

BEYOND TRADITION

Richard H. Driehaus cements his legacy on the built environment

BY LAURIE PETERSON



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE RICHARD H. DRIEHAUS FOUNDATION

What do the following projects have in common: a women's shelter in Englewood by Wheeler Kearns Architects; a West Side Jesuit high school by John Ronan; a student center at IIT by Rem Koolhaas; and a museum of decorative arts converted by Antunovich Associates from a Gilded Age mansion? All have been touched in some way by the philanthropy of Richard H. Driehaus, this year's winner of the AIA Chicago Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Driehaus name is famously linked with preservation and traditional architecture, so the breadth of his support of the built environment can come as a surprise. It all stems from his deep belief in the power of architecture and good design to transform people's lives.

The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Award for Architectural Excellence in Community Design is given each year to three Chicago-area projects that make "a significant contribution to the social, visual and cultural life of their neighborhoods through quality of design." The projects generally serve a disadvantaged population and are most often located in economically challenged neighborhoods. The jury, chaired by Thomas Beeby, FAIA, spends a day touring all finalists, speaking to the architects and clients. Dan Wheeler, FAIA, served on one of the juries and said this first-hand experience "ensures that what we're seeing in the documents is actually happening."

RIGHT La Casa Housing and Resource Center by UrbanWorks, 2013 recipient of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Award for Architectural Excellence in Community Design



PHOTO BY ANTHONY MAY

Jeff Bone, AIA, of Landon Bone Baker Architects says the awards “put a spotlight on projects, clients and communities that are usually under the radar.” Other firms that have won multiple Community Design Awards include Ross Barney Architects, Studio Gang and John Ronan Architects.

There are multiple benefits to receiving one of these awards. The architecture firm receives a cash prize of \$15,000, \$3,000 or \$2,000. Bone’s firm has used the money to subsidize its office’s summer program that engages high school students in interacting with a nonprofit organization. Each winning project is also profiled in a short video that is posted on the awards’ website. The videos create a “holistic narrative,” says Bone, showcasing the team effort and including interviews with architects, clients and often end users as well.

If it seems unusual to commission videos of small, neighborhood-scale projects, that is in keeping with the unique quality of the awards themselves: there are no

comparable awards given in any other city. And that itself is characteristic of Driehaus’s approach to philanthropy. Kim Coventry, executive director of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, emphasizes his love of innovation and says, “No two days at work are the same. He keeps us in uncharted territory all the time.”

“Placemaking” is the word most often used to describe Driehaus’s wide interests and his philanthropies. He is a passionate advocate for the built environment in its largest sense: for the art of architecture first and foremost, but also interests that range from big-picture city planning to the details of landscaping and lighting. He is a staunch supporter of the Congress for New Urbanism and a firm proponent of replacing typical zoning regulations with form-based building codes. He believes in raising the public’s expectations and convincing people that “good design doesn’t cost, it pays.”

Driehaus’s interest in promoting quality design for those who don’t always have access to it is reflected in

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COOPERHEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS, CREATIVE COMMONS

OPPOSITE Harvest Commons by Landon Bone Baker Architects, 2014 first place winner of the Richard Driehaus Foundation Award for Architectural Excellence in Community Design

ABOVE McCormick Tribune Campus Center by Rem Koolhaas

years of operating support for organizations such as ARCHEWORKS, archi-treasures and Designs for Dignity. And his belief in the importance of public parks and open spaces led him to support organizations promoting Chicago parks, the Chicago River, the Canal Corridor and The 606.

As part of his efforts to promote design excellence, Driehaus sponsors competitions for high-profile projects. The first of these was for IIT’s student center, and although he had no role in the jury’s decision, he was extremely enthusiastic about Rem Koolhaas’s winning design. Other competitions include the Burnham Memorial, Children’s Memorial Hospital and the Lurie Garden at Millennium Park (among other ways in which he supported the park’s development). The most recent competition was for artists’ live/work spaces in Pullman.

