Introduction: The 2011 Rudy Bruner Award

The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence (RBA) is a national award for urban places that promotes innovative thinking about the built environment. Established in 1987, the Award celebrates urban places distinguished by quality design—design that considers social, economic, and environmental issues in addition to form.

The RBA is unique among design awards because it emphasizes the process of urban placemaking and multiple aspects of place. The RBA considers architecture in terms of the skill with which a design responds to its user, neighborhood, city and region. In exploring the story of each winner, the Award articulates the ways in which these places respond to the uniqueness of their urban settings. In celebrating the winners, the RBA seeks to increase their visibility, and promote fresh thinking about the kinds of projects that make our cities better places to live and work.

With each cycle, the Rudy Bruner Award starts anew. Applications are reviewed by a Selection Committee chosen for each Award cycle from the most prominent placemakers, design professionals and mayors in the country. The Committee is challenged to identify places that achieve design excellence with nuanced responses to their users and urban settings. As they consider the applications,
Committee members are asked to define their own criteria for urban excellence in light of their experience and expertise. In discussing the applications, they identify the current challenges facing our cities, and develop a consensus on the kinds of urban places that make meaningful contributions to the built environment.

**ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

Because the RBA seeks excellence in places where it may not be expected, the criteria for submitting an application for the RBA are intentionally broad, encouraging applications from all sorts of projects. The few limiting criteria are that the project must be a real place, not a plan; it must be sufficiently complete to demonstrate its excellence to a team of site visitors from the Bruner Foundation, and it must be located in the contiguous continental United States.

**THE SELECTION PROCESS**

To ensure lively and informed discussion, each Selection Committee is an inter-disciplinary group of urban experts. Selection Committees always include the mayor of a major city as well as design professionals, developers, community organizers, philanthropists, and financiers. In their discussions, members of the Selection Committee explore a range of urban issues that relate to the most critical challenges facing our cities today.

The Selection Committee meets twice. In its January meeting the Committee selects five finalists from a field of about 100 applications. A Bruner Foundation team then visits each of these sites for two to three days, exploring the projects and pursuing questions raised by the Selection Committee. The team tours the site, interviews fifteen to twenty-five or more project participants (including community participants), takes photographs, observes patterns of use, and collects secondary source documentation on the project.

Findings from the site team visits are presented to the Selection Committee at its meeting in May. The Committee discusses the relative merits of each project and awards one finalist Gold Medal status, a $50,000 award. The other finalists are Silver Medal winners and each receives $10,000.
Rudy Bruner Award winners are never been presented as models to be replicated or as formulas to be transplanted to other urban settings. Instead, their value to placemakers resides in the innovative strategies they have used to meet challenges and create new models of placemaking that can be adapted to the unique conditions inherent in every city and neighborhood.

2011 SELECTION COMMITTEE:

LISA A. WONG, Mayor, Fitchburg, MA

RANDY GRAGG, Editor-in-Chief, Portland Monthly, Portland, OR

DAN PITERA, Executive Director, Detroit Collaborative Design Center, Detroit, MI

RENATA SIMRIL, Sr. Vice-President, Forest City Development West Coast, Los Angeles, CA

EDWARD K. UHLIR, FAIA, Executive Director, Millennium Park Inc., President, Uhlir Consulting LLC, Chicago, IL

JESS ZIMBABWE, Executive Director, Daniel Rose Center for Public Leadership in Land Use, Urban Land Institute, Washington, DC
2011 AWARD CYCLE

In 2011 the Selection Committee selected five projects: Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn NY; Gary Comer Youth Center/Gary Comer College Prep, Chicago, IL; Civic Space Park, Phoenix, AZ; and The Santa Fe Railyard Redevelopment, Santa Fe, NM; The Bridge Homeless Assistance Center, Dallas, TX. These projects are distinct, yet are united by their imaginative repurposing of under-utilized urban space, their combining of excellence in design with essential urban services and amenities, and the impacts they made on their respective neighborhoods and cities. As a group these winning projects have:

- Transformed and activated underused urban space
- Created well-designed environments in which to provide essential services to underserved populations
- Built spaces that were developed through complex community dialogue
- Created new models of sustainable design in very different urban environmental conditions.

2011 WINNERS

2011 GOLD MEDAL WINNER:

The Bridge Homeless Assistance Center, Dallas, TX

The Bridge is a well designed, 75,000 square foot homeless assistance center located in downtown Dallas, that provides day-shelter, emergency nighttime shelter, and transitional housing to the city’s homeless population. It also provides a variety of services dedicated to respectful treatment of homeless individuals, and reintegrating homeless persons into the life of the city. The Bridge is a LEED Silver certified complex, working to end homelessness in Dallas.
2011 SILVER MEDAL WINNERS:

Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn NY
Brooklyn Bridge Park is an 85 acre/1.3 mile linear park along the East River waterfront in Brooklyn, NY. It is a major civic project that reuses a derelict post-industrial area, and reclaims the waterfront for public use. A major new urban green space, utilizing sustainable technologies in plant selection and maintenance, the Park is designed to be financially and ecologically sustainable, and provides for a variety of recreational uses in a dense urban area.

Civic Space Park, Phoenix, AZ
Civic Space Park is a newly-created open space of 2.77 acres in an under-used and semi-blighted area between downtown Phoenix and the new in-town campus of ASU. The park is the result of a unique partnership between the City of Phoenix and ASU, with other partners in more minor roles. The park provides a variety of recreational spaces, including lawns, shaded seating areas, an outdoor performance venue, and a renovated historic building with a large meeting/class room, a public café, as well as a major work of public art. In addition, the park employs a variety of technologies geared toward energy-saving and sustainability.

