

History & Theory 2

What, or who do you think architecture awards are for?

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Introduction:

This essay gives an overall analysis on what, or who I think architecture awards are for. I will be arguing my points on who I believe they are for and what deserves them, whilst backing my points made with relevant information found either from articles, books, or corporate websites of the awarding bodies. You will notice that I am against the awarding system and who or what receives them; but this will all be backed up with any relevant information I have found, giving the reason for my opinions.

What deserves an architectural award.

According to Self (2014), "Design awards have become valuable means to distinguish the quality of their design work from that of their competitors". Architecture awards are just a way for the rich to become richer, if you look at any architectural award they are won by big companies with a big budget. Take the Bloomberg in London for example, owned by an international company with lots of money. It's achieved an RIBA London Award 2018, an RIBA National Award 2018 along with a Breeam National Award; being named the "World's highest BREEAM-rated major office building" (BREEAM, 2018). An architectural award shouldn't be for the major un-limited budget buildings, they should also be for the smaller, limited budget buildings. The problem with architectural awards is that they are all based on the aesthetics in my opinion, if you were to put a £35,000,000 building up against a £400,000 building; you can almost be sure who the winner would be. The £35,000,000 building would most definitely be built with the most expensive materials. Whereas the £400,000 building may have a lower budget material option, but overall a better design. Since the whole climate and environmental issue has occurred over the past, sustainability has become a very big part of life, and is ever-growing bigger. All those large firms are looking for a way to provide some good to the public for once, and what is easier than providing a big new shiny building along with an award to show off? As quoted from The Awards Effect "As marketers pinch their pennies, they will be looking for sound returns on their budgets more than ever", does this aim at the fact the whole award scandal for marketers is just a way for them to seem bigger and better (Ramshaw, et al., 2009). In my opinion sustainability awards are investigated wrong; going back to the Bloomberg building, it was awarded purely for the fact it had sustainable technology. It housed "Smart Airflow", combined heat and power, it is a "breathing building" and has water conservation (BREEAM, 2018). This can all be achieved with money, which not what architecture is... flashy technology. The building materials of the Bloomberg are mostly, if not purely stone and glazing (RIBA, 2018). What sustainability aspects doing that show? If it wasn't for the technology used in the building, the technology that was capable of being used because of the budget of 1 Billion GBP; the building being in theory would just be on big greenhouse. Where I do not agree with the whole sustainability award; I can agree that is unfair if in a scenario a small dwelling which had the same technologies and materials as the Bloomberg. It would barely, if not have any recognition by anyone, let alone any award. Awards should be for the buildings that are designed to a tight budget, even if they do include sustainable technologies, it should not just be those that it relies on. The building should incorporate a beautiful design, along with sustainability aspects all to a budget which is far less than

those of which we see today, exemplifying Bloomberg with it's 1 Billion GBP budget (Wainwright, 2017).

Design awards on the other hand are something which I can agree strongly with; design awards should be awarded to the building with the best design. For example, the Bloomberg building has achieved an RIBA Sterling Prize, which I see as suitable since the building is aesthetically pleasing (RIBA, 2018) . But again, that is a building with a near enough unlimited budget, I would appreciate it more if the building was to a much lower budget. In my opinion design awards should again include the smaller projects, as a lot of those do have designs suitable for an award. I understand that RIBA do hold an RIBA House of The Year award, but again those houses are normally on quite a high budget. Take for example, VEX, a RIBA London Award 2018 holder; I can agree with this building, purely for the bravery of how it is designed in a such a way it stands out with the surround terraced houses, but at the same time it's not a pain for the eye (RIBA, 2018). Comparing it to Gin Distillery, a house which was again awarded the RIBA London Award 2018, it shows architecture in the purist form, and the skill required to incorporate modernism within an existing Victorian gin distiller (RIBA, 2018) . As well as the fact the project only on a budget of 100,000 GBP, the minimalist, purist approach to the design captures a wider picture; something which the Bloomberg building would never be able to capture (Block, 2018) . With how I believe that more rural areas should be investigated into for potential nominees, it brings me to a small area in Wales, Pembrokeshire; with a building a head of its time being constructed in Druidstone. Malator, also known as the Teletubby house is the definition of ahead of its time, as well as sustainability; being constructed in 1998 it consisted of materials we would consider to be modern currently. Malator was designed by Future Systems, which had been built into the ground, benefiting any heat gain possible (IDEASGN, 2013). But there are no awards on record that Malator had been nominated for, no RIBA awards; but for a house that was built in 1998, using the same technology as any modern-day nominee. Looking at the Gin Distillery in London, the reason that it was nominated for an award was because of what? The fact that the architect managed to revive the old Victorian building with a few alterations. Does that mean that Malator would be able to nominate for an award if the architect were to come back and change a few more things on it? I highly doubt it; because of how the award nominees are only chosen from built up areas. In my opinion comparing Pembrokeshire to London, not many people visit Pembrokeshire, especially Druidstone compared to London. With the idea of having more people recognise the building with an award in London boosts up the market for those architects. An overlooking the smaller practices, intimidating those smaller practices to design, produce anything special in fear that it will not be good enough to be looked at let alone be nominated for an award.

