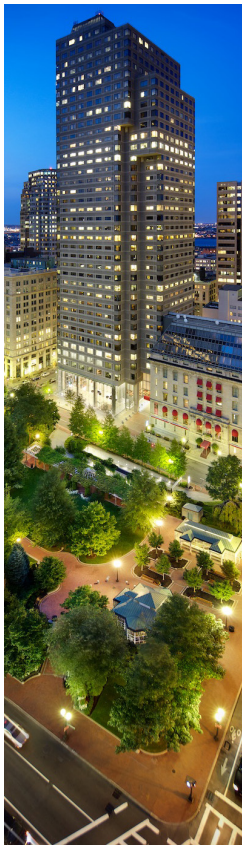
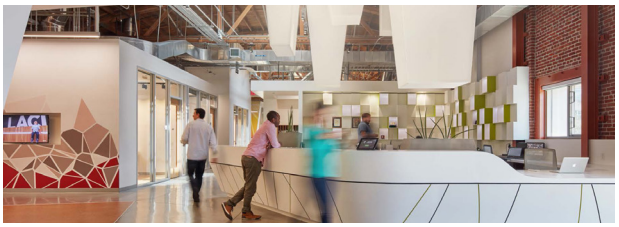




Creating Excellent Urban Places: Learning from the Rudy Bruner Award

Anne-Marie Lubenau, FAIA
Robert Shibley, FAIA, FAICP

October 2017

Creating Excellent Urban Places: Learning from the Rudy Bruner Award

Anne-Marie Lubenau, FAIA
Robert Shibley, FAIA, FAICP

October 2017

ABSTRACT

How do we create excellent urban places that foster social interaction and democratic dialogue, promote public health, and increase equity? The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence (RBA) was created as a method of inquiry to explore "the subtle and difficult process of creating excellence in the urban environment."

The RBA does this by seeking out, celebrating, and sharing the stories of transformative urban places that contribute to the design of the public realm and the economic, environmental, and social vitality of American cities. The evaluation process solicits input and perspectives from a variety of sources via the in-depth application, site visits, interviews with project participants and community members, and discussions with a jury of urban experts. Findings and lessons learned from the process are documented with detailed case studies that are published online as a resource for educators, practitioners, and students.

Since 1987 the RBA has recognized and documented 83 projects from across the contiguous United States that illustrate a remarkable diversity of approaches to urban development. The winners are located in small towns and large cities and range in scale and scope from a $150,000 series of neighborhood art installations to a $2 billion downtown mixed-use development. Each cycle of the biennial award uncovers new projects that reveal innovative tactics as well as affirm recurring themes.

This paper will discuss the value of the RBA as a tool for critical evaluation and the themes that have emerged from 30 years of investigation into the complexity of urban placemaking.

Keywords architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, urban planning, city planning, community design, community development, economic development, public policy, placemaking, design awards, evaluation

Presented at the 54th International Making Cities Livable Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Introduction: Exploring Urban Excellence

> "THE RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS A QUESTION—AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF EXCELLENCE."
>
> Robert Shibley[1]

2017 RBA Call for Entries postcard.

How do we create excellent urban places that foster social interaction and democratic dialogue, promote public health, and increase equity? The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence (RBA) was created as a method of inquiry to explore "the subtle and difficult process of creating excellence in the urban environment." Over the past 30 years the RBA has recognized 83 projects across the US that offer inspiring examples and insight into urban development in America. A snapshot of those projects reveals common threads or themes for consideration by those interested in building equitable, healthy, and socio-economically vibrant cities.

A program of the Bruner Foundation, the RBA is a national design award that recognizes transformative places that contribute to the design of the public realm and the economic, environmental, and social vitality of American cities. Founded in 1986 by Simeon Bruner, the award seeks to promote innovative thinking about the built environment and to advance conversations about making cities better by seeking out and sharing the stories of innovative and inspiring urban development.

Each biennial, the RBA recognizes five projects with one gold medal and four silver medals, with the gold medalist receiving a $50,000 cash prize and each silver medalist receiving $10,000.
To be eligible, projects must be: urban, built (not just a plan or a program), and located within the contiguous United States.
Winners are chosen by a six-member selection committee newly comprised each cycle to include a mayor and a participant from a prior RBA

The RBA has recognized 83 projects in 27 states.

winner along with other experts in design and planning, development and financing, and community engagement.

The committee meets twice: once to review and discuss an average of 50 to 100 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 interviewing people involved in the project to gather additional information. After the medalists are determined, the findings from research and selection committee discussions are integrated into detailed case studies and a summary of lessons learned that are published in a book and online on the RBA website so that others may learn from them.

