

# MCHAP

Mies  
Crown Hall  
Americas  
Prize

Premio de  
las Américas  
Mies  
Crown Hall

Prix des  
Amériques  
Mies  
Crown Hall

Prêmio das  
Américas  
Mies  
Crown Hall

## MIES CROWN HALL AMERICAS PRIZE ANNOUNCES 2018 FINALISTS

### *Jury Statements*

**Ricky Burdett CBE, Professor of Urban Studies, London School of Economics, and Director of LSE Cities and the Urban Age Programme (2018 MCHAP Jury Chair):**

There are many prizes for architecture. This one is different. Every two years one of the world's leading architecture schools, the Illinois Institute of Technology, gives a different group of people an extraordinary opportunity.

I have been privileged to embark on a ten-day journey with five other passionate experts to explore, question, and debate what 'quality' means in architecture in the Americas in the early twenty-first century. We were fortunate to meet people of exceptional talent and imagination—both designers and clients—to understand the stories and narratives that have given rise to buildings of real value and meaning.

We crisscrossed South and North America, visited buildings in some of the world's most vibrant cities, and have come to Detroit to reach our conclusions. Few places on Earth are as relevant today as Detroit to reflect on what architecture and cities mean to people's lives and opportunities. Like so many others, we are encouraged by the exceptional turnaround that this city is experiencing after such a painful period of decline.

This deep connection between architecture, society, and the environment has in fact driven the jury's search for excellence. As you will hear from my colleagues, we were quite clear in what we were not looking for. We were not looking for architectural pyrotechnics. We were not interested in one-off iconic objects that could soon go out of fashion. We were not looking for technical ingenuity, however brilliant and ground-breaking.

We were interested in buildings that work—for the city, for the institution, for the neighborhood, community and the individual occupants. Buildings that have meaning and complexity and enrich the lives of the people who use and inhabit them. We looked carefully at how projects related to their natural and man-made environments, their social and ecological landscapes and eco-systems.

We were keen to understand how architects used local materials and skills, making the most of available resources. We were mindful of how buildings would adapt over time, how they would age and respond to changes in everyday practices and lifestyles. We were looking for projects that—regardless of scale or budget—might set new typologies for universities, museums, public institutions, galleries and housing as we move forward in the twenty-first century.

We were particularly keen to understand how the progressive visions of clients in very different contexts—a university in the far north of Peru, an entrepreneur in Detroit, or the grand Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC—were translated into exciting and surprising internal and external spaces and places. For us, the space in between is as important as the front-of-

house. We wanted to see and hear how a cash-strapped state agency in Mexico and a social enterprise and a private foundation in Brazil's megacity of São Paulo invest in new facilities that not only perform for their patrons but also give something back to their city.

The Mies Crown Hall Americas Prize has the ambition to recognize quality architecture on a continent with over 1 billion inhabitants, where more than 80 percent live in cities. This is, of course, impossible. The differences between political culture, economic development, democratic engagement, and climate in the cities of North and South America are vast. Yet, the process of developing visions, commissioning architects, and delivering buildings establishes a common ground. As a jury we have tried to evaluate buildings of dramatically different scales, ambitions, and budgets on the same terms—asking the same questions and eliciting comparable answers from the building protagonists, designers and clients alike.

The 20,000-mile journey has been instructive, rewarding, and refreshing! I think I speak for all when I say that we have come away with a sense of optimism. Architecture in the early twenty-first century in the Americas is alive and well. There are clear signals that the design profession is responding to the profound social and environmental challenges of our age with confidence, imagination and modesty. Importantly, we found that all completed buildings were enjoyed and appreciated by their users and received a very positive reception.

In some ways, we were surprised that the architectural language of some of these very contemporary projects we admired are deeply rooted in the spatial concerns of the mid- or even early twentieth century. Many buildings celebrated the 'sectional', three-dimensional experience over the planar and the two-dimensional. Long ramps and generous vertical circulation spaces wound their ways across many levels, doubling up as places to meet, stop and reflect. Many of the architects enriched their client's program by expanding the potential of the Modernist '*promenade architecturale*'.

Natural daylight and natural ventilation were, wherever possible, prioritized over the hermetic box. The interplay of sun and shadow on internal and external surfaces marked the changing of the seasons and passing of time. Interior complexity, in many of the projects, was prioritized over symbolic facadism. Punctuated solid surfaces emphasized the connection between interior and the exterior. There is a return to the 'brutal' honesty of durable material like exposed concrete, often mixed with local sands or aggregates. Without resorting to the linguistic reduction of Mies van der Rohe's 'less is more', so admirably exemplified by his Crown Hall building at IIT, many of the projects explored the spatial potential of economy of means with maximum impact.

