

## PREFACE

The evolution of a city is a highly complex process, one that involves considered tradeoffs between diverse and often competing goals and perspectives. Developers pursue short term economic objectives, governments promote longer range planning and growth policies, and community groups try to preserve or improve aspects of neighborhood life. Architects and urban designers are responsible for supporting these needs in an esthetically pleasing and affordable box, whose construction is funded by bankers and regulated by government agencies. No one of these perspectives is, in itself, sufficient to create an excellent urban place. Rather, it is often the reconciliation of competing objectives that results in excellent places — where the economic, visual, and social perspectives enhance and complement one another. The Rudy Bruner Award seeks to find, reward, celebrate, and publicize those projects that exemplify the creative synthesis of these factors.

The ten years since the inception of the Rudy Bruner Award have not been easy ones for American cities. Shrinking public funds, drastic fluctuations in the economy, a growing population of the urban poor, and ever-increasing rates of crime and homelessness have made our cities — once proud centers of energy, creativity and the American spirit — into symbols of neglect. It is in finding examples to counter that negativism that the Bruner Award takes on its meaning.

The finalists for this round of the award are Campus Circle in Milwaukee, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center in Brooklyn, Harlem Meer in New York City, and Lowertown in Saint Paul — and the winner is the Maya Angelou Community Initiative in Portland, Oregon. What do they have in common? They demonstrate how inspired leadership, community participation, and creative thinking can open fresh perspectives and create truly excellent urban places. As you will read in the following pages, these projects are chock full of creative ideas and were selected not only because each is an outstanding place, but because each one contributes in a significant way to the spirit and fabric of its city.

### **Where We've Come From and Where We're Going**

When we started the Bruner Award, we assumed that the tenth year would be its fifth and last cycle (the award is given every other year). We expected that we would have learned most of what we could about urban excellence. In fact, we have learned that excellence depends on one's point of view, and that the perspective is always changing to meet new and evolving circumstances. However, since the award was conceived as a catalyst for change and a forum for learning, it seemed appropriate at the tenth anniversary to formally take stock. To further our learning, and with help from a grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, Bruner Foundation staff revisited the finalists and winners from the four prior award cycles.

## 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 four 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 Neil Pierce 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.
- *Rebuilding Communities: Re-Creating Urban Excellence* by Jay Farbstein and Richard Wener, published by the Bruner Foundation in 1993. Describes the fourth 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.

### Studying Excellence Over Time

An exciting recent Bruner Foundation endeavor has been to revisit the winners and finalists from the first four cycles of the award to learn about how the projects have fared over time — which have continued to thrive and which have struggled — and why? Partially funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 21 projects have been revisited by teams of Foundation staff and consultants, HUD regional staff, and past Selection Committee members. Case studies of each project and essays about the general themes that have emerged are in preparation and the results will be available by mid-1997 from the Foundation and HUD.

### 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 1995 Selection Committee

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

**Bart Harvey**, President of The Enterprise Foundation in Columbia, Maryland.

**Msgr. William Linder**, Executive Director of the New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey and co-winner of the 1993 Rudy Bruner Award.

**Norman Rice**, Mayor of Seattle, Washington.

**Susan Saegert**, Professor of Environmental Psychology at the Graduate School of the City University of New York.

**Sharon Sutton**, FAIA, Professor of Architecture at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

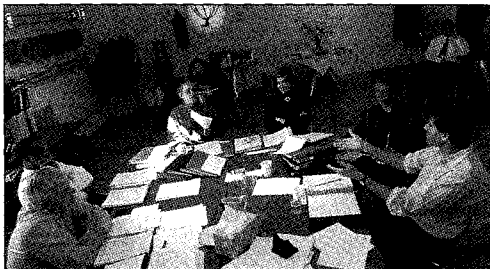
**Alexander Tzonis**, Professor of Architecture at the Technical University of Delft in the Netherlands.

#### 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 an outstanding project as winner (it received a \$50,000 award while the five finalists received \$1,000 each).

**Winner: Maya Angelou Neighborhood Initiative, Portland, Oregon.** An exceptionally democratic and inclusive process by Housing Our Families led to the successful conversion of one of Portland's most troubled properties into 42 units of low income housing for mostly single, female headed households. By reaching out to the community, the project became the impetus for turning the neighborhood around.

**Finalist: Campus Circle, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.** Like so many inner city universities, Marquette was surrounded by a decaying neighborhood. Marquette, however, led a bold initiative to transform its neighborhood into a safe and decent place for students, employees and community residents.

**Finalist: Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Boston, Massachusetts.** One of the nation's most dynamic grassroots organizations, Dudley has succeeded in reversing decades of neglect and disinvestment. It stopped the arson fires, cleaned up the dumping grounds, created a land trust, and built decent housing for low income families to buy.

**Finalist: Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center, Brooklyn, New York.** In this rehabilitation of a troubled but attractive mill building, a collective of woodworkers and artists are finding incubator workshops and studios with easy access to the downtown markets — maintaining and creating jobs that otherwise would have fled to the suburbs.

**Finalist: Harlem Meer (Central Park), New York City.** Years of neglect had allowed this lake in Harlem's corner of Central Park to become polluted and dangerous. A creative partnership between the city and the Central Park Conservancy has brought back the park, cleaned up the lake, and returned a marvelous amenity to the citizens of Harlem and the entire city.

