

# BANKER & TRADESMAN

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## Building Consensus: Jury Judges Unbuilt Architecture Awards

By Jeffrey Stein

**J**URIES: NOT ONLY ARE THEY AN IMPORTANT part of the American legal system, they also play a vital role in our system of design. Choosing a beautiful design for a building is a daunting task, akin to creating the design in the first place. Designers and builders have a saying: "Good clients make good architecture." It points to an understanding among architects. Given that they all have undergone approximately the same education and training, the difference in result is often made up by the client's judgment, willingness, clarity, understanding and budget. On the other hand, developing or selecting a design, like selecting a designer, is a mysterious process for a client who might not consider herself or himself well suited to make such a judgment.

Most people want to live, work, worship, educate their children and house their businesses in places that look and feel good; places that are inspiring and well designed. But unlike the famous judicial pronouncement on pornography – "I know it when I see it" – many clients for design feel they don't know good design when they see it. They are uncomfortable with their capacity to judge beauty. So, often, we develop competitions among architects, name a group of well-known and experienced people to a design jury who will analyze and assess the values of the designs, and simply let the jury decide.

Each year the Boston Society of Architects names a jury of designers to judge a special national design competition. This competition results in the Unbuilt Architecture Design Awards, an event that is now in its 12th year. Not all buildings that are designed ever get constructed. In fact, looking back at examples of the drawings and models of architects over history, one might get the idea that some of the

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**This design by Boston-based Moskow Architects for a Zipcar Dispenser in the city, which would stack cars in mechanisms above unused alleys while employing the machinery's scrim-like designed surface for advertising, is one of six winners the Boston Society of Architects' Unbuilt Architecture Design Award.**

best designs remain unbuilt. Bostonians get to see these unbuilt projects each year – some of the most interesting worldwide – and meet and talk with members of the jury that selected them about why these designs are good.

In the legal system, it is customary to withhold the names of jurors to keep them anonymous for their own protection. But part of the glory in the design system is to choose people who are well known, and whose judgment can be trusted, to decide on the fitness of a work of architecture. So we name names, and list the people who served on this year's Unbuilt Architecture Design Award jury in Boston. It's no secret; you can meet them all in person at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 19, when they make a public presentation of their delibera-

tions at Build Boston, the building industry conference and trade show that runs through that week at the World Trade Center in the South Boston Waterfront district.

There you'll meet jury chairman Henry Moss and jurors Alex Anmahian, Julian Bonder, Robert Hoye, Rachel Munn, Chris Reed, Gretchen Schneider and Jeff Stein, author to this column. On a sunny day this past August, this group of architects, and architecture teachers and writers, convened in a conference room in the Architects Building, the downtown Boston headquarters of the Boston Society of Architects, to talk about 130 separate projects, none yet built (although someday soon, several are likely to be constructed).

