

This is an excerpt from:

Challenging Conventions

The 2015 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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The 2015 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence: Introduction



OVERVIEW

The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence (RBA) is a national design award that recognizes transformative urban places distinguished by their economic and social contributions to America's cities. Each biennial, the RBA honors five winners ranging from large, mixed-use developments to modest yet remarkable projects.

Founded in 1985 by architect Simeon Bruner, the award seeks to promote innovative thinking about the built environment and to advance conversation about making cities better by sharing the stories of some of America's most inspiring urban development projects.

The RBA is intended to be a resource for anyone interested in learning about urban development and a point of departure for local and national conversations about the role of design in cities. Fundamental to this discussion is the Bruner Foundation's belief that "good" design is design that contributes to the economic and social vitality of our cities. From early medalists Pike Place Market in Seattle (1987) and Houston's Project Row



Clockwise from top left: Selection Committee discussion, 2015 applications, touring Uptown District and Falls Park, and conducting a site visit interview.

Houses (1997) to Brooklyn Bridge Park (2001) and the 2015 finalists, RBA winners illustrate the power of design to effect positive change above and beyond the resulting physical place and remind us of the complexity of urban placemaking. Their stories are compelling and provocative, offering inspiration and food for thought for students and practitioners alike.

All of our RBA publications, case studies, and “lessons learned” chapters are available online at www.rudybruneraward.org. We encourage you to read on, learn, and join the conversation about how we can all make cities better.

The RBA Process

Each cycle of the RBA prompts a conversation about urban excellence in America. By design, the conversation begins anew every two years with another call for entries, set of submissions, and selection committee charged with choosing five winners.

To be eligible, projects must be urban, built (not just a plan or a program), in operation long enough to demonstrate impact, and located within the continental United States. The 2015 RBA submissions included 55 applications from 40 communities in 26 states and the District of Columbia. Projects ranged in scale from development budgets of \$20,000 to more than \$500 million.

The winners are chosen by a six-member selection committee newly comprised each cycle to include a mayor and a participant from a prior RBA winner along with other experts in urban design and planning, development and financing, and community engagement.

The committee meets twice: once to review and discuss all of the applications and select five finalists, and again to determine the gold and silver medalists. In between, a team from the Bruner Foundation visits each finalist, spending two to three days touring the site, taking photographs, and

“THE BRUNER WAY OF JUDGING GIVES DESIGN WORK THE MEANING, DIGNITY, IMPORTANCE, AND RELEVANCE TO THE COMMUNITY THAT IT DESERVES.”

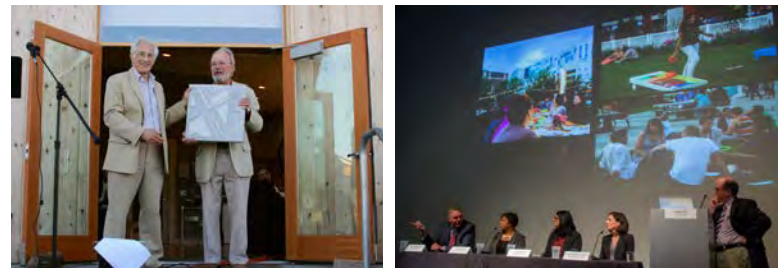
— Susan Szenasy, 2013 Selection Committee*

interviewing people involved in the project to gather additional information. One gold medal and four silver medals are awarded, with the gold medalist receiving a \$50,000 cash prize and each silver medalist receiving \$10,000.

Once the medalists are determined, the Bruner Foundation works with the winners to plan events that celebrate the medalists and reflect the unique character and culture of each place. Public programming such as tours and panel discussions provide opportunities to highlight the stories of the winners and their impact in the community and spur dialogue about future planning and development.

After the awards are made, the research and the selection committee discussions are integrated into detailed case studies and a summary of lessons learned that are available to others interested in urban design and development. The case studies are then posted online on the RBA website and published in a book by the Bruner Foundation.

*Szenasy, Susan M. “Food for Thought: Two competitions underscore the value of research, innovation, and collaboration.” *Metropolis Magazine*. June 2013. <http://www.metropolismag.com/June-2013/Food-for-Thought/>.



Clockwise from top: Falls Park award ceremony, Uptown District panel discussion, Falls Park public program, Quixote Village award presentation.

Clockwise from top: City of Greenville, Case Western Reserve University, City of Greenville, Panza

THE RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

Eligibility

Built, urban projects located within the continental United States are eligible to apply.

Selection Committee

A new six-member committee is assembled for each biennial award cycle, including a mayor and a participant from a prior winning project.



\$50,000
Gold Medal Winner



\$10,000
Silver Medal Winners

APPLICATION

The application provides an understanding of the project's design, development, and impact, including:

- Project data, overview, and description.
- Perspective forms completed by people involved in the project and community.
- Photographs and other visuals.
- Award use letter (opened after medalists are selected).

