Letter from the Chair

The Small Project Practitioners Advisory Group is pleased to present Journal No. 34, “Small Project Awards.” The subject of this eJournal is possibly the most important effort the Small Firm Forum, now the Small Project Practitioners, has yet to offer. For nearly two years, the advisory group has planned and programmed a viable means to acknowledge the many outstanding contributions to our communities and our profession in architecture design and project delivery. The result of this effort is the Small Project Awards, which we offer here.

In a national call, we received more than 80 submissions representing a wide range of project types, styles, scale, and construction value: residential, commercial, whimsical, traditional, and cutting edge. A jury, made up of members of the Committee on Design and led by moderator Charles Matta, FAIA, met in Washington in February. After a full day of consideration, the jury selected nine projects to receive the Small Project Award. At a reception held during the AIA national convention in Las Vegas, the projects and project architects were presented with their awards.

It is with great pleasure that we share with you those winners in this issue. Quality architecture, no matter the scope, duration, or budget, has great value to our profession and to our community, and needs to be recognized when appropriate and shared with our peers and the public. We hope you will enjoy viewing the award winners but, more important, we hope you will consider sharing your best projects with us next year.

David C. Hughes, AIA

2005 Chair

2005 Small Project Awards

The Toolbox
Bruce Roadcap Architecture

Architect’s Comments

The "Toolbox" is a new covered parking, storage, and workbench space replacing a 1920s single-car garage for a bungalow residence. The program dictated squeezing parking for two cars between a massive pecan tree and the back corner of the property. The existing slab was re-used and the new slab additions minimized to prevent damaging the large tree.

The project is open on all sides to reduce scale and provide ventilation and natural light. The workbench is visually separated from the structure and opens completely to the covered slab beyond two pairs of rolling metal doors. The doors are suspended from a laminated wood beam supported on poured-in-place concrete columns, which provide lateral support for the open structure. Wood studs and trusses are spaced 24 inches apart to maximize storage of tools and equipment between and within the thickness of the walls. A canvas panel is stretched over the last truss and pulled taught within the web to express the structural form. Bolts, screws, and all structural hardware are oversized and extended to accentuate connections. The small view port in the workbench area is sized to the wood siding and the stud spacing, providing a direct view to the children’s play area. The wood siding (no. 105) and color match the original 1920 house, while the corrugated galvalume roofing and louvers recall the former garage.

Jury Comments

- "A nicely scaled outdoor space for working and parking. The simple, clear details and skillful use of materials work well together. Every square inch of this little building was functional."
- "The Toolbox was a clever project further strengthened by the sensitive use of ordinary materials. This was a favorite of the jury."
- "This was a crisp and finely detailed project. We liked the clearly articulated elements and the successful integration of the various materials, particularly the canvas infill in the gable."

Tria House
Boarman Kroos Vogel Group Inc.

Architect’s Comments

The University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum invited 5,000 architects, landscape architects, builders, and artists to contribute to its summer 2004 exhibition, “Totally Terrific Treehouses,” that celebrates trees and one-of-a-kind treehouses. Of the 33 designs submitted, 10 were chosen. The arboretum selected 10 trees throughout the gardens and each designer then chose one tree for their installation.

“These extraordinarily creative tree house designs will cause visitors to rethink what a tree house is—or what it can be,” noted Peter Olin, director of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.

The design criteria included no nails, bolts, or hooks attached to the tree, nothing applied that may scrape or rub the bark, no painting or staining the tree, and no footings below ground level. ADA accessibility was preferred.

Our team of 12 designed, constructed, and installed the tree house, “Tria House.” The house has an interactive design that acts as a house for a tree rather than a house in a tree, and creates a quiet retreat that allows visitors to focus on nature. Named for its resemblance to Chia Pet, Tria’s mill steel sheet walls have holes through which sporobolus heterolepis, prairie dropseed, and blue oat grass grow. The gabion traverse, filled with granite rocks, follows the exterior walls while the recycled tumbled glass gravel runs within the interior of the house.

