

Affordable Design

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development sponsors or cosponsors three annual competitions for innovation in affordable design. This Cityscape department reports on the competitions and their winners. Each competition seeks to identify and develop new, forward-looking planning and design solutions for expanding or preserving affordable housing. Professional jurors determine the outcome of these competitions.

2016 AIA/HUD Secretary's Housing and Urban Development Design Awards

Rachelle L. Levitt, compiler

Director, Research Utilization Division, HUD Office of Policy Development and Research

Regina Gray, compiler

Social science analyst, HUD Affordable Housing Research and Technology Division

Excellence in Affordable Housing Design Award

David Baker Architects: Lakeside Senior Apartments, Oakland, California

Community-Informed Design Award

Collaboration of builders and architects: Texas Disaster Recovery—Round 2, Houston, Texas

Alan J. Rothman Housing Accessibility Award

FabCab: Port Townsend Residence, Port Townsend, Washington

Creating Community Connection Award

Private-public-nonprofit partnership: Dorchester Art-Housing Collaborative, Chicago, Illinois

The Jury

Jamie Blosser, American Institute of Architects (Chair), Atkin Olshin Schade Architects, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Ariella Cohen, Editor-in-Chief, *Next City*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Kevin Harris, Fellow, American Institute of Architects (FAIA), Kevin Harris Architect, LLC, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Rachelle L. Levitt, Director, Research Utilization Division, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, D.C.; David Lee, FAIA, Stull and Lee, Inc., Roxbury Crossing, Massachusetts; Lynn M. Ross, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Policy Development, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, D.C.; Suman Sorg, FAIA, Sorg & Associates, P.S., Washington, D.C.

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or the U.S. government.

Introduction

Since 1999, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has partnered with the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Housing and Custom Residential Community Knowledge Community to sponsor four awards that promote innovative approaches to affordable housing design, community-based housing development, participatory planning and design, and accessibility. This year's recipients were recognized for their efforts to encourage durable housing design without sacrificing affordability. Each award recipient made a valuable contribution to the knowledge and understanding of how and why design matters and responded to the needs of a thriving community and also to the families who live in them.

The **Excellence in Affordable Housing Design Award** is given to a project that offers a set-aside of at least 20 percent of its units for low-income residents or families. The project team must go beyond HUD and other federal requirements under existing programs, such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit or Choice Neighborhoods, to expand affordable housing options, demonstrate adherence to established design guidelines, and integrate new and innovative approaches to housing design and development. This year's award recipient was David Baker Architects. The project, Lakeside Senior Apartments, in Oakland, California, was recognized for the unique attention paid to energy-efficient building materials and design technologies.

The **Community-Informed Design Award** was given to a collaboration of builders and architects in Houston, Texas. The jury acknowledged the Texas Disaster Recovery—Round 2 for its disaster neighborhood revitalization efforts that focus less on housing and more on the integration of many different building types and uses to transform a community. The award emphasizes the importance of participatory design throughout all stages of the planning and development process—empowering residents to be active in the decisionmaking process and encouraging private-public partnerships in the reinvestment of transitioning communities.

The **Alan J. Rothman Award** is awarded to development projects that demonstrate a commitment to accessible housing for people living with disabilities. The design must be visionary and far reaching—responding to the needs of a community with a range of physical impairments and going beyond standard federal requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Fair Housing Act. The Port Townsend Residence features new technologies that incorporate universal design principles that allow for easy wheelchair passage and also adjustable amenities that are physically attractive and accommodate all levels of activity and mobility. Located in Port Townsend, Washington, the development boasts a community garden, a resident center, and expanded recreational space that appeal to all residents in the neighborhood. FabCab received the award for the Port Townsend house.

Special Focus: Creating Community Connection Award

The final award category is for **Creating Community Connection**. The Dorchester Art-Housing Collaborative (DA + HC) is an art-centered residential community of 32 two-story townhouses in

the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood in Chicago's South Side. A formerly abandoned public housing development, the rehabilitated project was the creation of a partnership among a local artist, a development company, an architect, and the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA). Initiated and led by local conceptual artist Theaster Gates, the partnership demonstrates both the possibility and pragmatism of rehabilitating neighborhoods through arts programming. The chairman of the AIA jury, Jamie Blosser, Director of the Atkin Olshin Schade Architects Santa Fe, New Mexico office noted: "This project does a remarkable job of transforming what was very generic public housing into handsome structures with landscaping. The key is the community art building, which ties it all together. This is part of something very large and momentous happening in Chicago right now, and is empowering an entire community."