The 83 RBA medalists are remarkably diverse, illustrating a variety of approaches to urban development. They are located in small towns and large cities and range in scale and scope from a $150,000 series of neighborhood art installations to a $2 billion downtown mixed-use development. They include arts and cultural institutions, educational facilities, food markets and a restaurant, housing, infrastructure and transit, office and retail, and parks and public spaces.

Diverse as they are, a survey of RBA winners to date reveals that they share several common characteristics or ingredients that illustrate the critical relationship between people, process, and place making. They include: leadership and vision, collaborative partnerships, engagement and empowerment, anchoring in place, and leveraging the power of design. Rather than serving as a prescription for urban excellence, they are intended to serve as a point of departure for discussion and inspiration, just as the RBA itself.

The Process: The Rudy Bruner Award as a Method of Inquiry

> "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[2]

The RBA is unique among design award programs. Most award programs focus on the product rather than the process[3] whereas the RBA is intended to be "thought of as a question—an inquiry into the nature of excellence,"[4] and includes a comprehensive evaluation of the project. It is an inquiry that stretches over 30 years of urban development in America, adding a new chapter every two years to an extensive body of work on the subject.

History

Simeon Bruner, an architect and developer based in Cambridge, MA, created the RBA to foster a better understanding of the impact of architecture and design in the urban environment and to promote best practices for effective urban place making. The RBA is named in honor of Bruner's late father, Rudy Bruner, who co-founded the Bruner Foundation with his wife Martha and enjoyed a lifelong interest in architecture and cities.

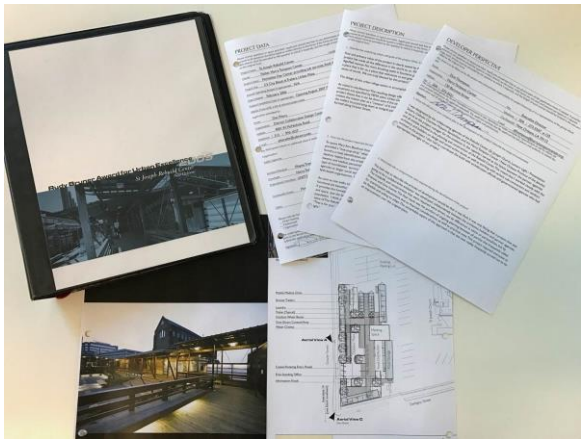
The premise for the award emerged from a 1985 convening of leading researchers in the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) hosted by the Bruner Foundation in New York City during EDRA16, the organization's annual conference. At the meeting Bruner outlined his concern about the focus of award programs on buildings as art or objects rather than substantive evaluation and critique about the nature of what it takes to make great places. The discussion helped confirm that creating a different kind of award would provide an opportunity to learn from celebrated acts of place making and capture that learning to influence future practice.

In 1986 Robert Shibley and Polly Welch developed a proposal for a new award program that included a survey of 19 national and international design award programs. Only a few included a comprehensive evaluation of the processes by which places are made and managed. None involved fact checking through reviews of secondary source materials, site visits, and onsite interviews and observations. None were predicated on a comprehensive application process calling for self-reporting from multiple perspectives on project development. What the awards programs were not doing became the foundational elements of the RBA.

Methodology

The RBA is an exploration into how groups of people make great places. As such, the approach and methodology is not about laying out preconceived notions of excellence on places but rather finding them in the places submitted for consideration. The award program makes no assumptions about the type or size of a project as a core determinant of

excellence; rather, it assumes that excellence occurs at all kinds of places and scales. It is not about how big a project is or how much money is spent but rather on how well it is made, managed, and delivers sustained performance.



The application is designed to elicit information about the making of the place.

To facilitate this exploration, the RBA process is designed to elicit and uncover information about the project—including its design, development, operations, and impact—and encourage conversation about what constitutes urban excellence. It includes an extensive application, a multidisciplinary selection committee, in-depth site visits and interviews with project participants, and substantial, iterative discussion. The final step is documentation of the winners with detailed case studies so that the stories of the projects and lessons learned from the process can be shared.

The first step, the 30-page application, encourages participants in the creation of the place to make a case for why their place is excellent in the context of how they came to make and value it. In addition to the project description and illustrations found in most award applications, RBA applicants are asked to describe the project goals and values, urban context, development, financing, and the opportunities and challenges it addressed that merit the award. The application includes a self-report component seeking input from multiple "perspectives" from people involved in the project's making and operations including representatives from the community, public agencies, and design, development, and other professional consultants.

A selection committee of six urban experts is assembled each biennial to review and discuss applications and findings from site visits and determine the medalists.