It is these elemental qualities that attracted the jury to a small group of projects that we wish to recognize as finalists. We are confident that the six buildings—in North and South America—stand out of the already outstanding list of shortlisted schemes.

**Jose Castillo, Principal, Arquitectura 911sc, Mexico City:**

This is a journey that started searching for good architecture and came back having discovered great clients, institutions and developers. In no way has this come at the expense of experiencing projects which all have unexpected spatial complexities and material decisions. These are all projects that are addressing what it means to think about the problems of architecture today, buildings with conceptual, intellectual, and formal connections to both previous and contemporary work:

from the re-imagination of the architectural promenade at the ramp in SESC to the rooftop that becomes a grand staircase at Teopanzolco Cultural Center; from the work on the escalator as an urban-architectural interface at IMS Paulista that relates it to both the Pompidou Center by Piano & Rogers, and to the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank by Norman Foster, to the free-section qualities of projects such as SESC and the spaces at the African American Museum that relate to previous work and ideas by OMA and Lina Bo Bardi.

In a similar fashion, questions of scale, light, and shadows and the way they relate to the intimate and the institutional are present in works such as True North and the University of Piura.

Because of the objectives of MCHAP, we have insisted on the notion that relevant architecture is one that jumpstarts new conversations; from the moment a building's vision and program is created, such as in the African American Museum, through the process in which it is built, such as in True North, and most importantly after a building is finished, establishing new audiences and publics as in the case of SESC in São Paulo. We have been fortunate these past few days to being much more than a jury; we have been witnesses to the capacity of architecture to become the platform for social life.

**Ron Henderson, Professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology and Director of the Master of Landscape Architecture and Urbanism:**

We have recognized six projects situated in four different ecosystems: the subtropical forest of Brazil, dry forest of Peru, high altitude montane ecosystem of Mexico, and the temperate deciduous forest region of North America. Although highly urbanized, the natural systems of wind, sunlight, water resources, and other factors continue to exert influences on these projects in the cities. We also experienced two seasons: winter in South America and summer in North America.

In São Paulo, both SESC and IMS Paulista exploited the necessity for shaded and wind ventilated space in humid climates to provide elevated, sheltered, and breezy open courtyards encompassing entire elevated floor levels that densify and extend the public realm.

Forty years ago, a new university in Piura was founded with the planting of a grid of 130 hectares of carob trees to create a suitable microclimate in the dry desert of northern Peru. This landscape established the milieu for the Learning Village at University of Piura, which was amplified by the clustering of discreet volumes of auditoria, classrooms, and administrative offices whose interstices performed as social landscapes hosting students and faculty from across the University. The inevitable seismic activity in this region also demanded isolation of these clustered programs—establishing an aggregated form of 11 buildings whose seismic gaps spilled light and ventilation into the public spaces.

As with the São Paulo and Peruvian projects, the Teopanzolco Cultural Center established a suitable microclimate for public space. Here, a large covered court oriented toward the Aztec archaeological site is an act of generosity to the public. The preservation of the patrimony of existing mature trees grounded the project in its site with immediacy.

The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture convincingly commands a corner of the Washington Monument grounds as a pavilion monument / museum. On a highly constrained physical footprint within a much larger contextual site, the museum

serves as both respite and messenger for the pilgrimage to the powerful narratives housed in the museum.

Lastly, we traveled here to Detroit on the shores of the Great Lakes—home of 20 percent of the world's freshwater supply—and a continental climate of four seasons. Here, at True North, the eight separate buildings were spaced precisely to generously expose residents to sunlight, ventilation, and a diverse arboreal canopy of deciduous shade trees that enliven and enrich the spaces that both separate and bond this community of housing.

Each of these projects convincingly address the global environmental concerns that we must address not only in these contemporary times, but for generations and generations of the future.

**Rodrigo Pérez de Arce, Professor, Facultad de Arquitectura, Diseño y Estudios Urbanos, Pontificia Universidad Católica, Chile:**

We usually understand particular buildings as unique responses—of course we are also talking in this case about particular standards of achievement—but there is another understanding about them that affects the way we operate and conceptualize architecture. For good buildings also are repositories of architectural and human experience and as such belong to particular lineages. So, for example, SESC São Paulo materializes certain agendas about the social condenser that were first conceptualized in Europe in the 1920s, whilst Piura's University cluster follows Louis I. Kahn's explorations on informality and schooling. But buildings also supply us with tools that are useful to shape the future, such as with the vertical assembly of facilities for dense metropolitan districts or the integration of building and landscape in less dense situations. Buildings explore typologies, they teach, they lead, and they guide.

