
**What Was Learned
About Urban Excellence**



This is an excerpt from:

Visions of Urban Excellence

1997

Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

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Vision

To make an excellent urban place requires a vision, a dream, the invention of a new concept or the combination of elements in a way never previously tried. It is an arena in which creativity and imagination are critical, and a lifetime of preparation may converge with circumstances that allow a new concept to take root.

Some commentators suggest that urban change is the product of large social, economic and historical forces, more than the actions of individuals. Certainly this process describes common trends that are taking place in cities around the country or around the world (such as densification of the center, or growth around the periphery). Others focus on change as the product of individual creative actions, great leaps — even genius — that give shape to the larger forces. The extraordinary individuals can create concepts or forms that may become models that are emulated elsewhere. Among the 1997 Rudy Bruner Award winners, creative individuals worked within the context of what was possible — and

then moved beyond that context to create new, and even myth-shattering models of urban excellence.

As the Selection Committee reflected on and discussed the criteria they might apply in choosing this round's winners, creativity and entrepreneurial vision were among the most important issues raised. In effectively applying this entrepreneurial spirit in the public or not-for-profit sectors, the creativity, strength of commitment, and drive to see the goal



Project Row Houses opens up its doors.

accomplished mirrored that often seen in the private sector. This entrepreneurial vision provides a guiding concept for the complex and difficult process of bringing a project to reality. While an enormous amount of effort and resources may have to be marshaled to implement a new vision, it is the creative vision that guides the process and gives it its unique and powerful identity.

One Selection Committee member stated that “change in cities is often attributable to a couple of people who do something, and everything spins around it. And...often it’s something you figure can’t actually be done, but they do it anyway.” Another added, “It’s something that is just truly unlikely [but], because it’s...a passionate vision of some individual, they manage to change the way things were getting done for the better.”

A Selection Committee member described the kinds of significant outcomes such innovative projects can have: “It could have changed the psychology of the town, it could have changed people’s attitudes towards investment in an area, it could have changed their behavioral patterns about using part of the city. It could have been a model for other cities, and...have an impact beyond [its own locale].”

To become such a model, it may be necessary to move beyond existing, dominant concepts or even myths about what is possible. (Can assisted housing succeed at the scale of 600 rooms? Can art form the basis for community transformation? Can an arts complex rejuvenate downtown?). The leaders of these winning projects believed passionately in the transformative power of their values and ideas and they were prepared either to convince others that new models could succeed or to proceed with or without traditional means of support.

A meaningful, creative, or new vision for a city addresses a real need, but approaches it in a new way and, in so doing, extends the notion of what is possible. If it works, it can become a new model for others to emulate. The Selection Committee looked for

projects that only happened because of the energy, creativity and vision brought by an individual or group, and that demonstrated a strong positive outcome or result.

This entrepreneurial, creative spirit is necessary in order to take risks and try new and unproven approaches to the often intractable problems of big cities. While city bureaucracies are not necessarily the locus where one would expect to find this spirit, for several of the projects the city officials did contribute sufficiently to supporting the vision (New York City, Oakland). In others there was less support, and the city may at times even have been an obstacle for the project to overcome (Houston).

The Selection Committee discussed at some length the question of how a creative vision comes to shape the city – should it come from a strong leader or should it be based on participation and consensus? Here, the Committee was interested in the balance between “top-down” and “bottom-up” processes. While it recognized the contributions and even charisma of some of the project leaders, it also noted the importance of democratic and participatory processes. One Committee member commented that “there has got to be a balance —and I think we are seeing this with some of the visionary entrepreneurs in these projects — between vision and...consensus-building with the public.” Another recognized the need to work “bottom-up and top-down simultaneously.”

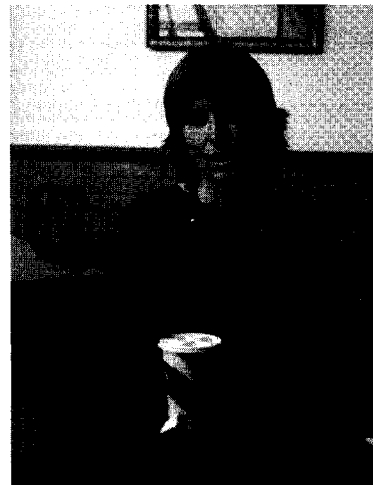
The Committee was also interested in the organizational (and often political) skills needed to mobilize others toward realization of the vision. The projects that proceeded most expeditiously and with the fewest obstacles were those where strong links were developed and maintained by the leader(s) to others in their organizations and to community and civic agencies. Realizing the vision and keeping it alive through the inevitable struggles requires determination, gumption, drive, and follow through — as well as the support of others and of the broader political milieu.

Three of the projects were envisioned by individuals or small

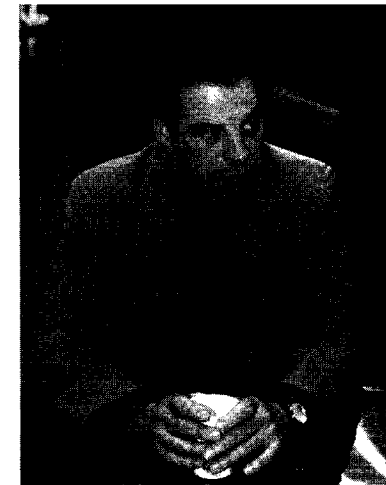
groups who created powerful new concepts of what could be done in their cities, while the other two are touched by vision and entrepreneurial energy in more modest ways.

