

## PREFACE

Lewis Mumford wrote that cities were created as “a means of bringing heaven down on earth.” They are a “symbol of the possible.” His idealism is hard to grasp these days when our cities have become symbols of despair. Solving urban problems sometimes seems impossible.

At the Bruner Foundation, we remain hopeful. Time and again we have watched people do the impossible: transform their neighborhoods, cities, even regions, through innovative, collective effort.

These successful models of urban excellence should be celebrated and their success examined so their lessons can be applied across the nation. The Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment was founded in 1986 to help make this happen. Primarily, the Award is a tool of discovery. Searching for worthy programs, we attempt to find out what kinds of things improve cities. With the urban crisis growing and resources shrinking, false solutions must be avoided; the cost in human terms is too high.

It is the rigorous, innovative process by which the Bruner Foundation evaluates urban places that gives the Award special value. Each round of competition takes two years.

The Selection Committee members are chosen, not only for their reputation in particular areas of expertise such as landscape architecture or community development, but for displaying receptivity to issues outside their fields.

Over the years, Bruner’s Selection Committees have tried to avoid defining urban excellence too narrowly. A narrow, simplistic perspective is one reason so many urban projects — even projects that win architecture or design awards — sometimes bring disappointing results in human and economic terms.

We believe the development process to be a highly complex contest involving diverse perspectives and goals, none of which is sufficient in itself to create excellent urban places: developers and architects pursue economic and aesthetic objectives; governments promote their planning and growth policies; neighborhood groups focus on the quality of life in their communities.

The Rudy Bruner Award competition seeks to identify, reward and publicize urban places that reconcile these often competing objectives. The economic, visual, and social perspectives must complement one another.

Although the limits which define eligible submissions for the Award are quite broad, the project must be a real place, not just a plan. It must demonstrate its excellence in action. The people affected by the project must be involved. Its values should be explicit and viewed as worthwhile by the local community. Conflicts should be discussed openly and resolved openly. While showing social responsibility, economic viability, and aesthetic sensitivity, the project must be ecologically benign.

With this broad mandate as a backdrop, each Bruner Award Selection Committee walks onto an empty stage without a script. The debate about what constitutes urban excellence begins afresh with each round of competition, inspired and framed by the varied responses to our call for submissions.

This year's Rudy Bruner Award, which includes a \$25,000 prize (1993's prize will be \$50,000), went to the Greenmarket, New York City's system of open air farmer's markets. Greenmarket best exemplified "connections," the over-arching theme of urban excellence that emerged from the Selection Committee discussions. Greenmarket — actually 25 markets — was honored for reconnecting the city economy to the necklace of farms surrounding New York, reintroducing city people to farming people, and reinvigorating urban spaces. The Selection Committee felt that the markets had become viable places of commerce as well as a vibrant social institution.

Readers should use this book just as the Rudy Bruner Award Selection Committee did; to evaluate and to learn from five promising examples of urban excellence. These wonderful efforts at making cities work also serve as a bulwark against despair in these difficult days in urban America.

Simeon Bruner  
Treasurer-Trustee  
Bruner Foundation

## INTRODUCTION

### The Rudy Bruner Award

As mentioned in the Preface, the Rudy Bruner Award is a **search** for urban excellence. It seeks to identify and reward excellent urban places, as well as serving as a forum for debating urban issues and the nature of urban excellence. Some features that distinguish the Bruner Award from other awards programs are the broadly representative nature of its Selection Committee (which meets twice and is composed of design professionals, politicians, developers and community representatives), the application process (which requires statements from a range of affected parties, not just the owner or designer), and the in-depth site visits to each finalist to verify claims and answer questions raised in the initial review.

### Criteria For Submission

The Bruner Foundation sets out a framework for the debate and the submissions furnish real life examples to be discussed. The Foundation intentionally does not pre-define urban excellence; rather the debate is framed by the call for submissions, their nature and scope, and the interactions of the Selection Committee members as

expressed in the review process. Here are the broad limits which the Bruner Foundation provides to define eligible submissions:

- The project has to be a **real place**, not just a plan. Of course, excellent planning is likely to contribute to an excellent place — but a plan is not enough. The place must exist and be able to demonstrate its excellence in action (not in theory or in anticipation).
- The planning and implementation **processes** may be innovative in involving new participants and constituencies, or they may be modifications of existing or traditional processes. But the people affected by the project must be appropriately involved and must see benefit from it. Conflicts must be made explicit and resolved, perhaps in new ways.
- The places or projects must address important **social, physical, economic, and ecological** factors. The call for entries invites projects which show social responsibility, are economically viable, demonstrate aesthetic sensitivity, and are ecologically benign.
- The project's or sponsor's **values** should be

worthwhile and consonant with local community values; perhaps equally important, they should be made explicit.

