



2017 Veronica Rudge Green Prize: The High Line

The Veronica Rudge Green Prize, bestowed every two years on an urban design project completed within the last ten years, is the only international design prize of prominence that considers not only the aspirations of a design proposition but also the real impact that a given design has post-implementation. This year, the Harvard Graduate School of Design is pleased to announce that the **2017 Veronica Rudge Green Prize in Urban Design** will be awarded to the High Line. This project has been selected not simply because of its exceptional design quality and its lasting impacts on the spatial and social character of a long neglected district in New York City, attributes which have already been recognized widely. This year's jury has chosen to recognize the High Line because it was a cooperatively-orchestrated, multifaceted endeavor in which citizens, top-tier design professionals, and public authorities worked together to innovate and successfully implement a new archetype for urban design, one that is now being replicated globally.

As a design intervention, the High Line is equal parts infrastructure, landscape, and architecture built around an impassioned commitment to post-industrial retrofitting, urban revitalization, the recuperation of public space, and the allure of the natural environment. Taking advantage of just a few miles of defunct and neglected railroad track, the High Line has strategically reorganized and dramatically expanded usable urban space even as it has transformed the image of New York City's entire west side. But the High Line is much more than a physical intervention at the scale of urban design. The High Line is also a project of cultural advocacy and citizen design insurgency, set in motion in 1999 by Robert Hammond and wide range of resident advocates who together formed the Friends of the High Line, and who were collectively motivated by a desire to activate new public spaces and by so doing enhance the overall quality of life for the residents of the neighborhood

Picking up speed in the early 2000's when New York City was seeking to restore optimism about its future after 9/11, after years of stalled urban real estate investments, political opposition, and policy inaction on the part of public authorities, the Friends of the High Line moved a visionary idea into a reality, and by so doing almost single-handedly stimulated a new burst of cultural, social, and economic dynamism built around deceptively simple reappropriation of an abandoned railroad track that continues to grab the public imagination. In 2016 alone, the High Line hosted 7.6 million visitors. In terms of tangible outcomes, the High Line's urban design impacts reverberated first through on contiguous parcels, and over the years have expanded to an entire district and ultimately the city as a whole. To date, the spillover effects have included: 33 new major development projects; 12,000 jobs; 2,558 new residential units; 1,000 hotel rooms; 500,000 SF of new office space; \$5 billion real estate investment; and \$1 billion tax revenue for NYC over the past 20 years.

In honoring the High Line, the jury recognizes that these transformative outcomes were realized through creative exchange and commitment among all the partners of the project during multiple years of collective work. The High Line would not have been built without unyielding citizen advocacy or institutional engagement with a variety of city agencies. Nor would it would have captured the attention of cities worldwide without the ingenious and masterful accomplishments of a team of architects, landscape architects, and urban designers that included James Corner Field Operations, Diller Scofidio and Renfro, and Piet Oudolf—all of whom worked together to give the High Line its extraordinary qualities as a public space. The rare alignment of actors, each reaching distinction at the highest professional level, made the High Line both remarkable and worthy of this prize, embodying the best in the field of urban design while also contributing to the collective urban realm.

Even so, because of their originating efforts and continued leadership, the jury has *elected to award the monetary prize of \$50,000 associated with the award to the Friends of the High Line*, in recognition of their initiating role and passionate guidance of the project at every stage. The Friends of the High Line have been pioneering and stalwart, but also self-critical and reflective, particularly about the potential downsides associated with their own successes. They have constantly reinvented themselves within the rapidly changing context that they helped to catalyze, and at the same time have sought to share knowledge of what they could have done better with other cities pursuing similarly path-breaking projects. From their initial efforts to save a doomed elevated railway track, through several citizen-led design competitions and ultimately the selection, support, and execution of a groundbreaking infrastructure project, through an inventive self-financing package that allowed them to maintain and expand the High Line without public funds, to the social and cultural initiatives subsequently used to engage



the neighborhood via educational and events programming, and most recently by forming the High Line Network, a consultancy that helps guide similar developments in other cities, the remarkable profile of this advocacy organization and the individuals behind it deserve special credit. As befitting an urban design prize, the Friends of the High Line supported design excellence from the very beginning of the project; yet just as significantly for the field of urban design, they have fostered and expanded the High Line's social and political relevance through community outreach programs and a wider dissemination program for cities around the United States.

In summarizing the deliberation process that led to this decision, the jury noted that a great urban design project is one where multiple actors spanning across public and private domains are involved and committed to lasting urban change. It further noted that urban design projects need time to mature and to take root in the community, as well as to remain relevant within a context that is constantly changing. Even in cases where they may begin as singular objects, they are never autonomous and are invariably existing in the intersection of multiple systems, disciplines, and interests that are often volatile and conflicting. A truly successful design therefore needs more than just the aspiration of the designers, but also the conviction and collaboration of multiple players, at multiple points of a never-ending process, to sustain the life of a project. In the complex interrelationships that characterize urban environments today, it is important to recognize works that are not only exceptional design propositions, but also works that resonate across disciplines and that grow, respond, and adapt to the dynamic and often unpredictable conditions of our cities to create vibrant and inclusive urban spaces. The High Line embodies all these principles.

With this award, the Harvard Graduate School of Design acknowledges not just design excellence, but also excellence in process. Set in motion by citizens, infused with a commitment to experimentation, realized through constant negotiation between city officials, motivated designers, and mobilized citizens, and educating other cities about implementation pathways, the High Line sets a new standard for evaluating innovation in the field of urban design.

2017 Jury

Diane Davis (chair)
Stephen Gray
Jeannette Kuo
Paola Viganó
Charles Waldheim