All submissions are reviewed and discussed by a diverse, multidisciplinary selection committee of urban experts in design and planning, development and financing, and community engagement assembled by the Bruner Foundation. Selection committees have included notables such as landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, architect and city planner Maurice Cox, artist Rick Lowe, mayor Joseph Riley, scholar Anne Whiston

Spirn, journalist Susan Szenasy, and author and urbanist William H. Whyte. The review process includes an examination of all the applications and a full day of discussion pouring over the merits of each project leading to the selection of five for further study.

Following the selection of the five, a team from the Bruner Foundation visits each project to do additional research and answer questions raised by the selection committee. The team spends two to three days on and around the site gathering information and observations, taking photographs, and conducting more than a dozen interviews. The findings are documented with a detailed, written site visit report and visual presentation prepared for the committee. The selection committee meets a second time for another full day to review and discuss the findings, determine the medalists, and reflect upon what constitutes urban excellence.

Site visits and interviews with people involved in the design, development, and operation of the five finalists uncover additional information.

Once the medalists are selected, the findings from the process are documented in detailed case studies and lessons learned essays that are published in a book and on the RBA website. The illustrated case studies capture the story of each project including a brief overview of the project, list of key elements and project goals, chronology, and a narrative description of the project and its impact. The narrative addresses the project's physical and socio-economic context, history, leadership and community, design and development, operations and programs, and financing. The assessment of its impact includes including observations and lessons learned as well as an audit of how well the project goals were accomplished. Each case study includes references to related RBA winners and a list of people interviewed and secondary sources used for additional research.

Case studies document the findings.

Values

The term “excellence” often connotes a kind of elitist and exclusive condition that seems to contradict aspirations for social justice and equity. The RBA deliberately adopted the term to confront the connotation. It presumes that “excellent” design is more than appearances. It considers and responds to the unique economic, environmental, and social context of place. It can foster social interaction and democratic dialogue, promote public health, and increase equity. In so doing, design has power to influence and improve the quality of our lives, and to make communities and cities better.

Much to the surprise of selection committees over the years, the RBA has only the most modest of fixed criteria for eligibility: projects need only be urban, built, and located in the contiguous US. The simplicity of these criteria is intentional. They are specifically designed to cast a wide net, so that places not traditionally associated with "architectural" excellence can make their case. They embody the core values of the program rooted in the interaction of people in processes that create and sustain places.

Even so, the RBA is not about creating a prescription for successful place making, but rather an effort to reveal how the complex relations among people, processes, and places help us more fully understand how such places are created. While it is possible to extract themes or lessons learned in every award cycle, they are not intended to prescribe what to do so much as to offer inspiration and to inform what might be done.

The Work: 30 Years of Exploration

> "THE RBA WAS CREATED TO PROMPT A CONVERSATION ABOUT URBAN EXCELLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES AND TO ILLUMINATE THE COMPLEX PROCESS OF PLACE MAKING."
>
> Bruner Foundation

Our method of inquiry involves a review of all 83 RBA case studies, published documentation of the awards program in literature, and a quantitative assessment of the types of projects awarded and the number of mentions afforded different "lessons learned" provided in the case studies. The lessons learned and cross cutting themes are grounded in a qualitative assessment based on selection committee reviews of the strengths and limitations of each project. For the purposes of this paper, we've selected ten projects for illustration and discussion. They include a sampling of winners from the past 30 years and the five most recent, 2017 medalists.

Pike Place Market	1987	Gold	Seattle, WA	$190,000,000

Pike Place Market is a complex on Seattle's waterfront that includes a historic farmers market with retail, mixed-income housing, and social services. The seven-acre, $190 million project includes 300 businesses and 750 housing units in an interdependent network of business owners, consumers, and residents. Developed and operated by the Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority, the project preserves the market's commitment to serving community by combining retail and housing with a wide a variety of social services supported by the nonprofit Market Foundation including a health clinic, food bank, child care center, and senior center.

The Park at Post Office Square	1993	Silver	Boston, MA	$80,000,000

The Park at Post Office Square is the replacement of a deteriorated parking garage with a 1.7-acre park in the heart of downtown Boston's financial district. Developed through an innovative public-private partnership by the Friends of Post Office Square, it was built and operated at no cost to the public. A1400-space underground garage provides parking for the surrounding neighborhood as well as revenue for the park's ongoing maintenance and operations. The park offers a green oasis in center of the city with abundant plantings, a fountain and trellised pedestrian walkway, and a glass pavilion housing a year-round café.

