

PREFACE

In these pages you will find descriptions of five projects: the winners and finalists of the 1993 Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment. These projects have transformed their communities so well, and on such a significant scale, that their accomplishments are nothing less than astounding — especially in contrast to the continual stream of pessimistic reports we all hear about cities.

The Winners

From the ashes of the 1967 riots, one of the winners, New Community Corporation (NCC), has constructed an alternative city within Newark, New Jersey. NCC houses and employs thousands, providing facilities for children, seniors, the sick, and the homeless. NCC delivers necessities that many other communities take for granted, such as a supermarket offering fresh food at reasonable prices.

In Boston, a community/developer partnership created Harbor Point — a mixed income, mixed race community — from a dangerous 1950s public housing project. The partnership, a joint venture between public housing tenants and a developer, is a microcosm of the community that works together to make Harbor Point home.

About the Process

At the Bruner Foundation, we believe that the evolution of cities is a highly complex process — one that involves tradeoffs between diverse perspectives and goals. Developers and architects pursue economic and aesthetic objectives. Governments promote planning and growth policies. Community groups try to preserve or improve specific aspects of neighborhood life. None of these is sufficient in itself to create an excellent urban place. The Award competition seeks to reward and publicize those processes that reconcile these often competing objectives and result in excellent urban places — where the economic, visual, and social perspectives complement one another.

We hope that the process by which the Bruner Foundation evaluates urban places operates on several levels. The application, while complex, requires the collaboration of varied participants. We hope it can be a learning experience. We ask a number of the actors to speak from their own perspective about the economic viability, community values, and physical contribution demonstrated by their project.

The Selection Committee members are chosen for their expertise in particular areas — such as architecture and community development, as well as their involvement in issues outside their own specific field.

Over the years Selection Committees have avoided defining urban excellence narrowly. A narrow, simplistic perspective is one reason that too many urban projects — even ones that win design awards — can bring disappointing results in human and economic terms.

Although the limits on eligibility for the Award are quite broad, the project must be a real place, not just a plan. It will, hopefully, demonstrate its excellence in action. The values should be explicit and worthwhile. Conflicts must be discussed and resolved. Current issues include social responsibility, economic viability, aesthetic sensitivity, and ecological balance.

With this broad mandate as a backdrop, each Rudy Bruner Award Selection Committee walks onto the stage without a script. The debate about that what constitutes urban excellence begins afresh with each round of competition. It is inspired and framed by the responses to our call for submissions. Once the Selection Committee has narrowed the field to five finalists, our professional staff spends two to three days visiting and evaluating each one, seeking to answer specific questions raised by the Selection Committee and discover the behind-the-scene stories. Quite naturally, we fall in love with each and every project.

The resulting report, which forms the basis for this book is a working document for the Selection Committee. It is this report that sets the stage for the final debate to select the winner(s).

Much as we might wish for a blueprint for the success, a project cannot simply be cloned and transplanted. Each project is worth studying on its own to discover dead ends to be avoided, general strategies that can be exported, and values that might inspire. It is thinking about the ways to transport these ideas that becomes so exciting and productive.

Excellence in Action

We hope that the Bruner Award is far more than an abstract or theoretical exercise. Through the Award process, the Foundation has sought to become a catalyst for change. Four rounds of entries and winners have produced a database of success stories and a network of colleagues who collaborate on urban change. They are documented in four books and an accessible archive.

The Bruner Foundation has taken an evolving course toward activism. In early 1992, in the wake of the Los Angeles riots, the Foundation sought a way to share the expertise of our winners. Working with the Executive Office of the President, the Foundation sponsored a forum in Washington, DC where community and government representatives could exchange ideas with Bruner Award winners and finalists.

The result was an alternative conference, "Los Angeles: Working Together Through the Crisis to Quality Urban Living." Seeking to share power through sharing stories, the conference fostered communication across lines of specialization and hierarchy. Bruner Award finalists who had struggled with acute crises shared their experiences with Los Angeles residents, special urban interest groups, housing managers, tenured government professionals, and HUD staff. In the course of a day and one-half in the Old Executive Office Building, stories were told and compared, questions asked, and answers shared.

One participant described the experience as "the assumption of human competence....It was a relief." HUD has now expressed interest in using these techniques and this kind of forum as a new type of "technical" assistance.

We were pleased that Henry Cisneros, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and a former Selection Committee member, agreed to present the 1993 RBA Award at HUD Headquarters in Washington, DC. In his remarks, the Secretary praised the Award and the Bruner books, which describe in detail how the values of good design, sound economics, and broad human cooperation can help remake urban America.

Currently, the Foundation is working with HUD, helping to bring our experience in real world success to bear on some of HUD's major initiatives, such as the Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community program. With limited resources and expanding need, it is critical to make the most out of each available opportunity.

Given the poverty and violence that pervades so many of our neighborhoods, it may be difficult to comprehend just how much one single project can accomplish. The stories from this year's Rudy Bruner Award prove once again that in human, economic and aesthetic terms, cities can be remade. It does not happen easily. It requires vision, diligence and compromise — but the result is more than worth the effort.