**Finalist: Lowertown, St. Paul, Minnesota.** Over a twenty year period, a unique approach to redevelopment has transformed a nearly defunct warehouse district perched on the edge of downtown St. Paul into a vibrant urban village with thriving art studios, entertainment, employment, parks, and walk-to-work housing.

In choosing the finalists at their first meeting, the Selection Committee made a deliberate effort to find projects that addressed what they saw as the range of variation in critical urban issues. In fact, the Committee's initial charge was to pick five finalists. But, in what would have been the last cut from six to five, they found themselves unwilling to eliminate any one of them. Not only did each appear to be excellent, but each represented an issue that they felt strongly should be documented in the site visits and in this book. In some cases, the project was kept in because of the participatory process it followed, in other cases because of the innovative methods it used, and in still others because it represented the solution to a problem common to many cities (such as how an urban



university can deal appropriately with its surroundings, how jobs can be created or kept in the city, or how the older edges of downtown can be restored to vital life).

One member of the Committee saw the six finalists as reflecting his three personal commitments (social equity, economic opportunity and ecological stewardship). Others felt that to make a city work, all these kinds of projects are needed. The projects were seen as exhibiting complementarity: together they form a mosaic of people of varied socio-economic status, scales and places within the city, strategies for action, and underlying values.

### The Award Presentation

The award presentation was held at a specially dedicated breakfast meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Conference of Mayors in Seattle, Washington in August 1995. The meeting, attended by about 40 mayors and the Secretary of HUD, Henry Cisneros, was lead by Norman Rice, then chair of the Conference. The format included a brief slide presentation on each project and gave a representative of the project the opportunity to address the mayors (five of the six projects were represented). Though the statements were brief, some very important messages were conveyed. They spoke to some key issues that cities face in achieving excellence:

- The importance for cities that individuals have both the vision and the values to create something excellent, as well as he follow-through to see that it does happen.
- The city plays key roles in fostering quality projects. Even a little support or small amount of financial resources from

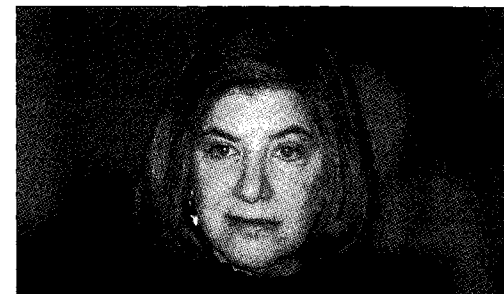
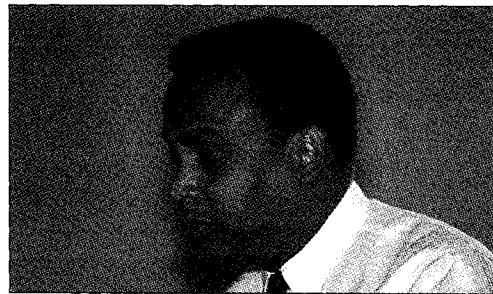
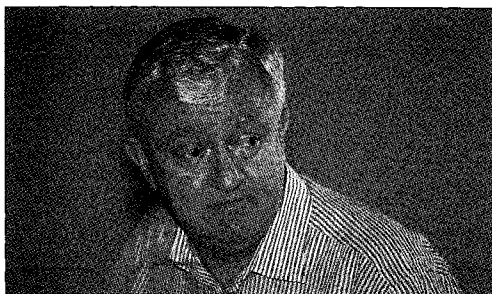
the city, provided at the right time, can make the difference in allowing these projects to go forward.

- The cities need to nurture these projects. Too often, the city is the impediment that must be overcome or the force that must be fought.
- Shrinking resources at the cities are going to make these excellent projects both harder to do and more necessary.
- Continuity of support across administrations can be crucial. Often it takes a long time to make a good project happen, and this can span administrations. The next mayor must try to see the merits of the project and not view it as the last mayor's pet.

By their comments, the mayors were deeply appreciative of the presentation. Apparently, it is relatively rare to see examples of urban success, and being presented with a diversity of outstanding projects, particularly ones with rather modest budgets like most of this round's finalists, was very impressive. They seemed to be inspired by what was possible and encouraged to go home and nurture projects in their cities.

### About This Book

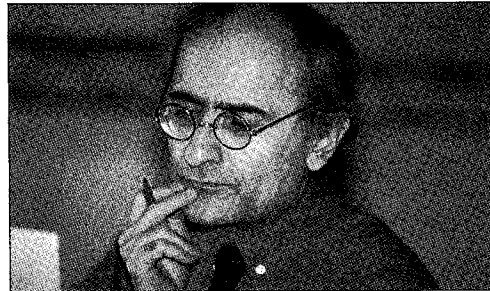
This book is based on the report we developed for the Selection Committee's second meeting. We have edited the text and added a section about the Selection Committee's comments on each project as they considered whether it might get the award. The chapters on each finalist were organized for ease of 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**, among which are the following:

- Non-Traditional Organizations — Building Coalitions for Urban Excellence
- Six Parts of A Whole City
- A New Role For Government
- Leadership and Decision Making Styles
- The Microwave versus the Crockpot — Differing Recipes for Community Development
- The Importance of Design
- Fighting Crime through Urban Design



**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 sector 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.