The Times Square is the product of one woman’s powerful vision of turning a nearly derelict structure with a history of failed proposals into the largest supportive housing facility in the country. This required Rosanne Haggerty to challenge myths about the limits to the scale on which this type of serviced housing facility could be successfully operated and the types of population that could be successfully mixed. She had to convince sitting tenants, powerful neighbors, a panoply of city boards, financial institutions and labor unions to back the project (or at least not to block it). It is even more impressive that all this was done in New York City, with its massive needs and equally imposing obstacles to accomplishment.

Project Row Houses is the product of Rick Lowe’s unique vision of art transforming not only a set of historic “shotgun” houses but a neighborhood as well. Before discovering the row



Rosanne Haggerty, The Times Square



Tony Hannigan, Center for Urban Community Services

houses, Lowe was already committed to finding ways to reconnect the African-American community to art and to its cultural roots. Lowe believes that art in a community setting has the potential to transform that community by creating positive cultural images of ethnic identity – through showcasing the accomplishments of African-American artists, by getting community people involved in artistic expression, and by engaging people from within and without the community in a dialogue about issues raised by the art itself. This radically different approach had to be accomplished outside of traditional funding streams, through foundations and volunteers. As the project became a reality, it evolved in response to circumstances and opportunities, growing to incorporate housing for young, single mothers and daycare as well as a wide variety of arts projects.

The Center in the Square. It is clearly a novel gesture to use an arts complex as the impetus for renewal of a declining downtown. This notion appears to have been born partly from the confluence of propitious circumstances (a theater needing a new home,



Rick Lowe, Founder, Project Row Houses

considerable attention focused on the market area near downtown, and a city-wide participatory planning event) and partly from the vision of a small group of civic leaders to locate several arts organizations in the area. In addition, there were pioneering businesses and real estate investors who took considerable risks in being among the first to move into the area, when the Center was no more than a plan on paper.

Hismen Hin-Nu realizes a vision of a dense, mixed-use project on what had been an underutilized retail site. The plan began with a study of the neighborhood by a group of architecture and planning students. It was adopted by the city and the not-for-profit developer, EBALDC. Then it was given shape through an open, participatory design process involving all the parties and led by the project architect. The authorship of the project is broadly shared, and the execution was skillful. EBALDC itself is an entrepreneurial organization, seeing needs and opportunities in the economic development area and moving strongly to expand training and opportunities for its tenants and other clients.

Cleveland Historic Warehouse District found its origins in a classical battle to preserve an important historical building which was threatened with imminent demolition. Winning that battle emboldened the group to broaden its vision and try to save what was left of the entire district. Again, a few urban pioneers moved into the district in its very early days and individual entrepreneurs forged ahead to renovate properties well before the banks or other traditional financing sources would support them.

Art In the City

This year's winners revealed a great deal about the transformative power of art in the urban environment. Art is central to three of the five projects (**Project Row Houses**, **Center in the Square**, and **Hismen Hin-Nu**) — and important to the other two (**The Times Square** and the **Historic Warehouse District**).

The predominance of art in these projects gave the Selection Committee the opportunity to discuss the role of art in urban excellence. The Committee found that art can be a strong force for revitalization. It can be an integrative factor, bringing diverse people together; it can be transformative of a project or an area or for the people involved in it; and it can provide images that express multiple levels of meaning about urban life, culture and places.

Because of the way a project makes high quality art accessible, people may be attracted to a part of the city (downtown or a neighborhood) they would never otherwise have visited. They may meet and interact with people they otherwise wouldn't have — artists or members of other ethnic or socio-economic groups. This is the case for Project Row Houses and Center in the Square.

People may become involved with art as an activity, or observe or interact with artists in a way that increases understanding or adds meaning (or self-esteem) to their lives. In some instances, art and artists who create it can provide important models of cultural identity. Over time and on a large enough scale, the involvement can become meaningful to the community, galvanizing energy and breaking barriers. This is true at Project Row Houses, Center in the Square, and The Times Square.

Art may be incorporated into a building or urban area in a way that the occupants and neighbors can enjoy and admire it and, if it is powerful and relevant, it can add meaning or understanding of the project to those who use it. We found this at Project Row Houses, Hismen Hin-Nu and, to some extent, at The Times Square.

For **Project Row Houses** art, and especially that of African-American artists, is the unifying theme of the place. The project has the lofty aspiration of using the experience and production of art to raise important questions and to effect people's lives. It also uses artists' (and other volunteers') energy to transform a group of decaying houses of historical value into a vibrant center for its community. Art is put to work on many levels — it is on display

and being created; African-American artists are present in the community while their work is being displayed, providing important role models for community residents; and the row houses themselves can be considered as art and have been used as the subject of paintings.

Rick Lowe and others there believe that art can change lives, bringing hope, meaning, and a renewal of the spirit. It is seen as catalytic and transformative, having special power in a disenfranchised community to tap and inspire the creativity that is lurking unexpressed or undiscovered. Art can even be a tool for "community building," increasing individual self-esteem and a sense of pride in the community and its cultural heritage. The project also encourages pride in the community's heritage, making the houses stand as symbols of its root values, struggles, and accomplishments. The Selection Committee was impressed that unlike many community or public art projects that are single episodes of short duration, "It's a permanent public art project in the community.



Floyd Newsom's "Tribal Markings" at Project Row House

They're always there." Another Selection Committee member commented that, "All of a sudden you've got large numbers of people marching into the Third Ward.... [and] the stereotypical view of that part of the world is changing."

