

Trends & Tips from Top ARDA Design Judges

Every February, a group of professionals from skilled industries like landscape architecture, interior design, and architecture gather at the ARDA national office to judge the entries that have been submitted to the Resort Design Division of the ARDA Awards program. With a range in expertise and experience, diverse perspective and styles, they work together to thoroughly review submissions in categories covering various aspects of resort design.

While some of the judges may have more technical experience in one specific area, their composite design backgrounds allow them to consider a resort design project from every angle to determine which entries have thoroughly satisfied the requirements for submission and demonstrated excellence in doing so. As the 2009 Awards Program gears up, some of these judges discuss trends in resort design and what they are looking for next year.

Going Green

A major trend the judges are noticing is environmental consciousness. “Going green” has become fashionable in almost every aspect of society and accordingly is an issue that has recently picked up speed in our industry. The 2008 ARDA National Convention and Exposition featured its first green educational session track; the ARDA New England Regional Committee chose to make “green” the theme of their recent annual June meeting (see p. 64 for details).

Not surprisingly, this awareness and emphasis on sustainability has extended into the world of resort design, with its influence extending to nearly every aspect of a design project—from the designers’ ideas down to the clients’ preferences. Jim Williams, an architect with JMWA

Architects, has seen environmentally conscious design really take off in his field, and landscape architect and land planner Bob Mortensen of Mortensen Associates, has seen clients increasingly seeking the use of conservation techniques and emphasizing LEED status. Interior designers are seeing the expanding use of and request for natural materials and green products.

Environmental Harmony

An important element of this work is sustainable design that creates harmony between a resort site and the natural environment. Mortensen says he pursues a look where the sites fit with their surroundings naturally, rather than “flashy unnatural designs that lack a timeless quality,” a goal common among many of the judges.

Being environmentally conscious may be costly, but an initial investment with careful designing can produce enduring results, rather than, as Mortensen cautions, “cutting corners in order to achieve a bottom line,” which can result in a project conflicting with its setting.

Jim Carson, of NCG Architects, says his firm seeks to create a “timeless design that responds to the unique stylistic traditional and natural site features...to create architecture that will appear just as relevant 25 years from now as today.” For many of the judges, the entries that stand out are ones that have not only achieved an exceptional level of design in the project but have also achieved a balanced interaction with their natural world.

Land Planning & Site Design

The world of resort design is not just “going green” figuratively but literally, too, as landscape design has become more popular in recent years. Mortensen

has seen his field rise in influence in design considerations.

“More developers are realizing that there is a real need for quality planning and design that will attract a wider end-user,” he says.

With the rise in so-called “lifestyle resorts,” where the goal is to provide the all-encompassing resort experience, focus is moving to pedestrian-friendly layouts that more outdoor gathering spaces, and “mixed-use trending away from heavy auto use.” Being able to create a site that is harmonious with the environment while also having beautiful features and functional elements is an important balance and goal. Williams asserts that the judges will be looking for projects like these that have “well-integrated landscape solutions.”

Amenities

Of course, in the dynamic world of design, there are numerous trends that run concurrently—greening is just one. Other trends noted by these design professionals include an emphasis on luxe and amenities. The contemporary look is still strong in interior design, and the judges will be looking for thoughtful design and careful planning to pull this look off without resorting to inferior materials.

The quality of materials used is always an important consideration. Carson has seen “a general improvement in the quality of interior finishes to keep up with the expectation of more discriminating consumers,” with new details such as sophisticated shower environments replacing traditional whirlpool tubs, and the evolution of on-site amenities, such as spa amenities and state-of-the-art fitness centers.

There are currently nine categories in the Resort Design division of the ARDA Awards program, ranging from Architecture to Interior Design to

Signage. While there currently are no categories in the resort design division specifically looking at achievements in green/sustainability design, it is being considered.

In the meantime, environmental sensitivity and the incorporation of green design will be a major element the judges look for in future entries. However, as one judge noted, "diversity in design is a good thing." There are myriad elements that make a project noteworthy and deserving of recognition, and the judges are looking forward to gathering in February 2009 to see "more fine entries!" **D**

Marielena Ivory is the meetings and awards manager with ARDA.

Tips for Future Entry Submissions

The elements listed in this article are observations by the judges, but they are not specifically required for entry—judges are more concerned with the overall quality of the design and innovative solutions, presented within the ARDA Awards guidelines.

Some of these requirements include

- A readable site plan,
- Clear photos of the main features, including "before" and "after" photos if requested, plus
- A concise description of the project and the project philosophy.

The judges agree that an exceptional entry "is one that presents a logical story, has a quality of design that is impressive," and most importantly, is complete as delineated in the rules of the nomination guide.

Check the Awards section of the Web site in early September to download nomination guides or to learn how to become a judge. The early bird deadline for submission for awards is December 19, 2008; please direct all queries to awards@awards.org.



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