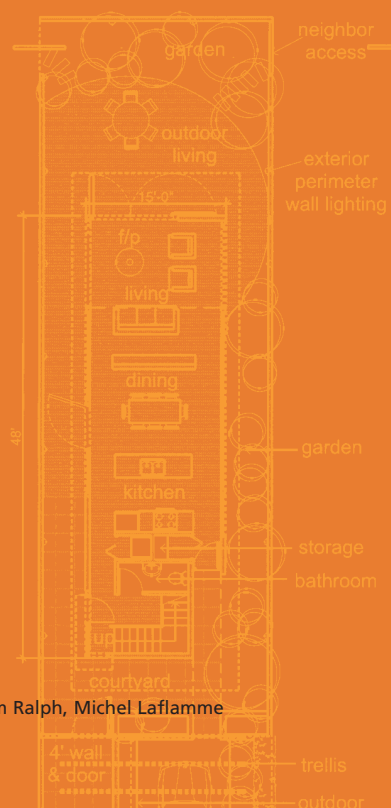




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# The Value of Competitions

BY FREDRICK H. ZAL / ATELIER Z

THE LIVING SMART PROJECT grew out of community dissatisfaction with the repetitive building forms currently under construction on many of Portland's existing 25-foot by 100-foot lots. The proactive response to this issue by the City of Portland was to host an international design competition to illicit fresh ideas and spur home dwellers, designers, and builders to collaborate in forming a vibrant new texture for today's cities.

The value that anonymous open design competitions bring to new development is a broad range of schematic explorations. Design competitions empower people to imagine ideas they might have never considered, and thereby lead to new professional relationships and progressive construction. By contrast, single-source contracts are often overwhelmed by aesthetic bias, typological experience, and preconceived notions. Design competitions open the playing field to both seasoned professionals and emerging talent, providing equal opportunity for selection based upon intellect and ideas.

There has been a long-standing debate over the ethics of design competitions. Competitors often work for little or no compensation while the competition organizers seemingly reap the benefit of architectural innovation. Numerous professional organizations have published competition guidelines to ensure a balance of benefits.

This monograph is one example of an outcome that balances these benefits. It provides an inclusive professional venue for these 49 Design Excellence teams, while retaining their intellectual property rights. The international distribution of this monograph provides a unique marketing opportunity to unveil these designs to a broad audience. It gives the City of Portland fresh ideas to address the important community issues of in-fill housing design and provides builders, home owners, and designers a unique resource for the design of narrow lot homes.

All 426 of the competition submissions rendered skillful solutions, which increased the difficulty of the jury's professional critique and selection process. The broad range of design strategies demonstrates that even within the confines of a rigid program, there are a number of architectural solutions (shotgun, dog trot, courtyard, split massing) that can be further modified. The many variations of these typologies have led to a myriad of design options that will enhance the architectural diversity of our cities.

With less than 5 percent of homes in the United States being custom designed by architects, trained professionals must actively participate in shaping new prototypes, creating new house catalogues, and promoting competitions to inform the cultural and physical nature of our communities. To fulfill the legacy of the Living Smart project, it is imperative that all designers continue to refine the theoretical basis of their work and find opportunities to bring it to market.

The City of Portland should be applauded for engaging the international design community in an important civic issue. This collection of exemplary designs for narrow-lot homes serves as an impetus for initiating a dialogue among residents, builders and designers toward creating a new vision for "Living Smart." ♦