At **Center in the Square**, the location and synergy of five cultural and arts organizations are used to draw people to downtown and have had the effect of transforming a decaying market area into an intensely used attraction. The institutions include an art museum, a theater and the regional arts association. The Center brought the art museum to downtown from an elite, rather remote, and ethnically homogeneous neighborhood. Its displays are now more diverse and culturally relevant, including ethnic art (such as a collection of African masks), and its attendance has broadened and increased many-fold. The institutions also offer hands-on art classes for children, as well as outreach programs for the region's schools. As a result of the Center, the level of cultural opportunities is very high for a city the size of Roanoke and the reach is very broad. The draw of these institutions has also contributed greatly to the transformation of the market area – from a run down and partially abandoned corner of the downtown into a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented zone with a critical mass of shops, restaurants and entertainment.

Hismen Hin-Nu was able to incorporate meaningful public art at a scale and to an effect well beyond what is usually possible in a lower income housing project. In fact, a hallmark of the project is the incorporation of art into the design. A \$50,000 National Endowment for the Arts grant was obtained with the intent of using the art not only as decoration, but to symbolize the racial and cultural diversity, and unity of the area. Artists representing various racial groups were invited to make submissions. The architect said: "The coexistence of art from these diverse traditions inspires a spirit of cooperation not only among the tenants but in the community." Examples include frieze panels at the tops of the



A painted mural on Hismen Hin-nu speaks to the multi-cultural character of the neighborhood and can be seen from the BART trains passing by.

towers which weave together patterns from many cultures, and a band of tiles along the street which represent 22 distinct cultures. Most notable is the sunburst gate and entry arch which provide an image that is appropriate to and inclusive of the entire community. The design is a highly imageable creation which inspired the name of the project.

The Cleveland Historic Warehouse District worked with the citywide Committee for Public Art to add art to the streets of the new downtown neighborhood. Examples include a national competition for the West Sixth Streetscape which resulted in sculptures inspired by the district's history of warehousing — sculpture consisting of stacks of sandstone blocks usable as seating (which refer to historical images of crates stacked on the sidewalks); "Art Behind Bars" which entailed installations behind the security bars in street level windows of an old warehouse; and "Signs of Life" which fostered collaborations between artists and businesses to create inventive and expressive street signs for a number of shops. These projects contributed to the meaning of the district and drew people there to see them.

The Times Square is involved with art on two levels. On the one hand, the meticulous restoration of the beautifully crafted original lobby creates a setting which represents a respect for visual and aesthetic quality. The grand marble staircase, period lighting

fixtures, and polished stone floor in the lobby demonstrate a respect for the craftsmanship inherent in the original building.

In addition, The Times Square has made considerable use of participatory art. It provides art workshops for residents' use and displays the results in the lobby. It also features tiles made by the residents which are incorporated into the 15th floor addition.

Reviewing the winning projects from 1997 reawakens our awareness of the importance of art in urban settings — its power to attract people, to excite them, to transform the physical fabric and the pattern of uses, to help people see the city and their lives in fresh ways, to see new possibilities.

Quality of Place

The 1997 winners have much to teach about the physical and architectural aspects of urban excellence. These places are a reminder that residents and citizens care a great deal about the physical qualities of urban places. Good design, quality materials, and physically beautiful environments that house the entire spectrum of human activity are a critical element of excellent urban places. A beautiful and well-designed space enhances and enlivens a creative vision, and can symbolize the project's meaning and importance.

Outstanding design can take many forms, and the 1997 winners present a varied group of places—old and new, large and small, built from both generous and limited budgets. Yet, each created a successful urban place which builds upon the strengths of its context, is open to and enhances its immediate community, supports and strengthens the programs for which it was designed, and contributes to the revitalization of its urban setting. Together these places confirm the essential connection between good design quality and urban excellence.

The Times Square makes a strong statement about the importance and value of providing beautiful and dignified living environments for all segments of the urban population. The quality design



The Times Square Lobby is an elegant and striking entry for residents and visitors.

of The Times Square reflects the philosophy underlying this project. The handsome living environment, enriched by the patina of time and history, communicates a sense of permanence and stability which mirrors Common Ground's goals of supporting residents and bringing a sense of dignity to their lives. Just as important, the physical transformation of the building has stabilized an important corner in the heart of Times Square, contributing a handsome entrance on the street and three thriving retail outlets on 8th Avenue and 43rd Street.

Project Row Houses demonstrates that the impact of the physical place can be as powerful on a modest scale as on a grand one. It shows that quality of place does not depend upon size, the expenditure of vast amounts of money, or luxurious materials. While Project Row Houses is the smallest and simplest of the 1997 winners, it has a beautiful and dignified physical presence which underscores the value and importance of the historic "shotgun" houses, and revitalizes two city blocks.



Restoration at Project Row Houses respects the elegant simplicity of the architecture.

At Project Row Houses it was essential for restoration to

respect the historic simplicity of the row houses. Each was repainted in its original white, retaining the corrugated tin roofs (now tinted with a patina of brown rust) and the narrow front and back stoops in their original form. Similarly, the interior courtyard was cleaned up but not paved, thus maintaining its traditional character. The result is a striking visual presence created through the repetition of simple, pleasing forms. As one Selection Committee member commented, “These are lovely, lovely buildings. It’s easy to diminish the aesthetic qualities of this place because it is small — but they are beautiful.”

The simplicity of these modest buildings contrasts to their powerful symbolism, both culturally and politically. Culturally, they have represented the emancipation and progress of freed slaves, while politically their restoration stands for a reversal of the long neglect of the culture and heritage of the African-American community.