Project Row Houses	2003	Silver	Houston, TX	$350,000

Project Row Houses repurposed 22 abandoned, historic shotgun-style houses in the Third Ward, one of Houston's oldest African-American neighborhoods, for supportive housing, art, and community services. Founded by artists and activists, the $350,000 project uses art as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization, youth education, and community engagement. It includes eight houses for art installations, seven affordable housing units for single mothers, a center for performances, a day care center and after-school program, empowerment programs, and a community garden. The community joined together to design, organize, and acquire funding for the multi-layered project.

Millennium Park	2009	Silver	Chicago, IL	$490,000,000

Millennium Park is the redevelopment of underutilized lakefront in downtown Chicago into a 24.5-acre park with performance venues, open space, and public art. The park includes 12 art and architecture installations, including commissions from world-renowned artists, and multiple theaters and stages offering over 500 free cultural programs annually. The site incorporates underground parking with the world's largest green roof and a pedestrian walkway providing access to the adjoining lakefront. Developed by the city of Chicago with substantial private support, the $475 million project attracts over 15 million visitors annually and spurred new downtown development.

	Santa Fe Railyard	2011	Silver	Santa Fe, NM	$137,000,000

The Santa Fe Railyard is the redevelopment of a 50-acre historic rail yard in downtown Santa Fe into a new mixed-use complex integrating a commuter rail line, public park, farmers' market, and commercial, residential, and arts space. More than two decades in the making, the project is a collaborative effort between the City, community activists, and two nonprofit organizations, guided by a commitment to keeping the railroad running and protecting the natural and architectural beauty of the district. The design incorporates the rugged industrial look of the rail yard, providing contrast to the surrounding Pueblo Revival architectural style.

	SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus	2017	Gold	Bethlehem, PA	$93,500,000

SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus is the transformation of a 9.5-acre industrial site in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania into a new civic commons. The campus integrates historic structures with interpretive programming and new construction to tell the story of steelmaking while stimulating development in a city devastated by the mill's closure. Developed by Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority in collaboration with the city and local nonprofits, the $93.5 million project includes an outdoor plaza and performing arts pavilion, visitor center, and facilities for nonprofit partners ArtsQuest and PBS39, along with an elevated walkway offering a view of historic blast furnaces.

	Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building	2017	Silver	Boston, MA	$124,000,000

The Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building is a community-oriented, mixed-use facility integrating public school headquarters, retail, and transit in one of Boston's oldest and most diverse neighborhoods. Located adjacent to a regional transit hub, the $124 million project was developed by the city of Boston to stimulate community development and investment. Designed with input from the community, the 215,000-square foot complex integrates new construction with facades of three historic buildings. It includes offices, community meeting space, and a spacious ground level lobby with shops and restaurants that serve building tenants and the surrounding neighborhood.

	Chicago Riverwalk Phases 2 & 3	2017	Silver	Chicago, IL	$95,480,000

Chicago Riverwalk Phases 2 & 3 transformed a series of barren concrete arcades along the river into vibrant public space in downtown Chicago. First envisioned as part of the 1909 Plan of Chicago, the Riverwalk is part of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's "Building on Burnham" initiative to invest in natural and recreational opportunities in neighborhoods citywide. Developed by the city, the $95.5 million, 3.5-acre project offers new waterfront amenities including fishing piers, kayak rentals, restaurants, seating, and wetland gardens. Now referred to as Chicago's "second waterfront," it has become a popular place to walk, dine, and appreciate the City's architecture.

	Iberville Offsite Rehabs Phases I & II	2017	Silver	New Orleans, LA	$12,131,996

Iberville Offsite Rehabs I & II is the rehabilitation of 26 scattered-site historic houses in New Orleans into 46 homes for low-income families. Located within the Seventh Ward and Treme, among the city's most historic and culturally and economically diverse neighborhoods, the formerly vacant and blighted structures were sensitively rehabilitated to preserve each building's unique architectural character while providing modern amenities and energy saving features such as solar water heating and photovoltaics. The $12.1 million project is a partnership between a private developer and the City, the Housing Authority of New Orleans, and a local homeless shelter.

	La Kretz Innovation Campus	2017	Silver	Los Angeles, CA	$49,200,000

La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts District Park was created to position the City of Los Angeles as a cleantech industry leader and sustainable urban center. Developed by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Sewer, the nation's largest publicly owned utility, in collaboration with the city and a consortium of local research institutions and businesses, the $49.2 million campus includes a cleantech incubator, education center, and a neighborhood park. Located in a renovated warehouse in Los Angeles' downtown Arts District, the campus is designed to foster interaction and collaboration among entrepreneurs, scientists, policymakers, and the community.