Who do you think architecture awards are for?

I believe that awards should be for the smaller businesses, not the big firms. An award should be something which allows you to gain recognition by others, not something that allows you to prove nothing. Awards should be given to the businesses in rural areas that can design to the same standards and are producing to the same standards as the bigger companies, the big companies do not see the award in the way a smaller business would. A design award would allow the business to grow, give a name for themselves in the eye of the public, to enable them to take a step further into the light. I also believe that there should be more awards for architecture students, this would be a great way to enable the student to get a job in the future. Not that the student may not be able to get a job without it, but it is something which will be on the student's history, as well as giving the

student something to be proud of. I know that there is The Presidents Medals now which does award students who design to standard (RIBA, 2018) . Another thing being that how architecture is male dominant, and that women do not get enough recognition within the profession. There should be more awards that recognise the female architects within the profession, not only helping the individual to get recognised in the male dominant area. But it will also inspire the generation of females that may want to study architecture but may not end up studying because of the male rate within architecture. I know that there is the Jane Drew Prize, which is aimed at recognising a female architectural designer that through their hard work and commitment, and who has raised the profile for all women in architecture (Farrell, 2018). Though it does not go to say that women cannot win any other award, which men are to be contributed in, for example the Architect of the Year award. This in which the annual award will recognise all excellence in design with emphasis on a single built project, which is completed in the last 18 months. In 2017 Gabriela Carrillo, a female architect was recognised for her outstanding work regarding the Criminal Courts for Oral trials in Pátzcuaro, Mexico (Farrell, 2018). In 2019, a British female architect named Amanda Levete, was the nominee and receiver of the Jane Drew Prize. With the past winners including, Densise Scott Brown, Odile Decq, Grafton Architect's founders Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, Zaha Hadid, Kathryn Findlay of Ushida Findlay and Eva Jiricna. This just going to show how the male nominated awards, and profession is moving to a more gender equalised approach (Review, 2018). I believe that anyone can win an award, but it's just a matter of the budget the client has, and the accessibility the architect has; whether that be computers or other employees. You find a lot of these larger firms have many employees working for them, with the architect possibly not having any work put in on the design process; but having their technicians to do it all. Which leads me to the point that a small practice could have one architect who does everything, all the design work as well as management. Which makes me think that there should be an award for those practices, giving them the ability to put out into the industry that they are able to compete, not with big practices or firms; but they are still able to produce excellent designs and give excellent advice.

Conclusion:

To conclude my above argument and statements; I believe that the whole awards ceremony idea is just a way for large companies to show off their money, to be able to show their fortune. I believe that there should be more fairness in who receives the awards, with more rural areas being investigated to see if there are any potential award nominees. I believe that awards are now meaningless, it's just a way to show you had an unlimited budget and that you can spend a lot. I do not think it is shown to be a fair game, I think that everyone should be involved, the smaller practices, the newly qualified architects. As I personally think anyone could design and produce to the same standards as for example the Bloomberg by Foster+ Partners, if everyone had the budget that it had. I would suggest that there are more female architect awards to help boost the gender match in the construction industry, as well as having more local council awards, to help boost the business of smaller, local businesses.

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