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HOMEFRONT

BY ANNE J. SWAGER, HON. AIA



PHOTO BY JONATHAN GREENE

It is my privilege to sit with the jury as it deliberates on the entries for the annual design awards. I help by explaining our categories, the awards that we offer, and trouble shoot any problems that might arise. I do not comment on the projects.

It is the responsibility and privilege of the first vice president to pick the jury chair. This year, Chip Desmone, AIA picked Dan Huberty, FAIA, who is a principal in a large firm (ZGF Architects, Seattle, Washington) that does large-scale projects. Part of this was because Chip knows him and thinks highly of him, and part of it was that we hoped to ensure that large projects got their due.

The evening before the deliberations, Chip and I took two members of the jury to dinner. This is helpful because it gives us time to explain our categories, the possible awards in each category, and to tell them a bit about AIA Pittsburgh and the city we call home. The jury comes away with an idea of who we are and how we work, all of which is helpful to them the next day. We had a very interesting conversation about the propensity of juries to award most of the prizes to small “jewel box” projects. The jury told us how most of the projects submitted to AIA Seattle’s design awards are residential and are most often the “jewel box” type project. This echoed the sentiments of last year’s lead juror Carol Burns, FAIA, who worked on the opposite coast in Boston. By contrast, the jury was astonished by how few houses are entered in AIA Pittsburgh’s design awards and this year was no exception.

The next morning we started bright and early. Like years past, during the first part of the day not much is said. The jurors are busy going through the 100 or so submissions. They begin the process of whittling down the pile to the final few they will consider for the awards. The first part always

continued page 2



DEC/08

In this Issue

Design Pittsburgh 2008 award winners page 6

The Sound of Conversation: Pittsburgh’s first Pecha Kucha night page 25

Photos from Design Pittsburgh events page 4 | Breaking Ground page 16


On the cover: Excavation of Mellon Hall, Chatham University, by Rothschild Doy10 Collaborative, photo by Massery Photography, Inc.

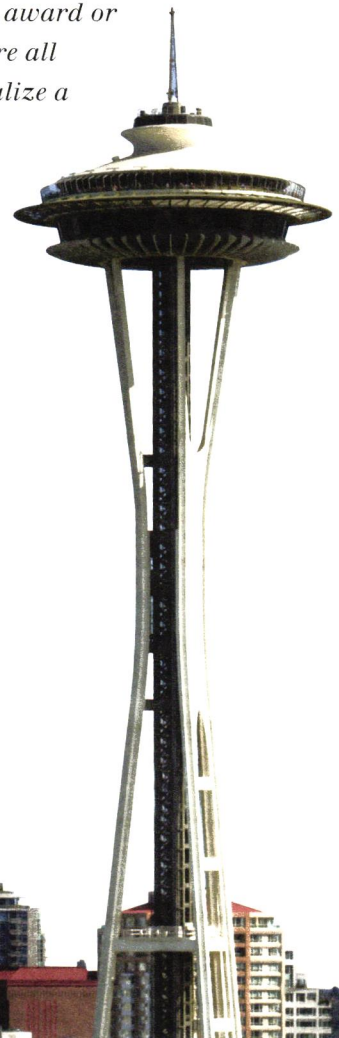


goes deceptively fast. In the past, the first vice president and I would be stuffing binders back into mailing boxes and organizing the remaining binders of the projects under consideration into piles. This year because the submissions were all electronic I checked email incessantly on my iPhone® and read the newspaper. We broke for lunch and ate in the same room. After a quick lunch the deliberations began again.

The hardest part is deciding which will be winners. Typically we start with as many as one third of the projects and the jury argues about which should be eliminated. By the time the pile is down to the projects that will actually win, it is time to decide what award each will be given. I explain the award categories again, there is more deliberation, and finally we have our winners. Then we work on jury comments. This is always a hard task at the end of a long day and I find myself constantly challenging them to say something other than “this is a really clean design”. This year’s jury worked hard on their comments and when Dan came to speak at our design award ceremony he had added even more comments.

