

## Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Design Evanston's Design Awards

by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) August 16th, 2023

During the past year, Design Evanston members have been collaborating with city planning staff and Council Member Clare Kelly (1st Ward) to develop a proposal for a new Community Design Commission in Evanston. See the RoundTable story [here](#).

Two of Design Evanston's long-standing programs are similar to those mentioned in research on Community Design Commissions: nonbinding Project Reviews and Design Awards. Project Reviews were featured in [last month's column](#). This essay examines Design Evanston's long history of presenting Design Awards – juried by local architects and designers – with the goal of demonstrating how good design has a positive impact on the community.

Beginning a year after its founding in 1980, Design Evanston began sponsoring Design Evanston Awards programs. Seventeen Design Evanston Awards events were held over 36 years. Gaps in the organization's chronology suggest there might have been more.



Postcard invitation to the 2005 Design Evanston Awards program. Credit: Jack Weiss

Reflecting on what Design Evanston's founder, Bob Teska, said: "The key objectives identified [in 1980] and still applicable to Design Evanston today were: 1. Encourage private, municipal and institutional investment in good design. 2. Enhance public awareness of the commitment to good design." The Design Evanston Awards program supports those objectives.

One of the 24 award recipients in 2001 was the City of Evanston for a project in the Landscape Architecture category: The Green Bay Corridor. The jurors commented, "Unifying design makes rail embankment slopes a visual asset ... defines Evanston through this major corridor. Strong, repeating design elements utilize native plants for high amenity and modest maintenance."



Metra/Union Pacific rail embankment, Green Bay Corridor. Credit: Jim Gamble

The mission of the awards program was stated in the 2017 presentation:

“Through our Design Evanston Awards, Design Evanston identifies significant aesthetic and functional improvements in the Evanston community and recognizes them with our Design Evanston Awards. Specifically designed not to be self-serving for design professionals, the awards are presented to owners responsible for the design excellence of local projects.

“These awards may be presented for new commercial construction, additions, adaptive re-use, multi-family structures, sensitive in-fill, or single-family residences, among other categories. In addition, awards may be granted in urban design, interior design, landscape design, signage/graphic design, and merchandising design.”

From 1981 through 1987, the Evanston Chamber of Commerce hosted the Design Evanston Awards. During those years, a small number of awards (four to nine) were presented annually and up to 200 people attended the events. In 1985 Design Evanston was invited by the Village of Flossmoor, Illinois, to consult on its design awards program.

Starting in 2001, the number of awards expanded to more than 20 and the event was held at the Music Institute’s Nichols Concert Hall, with up to 125 people attending.

In 2017, the most recent Design Evanston Awards were presented at the Evanston Art Center. A slowdown in building construction and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic brought the awards program to a halt. Plans are being made for the program to resume this fall.

## Design Evanston 2005 Design Awards



Every year *Design Evanston* recognizes recent projects of quality with a design award that is given to the owner of the project. We are pleased to share this past year's winners with you.

Awards are granted in five categories: Architectural Design, Urban Design,

Landscape Design, Graphic Design, and Merchandising Design.

These projects will be officially recognized at 6pm Thursday, April 6th in a presentation ceremony at The Music Institute of Chicago, 1490 Chicago Avenue, in Evanston. A food and beverage reception will follow the presentation.

Cost to the public is \$15.00. Please RSVP to the the Evanston Chamber of Commerce at 847.328.1500 ext 22. *Design Evanston* is grateful to the Chamber for its sponsorship of this event.

*Design Evanston* is a not-for-profit design advocacy organization devoted to

encouraging and recognizing good design in the City of Evanston. The organization is composed of design professionals and other concerned citizens who live or work in Evanston.

For membership information contact David Galloway, president, at 847 492 9509 or [d\\_galloway@ebcglobal.net](mailto:d_galloway@ebcglobal.net)



The Music Institute of Chicago



The Nail Bar



Nevins Pub



Fire Station No. 3



Revelle Residence



817 Hinman Condominium



North Shore Dentistry for Children



Optima Horizons



The Orrington Hotel



The Orrington Hotel



Koi Restaurant



The Architect's Wife



Burgess Residence



St. Mary's Church Interior



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Narra Restaurant



Narra Restaurant

*Design Evanston* is grateful to the following organizations for their financial support in producing this colorful recognition of the 2005 Design Award winners: Church Street Plaza • Coldwell Banker Real Estate • Davis Street Land Company • The Evanston Chamber of Commerce • Evanston Lumber • First Bank & Trust of Evanston • Golub & Company • J. Hawk DDI • The John Buck Company • Lakeshore Partners: John Adamson; Sandra Brown; Emily Guthrie • Anonymous • Ross Barney & Jankowski Architects • Renaissance Realty and Construction • Teska Associates • Diane Williams

In 2006 the RoundTable published this full-page summary of the previous years' Design Evanston Awards. Credit: Evanston RoundTable

The residence at 1331 Asbury Ave. was one of 28 Design Evanston Award winners in 2017. In the category of Single Family Residential, the jurors commented, "The stately façade of this structure was shaped by its location within the Ridge Historic District, a vibrant neighborhood noteworthy for its eclectic building stock. This context granted the freedom to pursue the clients' concept for the house – a current day take on traditional Mediterranean design."



The residence at 1331 Asbury Ave. Credit: Searl Lamaster Howe

In contrast, and by way of demonstrating the variety of Design Evanston Award winners in 2017, a project in the New Construction category was the Ryan Center for the Performing Arts on the Northwestern campus. The jurors said, “Guided by the university’s master plan, the building forms a new quadrangle with other fine and performing arts facilities, fostering a more collaborative arts community.”



The Ryan Center for the Performing Arts. Credit: Goettsch Partners

Complete presentations of six recent Design Evanston Awards programs can be found on the Design Evanston website [here](#).

It appears a Community Design Commission won't become a reality until the new Comprehensive Plan authorizes it in at least two years. The Design Evanston board was disappointed that the city Planning & Development Committee failed to consider the July 10 proposal to create a Community Design Commission. Fortunately, design awards, like those that Design Evanston has been presenting for over 40 years, will continue to provide an important benefit to the Evanston community. The Design Evanston Awards demonstrate and educate the public and its political representatives about what constitutes "good design."

*In [last month's column](#), Design Evanston's long history of providing Design Reviews – another benefit mentioned during Community Design Commission discussions – was featured.*

*Design Evanston's "Eye on Evanston" articles focus on Evanston's design history and advocate for good design in our city. Visit [designevanston.org](http://designevanston.org) to learn more about the organization.*

Source: Evanston RoundTable 8.16.23