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September 2024

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MASTER
DESIGN
AWARDS 2024

Winning Solutions

The 46th annual Master Design Awards highlight the best design ideas, executed skillfully.

by Kim Berndston, Contributing Editor



THE Master Design Awards culminate a full year of remodeling design competitions, which begin with the NARI CotY Awards in the late winter and the Chrysalis Awards in the spring. Launched in 1978 by this magazine, the Master Design Awards once again accepted some of the best design solutions found anywhere, thanks in part to continued partnerships with the Chrysalis Awards and NARI CotY Awards.

Eight remodelers and designers judged a record number of entries in Chicago on July 17 and July 18 and selected the projects featured in the following pages. We appreciate all submissions and ask the judges to score each project and provide feedback. Visit qualifiedremodeler.com for images and write-ups of the silver, bronze and honorable mention winners.

Feldman Architecture delivered a gem in Pebble Beach, California, from a 70s fixer-upper—a total transformation on the Monterey Peninsula.

Photo: DAVIDTSAY.com



Photo: Mark Battrell

Eight Is Enough

After viewing hundreds of remodeling projects over two days, here's what our panel said about this year's winners. They also offered tips on what it takes to win.

OUR 2024 panel of eight judges represented many disciplines: architects, interior designers and some of the leading remodelers from across the nation. Judging the 46th annual Master Design Awards sounds like a relaxing assignment, but the work is real. And there's the added pressure of knowing how much each remodeler invested in preparing each entry.

In July, at the end of two days of judging at the University Club of Chicago, *Qualified Remodeler* put them in front of the camera for their thoughts on two questions. Which trends or themes emerged from this year's entries? And what suggestions do they have for remodelers entering next year? Below are excerpts from their responses. You can watch their videos in the online version of this story.

BRUCE CASE

Case Architects & Remodelers
Bethesda, Maryland

I feel like there was a lot of personalization of the spaces in many of the projects. Conversely, I saw very few sterile, white kitchens. I think people are bringing their personalities more into their spaces—more colors, more textures, more combining of textures that you may not think would work well together, but they blend well. But that also requires more talent in the design arena to blend those in an effective way.

Specifically, there were a couple projects where they reused materials, whether it's something from the family, an antique or other details like that. Or even situations where part of house is taken down, those parts are then re-used in the (remodeled) house. And I think that reclamation and reuse of materials was very creatively done.

In terms of what makes a good entry, before-and-after pictures are critical. Drawings are also important. It's good to have "as built" alongside the new, but not too many of those. Be succinct about the plans that you submit. The third is to have an elegant presentation from A to Z to tell the story of the project.



PATTY DAVIS BROWN

Patricia Davis Brown Designs
Vero Beach, Florida

What I really enjoyed was a balancing of materials instead of, you know, for the longest time we've seen all white, and we're seeing a lot of different textures, a lot of different colors and patterns used. And I think there were some really good entrants who were able to balance all those and make an incredibly interesting design.

For me, the remodels that were able to bring separate structures together and the various ways that they created transitions. I saw some real genius designs.

Attributes of a winning entry: Uniqueness. Something that inspires me or something that's new, that's fresh, that hasn't been done before, and it works well.



FRANK FARKASH, AIA
Moontower
Austin, Texas

In terms of elements that surprised me or projects that stood out, I'd really focus on the whole-house category this year. In the whole-house more than \$1 million, it was just amazing how many projects were entered. Among other things, it's clear that inflation is pushing those prices up.

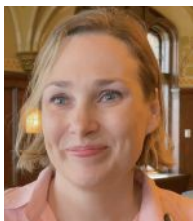


My favorite projects out of the whole-house categories were using wood abundantly, all throughout the interior, and it's just such a warm and timeless material.

Attributes of a winning entry: The most successful entries were consistently showing floor plans and great imagery. Don't be afraid to use some text on your images. And while beautiful images are amazing, spelling out a couple of key moments in your project can go a long way in your submission if it's done clearly. The judges are evaluating literally hundreds of submissions, so to have images that also have text on them, that might sound a little silly, but it's really straightforward, and it's really effective.

KRISTEN HARPER
Remodel Boutique
Austin, Texas

There were a lot of entries in the kitchen categories. This is a reflection that people were home from COVID, working from home, with their families and in their kitchens cooking. So, there's a ton of kitchen designs. They're innovative, bright, fresh and just fun to look at.



