

# Schindler Global Award

## Interview with Schindler CEO Thomas Oetterli

Thomas Oetterli became Schindler CEO in early 2016. He has been with the company since 1994; holding key roles on a number of continents before taking up his current position as CEO.

**The Schindler Award has been running since 2003, and was expanded to allow entries from students worldwide in 2015. Why is this urban design competition important to the company?**

The students of today will design the cities of tomorrow. By engaging students from around the world in a common task, we hope they can share ideas and gain experience working on large-scale challenges. We see a mutual benefit in hosting a competition for these future city makers. We hope they will learn from the competition, and we know that we will learn from them.

**The urban dimension of the award is unique for a company associated primarily with providing mobility solutions for individual buildings. How does the company see itself as a contributor in the larger urban realm?**

Elevators, escalators and moving walks are the workhorses of urban mobility. People use them everywhere, but don't always notice them. So their role is often overlooked, yet their impact is enormous. The award is focused on the total urban environment because that is the context for our work, and it's where all the major challenges lie for keeping the ever-growing populations of our cities mobile. We think of elevators almost as a calling card for a building. The urban scale is where we look at how entire populations of people move around, what they need in terms of vertical mobility and how best to serve them.

**With a focus on mobility, accessibility and sustainability – a broad scope of urban challenges – what does Schindler hope that students will gain from participation?**

When we started the Schindler Award in 2003, it was the European Year of Disabled Persons and we expressly put the focus on awareness in designs for universal accessibility. When we took the award global in 2015, that idea had expanded to the realization that accessible, sustainable mobility is growing rapidly in importance as a critical infrastructure element in the entire built environment. Obviously, this is important to Schindler. We hope the students will realize the power of mobility. The competition is designed to create a competitive dialogue of ideas. Of course we also hope the students will learn a lot by participating – and that they have some fun along the way.

**The elevator was key to the creation of vertical cities, and now there is much discussion about density as a key factor in desirable urban environments from all standpoints, social to sustainable. How does Schindler see the relationship between vertical density and vertical transportation developing in the future?**

We've always had a focus on sustainability. Everyone knows this word can be unspecific, but we've had to be very precise in what we mean. Elevators are a building system, and their energy use, from manufacture and distribution to installation and operation is carefully measured. Lower energy use is associated with sustainability at every point in that chain. The social impact of the elevator interests us as well. We would not have cities or very dense urban environments without the elevator. It fundamentally changed human existence by enabling tall buildings. Technologies like elevators or – say - fiber optic cables are often overlooked or taken for granted, but they are the unsung heroes of our modern cities. Without them, we would not have a dense, global world.

**The architects' renderings and artists' visions we see of global cities are typically stunning and futuristic, with towers stretching into the sky or massive underground public spaces transformed into parks – how does mobility link the layers of the city?**

I like these renderings – they have that science-fiction notion of a future city, and they are projections from our reality today! There's something very exciting about that. Global growth is exactly that – there is no one market I can pinpoint as the "largest". Some places, like China, are large in terms of urban development, while in some markets the largest, most important, aspects have to do with the pace of innovation or conversions of old systems to more modern ones.

**What do you see as future trends or innovations in vertical mobility as urbanization continues? Which might be specific to Brazil?**

Brazil is one of our most important markets, in part because the density of the city creates a need for large numbers of multi-storey buildings, and that's what people tend to think of first when they think about the modern-day bustling city. But we also focus on much more humble heights. Pressure for innovation touches not only the technical aspects of elevators - the materials and machinery that dictate the speed and reach of elevator systems, but also traffic management – how people move through a building. This is something Schindler pioneered in the 1980s, and we're now looking at how people move through entire cities with a similar logic.

**The site of the first Schindler Global Award was Shenzhen, and the current competition is sited in São Paulo. Students from around the world participate. Why is this kind of international focus important?**

Schindler has been an international company for over 100 years. Architectural practice has become increasingly global. Exposing students to the realities of worldwide business means they become accustomed to considering challenges outside of their everyday lives. This is important because the world is becoming more interconnected.

## What role might vertical mobility have on the competition site and task in São Paulo?

We see vertical mobility as something just as important to the city as horizontal mobility. Where the two primary directions of mobility come together is important. This means everything from an office lobby to the mezzanine of a public transit station. It all happens in public space.

The CEAGESP site and surroundings could become part of a new approach to the vertical and horizontal connections in São Paulo. I'm eager to see how the students consider the public space as integral to – or enabled by – infrastructure. The site is a rare chance to design a large area in the center of a dense city. That's very exciting.

## Is there any general advice you wish to give students who participate in the 2017 competition?

I am not a designer, but I can say that the best projects from the 2015 award were the ones where the students engaged the challenge in its totality, but then targeted their focus on specific ideas. Teamwork is also a good thing. All these students will find themselves working in teams in their professional lives. Our Award is a perfect opportunity for them to practice it now.

We're Schindler.

Be Schindler. Be Elevated.  
**Schindler Your First Choice.**