be functional and graceful. "Resolution of the geometry is simple and sophisticated," jurors said.

SAKON HOLT