The Findings: What We've Learned

By design, the RBA resists the formation of a definitive answer to the question "what is urban excellence?" The vitality of the program is in the ever-present opportunity to be surprised by a site visit, selection committee observation, or reflection of a case study author. Over the course of 16 award cycles the program has uncovered 83 distinct stories as well as recurring themes that offer insight into urban place making. It is important to note that these insights are specific to individual places even as they appear over and over again with subtle but critical differences. Each project is a product of its own unique place and circumstances, and places continue to change and evolve over time in response to complex economic, environmental and social forces.

It is with this in mind that we offer the findings from a snapshot and evaluation of the first 30 years of the RBA including five common threads or themes. The stories of RBA winners offer different variations and interpretations of the themes: the vital role of individual and collective leadership and vision; the construction of collaborative partnerships that enable and empower people and institutions to do things together that they can't do by themselves; and the ways in which the culture, history, and physical characteristics of communities create the foundation for deeply anchoring new development in its own unique place and time. As a design award, the central premise of the RBA recognizes the power of design to assemble, integrate, and respond to these dynamics to give form to place.

Leadership and Vision

The critical role of leadership and vision has been a consistent theme among RBA winners from the beginning. Even so, leadership is not one size fits all. It varies from top-down (institutional or political) to bottom-up (grassroots or community driven), and from singular (one individual or institution) to collective and shared. More often than not it is a hybrid of more than one type, and continues to evolve over time. Sometimes those initiating a project are not always the best at seeing it through, and as a project matures new challenges and opportunities arise that require different responses and skills. In fact, one of our observations is that the most enduring and resilient projects are those in which the responsibility of leadership and ownership is broadened and shared over time.

Chicago Riverwalk is part of Mayor Emanuel's visionary Building on Burnham Initiative.

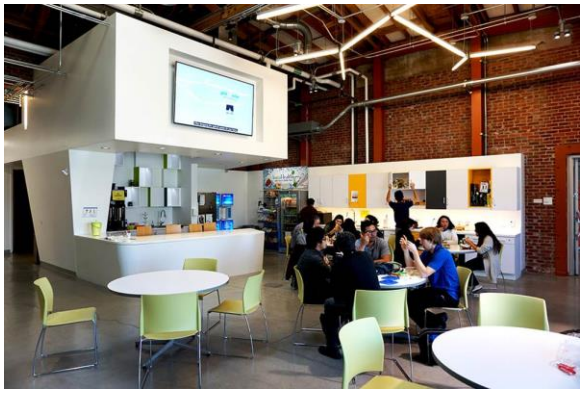
Examples of leadership among RBA winning projects span this spectrum. They include charismatic and connected individuals like artist Rick Lowe, founder of Project Row Houses, Norm Leventhal, a critical leader in the planning and implementation of The Park at Post Office Square, and Neil Morris of Redmellon Restoration & Development, which developed

Iberville Offsite Rehabs I & II. In many cases they involve institutional and political leadership like mayors who are instrumental in advancing ambitious public projects such as Millennium Park (Richard M. Daley), Chicago Riverwalk Phases 2 & 3 (Daley and Rahm Emanuel), the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building (Thomas Menino and Martin Walsh).

While ideas or projects may be initiated by one person or organization, leadership usually expands to take on an increasingly collaborative form, as in the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's cooperation with local research institutions and businesses in the development of La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts District Park, and the city of Bethlehem partnership with arts organizations in the creation of SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus. Leadership also emerges from the community, sometimes in resistance to top-down proposals, as in the case with Pike Place Market and Santa Fe Railyard. Regardless of the type, visionary leadership is essential to catalyzing projects and generating the enthusiasm and support necessary to move ahead.

Collaborative Partnerships

Leadership and vision is rarely enough. Truly transformative projects are seldom the product of one individual or organization but, rather, symbiotic relationships between people, organizations, and communities that work together over time. The sum of these relationships is far greater than the individual pieces. Among other benefits, collaborative partnerships provide access to essential resources and skills needed to tackle ambitious and complex urban projects.



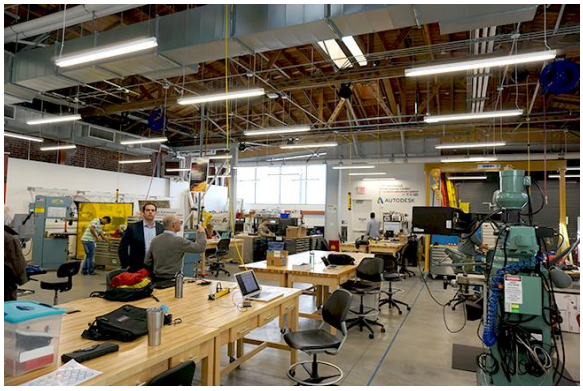
The Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building (top) and La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts Park encourage collaboration among tenants and the community.