The Arts Center was constructed in a central location where four of the original townhomes once stood and spans 2,200 square feet. It is the heart of DA + HC. The center features a spring-loaded dance floor, a specially padded acoustic ceiling, and a workshop area where residents, artists, and community members gather to perform, share ideas, troubleshoot projects, and use a variety of available design tools. Resident artists and other local artisans regularly offer workshops on videography, painting, ceramics, and other media. The Rebuild Foundation schedules events and spaces, which include yoga and mindfulness classes, summer workshops for children, and live performances.¹

The development team indicated a number of significant challenges.²

1. The existing buildings were poorly built and long abandoned. The original construction, especially of the masonry walls, was of poor detailing and required many of the walls to be rebuilt and shored up. For example, the brick abutted at the angled walls rather than weaving together, which, over time, caused them to split apart. In addition, some of the buildings had sustained extensive fire and water damage. In one instance, a broken water main had washed away the ground beneath four of the townhomes and the units' concrete foundations were essentially floating in the air. In addition to having most of the units and masonry walls rebuilt, frame walls were added as necessary and details and features were modernized throughout.
2. Accessibility was a challenge in adapting two-story townhomes that sit 15 to 18 feet above grade. First, the site is now entirely ADA accessible with the introduction of ramps as needed. To create accessible units, four townhomes were turned on their side—combining the first floors of several units at grade and then stacking nonaccessible units above them.
3. Safety and security were of high importance and required the rethinking of open, communal spaces in a distressed neighborhood because no real barriers exist between the site and the street, and the minimal fencing (at the back and near parking) is open and creates a mental barrier more than a physical one. Communal spaces were made highly visible, to highlight community activity and street presence—using openness and participation to combat gang activity that once plagued the site.

¹ <https://rebuild-foundation.org/events/>.

² The list of challenges is from an interview with Landon Bone Baker Architects, Chicago, Illinois.

Making It Work

DA + HC is not the first housing development in the country that features art or artists, but it is the first mixed-income public housing redevelopment with an arts center and a preference for artist-residents. This unique approach has proven to be a sustainable model for art-centered, mixed-income housing. The artists assist in the programming of the Arts Center, with the intent of fostering dialogue and collaboration between both groups.

Funding for the development of DA + HC included low-income housing tax credits. The other major funding source was CHA's HOPE VI Program (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere).³

What Others Can Learn From the Project

DA + HC is an outward-facing development that provides a public resource and an amenity. Envisioned as a place open and available to all, the Arts Center's glass walls create visibility to the center's events and inclusive, all-ages programming. In turn, foot traffic and public safety have improved, with more active engagement within the community and on the streets. Although the program is small in size, the introduction of arts programming allows the 32-unit, mixed-income housing project to play a larger role in the investment and revitalization of the South Side neighborhood. DA + HC is a testament to the power of shared space, the value in collaboration and partnerships, and the importance of a participatory development model to create innovative and enduring projects.

The landscape and site design connect DA + HC to the surrounding neighborhood and strengthen its function as a community hub. Children are offered creative and nature play opportunities—stone outcroppings; lush native plantings; and hard(er)-scape materials like concrete, gravel, and mulch that are less prescribed than typical playgrounds. The site is fully accessible with minimal fencing, and each resident has private outdoor space that melds with larger courtyards in the back and with the sidewalk and front street.

The Arts Center has become a community asset and cultural hub. It is used by residents and neighbors of all ages for yoga, classes, performances, discussion groups, exhibits, and more and by local institutions, such as the Hyde Park School of Dance and the South Shore Fine Arts Academy, to serve South Side children and youth. The introduction of arts to revitalize a community and the introduction of the new Arts Center as a community asset both are innovative features, especially within an affordable housing development.

Especially innovative was how the project flipped traditional development on its head. Rather than being initiated by a developer, the community nonprofit had a vision for the project, sought out an architect to articulate the vision, and partnered with an affordable housing developer and the CHA to bring the vision to fruition. The project embodies a successful collaboration between private, public, and nonprofit sectors committed to transforming the Chicago neighborhood into an arts incubator.

³ https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/hope6.

The project weaves in the existing fabric of neighborhoods—with a large majority of CHA public housing now demolished, DA + HC is important in that it saved not only a building but also part of the neighborhood and the city's history and story. Dante Harper Homes' size and construction allowed the buildings to be part of the neighborhood again—a rare opportunity and typology in Chicago's public housing past.⁴

Acknowledgments

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Postscript

To learn more about the HUD/AIA award recipients, visit <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/about/secaward.html> and <http://www.aia.org/practicing/awards/2016/hud-awards/>.

⁴ From an interview with Landon Bone Baker Architects, Chicago, Illinois.