### The 1991 Selection Committee

The committee consisted of a group of distinguished — and intentionally diverse — actors in the urban development drama:

**Gwendolyn D. Clemons**, director of research at the Chicago Housing Authority, Chicago, Illinois.

**Lawrence Halprin**, FAIA, architect and landscape architect, Lawrence Halprin Studio, San Francisco, California.

**Tony Hiss**, who writes on urban affairs for the *New Yorker* magazine, New York, New York.

**Joseph B. McNeely**, director of the Development Training Institute, Baltimore, Maryland.

**Adele Naude Santos**, founding dean of the new Department of Architecture, University of California at San Diego, San Diego, California.

**Vincent C. Schoemehl**, the mayor of Saint Louis, Missouri.

### The Selection Process

Given the broad and general mandate from the Bruner Foundation, the Selection Committee had two fascinating discussions about the submissions and about urban



*Members of the Selection Committee review submissions.*

excellence. The first occurred in the context of winnowing 70 submissions to five finalists (see list below). The second examined the five finalists in light of the in-person, on-site investigations and reported findings.

### Site Visits

To learn how the places really worked, the authors visited each finalist between the two Selection Committee meetings. These were not quick walk-throughs, but lasted about three days, including part of a weekend. We served as the Selection Committee's eyes and ears, touring all parts of the project, interviewing 15 to 25 participants, taking photographs, and observing patterns of use. In addition to activities planned by the project organizers, we carried out our own agendas. Thus, we were able to answer the Selection Committee's questions and investigate their concerns.

## The Winner and Finalists

The site visit findings were presented at the second Selection Committee meeting. Following a vigorous debate, they picked the winner (which received the \$25,000 award) and the finalists (which received \$1,000 each).

**Winner: Greenmarket, New York City.** A program of 25 farmer's markets in New York City which incorporates the preservation of farmland in the surrounding region.

**Finalist: Brooklyn-Queens Greenway, New York City.** A bicycle path connecting recreational, educational, cultural, and historical resources through 40 miles of Brooklyn and Queens.

**Finalist: Ocean Drive Improvement Project, Miami Beach, Florida.** Preservation and revitalization of a 15 block ocean front historic district of Art Deco hotels and apartments.

**Finalist: Roslindale Village Main Street, Boston, Massachusetts.** Community group revitalization of a neighborhood commercial center.

**Finalist: West Clinton Action Plan, Portland, Oregon.** Community development, revitalization, and renovation in a lower income neighborhood.

## About This Book

This book is based on the report we developed for the Selection Committee's second meeting. We have edited the text and added a section about the Selection Committee's comments on each project as they considered whether it might get the award. The chapters on each finalist were organized for ease of use by the Selection Committee. Thus, they are rather "telegraphic," using an abbreviated outline

format to get the main ideas across quickly. Each project is described under the same headings and evaluated both in terms of its own goals and the issues the Selection Committee sent us out to investigate. We have added a section to these chapters summarizing the Selection Committee's response to it.

In a final chapter, we draw out the themes and variations raised at the Selection Committee's two meetings. While the Committee did not always reach complete consensus, they did identify very important themes and issues. The final chapter attempts to synthesize those themes, which fall into two broad categories: common characteristics of the finalists and more general issues around the nature of urban excellence. Themes included the following:

### Characteristics of the Finalists

- Making connections: among people, among neighborhoods, and between the city and its region.
- Participation and empowerment.
- Social justice; meeting the needs of those who need the most.
- Balancing local initiative with governmental support.
- Preservation: linking old and new.
- Stable, dynamic organizational structure.
- Early signs of success.

### The Nature of Urban Excellence

- What makes an excellent place?
- Urban issues and problems addressed.
- Process versus place.
- Concept versus realization.
- Innovation.
- Uniqueness versus replicability.

### About the Authors

The authors of this book are professional advisors to the Rudy Bruner Award. In addition to assisting with its administration, they facilitate the two meetings of the Selection Committee and conduct the site visits to the finalists.

**Jay Farbstein**, PhD, AIA is an architect by training. He leads a consulting practice in San Luis Obispo, California which specializes in helping public clients develop and document their requirements for building projects as well as in evaluating the degree to which their completed buildings meet those requirements.

**Richard Wener**, PhD, an environmental psychologist, is a professor in the Social Sciences department at the Polytechnic Institute of New York, where he heads the Environmental Psychology program. He has done extensive research on the effects of built environments on individuals and communities.