__Jury Comments__

- “Innovative definition of a tree house. A rich idea of three walls defining space and circulation. Mies would love this. The thickness of the walls gives a feeling of permanence and substance. The Chia Pet idea just sucked us in. My favorite small project.”
- “This project exhibited the most inventive design of all of the entries, both large and small. The outdoor space will charm old and young and will age with grace because of the enduring materials.”
- “Clear concept beautifully executed. A strong image that will only improve with age (as the planting within the walls matures). Best of Show.”

__Black Box__

**Tighe Architecture**

Architect’s Comments

The Black Box is built in the Scandinavian tradition of an earthy palette of natural materials. The supple dark volume provides a backdrop for the existing flora of magnolia blossoms and white birch branches. The building envelope is made of vertical wood siding mounted over asphalt roofing shingles. The wood siding is protected with a burnt tar, sooty stain. The brooding, dark exterior stands in contrast to the blonde interior. The interior surfaces are a series of horizontal bands of various wood applications. The shifting horizontal zones define the penetrations of the building and accommodate the built-in amenities. Recycled wood was used for the siding and deck. The windows were made with steel angles. Perforated steel screens close the building for privacy. The building is 225 square feet and was built for $19,500 ($85 a square foot).

__Jury Comments__

- “A get-a-way from some where? We liked the project so much that we overlooked the context. What a nice place to meditate or have a time out.”
- “I personally favored this project the most. I guess I have secret wishes to spend some quiet time in a carefully detailed box. The exterior is clean yet rich, while the interior is functional, bright, and spare.”
- “Calm and reassuring. This one-room building shows strength and reserve. There's a wonderful contrast between the dark and somewhat forbidding exterior with the bright and well-crafted interior space.”

__Vaccaro Loft__

**Leeser Architecture**

Architect’s Comments

The Vaccaro family of four, comprised of a photographer, a graphic designer, and their two young sons, asked Leeser Architecture to reimagine their
living space as a series of compact and rigorously engineered open zones within a typical New York industrial loft building. A large kitchen, clothing and equipment storage, defined sleeping areas, and new bathrooms were required.

One apartment wall is thickened to contain the bathrooms. Within the resulting volume, a sleeping loft, kitchen, and storage areas are integrated into one piece of domestic furniture by taut, lacquered surfaces which stretch over them.

One surface forms the cabinet faces, kitchen backsplash, and the loft underside, while the other forms its topside, featuring a long, low walkway which allows for unobstructed headroom to access the sleeping areas of the platform. The walkway creates a unique sectional interlock as it drops below the line of the platform underside to accommodate a standing occupant above.

Tapering and meeting at a single long edge facing the dining and entry zones, the surfaces announce their thinness and deemphasize the depth of the platform internal structure. This domestic fixture defines the zones of the daily domestic ritual, while the remaining volume of the apartment is devoted to living, dining, and play space, and is open to full-height ceilings.

Jury Comments

- "So crisp and clean. A great way to borrow some typically unusable space."
- "The best architectural section of the competition! The architect found space and created a 'Jetson' type solution."
- "Elegant in its visual simplicity. The minimalist detailing empowers the space. A clever section which provides a recessed second floor walkway over the kitchen. Well executed."

Two Popes Film
Boarman Kroos Vogel Group Inc.

Architect's Comments

The offices of Two Popes Film serve as home base for this company, which directs and produces advertising media nationwide. The program included two offices, lobby, meeting room, kitchen, and staging space for the production of advertising, primarily for television. With the exception of the two offices, the space had to be "ultimately flexible" to handle a wide-ranging scale of production.

The existing walls, ceiling, floor, and exposed structure remained largely intact. A skylight was uncovered and re-glazed to provide light to a very long and narrow space. The concrete floor was painted with an epoxy-based paint and the north and east walls were painted using 10 colors primarily of an ochre palette. All materials used were selected within the range presented by the existing materials evident in the original structure.