This book is intended as a guide to help understand the strengths (and weaknesses) of five very special projects: the two winners and three other finalists. We hope that you find this book a useful tool in making change happen for you. So, as you read these studies in urban excellence, prepare yourself for some unaccustomed good news.

Simeon Bruner
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, while 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 its broadly representative selection committee (which meets twice and is composed of community representatives, elected officials, design professionals and developers), 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 learn about the context, answer questions raised in the initial review, and verify claims.

The Rudy Bruner Award is granted every two years; it was given for the fourth time in 1993. Each cycle of the award has culminated in publication of a book. The first three books are:

- *Urban Excellence* by Philip Langdon with Robert Shibley and Polly Welch, published by Van Nostrand Reinhold in 1990. Describes the first round of the award.
- *Breakthroughs: Re-creating the American City* by Neal Peirce and Robert Guskind, published by the Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University in 1993. Describes the second round of the award.
- *Connections: Creating Urban Excellence* by Jay Farbstein and Richard Wener, published by the Bruner Foundation in 1992. Describes the third round of the award.

A copy of any past Rudy Bruner Award submission is available from the Interlibrary Loan Department of the Lockwood Memorial Library at the State University of New York at Buffalo, Amherst, NY 14260.

Criteria For Submission

The Bruner Foundation creates a framework for the debate about urban excellence 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, the nature of the projects, and the interactions of the Selection Committee members in the review process. Here are the broad limits which the Foundation provides to define eligible submissions:

- The project has to be a real place, not just a plan. Excellent planning is likely to contribute to creation of an excellent place — but a plan alone is not enough. The place must exist and be able to demonstrate its excellence in action (not just in theory or in anticipation).
- The planning and implementation processes may be innovative — involving new participants and constituencies — or they may be modifications of traditional processes. But the people affected by the project must be appropriately involved and must see benefit from it. Conflicts should 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 values exemplified by the project should be worthwhile and consonant with local community values; perhaps of equal importance, they should be made explicit.

The 1993 Selection Committee

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

Sara Bode, President of the Honey Tree Learning Center, Chicago and former mayor of Oak Park, Illinois.

Denise Fairchild, Director of the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), Los Angeles, California.

Harvey Gantt, FAIA, architect and urban designer, Gantt Hubermann Architects, and former mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina.

Ed McNamara, Director of the Neighborhood Partnership Fund, Portland, Oregon.

Frank Sanchis, Vice President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, DC.

Robert Sommer, PhD, environmental psychologist, professor of psychology and head of the Center for Consumer Research, University of California at Davis.

The Selection Process

In the context of the broad mandate from the Bruner Foundation, the Selection Committee had two fascinating discussions about the submissions and about urban excellence. At the first meeting, they winnowed 93 submissions to five finalists (see list below). At the second, they examined the five finalists in light of the on-site investigations and reported findings in order to pick a winner.

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, generally 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. At the culmination of a vigorous debate, the Committee selected two outstanding projects as joint winners (each of which received a \$25,000 award while the three finalists received \$1,000 each).

Winner: Harbor Point Apartment Community, Boston, Massachusetts. Tenants team with a private developer to rebuild a distressed public housing project into an attractive mixed income community with a waterfront park and many services.



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Winner: New Community Corporation, Newark, New Jersey. Represents twenty-five years of rebuilding the devastated central ward of Newark with housing, jobs, daycare, education, senior care, and a supermarket.

Finalist: Betts-Longworth Historic District, Cincinnati, Ohio. Preservation and rebuilding of an historic district near downtown.

Finalist: Beyond Homelessness, San Francisco, California. A comprehensive plan and eight projects which provide shelter and services to the homeless.

Finalist: The Park at Post Office Square, Boston, Massachusetts. A newly created urban park over an underground parking garage in Boston's dense financial district.

The Award Presentation

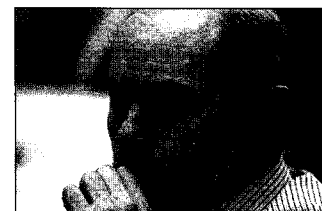
The award presentation was held at the offices of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Secretary of HUD, Henry Cisneros, made the presentation and was joined by Senators Bill Bradley and Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey and Senator John Kerry and Representative Martin Meehan of Massachusetts, as well as many senior HUD officials. The formalities were followed by an hour long forum — hosted by Marty Goldensohn, correspondent from American Public Radio — on the social, economic, political and design processes that contribute to urban excellence. The forum focussed on a typical problem in a hypothetical city and invited participants to play the roles of key actors in the urban scene, from tenants, to the housing authority, mayor, funding agency, planner and architect.

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 with many bullet points 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 and the award presentation. 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 include the following:

- Rebuilding communities
- A comprehensive approach: providing services, not just buildings
- Addressing critical urban problems



- Doing the impossible: persistence in the face of overwhelming odds
- Balancing leadership and participation
- Effective, ongoing management
- The role of technical expertise.
- Achieving quality in urban places.

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.