

## Interview

Date September 17, 2008

Page 1/4

### **"Architects should propose new visions of the city"**

Schindler Award jury president, Françoise-Hélène Jourda, says the competition is contributing to a new awareness of how architecture should serve humanity.

#### **This is the third Schindler Award. Do you think the competition has been a success?**

**Françoise-Hélène Jourda:** We had 125 entries, a third more than for the previous competition in 2005/06. This means there is growing interest in questions of "Access for All" and universal design, and that's really good news for people and for cities!

It was a difficult competition for students, who are not used to such complex tasks, but the nominated projects are very good. The competition has the important aim of encouraging architecture schools in Europe to try to take into account the question of disability. Not only the disability of wheelchair users, but of all people who may be temporarily or permanently disabled in some way.

#### **How do architect students understand their subject? And is the Schindler Award making a difference to that understanding?**

**F-H. J.:** I have the feeling that students' competitions are usually about utopias, or things that have more to do with dreams than reality. I think it is very important to have competitions which make young architects think about the future of their practice and encourage them to take care of people – all people.

At the moment, we see in architectural reviews, in big competitions and in the work of many well-known architects, funny objects with difficult and strange geometries - bubbles or buildings carved out of the ground.

## **Interview**

Date September 17, 2008

Page 2/4

Subject **"Architects should propose new visions of the city"**

It is very important to tell students and also teachers that we are building for all people and not only for themselves, for architects, or for their client. It is not enough just to build nice buildings. As architects we are responsible for creating living conditions for future generations.

So the psychological effect of this competition on students is very important. And I think such competitions are also important because they honour teachers, and it is of course the teachers who are preparing students for the future, and for their future responsibilities.

### **What needs to change in terms of how architects think about accessibility?**

**F-H. J.:** Architecture cannot just be a question of form, volume, light or material. When it comes to the needs of disabled people, it has to be sustainable. And I think with the growing awareness of sustainability - in terms of economics, the natural environment and in our social environment - we have a chance to take a stand against the fashion of making only funny or strange objects in cities.

It is time for architects to discover, or re-discover, their roots in society, because they risk losing them completely, if they don't respond to environmental and social needs.

Many very well-known architects are trying to re-anchor their practice in something that has more to do with humanity.

### **The Schindler Award set students the challenge of revitalizing a part of the Austrian capital, Vienna. Do architects have a role to play in re-inventing our cities?**

**F-H. J.:** Yes, our role as architects, and especially that of architecture students, should be to create the first flares of what could be our future. We really have to think about how to heal our cities: 99% of our environment is already built, so just working on new buildings is not useful.

## **Interview**

Date September 17, 2008

Page 3/4

Subject **"Architects should propose new visions of the city"**

We have to take care of existing cities. What we are doing at the competition site is a little like acupuncture - if a Schindler Award project was actually realized, it could change not only the district, but perhaps the entire city. I use the analogy of healing because we could really change life in cities with very limited means. And if a good solution exists somewhere, and people are happy about it, others elsewhere will ask for the same medicine.

### **Why was a derelict area of Vienna chosen as the competition site?**

**F.H. J.:** I think the choice of site was very good. It made the students confront some of the traditional problems of a city: lots of traffic all around, and abandoned areas that are not used for gardens, parks or other social purposes. There was also the issue of public transport, and the question of integrating the river.

There was some interesting work between the city of Vienna and the organizers at Schindler, which made it possible for this competition to take place. Although the competition is focused on ideas, I think the city could really benefit from the different proposals made by the students. They considered the city as it is today, and had very interesting insights about what it should be like and about the qualities of public space. It's not only about finding a formal solution – which is the case in many competitions, which focus on nice buildings and drawings – it's more about finding new solutions so the city can be shared by everyone.

### **What advice do you have for the organizers of the next Schindler Award?**

**F.H. J.:** I would say it is very important to focus on existing cities, even if there is nothing to build. It could be very interesting to talk about the renovation of cities and buildings. How could we change a city by doing the minimum, because sometimes only a few things need to be done to change the life of a place?

It's really about a new attitude towards people. We don't need lots of technologies – we already have everything. Architects and city planners need to go back to the foundations of their job – to take care of people.

## **Interview**

Date September 17, 2008  
Page 4/4  
Subject **"Architects should propose new visions of the city"**

Françoise-Hélène Jourda is professor of architecture at the Technical University of Vienna, Austria. She was interviewed by Ian Banerjee on September 12, 2008.

### **Professor Françoise-Hélène Jourda (France), Architect**

Professor Jourda graduated as an architect in 1979, and has designed many landmark projects in France, Germany, Belgium and Austria. A member of several distinguished academies, she has lectured at the Ecole d'Architecture de Lyon, France (1979 – 83), the School of Architecture in Oslo, Norway (1985-1989), the University of Minnesota, USA (1992), the Polytechnic University of Central London, England (1992) and the University of Kassel, Germany (1998). Since 1999, she has been professor of architecture at the Technical University of Vienna.

A picture of Professor Françoise-Hélène Jourda is available in our Download Center on [www.schindleraward.com](http://www.schindleraward.com).

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