The handsome architecture of **Hismen Hin-nu** demonstrates the connection between design and urban context (particularly its multi-cultural aspects); the value of a participatory design process; and what can be achieved through the use of local architectural vernacular. It also underscores the importance of quality residential environments at all levels of affordability.

The development of Hismen Hin-Nu reflects a strong tradition of participation by residents in planning for their neighborhoods. The design clearly benefited from participatory, architect-led workshops which explored with residents the kinds of options possible on the site. As an antidote to neighborhood concern about a large-scale affordable housing project being introduced into their neighborhood, the architects were able to incorporate elements of residential design usually associated with single family housing. These include interior porches, separate outside entrances, exterior elevations which provide eyes on the street, outside play space for families and children, and a high degree of

individualization of units, consistent with varied family configurations.

Finally, Hismen Hin-Nu is maintained at a very high level, contributing to the feeling of the place as a permanent dwelling rather than transient low cost housing. The use of quality building materials throughout, but especially at street level, has eased maintenance effort and cost.

Center in the Square restored and built onto an historic structure. Physical design, especially the new entry and circulation space — from which all the institutions can be seen — has created a vital synergy among institutions, strengthening and enlivening each. Together with the adjacent market the Center in the Square has created a new urban focal point whose drawing power transcends any one of its separate elements and has succeeded in bringing people of all ages back to the downtown, supporting the educational and cultural life of the area and enlivening small businesses. While design is a less powerful presence here than The Times Square, Hismen Hin-nu, or Project Row Houses, it makes an important point about the synergies which evolve from shared space.

The **Cleveland Historic Warehouse District** demonstrates that the successful creation of a new downtown neighborhood depends upon the interweaving of a complex web of physical, social and economic factors. The physical and architectural quality of the neighborhood goes beyond the restoration of any particular building and depends instead upon achieving a critical mass of historic buildings, quality architectural restorations, consistency of scale and materials, and the quality of the streetscape and public spaces.

The Warehouse District has begun to achieve these goals. It has preserved and restored a significant number of Victorian warehouses. Although quality of restoration varies among individual buildings, the cumulative result of the restorations is the preserva-

tion of a handsome group of structures of compatible scale and materials that form an attractive edge to the downtown, and a critical connection to Cleveland's past.

The long term architectural strength of the Warehouse District, however, is dependent upon several factors. It will be important (and challenging), to preserve and re-use the remaining historic buildings, some of which are very large and in poor condition. It will be even more critical to ensure that future development on the large vacant parcels is well designed, and that it re-enforces the scale, materials and historic context inherent in the District, strengthening the still fragile and emerging residential neighborhood.

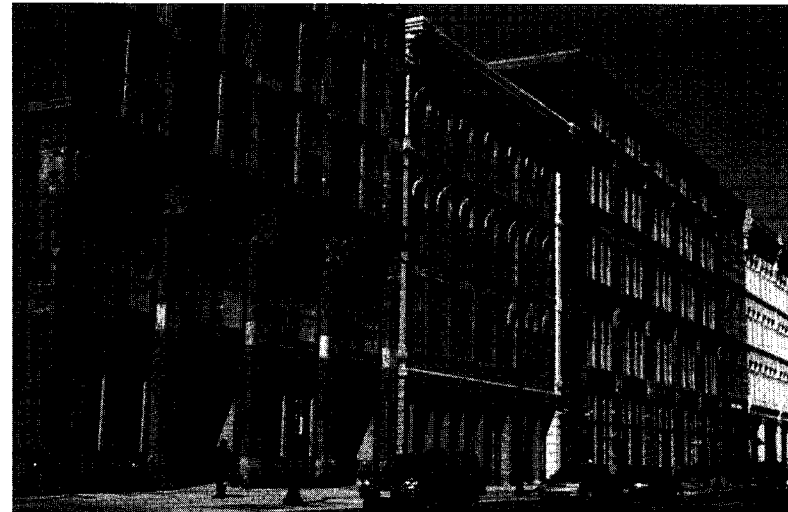
Preservation as a Strategy for Change

Preservation, restoration, and adaptive reuse of historically or architecturally significant places was a central theme for four of the five 1997 RBA winners. In Houston, Cleveland, New York City, and Roanoke, efforts to save and restore places with historic and cultural significance were an essential element of the projects, and critical to their success. They teach that making excellent places often involves re-creating and breathing new life into what was once of value in our cities. The re-use of these buildings provides an opportunity to take the best of past urban design and adapt it to current needs and economic realities.

A desire to save important historic buildings was a driving force in the inception of the **Cleveland Historic Warehouse District** and **Project Row Houses**. The people who led these projects had a special interest in saving a group of buildings with architectural, historical and cultural relevance. In each case, the program evolved beyond preserving the buildings as museum pieces, to devising unique ways of re-using them to support and enhance the community and larger urban context.

The Times Square and **Center In the Square** are located in areas that had once been central to the commerce and street life of

their cities but had since deteriorated. The preservation and reuse of these buildings contributed significantly to the improvement of the whole area. The original motivation for **The Times Square** was the creation of a social program for a particular needy population. Preserving the building was not the prime motivation, but important synergies developed between the social service and preservation goals. Preservation and restoration of the building provided beautiful and dignified living environments which became a major element of its success. In Roanoke, preserving the farmers' market area, a place with social, historical and cultural importance, was the most important item on the agenda. Rehabilitating the **McGuire Building**, which houses **Center in the Square**, was a way to bring cultural and arts organizations together downtown, and provide an important cornerstone for the market facilities. In all four of these cases, successful efforts to preserve and maintain historic structures and spaces resulted in the creation of places that were pleasing, comfortable and successful in supporting contemporary urban needs.



