

The AIA Michigan Design Awards ceremony was wonderful this year and I want to (briefly!) share my thoughts about why design award programs are important to the architectural community.

Of course, there is recognition.

As much as we try to deny it, we all have egos – some ...“healthier”... than others!

As architects, it’s important to us that our work is experienced and used the way the client envisioned it and the way we executed the vision through the design of the building. We put our heart and soul into the designs we create and we put in long hours because to us design matters. We love what we do but we are our own toughest critics and it is high praise to be publically recognized by our peers for our creativity and for our contribution to the quality of the built environment. So recognition is important and something that drives all of us to some degree to aspire to, however I believe there are two **higher values to be gained**. Those are **Inspiration to the profession** and **raising the public’s awareness of the importance of good design**.

Inspiration is what moves us forward as a society! Architects love to experience and talk about and create meaningful and beautiful design and we get inspiration from the built and natural environment around us. Award programs are a venue where we can look at a collection of designs that have been judged as successful by our peers and these celebrations – like the AIAMI Design Awards – are inspirational for the profession.

Experiencing design excellence and innovation improves the standards of design in the industry and in turn improves the products that are available for the designer to work with. Recognizing and celebrating great design promotes, inspires and fosters excellence, innovation, lasting achievement and contribution to the quality of life by designers and manufacturers alike.

So there’s recognition, there’s inspiration, and then there is awareness. **Raising the public’s awareness about great design creates the demand for it**. People know good design when they see it, but they often don’t know why it’s good or why they like it. By publishing the awards with descriptions of why it won an honor award, we help raise awareness and educate the public on what makes a design good. **We need to talk a lot more about the “good” in good design**. The more the public understands it - that design matters – the more they will demand great design and challenge all of us to continually create a better and better built environment.

So my challenge to all of us is to take these excellent award winning projects and publish them and talk about the good and tangible benefits that great design brings to our communities. In answer to the question of why these design award programs are important to the architectural community, there are three things: recognition, inspiration, and raising the public’s awareness.

Speaking for myself, great design reflects our times, it is sustainable, it reflects the values of the world around us, our neighborhoods, our communities, it makes the client’s vision real and tangible, it responds to its site and it is inherently flexible for future change. I want to think that critics in 50 years will be saying how innovative and adaptable our designs were, and not “what were they thinking?!?” It was through that collective and lively engagement among the jurors and seeing the design through each other’s eyes that we were able to select projects we wanted to honor with an award. We believe these projects will be among those whose innovation will inspire us with new possibilities now and will be looked at as worthy of being preserved and adapted to new uses when they have been around 50 years! Design touches all of us in different ways, yet the best design touches us collectively.

Sincerely,

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