

MODESTY AND GENEROSITY



FOR THE 49TH ANNUAL CANADIAN ARCHITECT AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE, JURORS MANON ASSELIN, DAVID SISAM AND PATRICIA PATKAU SELECTED TEN PROJECTS THAT EXEMPLIFY SOLID PLANNING, INNOVATIVE THINKING AND A STRONG SENSE OF SOCIAL PURPOSE.



ABOVE LEFT The Art Gallery of Hamilton by Their + Curran Architects knits together the surrounding urban fabric. **ABOVE RIGHT** Ryerson University's Daphne Cockwell Health Sciences Complex by Perkins+Will Canada provides a new passageway into the campus.



For 49 years, the Canadian Architect Awards of Excellence program has celebrated projects in the design stage. This year, our jury—consisting of Manon Asselin, MRAIC, Patricia Patkau, FRAIC and David Sisam, FRAIC—picked 10 winning projects from nearly 150 submissions, following two days of deliberation on the quality, importance and future of Canadian design.

The jurors were drawn to projects that exuded modesty and generosity, which they believe will have a strong ability to sustain their quality. “What will a project look like in 20 years?” asked Sisam. “It’s a test of endurance, which speaks to the importance and success of a building over time.” For Asselin, the most successful projects were those that demonstrated a thoughtful approach to program. “It’s not only about establishing an architecture that is aesthetically elegant, but one that is aware, efficient and significant in its purpose and design,” she said. Patkau was struck by projects that speculated about the nature of architecture and its elements. “The projects we picked offered certain insights into architecture: from framing a time-based idea of domestic space, to reimagining the wall as an urban surface, to issues of pure delight,” she said.

A number of residential projects feature amongst the winners: the multi-unit dwelling Elää in Montreal by KANVA, the co-housing prototype C House in Calgary by STUFF, and an infill dwelling on a half-width Edmonton lot by Barry Johns. Each articulates generous ways of living within a relatively compact footprint, and gives considerable attention to the balance between private, public and semi-public spaces. Elää, for instance, creates an intimate inner courtyard that contrasts with the street-facing realm of the project; C House includes a suite of shared, patio-like spaces within. Barry Johns’ Infillhaus is the most private dwelling of the trio. But it serves as a model neighbour, adopting a modest size and avoiding views into adjoining yards, while including clerestories that pour sunlight into its loft-like living spaces.

A system of flat-packed prefabricated huts by Vancouver-based Leckie Studio also received an award, with the jurors remarking on its economy of means. “It’s a handsome structure that’s quite organized with very little space,” said Sisam. Intended for backwoods use, the compact dwellings can be ganged together to create larger shelters—or kitted out for use in urban settings as tiny houses.

Several housing projects captured the attention of the jurors for their innovative approaches, although they fell short of winning awards. The

Breathe Box by Calgary firm Bioi, for instance, imagined a minimal living space placed in the middle of a house that was gutted following the city’s flood. “This armature of occupation is a stable core, that can then affect the space around it according to the circumstances of daily life, or through time-based changes that occur over a lifetime,” noted Patkau.

The jurors were also impressed by several projects that related deftly to their historical context. A new visitor’s pavilion for the Quebec provincial legislature by Provencher_Roy and GLCRM Architects, for instance, underscored the primacy of the heritage building by carving out space beneath its grand staircase. The design for the new Canadian Canoe Museum by heneghan peng and Kearns Mancini Architects similarly sinks down into the landscape, transforming the museum into a viewing platform towards the adjacent Trent-Severn waterway with its lift-locks.

A winning project from Montreal relates to its surroundings with a playful touch. The series of inflatable arches by KANVA (a second honour for the firm in this year’s awards) lends vitality to St. Catherine Street during a protracted upcoming period of street repairs. The jurors appreciated how the system brings a bit of joy to the dismal business of street work, and could potentially be adapted for use in other locations.

Certain urban submissions did not merit awards, but were nonetheless notable for their role in strengthening the surrounding built fabric—including the Art Gallery of Hamilton by Their + Curran Architects and Ryerson University’s Daphne Cockwell Health Sciences Complex by Perkins+Will Canada. “The Art Gallery of Hamilton really attempted to bind things together,” said Patkau, noting its sensitive edge treatments that will result in widened streets, retail spaces and an interior courtyard for the gallery. Sisam noted that the Ryerson University project, for its part, enabled thoughtful connections between streets. “These projects reinforce the idea that a building can go beyond satisfying its program, and also contribute to ameliorating the place that it’s set within,” he said.

A similar idea was evident in certain suburban projects, such as the Columbia Valley Centre in Invermere, B.C., by SHAPE Architecture. “It made a real effort to make a connection with the main street of the town, while at the same time dealing with the suburban condition of parking and making an entrance that was generous for both,” said Sisam. The Williams Parkway Operations Centre in Brampton, Ontario, by RDH Architects, was another instance of a municipal project that added architectural quality to a suburban setting.



ABOVE Calgary firm Bloi's Breathe Box contains a wooden core that unfolds to provide amenities including a kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. **BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT** A church doubles as a library in this design by Dominique Laroche; the Columbia Valley Centre by B.C. firm SHAPE Architecture connects users to mountain views. **OPPOSITE** A view from a student installation by Michael Fohring entitled *An Architecture of the Earthly Grotesque*.

A renewed interest in the art of building was evidenced in three winning projects: an office building by Batay-Csorba Architects in Toronto's Liberty Village, the North East Transit Garage in Edmonton by gh3, and a brewery at The Forks market in Winnipeg by 5468796 Architecture. Batay-Csorba's office building is a contemporary take on Toronto's ubiquitous precast concrete constructions from the 1970s. "It's very much a play on rethinking a technology that we know," said Asselin. Added Patkau, "It is a highly original attempt to reinvent both material solidity and experiential depth in architecture."

The Brewery at The Forks uses corten steel in an intriguing way that celebrates the material presence of architecture. The transit garage, for its part, uses custom stainless steel panels to investigate the question of surface in a rigorous manner. The jurors also applauded the garage as an exemplar of durable, well-designed infrastructure. "It's really interesting that cities are investing in these projects," noted Asselin.

The question of municipal investment applies at all scales. While it did not receive an award, the jurors were drawn to an inventive solution for a library in Saint-Calixte de Kilkenny, Quebec by architect Dominique Laroche, which inserted bookshelves along the side aisles of an existing church, allowing both functions to co-exist in the space. During services, stained glass panels slide over the windows and inte-

grated screens cover the books. "Overlaying these things makes so much sense for smaller communities that are in need of new services, but may not have the resources to produce them," said Asselin.

Turning their attention to the next generation of architects, the jurors were particularly impressed with the depth of thinking in the student submissions. Two thesis projects—both by University of British Columbia Students—were selected for Student Awards of Excellence. Lőrinc Vass's project addresses contested spaces in the greater Vancouver area, while Alexander Ring's submission details a strategy for tackling sea level rise in a threatened island nation. "In most cases, the students weren't just interested in designing elegant buildings, but in addressing very substantial issues," said Asselin. "It's refreshing and comforting to see young architects embracing their responsibility as the designers of tomorrow."

"The ambition of some of the students is remarkable," added Patkau, "and many of their drawings are just fantastic." The jurors also admired the aesthetic qualities of a cast concrete installation by Michael Fohring, a graduating student of McGill University.

The winning projects that follow were ultimately chosen for their depth, optimism and insight into the issues facing architecture today. As we look to the 50th anniversary of the Awards of Excellence in 2017, we believe these winners point to a promising future in Canadian architecture. ▲