Restored block, Cleveland Historic Warehouse District

In many cities, historic preservation organizations have only come into being as the result of the loss, or threatened destruction, of a treasured local symbol. This was the case with the **Cleveland Historic Warehouse District**, which was born as the result of a local preservation crisis. For years citizens of Cleveland watched the demolition of some of the finest examples of 19th Century buildings in the downtown area, and their replacement by parking lots. The preservation community was finally able to focus its energy when the Hilliard Building, the oldest building in the downtown area, was threatened. Their success in saving the Hilliard Building led directly to the creation of the Historic Warehouse District Development Corporation, which conducted a survey of the surviving buildings and created an historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The District's judicious use of design review and support of developers in financing and dealing with red-tape has led to the successful conversion of a number of buildings into apartments and retail uses. Their efforts to save this large group of buildings that were similar in age and style, had a cumulative effect that gives the district a distinctive, distinguished look and feel (see Quality of Place). No one doubts that preservation has been a positive and cost-effective process. The only regret is that it didn't begin earlier, before so many important older structures were demolished and the fabric of the community was seriously compromised by a series of surface parking lots in the heart of the district.

The "shotgun" houses that became the site of **Project Row Houses** in Houston's Third Ward are representative of a historic and culturally important residential form. These buildings are small and unprepossessing, but for many in the neighborhood they are symbolic of an era of progress and independence that followed the freeing of slaves after the Civil War. Their scale and the central courtyard reflect a housing form reminiscent of communal life with African roots. Similarly, their neglect and deteriora-

tion was symbolic of the social and economic problems of the Third Ward.

Houston is not known for preservation. Development there has most often been characterized by new construction replacing the old. Moreover, the main constituency for the "shotgun" house building type is the local African-American population—a group which is socially, politically, and economically disenfranchised. The likelihood of imminent demolition of these houses was high and they had become symbols of the neglect experienced by this segment of Houston's population. In a city of jarring discontinuities and juxtapositions, constant demolition and new construction, Project Row Houses presents a face of simplicity, unity of appearance, and recollection of important historical events.

The McGuire Building, which was to become the new home of the **Center in the Square**, was not especially distinguished architecturally, but presented an opportunity to bring cultural and arts programs to a central location downtown. The results were successful beyond the expectations of the original planners. The farmers' market has survived, grown, and thrived, the surrounding area has come to life, and the energy has extended across the railroad tracks to the restoration of the Hotel Roanoke and downtown. Thus, historic reuse has been the spark leading to the revival of Roanoke as an important cultural and educational destination.

Preservation and Urban Excellence

This is not the first year that preservation has been an important aspect of urban excellence as recognized in Rudy Bruner Award finalists. Many past winners, from Pike Place in Seattle to South Beach in Miami and Lowertown in St. Paul, have been based on historic preservation. It is reasonable to ask why preservation is important, why it so often is linked to successful examples of urban excellence, and what lessons can be learned for the future of our cities. There are a number of reasons historic preservation can

be critical to urban excellence.

Urban Ecology Preservation can be an efficient use of time and resources. By reusing existing sites, scarce materials can be recycled and the energy costs of demolition avoided. Restorations usually cost less than new construction, and carry with them the patina of age that lends continuity to urban life.

Funding Options Restoring a building with historic value can trigger sources of funding including tax incentives that would otherwise not be available to the project. The Times Square benefited greatly from preservation tax credits which provided significant additional funds for construction and restoration. Preservation-based tax incentives contributed to the viability of projects in Cleveland's Historic Warehouse District, projects that, especially early on, might not otherwise have been able to get off the ground.

Quality of the Historic Building Many older buildings have a level of detail and materials that would be difficult or impossible to reproduce economically in a new building (see Quality of the Place). This is especially true for non-profit corporations, which often have minimal budgets that restrict the level of architectural detail.

Quality of Setting The Times Square, as a result of restoration done with preservation funding and incentives, is clearly superior to typical SROs. For the residents, these attractive spaces demonstrate a concern for their welfare and a respect for their humanity.

Many of the historic warehouses in Cleveland also exhibit an elegance of design and attention to detail lacking in much modern construction. Even where interiors have been gutted for rehabilitation, lobbies and facades present Victorian character for their public face, creating a sense of dignity and historic continuity to the visitor.

Symbolic Aspects of Preservation Places symbolize collective cultural memory of people and events, and saving a building can be a powerful statement of the importance and value of cultural history. The emotional bond that exists as part of the psychologi-

cal sense of place can be broken when buildings are demolished and landscapes torn apart. People can feel a sense of loss and rootlessness when those familiar places are removed, making new construction feel empty and sterile. By preserving buildings and neighborhoods we also preserve images, symbols and memories that can have strong cultural and emotional significance.

The Roanoke farmers' market and the Hotel Roanoke are good examples of the kind of connection that people make to a place. The market provided more than a place for commerce. It was a social and communal space of the best kind and, in an earlier era, the only place where people of all races freely mixed. The Hotel Roanoke was a symbol of quality and a "world-class" hotel for a small southern city. The deterioration of these areas hurt the image local citizens had of their city and generated pessimism for the future of downtown. Their revival has been a hopeful sign for Roanoke as Center in the Square and the adjacent marketplace continue to thrive, a new sense of urban pride is palpable.