SELECTION PROCESS

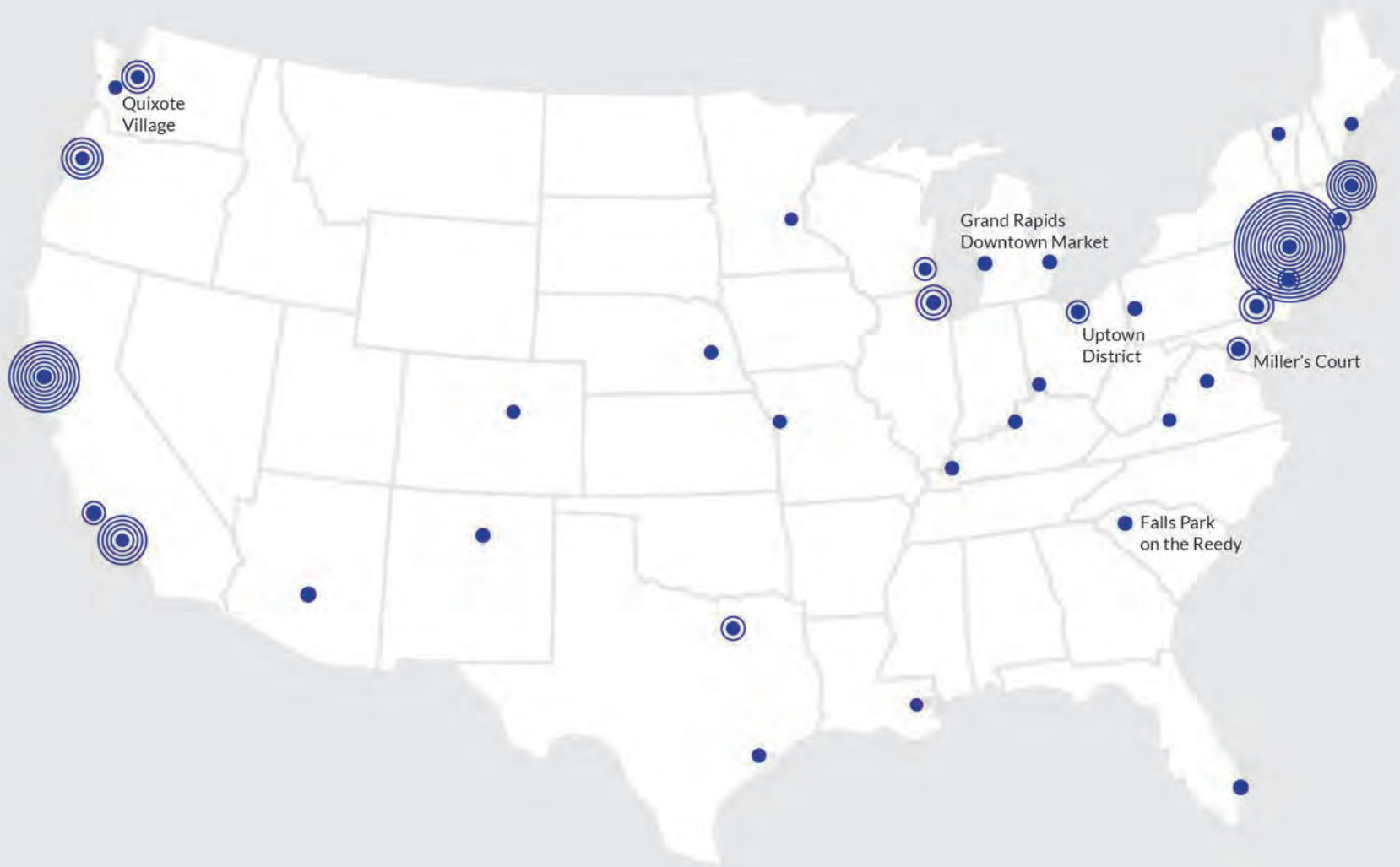
Winners are determined by the Selection Committee through a three-step selection process:

- Selection Committee reviews and discusses applications and selects five finalists.
- Bruner Foundation conducts site visits to collect additional information.
- Selection Committee reviews and discusses site visit findings and determines the medalists.

AWARD & CASE STUDIES

The winners and their stories are documented and shared through presentations and publications:

- On-site award presentations that showcase and celebrate the winners.
- Events, presentations, and tours that highlight the stories of the winners and their impact.
- Detailed case studies with lessons learned from the medalists.



Together the 78 RBA winners reflect a diversity of scale and approaches and the evolution of cities and urban development in America.

THE 2015 RUDY BRUNER AWARD

Each round of medalists yields fresh ideas and perspectives that challenge our assumptions and increase our understanding of how to make great urban places. The 2015 RBA winners—Miller’s Court in Baltimore, Maryland; Falls Park on the Reedy in Greenville, South Carolina; Grand Rapids Downtown Market in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Quixote Village in Olympia, Washington; and Uptown District in Cleveland, Ohio—tackle big issues such as the quality of urban education, homelessness and public health, supporting local agriculture and entrepreneurship, and regenerating communities. As the 2015 Selection Committee observed, the medalists were ambitious and courageous, challenging conventional practices and wisdom, rediscovering and reclaiming existing assets and creating new ones in the process. Each winner engaged people and institutions in the community, creating collective buy-in and ownership and strengthening the city’s identity and pride. They also persevered in the face of challenges and setbacks, staying focused on their goals and true to their values.