Collaborative partnerships take different forms, involving different types and relationships between partners. The unlikely partnership between Sands Casino, the City and its Redevelopment Authority, Artsquest and PBS39, and community and preservation advocates led to the creation of SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus. Iberville Offsite Rehabs was made possible through a partnership between Redmellon Restoration & Development and the City of New Orleans, its Housing Authority, and a local homeless shelter which enabled the developer to access public funding including Federal Low Income Tax Credits and rental subsidies to finance the project. Financing for Chicago's Millennium Park was made possible through substantial corporate partnerships and sponsorships and Chicago Riverwalk Phases

2 & 3 was financed in part with a federal Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act loan. The Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building and La Kretz Innovation Campus were made possible with investment of private capital via Federal New Market Tax Credits and Enterprise Community Investment. The Park at Post Office Square was developed through a private civic corporation that grew out of a public private partnership and careful planning process, and at Pike Place Market, the Market Foundation organized different cohorts within its community to connect people and programs.

Engaging and Empowering

Even the best leadership, vision, and supportive partnerships can produce hollow places if the process of place making does not engage and create relationships between people and place. Involvement in the creation of place—through activism, community design, and participatory planning and workshops—contributes to a deep kind of ownership, stewardship, and community empowerment and pride.



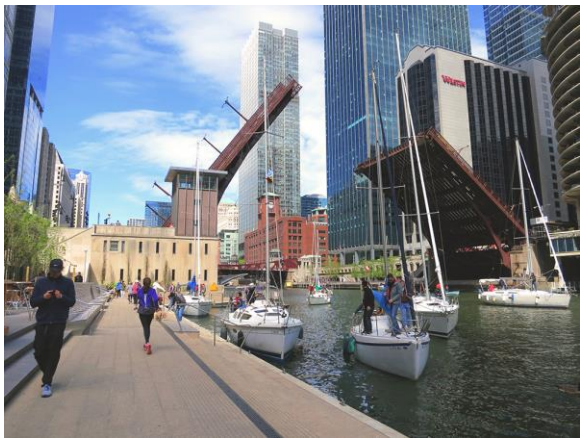
The innovation center at the Bolling Building (top) and prototype lab at La Kretz help local residents access the innovation economy.

The engagement of the community in the redevelopment of Santa Fe Railyard emerged in critique of other development in the city and initial proposals for the site that appeared to be more interested in serving tourists than the citizens of the community. The resulting vision for a more authentic and vital public space was created in partnership with the arts, nonprofit organizations, and city government. Similarly, SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus is the product of a collaborative effort between the city of Bethlehem, nonprofit arts organizations, and local community and preservation organizations that worked together to forge a redevelopment plan that used the city and site's industrial past as a platform for launching a vision for the future.

Places that engage and empower tend to enhance community interaction and increase access to opportunities and services, improving quality of life. This can be accomplished with affordable and supportive housing such as exists in Pike Place Market, Project Row Houses, and Iberville Offsite Rehabs I & II that integrate creative and supportive programming. The Roxbury Innovation Center at the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building and prototype lab at La Kretz Innovation Campus offer access to equipment and training to enable surrounding residents to build the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the growing innovation economy.

Anchoring

The act of place making is informed by an understanding of the unique history, culture, and physical context in which it takes place and the values embedded within the community. This understanding is revealed through the involvement and engagement of community leadership, partners, and stakeholders in the process. The RBA seeks to elicit this information in the application and site visits, although the full story is usually uncovered through the iterative process of interviews, secondary research, and discussion.



New public spaces at Steelstacks Arts and Cultural Campus (top) and Chicago Riverwalk reflect the culture and history of their respective cities.

No doubt the origins of Seattle's Pike Place Market in the establishment of an unlawful public market in1908 created a form of social contract between the place that evolved and its staunch "save the market" defenders. Few people miss the connection between the 1909 Plan of Chicago and boldness of civic ambition that helped to make Millennium Park and Chicago Riverwalk exemplary projects. SteelStacks Arts and Cultural Campus reflects the legacy of the Moravians who founded the city in 1741 with an affection for music and education coupled with grit and pride of steel making in the industrial revolution, construction of landmark buildings and infrastructure, and defender of democracy during World War II. Likewise, the the Park at Post Office Square reflects the deep history of the New England public commons. Project Row Houses and Santa Fe Railyard illustrate the strength of the integration of vision and community partnerships and values in the creation of place and community renewal.

Leveraging Design

The RBA program was established as a design award with the full acknowledgement that design is a necessary but not sufficient condition for excellence. Every award cycle, selection committees discover projects exhibiting extraordinary leadership and vision, powerful partnerships and engagement, and strong anchoring in their respective physical and socio-economic context. Yet they still press for an answer to the question, "Is it excellent design?"