Preservation as an Alternative to Urban Planning Some commentators have suggested that preservation has become a grassroots response to some of the excesses of urban planning, serving as a form of urban planning and zoning by default. In some cases it is a reaction to the vacuum created by a lack of thoughtful urban schemes on a broader scale; in others, an alternative to grandiose urban plans that local residents feel are imposed upon them. Preservation has in some cases become a rallying point for



Roof detail, Project Row Houses

neighborhoods trying to maintain their scale and unity in response to highways, public works or private development. The organizations that coalesce around these issues can serve to channel public efforts to change neighborhoods for the better.

Public/Private Collaboration

The era is past in which government was presumed to be the main force planning and implementing urban change. The recent review of the history of the Rudy Bruner Award winners (*Sustaining Urban Excellence; Learning from the Rudy Bruner Award, 1987–1993*, Bruner Foundation, 1998) found that Rudy Bruner Award winners have frequently been the result of collaborations among groups in the public, not-for-profit, and/or for-profit sectors. (See also *Building Coalitions for Urban Excellence*, Bruner Foundation, 1993.) Most often, non-profit groups were the lead organization and prime developer. This makes sense given the realities of our time. Government agencies at all levels are reducing budgets and devolving power upon localities, while businesses naturally focus on efforts that have profit potential. Typically, that leaves non-profit organizations to address pressing urban needs.

This is clearly the case for all five of the 1997 winners, which were collaborative projects where non-profit organizations had the primary responsibility for initiating and overseeing planning and management. The kind and quality of collaboration with private and public sectors, however, varies considerably. While the actions of city agencies were relevant in all these projects, the city government played an active role in the initial stages only in **New York, Oakland, and Roanoke**. Also, while most of the projects had some involvement with private, for-profit organizations, private development was usually a small part of the effort, central only to the **Cleveland Historic Warehouse District**. While the non-profit Warehouse District managed the preservation process, as well as overall planning and organizing strategies, the capital, energy, and

risks for each individual project came from developers who were seeking profits by creating rental units in rehabilitated buildings. City government was, in much of the early effort, largely irrelevant. In the midst of Cleveland's fiscal crisis, it practically ceded planning authority to the Historic Warehouse District. Now, however, the city is playing a more important role, particularly in institutionalizing the master plans and encouraging developers.

The involvement of all three sectors was balanced best in **The Times Square**, which was one of things that the Selection Committee found appealing. While conceptual development, energy, and leadership was clearly came from Common Ground, the city of New York played a significant role. The purchase, restoration and conversion would not have been possible without the city's significant SRO loan. New York city agencies and offices, which can be an impediment to non-profit development (see case study of the Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center in *Building Coalitions for Urban*

Excellence, Bruner Foundation, 1996), were facilitative and supportive. This is most clear in the City's efforts to help Common Ground extend and replicate its success in another building and neighborhood. Private corporations also played a role in The Times Square. The companies that rent the street-level retail space along 8th Avenue or 43rd Street, most prominently Starbucks and Ben & Jerry's, provide jobs for residents of The Times Square, and rental revenue which Common Ground uses for job skills training.



Gretchen Dykstra, Director of the Times Square Business Improvement District

Center in the Square is a non-profit organization, founded and operated for the support of non-profit cultural institutions. Private enterprise plays a role largely in the maintenance and operation of the farm stands and in the local businesses whose return has had a positive ripple effect on the neighborhood. The city of Roanoke was somewhat involved, providing UDAG funds and encouraging private investment. It has received a very large return in terms of public benefit provided by Center in the Square and resulting development, from a small public investment.

In **Hismen Hin-nu (Sun Gate Terrace)** The City of Oakland had completed planning studies which targeted the San Antonio district for additional housing and commercial development. The City of Oakland was thus willing to play a key role in facilitating the acquisition of the site by EBALDC. The project was the product of a traditional community development model, although the design process and outcome were exemplary. Private enterprise involvement is limited to the street level shops, which have not, to date, experienced significant success.

Project Row Houses, more than any other winner this year, has been on its own in developing funding and support. It is the least supported by local city government. The city of Houston has at times been a neutral bystander and on other occasions an obstacle to be overcome. Despite the fact that Project Row Houses has received funding through the Houston Council for the Arts, the city has not been a source of significant material support. Project Row Houses has had a positive and ongoing relationship with the corporate world in the form of major volunteer efforts by employees of companies such as AMOCO and Chevron, who have performed hands-on restoration work. Although these relationships appear to be based upon a firm and ongoing commitment from these corporations, there is no continuing relationship in Project Row Houses in which the project directly supports or is supported by revenue from private operations.

In this group of excellent projects the energy, innovation and creativity for urban excellence came largely from those working outside of government agencies and structures. Though there is some evidence of increasing commitment by local government, especially in Cleveland, not-for-profit organizations, in particular, play a special role in coordinating the efforts needed to make these efforts succeed. They are able to avoid the bureaucracy and time frames typical of government agencies, and can act where risks outweigh potential profits for private enterprises.

The most successful and sustainable urban projects may be ones where, as in The Times Square, there is a strong collaboration among non-profit, private and public organizations. New York City has been a supportive and helpful partner in The Times Square, which was also able to harness energy and capital from private operations in support of goals that are not, in and of themselves, profit oriented. Its partnership with Ben and Jerry's has been mutually sustaining, and is a good example of a growing trend among non-profits to find ways to support social services with funds from profit-making activities (see also the case study of New Community Corporation in *Sustaining Urban Excellence; Learning from the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, 1987-1993*, Bruner Foundation, 1998, and in *Rebuilding Communities: Re-Creating Urban Excellence*, Bruner Foundation, 1993.).