The 2015 winners also highlight and reinforce common threads among nearly three decades of RBA winners. They demonstrate the capacity of design to transform lives and communities. They connect people and communities with each other and with resources and remind us of the importance of vision and leadership, collaborative partnerships, and engagement and capacity building. At the same time, each project is anchored in its own time and place and is a unique response to the history, culture, and economic and social conditions of its city. The winners also highlight increasingly common 21st-century urban themes that are emerging with the renewed interest in, investment in, and growth of cities. These include concerns about economic and social equity, sustainability and resilience, public infrastructure, balancing open space with density, and financing urban development. Together all 78 winners reflect a remarkable diversity of scale and approaches and the fascinating evolution of cities and urban development in America.

Gold Medalist:

Miller’s Court

Baltimore, Maryland

A supportive living and working environment for school teachers and education-related nonprofits.

Silver Medalists:

Falls Park on the Reedy

Greenville, South Carolina

Transformation of a forgotten waterfall and river valley into an urban oasis and centerpiece for the city.

Grand Rapids Downtown Market

Grand Rapids, Michigan

A new public market and gathering space promoting local food, education, and entrepreneurship.

Quixote Village

Olympia, Washington

A community of tiny cottages developed for—and, in part, by—people who were homeless.

Uptown District

Cleveland, Ohio

The collaborative redevelopment of a mixed-use urban corridor linking arts, education, and health care institutions and adjoining communities.



Clockwise from top left: Miller's Court, Falls Park on the Reedy, Grand Rapids Downtown Market, Quixote Village, Uptown District.

Clockwise from top left: Miller's Court, Falls Park on the Reedy, Grand Rapids Downtown Market, Quixote Village, Uptown District.

2015 SELECTION COMMITTEE:

Titles and positions of committee members were effective as of May 2015.

Mark Stodola
Mayor
City of Little Rock
Little Rock, Arkansas



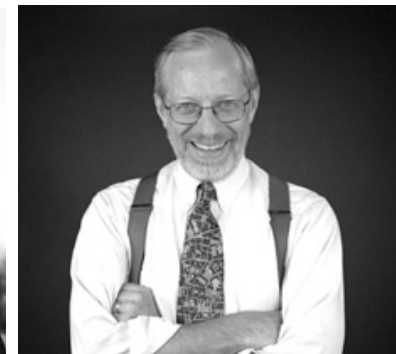
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Cleveland, Ohio

Mia Lehrer, FASLA
President
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Los Angeles, California



James Stockard
Lecturer in Housing
Harvard Graduate School of Design
Cambridge, Massachusetts

**Architect of 2013 Gold Medalist Inspiration Kitchens—Garfield Park.*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The 2015 RBA selection process was facilitated by Richard Wener, who participated in all of the site visits and oversaw—along with RBA Director Anne-Marie Lubenau—development of the site visit reports, winner case studies and lessons learned, and the 2015 publication. The case studies were written by Anne-Marie Lubenau, Jay Farbstein, Robert Shibley, and Richard Wener. Editorial support and copy editing was provided by Elizabeth Chesla.

Anne-Marie Lubenau, FAIA, is the director of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. She focuses on expanding the role of architects in shaping cities by engaging people in the process of design and increasing understanding about the built environment and its impact on our lives.

Jay Farbstein, FAIA, PhD, leads a national consulting practice based in Los Angeles that specializes in helping public sector clients develop and document their requirements for building projects and prepare post-occupancy evaluations after projects are completed.

Robert Shibley, FAIA, FAICP, is professor and dean at the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo, the State University of New York. He also serves as the university campus architect and is a senior fellow of the University at Buffalo Regional Institute focused on the study and critical practice of public policy, urban planning, and design.

Richard Wener, PhD, is an environmental psychologist and professor in the Department of Technology, Culture, and Society at the Tandon School of Engineering of New York University, where he co-directs the Sustainable Urban Environments program and is a faculty affiliate of the Rutgers University Center for Green Building.

Elizabeth Chesla, MA, helps individuals and organizations around the globe communicate clearly and effectively in both print and online media. She has over 20 years of experience writing, editing, and teaching English and professional communication.

ABOUT THE BRUNER FOUNDATION

Established in 1963 by Rudy and Martha Bruner, the Bruner Foundation seeks to inspire meaningful social change. Building collaborative partnerships, leveraging resources, and tackling complex social issues are common threads in the foundation's 50-year history. The foundation has placed priority on assisting neglected and disenfranchised segments of society and has influenced national policy in health care delivery, Holocaust studies, education, and nonprofit evaluation methodologies and increased understanding of the urban built environment.

For more information, contact:

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—2015 Selection Committee