The space is bisected longitudinally by a birch partition, accessible from both sides. East and west divisions are formed using 20-gauge steel studs faced on each side with dual cell polycarbonate panels. The panels allow for increased permeation of light throughout the space. The seams of the panels are strapped with steel bar stock and lacquered in their natural state. All electrical and data lines are run in conduit and visible through the panels, designed as part of the partition facades. All spaces are connected via sliding doors that are constructed of the same material and use "barn door" hardware.

Jury Comments

- "Simple, sophisticated, clear thinking. The cabinets are a bit quirky for me, but the building and spaces work."
- "The millwork was the best. The attention to detail on such a large production space lifts the quality of the environment and, I am sure, the patron's appreciation for the space."
- "Industrial minimalism. The millwork animates the space while giving definition to the plan. A clear and simple expression of a creative workspace perfectly appropriate for its function."

7735 Tecumseh Trail
John Senhauser Architects

Architect's Comments

When commissioned to design the typically pragmatic master bedroom addition, we decided to use what little programmatic area we were given to its fullest poetic advantage, a "more with less" approach.

By lifting the addition on pilotis, the new bedroom is aligned with the former bedroom, creating a master suite. The terrace created beneath this addition provides shaded rest for the users of the pool and bocce ball court nearby. Folding open the large window wall allows the custom bed to track out onto the elevated terrace — bringing the indoors out — permitting comfortable nights spent under the moon and stars.

Jury Comments

- "The ultimate adjustable bed. Just roll outdoors, smell the roses, and gaze at the stars. The seamless house addition is well done. Is there a rain sensor?"
- "The addition was the cleverest in this category. The ability to change the orientation of one's bed view is a great idea. This project employed a bit of space-age thinking housed in the simple architecture of the existing building."
- "A wonderfully inventive yet perfectly appropriate addition to a two-story suburban house. The addition blends seamlessly with the original structure.
while providing a contemporary bedroom space. The moving bed and the operable bedroom wall provided a creative link between the new addition and natural setting of the house.”

**St. Peters Parish Hall**

Crisp Architects

**Architect’s Comments**
The parishioners of a rural church, circa 1890, needed space for Sunday school classes, coffee hour after church, and social gatherings. The new parish hall needed to closely fit the footprint of a carriage barn, which had deteriorated and was removed. The hamlet surrounding the church is composed of 17th- and 18th-century homes and pasture lands. It was imperative the new structure fit into the neighborhood.

Vestry members stressed that the new parish hall be subordinate to the Carpenter Gothic church. Additionally, the building needed to complete a complex of clapboard structures which would include the church and a vicarage. The program included a large main room for gatherings and classes, a kitchen with access to the main room, and a small flexible room for child care.

We used details sympathetic to the church both on the exterior and interior. On the gable ends of the parish hall we used a jerkin head detail similar to the side and rear of the church. Clapboard siding with corner boards tied the buildings together reinforcing a compound feeling throughout the church, the parish hall, and the vicarage. Interior-exposed king trusses echoed a similar detail within the church. The hall has been in use for several years and has fulfilled the requirements set forth by the Vestry and the congregation.

**Jury Comments**

- “This building should go on the historic register now, along with the church. Restraint, simplicity, cost effectiveness, qualities are all apparent. The congregation and architect are to be commended for having the courage not to attach to the existing church.”

- “The parish hall was an appropriate addition to a historical setting. The detached hall was authentic in its relationship to the church in that it was detached. The new building, despite its desire to be contextual with respect to a former time, was playful in its interpretation.”

- “This small building was restrained yet exuberant. The jury particularly appreciated that the building was not attached to the existing church, but sited behind it and rotated which created a comfortable relationship between the two structures. The parish hall recognized the stylistic precedent of the church building but offered its own architectural interpretation.”