An important role for government agencies may be in helping non-profits achieve stability and viability, as New York City did for The Times Square. Often the biggest problem of non-profit organizations is finding financial support when they are just starting, before a track record has been established. At several times early in its history, Project Row Houses was perilously close to collapse, in part because of the limited level of help it received from the City of Houston. Center in the Square found ways to develop and survive, with limited help from the city of Roanoke, and more significant help from the state. While in these two cases, the cities

were able to gain significant rewards for relatively small investment, it may be reasonable to ask how many other projects, that could have had a positive impact but may have been just a little less hardy, collapsed for lack of initial investment and support? In this era, the role of the city government may rest in being wise about ways to identify those projects with potential and need, and provide the support needed to nourish and sustain them.

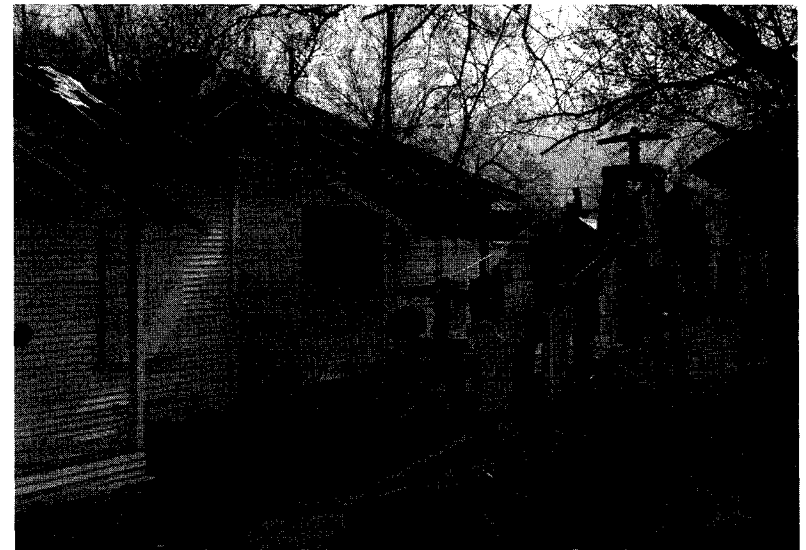
Adapting New Models of Urban Placemaking

The ability of a project to serve as a model which can be adapted to other urban settings increases its potential for having an impact on national urban practices, and is an important aspect of urban excellence. While each Rudy Bruner Award winner makes a contribution within its particular setting, its impact grows exponentially when it can be successfully adapted to other urban environments. Meaningful adaptation involves application of the guiding ideas and concepts, not replication of the original project. Simply replicating a project with a “cookie cutter” approach would be to ignore unique local contexts and problems. Instead, process, guiding philosophy and concepts should be redefined in the context of each urban setting, drawing upon the unique cultural and social identity of a city or neighborhood. In this group of winners, several have already demonstrated the adaptability of their models to other sites or cities.

In New York City, **The Times Square** model is being used at Common Ground’s new project, the Prince George. This project, currently under construction, will again rehabilitate an attractive historic building to serve a mixed population with permanent housing and supportive social services. It need not be the original project leaders who implement the adaptation of innovative models in other cities. The Mayor of Baltimore has recently sent members of his staff to New York to study the Times Square for the purpose of adapting the model to Baltimore.

The **Project Row House** model links culturally-based artistic talent and leadership with discovery and re-use of local architectural forms. These resources are tapped to celebrate ethnic identity and community pride and to provide programs responsive to local community needs. Project Row Houses has formed a separate organization to offer technical assistance to other inner city neighborhoods interested in their approach. In their own words, “Project Row Houses is establishing a national model for reclamation of inner-city neighborhoods with art as a catalyst to stimulate constructive dialogue addressing cultural, educational and social issues.” Projects are already underway in Dallas, the Watts area of Los Angeles, East St. Louis, and Birmingham.

Aspects of **Hismen Hin-nu** that can be effectively adapted to other settings include the innovative participatory process, the inclusion of varied unit configurations, and the effective integration of art which grows out of the ethnic mix of the surrounding neighborhood.



Courtyard at Project Row Houses, with permanent art installation.

The **Cleveland Historic Warehouse District** could serve as a model in many other industrialized cities where changes in economic and manufacturing trends have left historic buildings in prime locations under-used and abandoned. The combination of the adaptive reuse of an entire district of buildings and the concept of creating an entirely new residential neighborhood in the downtown, although not unique, is impressive. (See also the case study on Lowertown in *Building Coalitions for Urban Excellence*, The Bruner Foundation, 1996.) In Cleveland the creative uses of layered financing and strict design review created an operating model of financing and development which have demonstrated success and opened up new ways of thinking about district-wide adaptive re-use.

A number of small cities have looked closely at **Center in the Square**, with an eye toward using its model of concentrating arts institutions to renew a downtown area. Asheville, North Carolina created a similar complex, although with somewhat less success (possibly because they didn't sufficiently modify the model to fit local conditions). In these times, when funding for the arts is more of a struggle than ever, the Center model might well provide a way to support the cultural and educational initiatives of local cultural institutions, while creating new destinations in urban centers.