While supporting competitions and awards that often recognize cutting-edge architecture, Driehaus ensures that traditional and classical principles remain part of the design world dialogue. The most prominent example of this is the Richard H. Driehaus Prize at the University of Notre Dame. Unlike the many Chicago-based awards associated with Driehaus, this prize is international in scope.

In addition to awards, Driehaus’s philanthropies increase awareness of important Chicago architecture through sponsorship of exhibitions and publications. Examples include the Bertrand Goldberg retrospective at the Art Institute of Chicago and the book “The

Complete Architecture of Adler & Sullivan.”

One of the Foundation’s most high-profile activities was last October’s symposium, “The Chicago Tradition in Architecture: Inspiration or Artifact?” The goal of this event was to bring Chicago’s heritage into the conversations of the inaugural Chicago Architecture Biennial.

Preservation of historic buildings has always been the cause closest to Driehaus’s heart. Landmarks Illinois has administered the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Awards for 22 years. That organization has also benefited from faithful ongoing operating support, as have many others, including Preservation Chicago and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “Advocacy is a long-term proposition,” notes Coventry. The Historic Chicago Bungalow Association is another organization that benefits from his largesse. And county courthouses in small towns throughout Illinois have been renewed as community anchors thanks to Landmarks Illinois’ Richard H. Driehaus Courthouse Initiative.

Preservation is a cause that he practices as well as preaches. His first large-scale restoration project was of his house in Lake Geneva, Wis., a McKim, Mead and White design from 1906. This challenging commission went to Environ Inc.’s John Nelson, FAIA, whose success marked the beginning of a long collaboration and friendship. “He is always curious, and he has a rare enthusiasm,” says Nelson, who marvels at how much Driehaus enjoys every phase of a project.



PHOTO BY WAYNE CARL E

Richard Driehaus has an unusual ability to zero in on the finest detail while never losing sight of the big picture.



PHOTO BY NATHAN KIRKMAN, COURTESY OF JOHN RONAN ARCHITECTS



PHOTO BY ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF, AUGUST 2014, COURTESY OF THE RICHARD H. DRIEHAUS MUSEUM

ABOVE The Richard H. Driehaus Museum in River North

TOP RIGHT Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School by John Ronan Architects, 2011 winner of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Award for Architectural Excellence in Community Design

Driehaus was not content to simply live in historic buildings; he wanted to work in one, too. Driehaus Capital Management gave up the amenities of a Loop office tower (“we felt anonymous in that building,” he says) for the Romanesque splendor of the Ransom Cable House at 25 E. Erie St. The 1886 building by Henry Ives Cobb has a striking exterior of pink Kasota stone but had lost its interior features. Antunovich Associates restored the outside and united the residence with its coach house and neighboring townhouse, creating a courtyard in which one of Driehaus’s many antique cars is often on display. Reception spaces and meeting rooms on the first floor showcase Driehaus’s important collection of

decorative arts that include furniture, lighting and Tiffany stained glass.

By far the most challenging and costly undertaking was the restoration of the Samuel M. Nickerson Mansion and its conversion to the Driehaus Museum. This labor of love would achieve a trio of important goals: preserving an important example of Gilded Age architecture and interior design; evoking a sense of historic Chicago at the corner of Erie and Wabash; and creating a museum that would be the perfect repository for Driehaus’s significant collection of decorative arts from that era.

Joseph Antunovich, AIA, led an enormous team of consultants and experts. The porous beige sandstone exterior had turned black within a decade of completion. To remove a century’s accumulation of coal dust and grime while preserving architectural details required an unprecedented step: for the first time in the United States, an entire building was cleaned with laser technology. The interior was in a similar state: the original character was remarkably intact, but it required a wealth of expertise and craftsmanship to restore. The final touches are the period lamp posts, garden wall and landscaping. The museum’s popularity has surpassed expectations, which gives great joy to its founder.

Richard Driehaus has an unusual ability to zero in on the finest detail while never losing sight of the big picture. At any given moment he might be discussing the outlines of an innovative new program, or reviewing the placement of a Tiffany lamp in the Driehaus Museum. It’s all in a day’s work for a philanthropist whose passion for Chicago and the built environment knows no bounds. **CA**