When the answer is "yes," it is sometimes the result of a deliberate ambition or process, such as with Millennium Park which engaged leading artists and designers, or the Bolling Building

where competitive design processes attracted teams from around the world and engaged the community in the planning. It may be an outgrowth of an embedded value system that seeks excellence as in the Chicago Riverwalk.

In many cases it is the modest, non-heroic execution of design, rather than one that calls attention to itself. Boston's BA winning projects span this spectrum. They include charismatic and connected individuals like artist Rick Lowe, founder of Project Row Houses introduces a deceptively simple appearing yet complex new green space in the midst of the dense urban center. At Pike Place Market and La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts District Park old and new are sensitively integrated so as to complement rather than overshadow each other. SteelStacks is anchored by modest new structures that frame a central civic plaza with the steel mill's iconic blast furnaces as the backdrop. Iberville Offsite Rehabs and Project Row Houses illustrate the value of the careful preservation of modest, historic homes that forms the fabric of many American communities.

Iberville Offsite Rehabs (top) and Steelstacks preserve historic structures while integrating new technology and uses (SteelStacks photo courtesy ArtsQuest).

At its best, skillful design succeeds in the careful craft of integrating the intelligence and values articulated and embodied in leadership and engaged community partners. Excellence in urban design is knowing when to be the star of the show and when to be an excellent supporting actor.

Conclusion: Inspiring Urban Excellence

> "RUDY BRUNER AWARD WINNERS HIGHLIGHT THE DIVERSITY OF INNOVATION IN OUR CITIES TODAY. THEY SHOW US URBAN EXCELLENCE AT ALL SCALES AND INSPIRE US WITH THEIR OPTIMISM."
>
> Simeon Bruner

The pursuit of livable cities is an enterprise that warrants learning from each act of place making, and inviting such acts to be deep explorations. They are conscious acts of discovery tempered with expert knowledge blended with the creative process of design. The RBA is committed to capturing value from excellent urban projects and sharing what is learned as a snapshot in time, not a prescription for all time.

The RBA is intended to be a resource for people interested in learning about urban development and a point of departure for local and national conversations about how to create excellent urban places. Fundamental to this goal is the belief that excellent urban projects contribute to the economic, environmental, and social vitality of cities. It also presumes that understanding and investing in the process of place making—leadership and vision, collaborative partnerships, engagement and empowerment, anchoring in place, and leveraging the power of design—is critical to creating and sustaining excellent urban places.

Public programs including forums, tours, and panel discussions encourage interactive exploration and discussion.

The RBA archives (at the University of Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning), case studies and publications, website, and public programs—including the long-running Bruner Loeb Forum symposium series with the Harvard Graduate School of Design Loeb Fellowship—offer sources of projects, perspectives, and discussions that offer insight into urban excellence. They are intended to advance collective thinking about urban excellence, not to conclude that all such thinking and experimentation is in place. The RBA body of work offers inspiration, never prescription. The entire program is meant to catalyze future design thinking.

The richness of the RBA is not in its definitive conclusions but in the continuing search for excellence and the critical conversation and evaluation embodied in the process. The case studies in this body of work represent persuasive descriptions of what constitutes excellence. Taken together, they embrace the full and diverse complexity of the interplay of relationships among process, place and people in place making.

1987 RBA Gold Medalist Pike Place Market in Seattle

By design, the RBA process begins anew every two years with another call for entries, set of submissions, and selection committee charged with choosing five winners. Each cycle prompts another conversation about urban excellence in America, uncovering five more projects that offer fresh observations and innovative tactics as well as affirming recurring lessons. In this way the RBA reveals as much about the process of learning and the evolution of American cities as it does the process of making excellent urban places. Even after three decades of research into urban excellence by the Bruner Foundation, the work is not done. It will never be done. So, by design, the conversation continues.

Bibliography

The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence has been a collective effort led by Simeon Bruner and the staff of the Bruner Foundation along with a core team of consultants over the life of the program. This team includes Jay Farbstein, FAIA, Robert Shibley, FAIA, FAICP, and Richard Wener PhD, all of whom were part of the Bruner Foundation's 1985 convening of Environmental Design Research Association members. They, along with other consultants engaged by the Foundation over the years, participated in site visits, facilitated selection committee meetings, and authored case studies and books published by the Bruner Foundation documenting each award cycle. The authors of this article drew upon this collective work as well as the valuable contributions of numerous advisors over the past three decades.