**Twin Valley House**

Danze & Blood Architects

**Architect’s Comments**
The most compelling attribute of the house, as well as its greatest challenge, is the site. Located on the side of Cat Mountain in Austin, Texas, the site has extensive views of the surrounding Hill Country. The lot is 40 feet wide and part of a Planned Unit Development, which allows houses to be built on the property line separated by only five feet. A wall was created along the south side to remove awareness of the nearby neighbor. The lot fronts a protected greenbelt offering an intimate connection to the landscape. At the upper level, the wall has a continuous ribbon window opening to distant views. Decks are built on all levels maximizing the visual and literal connection to the outdoors. Rather than specifically defined areas of living, a collection of spaces suitable for flexible use were created.

Special attention was paid to the design and execution of the building details. Bamboo is used throughout for flooring and cabinetry, salvaged metal is used to create hearths, and translucent Panelite is used in a double-pivoting door creating a wall that can be simultaneously closed and open to varying degrees.

**Jury Comments**

- “A skillful use of the site, with a plan that works.”

- “The house was beautifully done.”

- “Wonderfully sited with interior and exterior spaces taking full advantage of the views. The double-height living room was well detailed and beautifully rendered. Well conceived and well executed.”

**Murphy Residence**

Nancy Clark Brown, AIA

**Architect’s Comments**
The design of a new home for an artist and her child was characterized by the concept of sanctuary. A sanctuary has many implications: immunity,
sanctity, protection. The project goals for the client were to create a timeless place with contrasting contemporary and historic elements, modest in scale, and space for the exhibition of a growing art collection.

For the consideration of a timeless architecture that could wear both the contemporary and the historic, the archetype derived from the experience of many and present in the unconscious of the individual was explored in the context of the Inland Northwest. A ruined barn that could be found on any rolling hill of the "Palouse" was considered an archetypal form for its imprint in the minds of many.

The form of a quiet, modest barn and its materials can be identified in the resolution. Like the utilitarian nature of the barn, the sanctuary also wears its purpose. Small apertures allow light and ventilation in private spaces, large apertures allow transition and commune with the exterior in social spaces. Programmatically, the home is defined by two displaced yet similar forms linked by and a gallery/entry. The social space is open and unobstructed and the private spaces are defined and enclosed. Each space has active, purposeful storage that encloses office space, laundry, technology, books, and storage.

The sanctuary for mother and child marks a quiet presence and place. Following the contours of its site along its longest side, it maintains its stature against the forces of nature and man, providing interiority, protection, and solace.

Jury Comments

- "Well defined, wonderful private and public space for both members of the household. A lucky mom and child to share these thoughtful spaces. The client/architect cooperation is apparent and admired."
- "A sensitive solution."
- "Elegant in its simplicity. Simple yet appropriate detailing. The forms were crisp and expressive. An exercise in restraint for powerful effect."

**Small Project Awards Jury**

Ronnette Riley, FAIA, Chair  
Ronnette Riley Architects  
New York  

David Brems, AIA, Vice Chair  
Gillies Stransky Brems Smith PC  
Salt Lake City  

Carol Bentel, FAIA  
Bentel & Bentel Architects and Planners  
Locust Valley, NY  

Louis Pounders, FAIA  
Williamson Pounders Architects  
Memphis  

**Tips**

**Tip1: The Carrot and the Stick**  
*Julie Clayton, AIA*

**Tip2: Using Return Envelopes**  
*Steven Penn Bryan*

**Tip3: Getting Paid**  
*Nestor D. Matthews*

**Tip4: Facilitating Payment**  
*Andrew M. Fethes, AIA, NCARB*

**Tip5: Overwhelmed by Submittals?**  
*Jeff Rouse, AIA*

**Tip6: Your Space**
Tip7: BIM and Small Practice Firms
Jeff Owens, AIA
The Carrot and the Stick
Julie Clayton, AIA

AIA standard contracts generally allow for interest to accrue on a client's unpaid invoices after a certain amount of time, often 30 days and at a rate determined by local law. In my local jurisdiction, the rate is 1.5 percent. But rather than wait for the client to pay at the last minute before that interest kicks in, I have found it extremely useful in my practice to offer an incentive, a carrot if you will, to encourage prompt payment. My contracts allow the client an "early payment reduction" of 1.5 percent if they pay the invoice in full within five days. Sure, it costs me a little bit of revenue, but I usually get my money in the bank within one week, and it creates good will with the clients. The peace of mind is worth it.
Using Return Envelopes  
Steven Penn Bryan