Those are vertical linkages between past present and future. The real time communication between client and architect is equally relevant and productive, as we have been able to ascertain thanks to MCHAP's unique methodology of site visits and interviews. At its best it leads to a very productive complicity between the actors in the forging of new spaces such as verified in True North Detroit, Piura, Teopanzolco Cultural Centre, and the African American History and Culture Museum. This relationship enables the actors to meet needs, to construct upon needs, to open up new dimensions of program. This sophisticated collaboration was ratified in the above mentioned cases together with all other nominated schemes, by the unusually positive reception of those by the public. And that is a fantastic achievement of itself.

**Claire Weisz, Founding Principal, WXY, New York:**

Public space, forming the capacity of architecture to engage and include people in an activist sense, describes the success of these finalist projects. They demonstrated an expanded view of architecture where both program needs and site constraints were the ingredients for engaging more people. As we found during our visits this was not only what we saw as excellence but it was also how the teams also measured success. Quoting Degas, "Drawing is not form, it's the way you see form." If one substitutes public space, illuminates a shared understanding amongst the six to use the design, realization, and caring for of the public realm as the way to see the form of their projects, their cities—Piura, São Paulo, Cuernavaca, Washington, and Detroit—and their local neighborhoods.

Public space is reimagined everywhere in each of these projects. From the University of Piura, where the design between classrooms is a new kind of social space incorporating its forest, to

SESC, that reinvents the value of public access to water. The architectural effect was the opposite of skin deep. This was as true for the smallest, True North, and the largest, the African American Museum. Here in Detroit this meant perfectly scaled relationships between two apartments sharing space or having a rock garden in lieu of a fence set up new context both for those renting and for the neighbors who had never wavered in believing that their street was a fine place to live. In a city where manufacturing and design is part of its heritage, the value and relevance of using the Quonset hut as an vaulted volume was made meaningful when connected to form large and small shared spaces, evoking a new form of porches and shared yards. In Washington, DC, the scale of public space needs to operate on a national consciousness. Therefore the massing and quality of the building form has a level of public engagement at an almost impossible level. Here public space is a corona and has become protagonist in redefining the idea of the American temple. Reflecting on all the semifinalists it is gratifying to see that the soul of practice is a relationship and its practice instrumental to society across the Americas.

## **ABOUT MCHAP**

The Mies Crown Hall Americas Prize (MCHAP) is a biennial prize that acknowledges the best built works of architecture in the Americas. MCHAP was conceived by Illinois Institute of Technology College of Architecture in 2013.

Visit <http://arch.iit.edu/prize/mchap/> for more information.

## **ABOUT ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Founded in 1890, IIT is a PhD-granting university with more than 7,300 students in engineering, science, architecture, psychology, design, humanities, business, and law. IIT's interprofessional, technology-focused curriculum is designed to advance knowledge through research and scholarship, while preparing students from throughout the world for a life of professional achievement, service to society, and individual fulfillment.

Visit [www.iit.edu](http://www.iit.edu) for information on all available academic programs.

## **COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE**

IIT Architecture builds on a legacy of disciplined experimentation in materials and technologies to educate and inspire the next generation of architects and landscape architects. From its landmark campus and home at S. R. Crown Hall, IIT Architecture champions an interdisciplinary approach to education and research that is simultaneously local and global in its impact. IIT Architecture students are educated to address complex, contemporary challenges of designing and constructing across all scales. Both faculty and students enjoy a longstanding relationship with professional practice in Chicago, a city with a vibrant history of innovation in architecture, design, landscape architecture, and urbanism.

IIT Architecture offers a five-year Bachelor of Architecture degree, four Master's degrees (Master of Architecture, Master of Landscape Architecture + Urbanism, Master of Science in Architecture, and an MARCH/MLA Dual Degree), and Chicago's only PhD in Architecture.

Visit [www.arch.iit.edu](http://www.arch.iit.edu) for information on all available academic programs.

## **SPONSORS**

MCHAP is supported by Kohler Co., the Alphawood Foundation, the Mies van der Rohe Society at the Illinois Institute of Technology, and AIA Chicago.

Visit <http://arch.iit.edu/prize> for more information.