This year I also had the opportunity to attend AIA PA’s design awards ceremony. One project won a silver medal in historic preservation and the client asked to speak a few words. She spoke about how the architect team inspired the staff, got them through some tough problems, and basically gave their ‘all’ to the job. She concluded by saying “*Whether you win an award or not, if your client feels the way I do about my architects then you are all winners. My architects are my friends and they have helped me realize a dream.*”

Congratulations to all of our winners and to all of you for a terrific body of work. In the important role of place makers, you enrich our lives. 



ENGAGED IN OUR COMMUNITY

BY PAULA R. MAYNES, AIA

Each year I look forward to AIA Pittsburgh's two annual signature programs: Build Pittsburgh, offering continuing education seminars and a product showcase each spring, and Design Pittsburgh, recognizing the excellent work of our Pittsburgh colleagues through a month-long series of events each October. However, 2008 brought three new initiatives that have been the most memorable for me, and not merely for their novelty. This year AIA Pittsburgh commissioned a promotional video called the *Digital Gallery*; celebrated Pittsburgh's first *Pecha Kucha Night*, and conducted a *Survey on Civic Engagement*. These activities, each in a strikingly distinctive manner, expressed our membership's interest in interacting with and contributing to our community.

The film company, Lot 25, was commissioned to produce the *Digital Gallery*; a video celebrating the character of the City of Pittsburgh and the role architects have played in shaping this very livable community. The video describes Pittsburgh's own special blend of tradition and innovation and is AIA Pittsburgh's gift to the City in honor of Pittsburgh's 250th Anniversary. The *Digital Gallery* will be on view in January 2009 at the exhibition of *America's Favorite Architecture*, a traveling show depicting the results of a national survey conducted by the AIA.

Pecha Kucha, meaning "the sound of conversation" in Japanese, is a fast-paced format where each presenter is allotted 20 seconds for each of 20 slides. Pittsburgh's first *Pecha Kucha Night* featured uniquely individual presentations by sixteen architects, graphic designers, painters, sculptors, photographers, musicians, and performance artists and was nothing shy of awesome! I offer a special nod to our own *Columns* editor, Becky Spevack, who provided a particularly en-

tertaining and revealing glimpse into her "geeky" (her word) and artistic awareness of space, pattern, and process. I commend Rachael Kelley in her success in securing the *Pecha Kucha* trademark rights for AIA Pittsburgh. You can count on more creative souls displaying their talents and encouraging conversation in the future!

As part of AIA Pittsburgh's dialogue on public engagement and in response to AIA National's initiative to create a directory of Citizen Architects, we turned to our members for input.



We were aware that many architects contribute to the community through service as well as through their work. To learn more about the interests and volunteer activities of AIA Pittsburgh members, a *Survey on Civic Engagement* was conducted. The results were noteworthy. Over half of the survey re-

spondents are active on commissions, boards, or engaged in volunteer activities. This level of involvement is more than double that of the typical U.S. citizen. It is also striking that AIA Pittsburgh members invest a significant amount of time volunteering, spending on average well over five hours a month serving their communities. These results, combined with the input provided in our Town Meeting will be used to develop AIA Pittsburgh's *Policy on Public Engagement*. I thank all of you who have provided valuable comment and insight in this process.

It has been a great honor to serve as the 2008 President of AIA Pittsburgh. The position has afforded me the opportunity to witness the great effort and enthusiasm invested by our members, our staff, and our Board of Directors not only in the execution of member services and events, but in service to the greater community. Thank you.

As a membership organization, the most and the least of what we can accomplish is up to you. ■

AIA Pittsburgh serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and AIA Pennsylvania. The objective of AIA Pittsburgh is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields.

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DESIGN PITTSBURGH: INSPIRATION, INTERPRETATION, INNOVATION

At the very least, AIA Pittsburgh throws a great party, but at our very best we provide opportunities to experience the art, craft, and science of architecture and design. Design Pittsburgh is a signature program of our chapter, celebrating excellence in architecture and design, and honoring those who create it. And as important as it is to celebrate and honor, it is equally important to experience – to understand how and why architecture and design can influence and impact our lives, and to recognize that there is an intersection where creative minds (from a variety of disciplines) come together to create the places where we live, work, and play.