A majority of our clients are residential clients and, as such, they don't have an accounting department to process bills. So our goal is to make it as easy for them to make their payment as easily and quickly as possible. Enclosed with each invoice sent is an addressed return envelope. Just like paying the electric bill or telephone bill, having a return envelope simplifies our clients' efforts to pay. Of course, the real benefit is that we get paid faster.
Getting Paid
Nestor D. Matthews

I often hear architects complain about getting paid. When I started my small business in residential design, my contracts stipulated that payment was due 15 days from the date of invoice instead of the traditional 30. In 10 years no one has ever complained. The change is usually noted by the client, though. So clients make a special effort to get the check to me, at least within 30 days. At 30 days, I have no problem placing a reminder call or sending a late due reminder along with the next month’s bill. My clients' payment record is pretty flawless.
Facilitating Payment
Andrew M. Fethes, AIA, NCARB

When invoicing my residential (and small business) clients, I include a check-sized envelope that is self-addressed. I even include the client’s return address. This facilitates their payment of my invoice and allows me to quickly scan my mail for incoming checks. This only works with clients who write checks by hand.

An even better solution would be to establish a business reply account with your local post office. This way you can pay the cost of the postage. If your client loses the invoice, however, you will not have wasted the postage if you stamped the return envelope. While this may seem trivial, many clients have thanked me for the thoughtfulness and convenience.
Overwhelmed by Submittals?
Jeff Rouse, AIA

One way to reduce rote submittal reviews and re-review time is to omit some of the detailed submittal requirements for a few standard spec sections, e.g., drywall, studs, insulation. If the general contractor (GC) confirms in writing that he or she will provide the specified items, then the contractor can submit a list of the products and models to be used on the job. The GC will still want to keep the full submittal on hand for the owner’s closeout documentation. Another strategy would be to provide a checklist of the submittal packages required for each project as part of the project manual (spec book). This would give the GC a template for the submittal schedule and constructive notice of the number of packages expected.
Your Space
Nancy Brown

I used to think I needed a physical space to validate my practice. I have come to realize, however, that clients don't care about my space. They care about whether I am interested in their future place. They want to know I am listening to their dreams and aspirations and integrating their ideas into the work. Nothing confirms my interest in their project more than working along side them in their space. Clients feel included in the design process as real-time changes are made on their dining room table. In turn, I gain a trust and respect that allows me greater design exploration. My office is wherever I am. The space where I work is irrelevant.
BIM and Small Practice Firms
Jeff Owens, AIA

BIM (building information modeling) is the present-day "representation" of building with the more informative "simulation" of building. In plain English, BIM is a methodology that gathers, models, visualizes, analyzes, and simulates the performance entailed in conceiving, constructing, and maintaining a virtual building, and inextricably links it to the conception, construction, and maintenance of a real building. Put another way, it's what one might label as balance between the virtual and actual of the building entity and environment.

The structure of small practice firms allows a flexibility to adjust and implement these new technologies at a rapid pace, thus obtaining first-hand knowledge of this new technology and the benefits for creating a more complete design process for each design opportunity. It is the possibility of using this intelligent model technology as a base for design simulation of the building before construction to further explore and adjust sustainable design strategies and strive for buildings driven by human needs design.

It is truly a small firm advantage to quickly embrace and reap the benefits of this new technology. It makes it possible for the small firm to create design communication content while cutting production time. The professional has more time to test and work on the design and still provide quality documents.