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Collaborative Wins Minneapolis Artist Housing Design Competition

MSD/what!worx DESIGN collaborative wins First Place Design Award for Bearden Place

- Competition sponsored by City of Minneapolis, Builders Outreach Foundation
- Part of City's strategy for rebuilding communities affected by foreclosure
- 47 entries from throughout U.S.
- Live/work townhouses for artists are MN Green Star compliant

MINNEAPOLIS, MN – May 30, 2010: Taking an unconventional approach to the business of design, MSD, an engineering firm, together with what!worx DESIGN collaborative, a group of like-minded independent design professionals, teamed up to offer their best solution for artist live/work townhouses in North Minneapolis, entered the competition... and won.

Just one week after the April 21st submission deadline, The City of Minneapolis and the Builders Outreach Foundation (BOF), the charitable arm of the Builders Association of the Twin Cities (BATC), announced the winners of the Minneapolis artist housing design competition, "Bearden Place: A Housing Competition in the Artists' Core".

The design team of MSD/what!worx DESIGN collaborative (Ira A. Keer, Tim Heitman, Sandra Gay, Donovan Hart, Robert Fischer, Spencer Finseth and Gary Lampman) was selected as the First-Place Winner in the housing design competition that attracted 47 submissions from across the United States. The winning team of designers and planners will receive \$10,000 in prize money and will have the first opportunity to negotiate a contract for project development services. The competition, part of the City's strategy and commitment to rebuilding communities affected by foreclosure, called for the design of multiple artist live/work units for the site, located in North Minneapolis.

The winning entry, titled *Artist Commons in the Core, A YIMBY ("Yes in my Backyard") Project*, is a six unit town-home structure. Conceived as MN Green Star compliant housing, the dwellings were designed as live/work spaces for local artists. Primary goals of the design were to create "strong identity with an artful, appropriate and affordable solution," says Ira A Keer (design team Architect). To that end, the building façade is a collage of six nearly identical units, each full of varying color and crafted details such as cracked tiled columns, planters and identity kiosks. The entryway to each dwelling symbolically reaches out to the street and the community with a trellis made of rafters arranged in a playfully pattern.

Reaching out to the community is an integral part of the design of the structure and site. "Responding to a perception that public space is an endangered species on the Northside, we featured in our design the creation of housing with semi-public space for social and economic vibrancy," says Donovan Hart, a city planner who worked on the team to contextualize the development and broadcast its larger goals. Large windows, rich architectural detailing and front patios create a welcoming aura to visitors or passersby. The design team suggested that the front yard include features such as public benches, planters and decorative address kiosks that promote community connection.

The MSD/what!worx winning design solution incorporates several key principles that contributed to its success:

- Create a demonstration showpiece of sustainable infill development
- Set a new standard for cost effective quality design and affordable living

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- Craft a simple solution project that can easily be replicated elsewhere in Minneapolis
- Respect the heritage and traditions of the neighborhood
- Uphold the time tested concept of home ownership (front yard, patio, house, garden and garage)
- Embrace artist homeownership as neighborhood economic incubator

The winning entry was selected by jury. Jurors praised the MSD/what!worx DESIGN entry. “The development is named for Romare Howard Bearden (1911-1988), famed African American artist who left a legacy of individual expression that reflects community by imbedding diverse times, images and themes with distinctive character and a physical presence using collage as his primary medium. Bearden Place reflects Romare Bearden’s artistic sensibility and the MSD/what!worx DESIGN collaborative captured his essence without fault,” said Roxanne Givens, juror and community member, entrepreneur and philanthropist.

“There were many projects with exceptional ideas that merited discussion by the jury, but the winning scheme covered the greatest number of issues most completely,” said Tom Fisher, juror and Dean of the College of Design, University of Minnesota. “We looked for projects that were buildable within the budget, appropriate to the user group and location, and capable of advancing new ideas about affordable housing,” he added.

The development site is in the Willard Homewood neighborhood, rich in architectural tradition, but heavily impacted by foreclosure. In the past two years, significant resident commitment has focused efforts on revitalizing this neighborhood with a marketing campaign targeted to bringing artists into the community.

The Artists’ Core, a community response to the housing/foreclosure crisis, grew out of the Willard Homewood Residents Economic Development Committee meetings begun in the mid-1990’s. In April 2008, there were 65 foreclosed homes in the 16-square block area now designated as the Artists’ Core. Today, there are fewer than five of the original 65 homes on the market. The community continues work to ensure new families are invited to purchase homes.

A public exhibition of all competition design submissions is scheduled to run during the summer 2010. An opening night exhibition and public reception with the design team and jurors is scheduled for Wednesday, June 30th from 5:30 PM - 7:00PM at the Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center (UROC, 2001 Plymouth Avenue North Minneapolis, MN 55411 uroc@umn.edu). Public attendance is welcome.

Mechanical Systems Design, Inc. provides mechanical engineering solutions and services building systems to control technology and project management. While many firms act as consulting engineers, MSD brings to these tasks an unusually high level of engineering design and insight. From its inception in 1980, MSD resolved to deliver design and mechanical answers that work the first time, every time. It’s an approach that commits the organization to develop a well-thought out, technically correct concept from the beginning. It’s an attitude that understands that the engineering serves more than an immediate project, but the larger strategic goals that guide the client’s business.

what!worx DESIGN collaborative (www.whatworx.com) is a network of creative design professionals, with years of individual experience across multiple project types and practice disciplines. With a plug-and-play approach to team building, what!worx provides clients with high quality design talent and ideas tailored to the project requirements. A customized team of independent designers means reduced overhead and an optimized project budget without forfeiting experience, quality or a winning solution.

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