Gary Comer Youth Center/Gary Comer College Prep, Chicago, IL
Gary Comer Youth Center is a 13.5-acre campus in the Grand Crossing neighborhood of Chicago, composed of the 80,000 square foot Gary Comer Youth Center and the 45,000 square foot Gary Comer College Prep. Together these facilities comprise an education-focused complex that provides academic, recreational, athletic, job training and other programs for impoverished students on Chicago’s South Side.

The Santa Fe Railyard Redevelopment, Santa Fe, NM
The Santa Fe Railyard Redevelopment is a 50-acre, $127 million project to restore and revitalize the industrial and transportation district directly adjacent to the former Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company spur line. It includes 13 acres of open space
(including public plazas and a 10-acre park), and 500,000 square foot of buildings in a mixed-use project that includes retail and gallery spaces, the Railyard Park, the New Mexico RailRunner Express train depot, and four core nonprofit tenants: the Farmers Market Institute, SITE Santa Fe, Warehouse 21, and El Museo Cultural, with housing and residential space adjacent.

AWARD PRESENTATIONS

Award presentations celebrate the accomplishments of each winning project and raise awareness of the issues addressed by each of them. Past awards have been presented at the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and in many of the cities in which winning projects are located. At the presentations, planners, community organizers, architects, and developers speak about their projects, and mayors are often present to recognize the contributions these projects have made to their respective communities.

Rudy Bruner Award winners are all real places in real communities, and each site has a complex story. These “back stories” involve struggle and perseverance, leadership and cooperation, tension and resolution. The winning projects are never simple, and for the most part, they come to fruition despite limited budgets, competing agendas, and political complications. The RBA has found that great urban places respond to challenges by enhancing the quality of design and extending the use of design beyond initial expectations.

In order to tell these stories, Bruner Foundation publishes a book that details the story of each winner and also includes a synopsis of the Selection Committee dialogue. All Rudy Bruner Award publications are available online at www.brunerfoundation.org; most RBA books are also available from the Foundation in hard copy.

The books are part of the RBA’s commitment to facilitating a national dialogue on the meaning and nature of urban excellence, and to promoting important new ideas about urban placemaking. They
are a resource for placemakers, educators, policy makers, financiers, and community organizations who wish to use the creative thinking of RBA winners in their own communities. Bruner Foundation books are used in graduate and undergraduate programs across the country.

**THE RUDY BRUNER AWARD WEBSITE**

The Rudy Bruner Award website is a primary access point for RBA history and resources. The site contains case studies and images of every RBA winner, summary profiles, and links to winner websites. The site also includes profiles of Selection Committee members and news about ongoing RBA activities. It is also the location for the Rudy Bruner Award application, which is now offered only through the website, and no longer in printed form.

We encourage you to visit the website to learn from the experience of our winners, and to use their stories to create excellent urban places in your own communities.

http://www.brunerfoundation.org/rba

**ACCESS TO OTHER RUDY BRUNER AWARD MATERIALS**

A digital archive of Rudy Bruner Award winners is also available at http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/bruner. The Rudy Bruner Award Digital Archive (RBADA) includes award winners’ original application materials. Projects are searchable by keyword in seventeen categories including housing, historic preservation, art, land use controls, commercial development, and transportation. The University at Buffalo site is coordinated through The Urban Design Project, directed by Robert Shibley and developed by the staff at the University at Buffalo’s Lockwood Memorial Library. It is a valuable tool for students, practitioners, and others interested in various aspects of the urban built environment.

**BRUNER LOEB FORUM**

Established in 2001, the Bruner-Loeb Forum brings together two of the preeminent national programs dedicated to the urban built environment. In the Bruner-Loeb Forum, the Rudy Bruner Award partners with the Loeb Fellowship Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Design to present two forums per year in cities around the nation. The Forum is an interactive program, designed to apply the experience and expertise of RBA winners and Loeb Fellows to challenges facing our cities, and to create dialogue among a diverse group of stakeholders. In so doing, the Bruner Loeb Forum fosters a
national dialogue on the most important urban issues of the day. For more information please visit: www.brunerloeb.org

RBA RECOGNITION

The work of the Rudy Bruner Award and its winners has been recognized by organizations across the country, including the Mayors’ Institute on City Design, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Environmental Design Research Association, and, Partners for Livable Communities.


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Emily Axelrod, MCP, is a former director of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. She holds a master’s degree in city planning from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and has worked in urban planning in both the public and private sectors in San Francisco and Boston.

Brandy Brooks, MPA, is a former director of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, and of the AIA Community Design Resource Center on Boston. Brandy holds a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Suffolk University, and a BDS from the Boston Architectural Center.

Jay Farbstein, PhD, FAIA, is an architect and the president of Jay Farbstein & Associates. He leads a consulting practice in Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo, CA, specializing in helping public sector and private clients develop and document their requirements for building projects as well as in evaluating the degree to which their completed buildings meet those requirements.
Robert Shibley, FAIA, AICP, is the Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the State University of New York, Buffalo. He is also a founding partner of Caucus Partnership, a consulting practice on environmental and organizational change. At the University at Buffalo, he is a former chairman of the Department of Architecture and also serves as the director of The Urban Design Project, a center in the school devoted to the study and practice of urban design.

Richard Wener, PhD, is associate professor of environmental psychology in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Polytechnic University in Brooklyn, New York. He has done extensive research on the effects of built environments on individuals and communities.

For more information, please contact:

Bruner Foundation
130 Prospect Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
Phone: (617) 492-8404
Fax: (617) 876-4002
Email: info@brunerfoundation.org