Attributes of a winning entry: It was important to see the "before" photos and get an understanding of the floor plan before and after. It was important to understand from the designer what problems the client wanted solved. Further, it helped when entries clearly defined obstacles that they had to overcome to create a successful design. And so, that's nice to know when you're judging, so it's not just a final picture, it's the overall package.

BAILEY HEATHER
Longacre Construction
Lewisville, Texas

We saw a lot of outdoor living projects, and the volume of them made an impact on me. I think a lot of people want to spend more time at home and make that place more comfortable and create more activity for them and their families. We also saw many projects utilizing innovations that were important for energy saving, green energy.



Attributes of a winning entry: I noticed the successful entries definitely had professional photography, and you can also tell that they took the time to put together a well-organized submission with before photos, after photos, floor plans, and all the details to help you understand what the full scope of the project entailed.

EVE RUSK
Rusk Renovations
New York City

I saw a couple of people opening ceilings to create more space. I also saw other layout changes that I thought were really interesting. One remodeler created a bathroom from a closet in a bathroom, so they expanded the bathroom. There were a lot of layout changes to make spaces feel grander and more spacious.



There was one project that used antique appliances. It was cool how they were able to make them look cohesive even though all the pieces were from a different time period.

Attributes of a winning entry: I've thought about this a lot because I've been an applicant myself. I think it's so important to have high-quality images of your projects. Before-and-after pictures from the same exact angle can really help. And then the last thing I think makes a successful entry is to tell a story. We want to know what the client wanted. We want to know how you were able to meet certain challenges.

ANDREW SCHROEDER
Schroeder Design Build
Fairfax, Virginia

The major themes that I saw when reviewing the packages and going through this process was the focus on clean lines. That was the trend with a lot of the winners. They were thoughtful and purposeful about having clean lines and viewpoints.



I think the main thing that surprised me is still how common white kitchens are, as well as white kitchens with blue elements. Many submissions included a lot of the challenges that took place during COVID. Many projects had elongated timelines due to supply and other issues.

What makes a successful entry is being very clear about what's included in the project's scope of work. Before-and-after pictures and floor plans should be next to one another on the same page. That way you're purposeful about what you did, and judges can understand the project relatively quickly.

ANDY WELLS
Normandy Remodeling
Hinsdale, Illinois

We always try to make the project flow well. It's also important to stay true to the house's style. This is what we saw in most winners.

One project that stood out was a historic renovation of an old barn on the East Coast. It was a house, and they did an addition renovation. It was an amazing space that was super old. And what they added was great and seamless. It made the project just amazing. That one stuck out for me.



In judging there's a lot to go through. The best entries were very succinct in the descriptions without too many flowery words. They get straight to the meat-and-potatoes of the client's needs and the difficulties and how they overcame those difficulties. Before pictures are important. Many entries didn't have before pictures, so it's hard to see the transformation. I'd say the actual studying of blueprints was less important than having before-and-after pictures. **QR**

Bathroom \$75,000 to \$100,000

GOLD

DESIGN BY THE JONATHANS, LLC
New Haven, Connecticut
thejonathans.com

Location: Woodbridge, Connecticut

Designer: Lana Nguyen

Square footage before: 79

Square footage after: 142

Project cost: \$90,000

This 1980s primary bathroom was no longer serving its purpose with its unfunctional layout and standard finishes. Instead, the homeowners were seeking a sanctuary in which they could awaken and be energized in the morning yet relax at night before sleeping. They were highly inspired by hotels and spas from their travels, and they were open to modern details using natural materials.

The firm removed the wall that separated the existing bathroom and the narrow walk-in closet to create a highly functional space. The focus of the design is to invite nature in through the tall glass window. The organic, dark-color, egg-shaped freestanding tub for two is placed where the clients can relax and be one with nature. Behind the double-vanity, light oak vertical wood slats draw the eye to the tall, slanted ceiling. The luxurious double shower, clad in dark finishes and a variety of textures, is carved into the room creating its own niche, yet it feels completely open to the beautiful view.



Photos: Robert Norman Photography



SILVER

ADAMS INTERIOR DESIGN
Hopewell Junction,
New York
aidesignny.com

BRONZE

NEIL KELLY COMPANY
Portland, Oregon
neilkelly.com