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## VJAA Receives AIA Minnesota's Firm Award



**MINNEAPOLIS, MN** The American Institute of Architects Minnesota (AIA Minnesota) is pleased to recognize VJAA with its Firm Award for 2009. Given biennially, this prestigious award is presented to firms that have contributed to the advancement of the profession in the areas of technology, service and design.

VJAA, a nationally recognized design firm based in Minneapolis, was selected for this award by the AIA Minnesota Firm Award Selection Committee. The committee discussions continually brought forth a consistent theme about the firm, they are a research-based firm that understands sustainability and technology. "VJAA's model of practice advances understanding of critical issues while also achieving excellent design. It's very impressive," noted the committee. They also found their practice to be rooted in education, enabling them to be collaborative and innovative while creating a national and international standard that measures building performance.

VJAA's unique approach through the synthesis of research and design has evolved over the past fourteen years. The underlying belief that good design improves the quality of life drives their work. The firm calls their process "polyvalent," meaning that their work is diverse, adaptable, and embraces a broad range of issues including ecology, culture, context, and technology. Firm principals Vincent James, FAIA, and Jennifer Yoos, AIA, describe this design process in their introduction to VJAA's recent monograph; "Integrating research with design is one method that we use to make our practice more reflexive and adaptable to the wide range of problems and environments that vary with each project."

The firm works on a wide range of project sizes and types -- predominately institutional, cultural, and residential -- notable projects include Charles Hostler Student Center, Beirut, Lebanon; the Monastery Guesthouse for St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN; Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life, New Orleans, LA; the Blessed Sacrament Chapel at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN; The Dayton House, Minneapolis, MN; and the Minneapolis Rowing Club Boathouse, Minneapolis, MN. They credit their design process for creating an office culture that emphasizes collaboration and design excellence and allows the three firm principals and their staff of 11 architects and designers to work together seamlessly. Collaboration within the firm and with clients is enabled through sketches, models, physical mockups, and a range of sophisticated digital tools for testing and developing ideas.

Their consistent success has resulted in receiving 17 national design awards within the past 12 years, including four National American Institute of Architects Honor Awards, six Progressive Architecture Awards, and two American Institute of Architects/Committee on the Environment



Top Ten Green Building Awards. The AIA Honor Awards recognize the quality of built projects, and of material craft, the P/A Awards honor ideas in architecture that are progressive and innovative, and the COTE Awards honor sustainable design excellence. In addition, every major built project has received an AIA Minnesota Honor Award. "The list of their design awards is amazing," commented the Firm Award Selection Committee. "Their firm doesn't have a signature style per se, but what comes across in their use of clean lines and high design is a response to the clients needs."

In 2001, the firm also received the Award in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The firm's work has been published widely and included in *Architecture*, *Architectural Record*, *Architecture Review (UK)*, *A+U (Japan)* and *The New York Time* and in a number of books in the U.S. and in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, and Spain. The work of VJAA is also the subject of a monograph published by Princeton Architectural Press.

Vincent James, FAIA, is founding principal of VJAA. Vincent worked with HGA in Minneapolis and in New York before beginning his own office in Minneapolis in 1990 and founding VJAA in 1995. He was on the faculty for a number of years at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and was also the Favrot Chair at Tulane University. Jennifer Yoos, AIA, joined VJAA in 1997 and has practiced both independently and in firms in Minneapolis and London over the past eighteen years. She currently teaches design as a Professor-in Practice at the University of Minnesota's College of Design. Jennifer received her graduate education at the Architectural Association in London and was also awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University. The firm's third principal, Nathan Knutson, AIA, is managing principal at VJAA where he has practiced since the firm's founding in 1995. In addition to collaborating on all of the firm's major projects, Nathan is responsible for the office's fiscal management, scheduling, and contracts. Both Nathan and Jennifer are LEED accredited.

"It is absolutely wonderful for our firm to be recognized by a community of architects that we respect so much. We would like to thank all of the AIA Minnesota membership for this honor," said founder and firm principal Vincent James.

VJAA will be honored at the AIA Minnesota Awards Celebration on December 4, 2009, at International Market Square, Minnesota, Minneapolis.

*The American Institute of Architects Minnesota, founded in 1892, is dedicated to strengthening our communities, improving our built environment and providing exceptional design. For more information on the organization and Minnesota architectural firms, reference our Web site at [www.aia-mn.org](http://www.aia-mn.org) and pick up a copy of *Architecture Minnesota*, the award-winning architectural magazine of the Midwest.*