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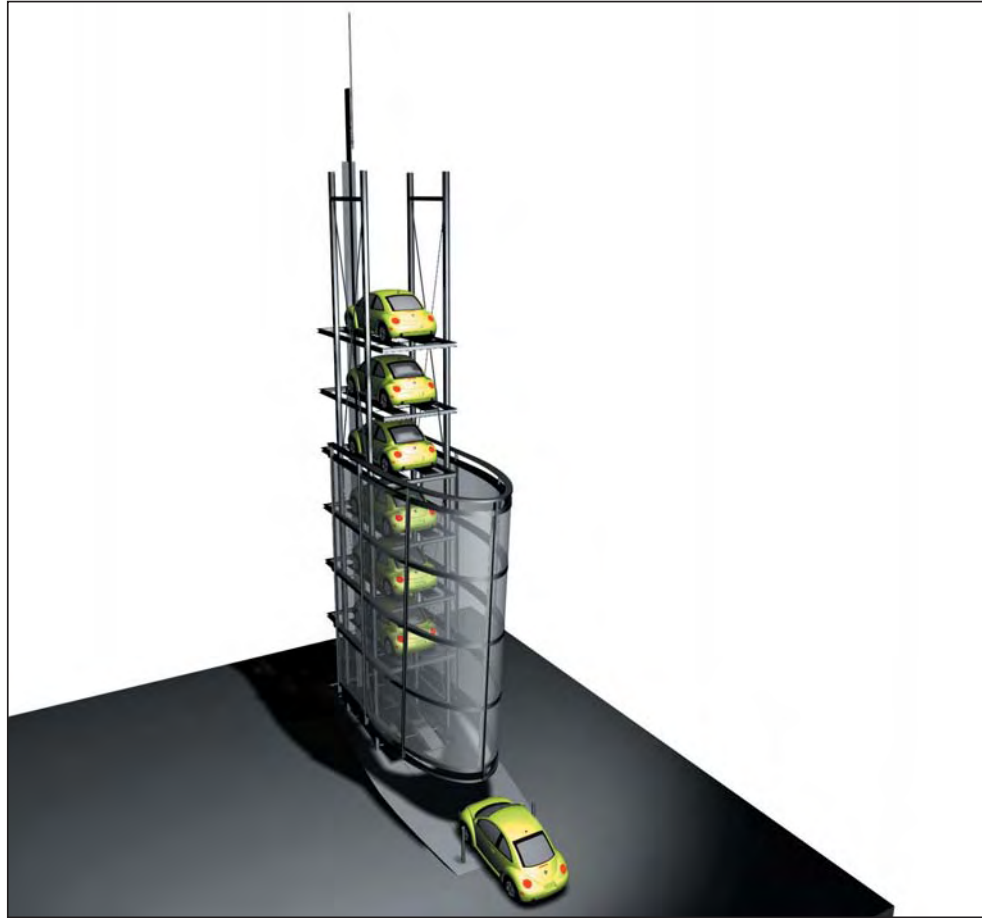
Many of these projects were designed for real clients, several were undertaken as theoretical explorations, a few were imagined to be somewhat ahead of their time. At the end of the day, six projects were deemed victorious. The work of those six designers will be on display at Build Boston and will be the focus of the jury's public discussion.

## Waiting to Exhale

Some of the most improbable projects are among those judged the best. They also are among those most likely to graduate to the "built" category in the future. One of these is entitled "The Heavy/Light House" by Cambridge architect Dan Hisel. This project for a client has a most unusual site – it will be suspended from unused railroad trestle. And what a good idea, jurors thought, to reuse obsolete infrastructure and reinterpret it for a new and imaginative purpose. Beyond that, Hisel crafted extraordinary space within the building. Jurors thought they would like to visit this house when it is finally constructed.

The design for a memorial in Manhattan, "Exhale," by Martina Decker and Peter Yeadon of Providence, R.I., made a powerful statement to jurors. Not a structure, really, this altogether fresh understanding of memorial architecture is made of bubbles, whose chemistry is such that they are able to travel throughout the city. The dusty residue they leave when they finally burst is part of the understated power of this project about memory and time.

My own favorite is a project for Boston, one that has precedents as disparate as the work of Japanese architect Toyo Ito and Pez candy holders. It is a Zipcar Dispenser designed by the Boston firm Keith G. Moskow Architects. We're all for Zipcars in this city, and the idea to stack them in mechanisms above unused alleys while employing the machinery's scrim-like designed surface for advertising is both playful and unapologetic. It was interesting to learn just recently that a Boston-area company is actually able to manufacture stacking car-parking mechanisms like this that could be at the heart of the Moskow team's design.



**This rendering shows how the Zipcar Dispenser that Boston-based Moskow Architects' designed for the city would work.**

Other significant projects of note to the jury include a new interpretation center for the historic "African Cemetery #2," an African-American graveyard in Lexington, Ky. This lyrical excavation and renovation of an important historic landscape was designed by Henri deHahn in Lexington. A powerful way to pile up big-box retail facilities, "The Vertical Power Center" was designed by a team of architecture students and their faculty advisor, professor Stephen Luoni, from the University of Arkansas. And a terrific "Central Bank of Kuwait Headquarters" was designed by Skidmore Owings and

Merrill's New York City office. This is an entirely new vision for how a tall building should appear, grounded in the building's response to its immediate cultural history and its climate, resolving issues of solar gain and natural light in Kuwait.

It is as fascinating to see what remains unbuilt in 2003 as it is to experience what gets built in Boston. A rare chance to participate in the process of design and to see how the jury system works in America comes to our city on Wednesday, Nov. 19, at the Build Boston trade show. Don't miss it. ■