Bruner Foundation Publications

- Farbstein, Jay with Axelrod, Emily; Shibley, Robert; and Wener, Richard. *Creative Community Building: 2003 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2004.
- Farbstein, Jay with Axelrod, Emily; Shibley, Robert; and Wener, Richard. *Urban Transformation: 2009 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2010
- Farbstein, Jay; Shibley, Robert; Welch, Polly; and Wener, Richard with Axelrod, Emily H. *Sustaining Urban Excellence: Learning from the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence 1987-1993.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 1998.
- Farbstein, Jay and Wener, Richard. *Building Coalitions for Urban Excellence: The 1995 Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 1996.
- Farbstein, Jay and Wener, Richard. *Connections: Creating Urban Excellence. 1991 Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment.* Bruner Foundation, Inc.,1992.
- Farbstein, Jay and Wener, Richard. *Rebuilding Communities: Recreating Urban Excellence. 1993 Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 1993.
- Farbstein, Jay; Wener, Richard; and Axelrod, Emily. *Visions of Urban Excellence: 1997 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 1998.
- Shibley, Robert with Axelrod, Emily, Farbstein, Jay, and Wener, Richard. *Reinventing Downtown: 2005 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2007.
- Shibley, Robert with Axelrod, Emily, Farbstein, Jay, and Wener, Richard. *Commitment to Place: 1999 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2000.
- Shibley, Robert with Brooks, Brandy H. M.; Farbstein, Jay; and Wener, Richard. *Partnering Strategies for the Urban Edge: 2011 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2012.
- Wener, Richard with Axelrod, Emily; Farbstein, Jay; and Shibley, Robert. *Building Sustainable Neighborhoods: 2007 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2008.
- Wener, Richard with Axelrod, Emily; Farbstein, Jay; Shibley, Robert; and Welch, Polly. *Placemaking for Change: 2001 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2001.
- Wener, Richard; Farbstein, Jay; Lubenau, Anne-Marie; and Shibley, Robert. *Inspiring Change: The 2013 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2014.
- Wener, Richard; Farbstein, Jay; Lubenau, Anne-Marie; and Shibley, Robert. *Challenging Conventions: The 2015 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence.* Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2016.

Publications about the RBA

- Krieger, Alex. *Community Builders*. Architecture Magazine, June 2011.
- *Projects that Make a Difference*. Designer/Builder, December 1997.
- *The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence Marks 25 Years*. ArchNewsNow. July 19, 2012. http://www.archnewsnow.com/features/Feature399.htm.
- Feldman, Roberta. *On Making Informed Decisions: The Rudy Bruner Award Selection Process*. New Village, 1999. http://www.newvillage.net/Journal/Issue1/1brunerawards.html.
- Langdon, Phillip with Shibley, Robert G. and Welch, Polly. *Urban Excellence*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990.
- Long, Linda A. *Adaptive Re-Use Squared*. Foundation News & Commentary, November/December 1998.
- Lubenau, Anne-Marie. *Five Ingredients for Successful Places*. LoeBlog. October 11, 2013. http://loeblog.gsd.harvard.edu/loeb-lab-cities-for-the-21st-century/.
- Lefaivre, Liane. *The Value of Community*. Design Book Review. Winter 1996/1997
- Peirce, Neal R. and Guskind, Robert. *Breakthroughs: Recreating the American City*. Rutgers Center for Urban Policy Research. 1989.
- Shibley, Robert G. *Case Studies in Urban Design*. Timesaver Standards for Urban Design, 2003.
- Shibley, Robert G. and Welch, Polly. *Excellence in Urban Development: Preliminary Findings from a Review of the Rudy Bruner Award Program*. Urban Land Institute, September 1990.
- Shibley, Robert G. and Schneekloth, Lynda. *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities*. Wiley, April 1995.
- Szenasy, Susan. *To Judge Good Design You Have to Get Past the Pictures: Two competitions underscore the value of research, innovation, and collaboration.* Metropolis, June 2013. http://www.metropolismag.com/design/judge-good-design-get-past-photos/.

Additional Resources

- RBA website. www.rudybrunerawards.org.
- RBA blog posts. www.rudybrunerawards.org/blog/.
- RBA digital archive. http://digital.lib.buffalo.edu/collection/LIB-ASL002/.

[1] Shibley, Robert G. and Schneekloth, Lynda. *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities*. Wiley, April 1995.

[2] Szenasy, Susan M. *To Judge Good Design You Have to Get Past the Pictures: Two competitions underscore the value of research, innovation, and collaboration.* Metropolis Magazine. June 2013.

[3] Langdon, Phillip with Shibley, Robert G. and Welch, Polly. *Urban Excellence*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990.

[4] Shibley, Robert G. and Schneekloth, Lynda. *Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Communities*. Wiley, April 1995.