Sustaining Urban Excellence

The 1997 Selection Committee emphasized the importance of sustainability as a critical element in urban excellence. While the creative and innovative visions developed by the 1997 winners have the potential to make important contributions to urban placemaking, much of that potential is lost if a project cannot sustain itself over time. In its investigation into the longevity of urban excellence, (see *Sustaining Urban Excellence: Learning from the Rudy Bruner Award 1987-1993*, Bruner Foundation, 1998), the Bruner Foundation has identified a number of factors critical to long-term success

Financial Independence

Financial stability can derive from something as basic as predictable cash flow and capital reserves to more complex financial mechanisms, such as the sale of historic preservation tax credits. In order to provide stability, sources of cash must be free from fluctuations of financial markets or political trends. **The Times Square** is in the enviable position of having been generously funded for acquisition and construction, leaving a significant capital reserve which protects the project from unforeseen city operating budget cuts. Its operating expenses are covered by rents, while the extensive social services are financed by contracts with the state, and job training is financed by the high-rent retail operations this location can command. This diversified set of funding sources, together with its cash reserve, give The Times Square an unusually strong financial outlook.



Emily Axelrod, Director of the Rudy Bruner Award, with Josh Simon of Hismen Hin-Nu and Simeon Bruner, Founder of the Rudy Bruner Award

Center in the Square bases its operating budget on contributions from various governmental agencies, including the state, city, and county, and is looking to create a substantial endowment through fundraising. The variety of supporting jurisdictions adds stability to its funding sources. However, sudden changes in the funding patterns of the state, county or city, could conceivably put Center in the Square at risk, but the contribution made by the project to educational opportunity in the area gives it an advantageous position with respect to public funding. As long as the educational and cultural benefits continue to be perceived as valuable, funding is likely to remain secure.

The prospects for sustainability for **Hismen Hin-nu** are excellent. Permanent financing for both the residential and commercial portions of the project have been provided by a combination of state and local entities, as well as by EBALDC itself. The rent structure allows the project to operate within budget, and to make regular payments on its remaining debt. The developer, EBALDC, is a financially secure and mature community development organization, adding another level of financial security to the project. There is no reason to believe that Hismen Hin-nu faces financial instability, despite retail vacancies.

Project Row Houses has relied on very different types of financing to develop its programs. Many of its most important funding sources are one-time grants and loans from private individuals and foundations. Project Row Houses is well aware that renewable, ongoing funding sources will be critical to its future. Its Board is actively involved in fundraising for the project, with the goal of acquiring additional assets in the form of adjacent property, and securing a source of endowment capital sufficient to ensure a predictable cash flow. In addition, Project Row Houses is working hard to develop an improved relationship with Houston's Department of Community Development, which could be helpful to the project's future.

Sustainability of the **Cleveland Historic Warehouse District** is far more complex. Each renovation project within the district must create its own financial package. The viability of individual projects depends upon the health of the local economy, the cost of borrowing money, and the availability of financial incentives such as low income tax credits, historic conservation easements, property tax abatements, and other mechanisms which provide significant public subsidies. Currently the prospect of ongoing availability of these tools is very positive, as the City of Cleveland has become a supporter of development of the district.

Leadership Transition

The first section of this chapter discusses the importance of the vision of a strong and capable leader. However talented and visionary these leaders may be, however, the future of the places they create will depend upon their ability to introduce, train, and gain support for new generations of leaders who will carry their projects into the future. They need to develop resilient organizations that are able to adapt to inevitable changes in leadership.

At **The Times Square**, Rosanne Haggerty is the symbol and personification of the project. It was her vision and skill that persuaded the City of New York to grant to Common Ground the largest award of its kind ever given in New York City. Her total commitment to the project from its inception has been critical to its success.

Today, however, Haggerty is less involved in the daily operations of the project and is devoting more time to adapting The Times Square model to new projects. New staff have been hired and are being trained to take over the management role, while she remains available to ensure consistency with the philosophy and mission that guided the establishment of the project. Leadership transition is well underway and shows every sign of proceeding smoothly.

Project Row Houses has been closely linked with the energy and vision of its founder, Rick Lowe. Lowe recognized early that it was critical to bring on an executive director (Grotfeldt) to broaden the base of leadership for Project Row Houses and contribute needed day-to-day management skills. While both Lowe and Grotfeldt remain committed to Project Row Houses, they are also involved in other initiatives throughout the country. Training new leadership to run day-to-day operations is an ongoing effort, and will be important to the future success of the project. Project Row Houses has not yet attained a degree of stability which would withstand the absence of its original leaders; thus, it is still important for them to remain closely involved at home.

Projects like **Cleveland Historic Warehouse District**, **Hismen Hin-nu**, and **Center in the Square**, are run by mature organizations, which have already experienced changes in leadership and personnel. They have passed the initial stage of vision and creation which are characteristic of newer projects, and now require seasoned and capable managers. As a result these places are far less dependent upon key individuals for long term stability. There is every reason to assume that these projects can withstand future leadership transitions as long as care is taken to choose leaders who remain committed to the original project values.

Conclusion

The 1997 Rudy Bruner Award winners reflect several important truths about urban placemaking, and address some of the most critical issues facing our cities today. As a group, they provide us with new models of urban excellence that can be adapted to cities and neighborhoods across the country. As individual projects, they demonstrate creative solutions to local urban problems — solutions which are built on the cornerstones of the Rudy Bruner Award: **process, place, and values**.

The 1997 winners have enriched and enlivened their cities and their neighborhoods, and made a lasting contribution to the urban environment. They have provided new models of urban excellence, and have demonstrated once again what can be accomplished through imagination, dedication, and hard work. “Change in cities,” one Selection Committee member said, “is often attributable to a couple of people who do something, and everything spins around it. And... often it’s something you figure can’t actually be done, but they do it anyway.”