



Published by the Boston Society of Architects  
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www.architectureboston.com

**January/February 2008, Vol. 11 No. 1, “2007: The Year in Review”**

“The Rotch Travelling Scholarship”

Pages 28–29

# 2007 ROTCH TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP

## Inside Out

### Constructing a new architecture

by Nader Tehrani

#### JURY

**Nader Tehrani**  
Office dA  
Boston  
Chair

**Felipe Correa**  
Harvard Graduate School  
of Design

**Gabriel Feld AIA**  
Rhode Island School of Design

**Andrew Hargens AICP**  
Massachusetts Port Authority  
Boston

**Sheila Kennedy AIA**  
Kennedy & Violich Architecture  
Boston

**Ingeborg Rocker**  
Harvard Graduate School  
of Design

**First Prize (\$35,000)**  
Mason Pritchett

**Alternate**  
Robert Genova AIA

**Honorable mention by jury**  
Ramsey Bakhoum

**T**he two parts of the 2007 Rotch Competition were both organized around the South Boston harborfront, offering studies and visions for this urban district from a more speculative vantage-point than can be offered from the real-estate market and political pressures of the current development. The preliminary competition, written by Sheila Kennedy AIA, attempted to draw out urban strategies for the transformation of the waterfront based on research in sustainability and new technologies. The final competition, written by Nader Tehrani, focused on construction as the arena of research.

If architectural education in recent decades has looked outside its boundaries — toward philosophy, critical theory, media, and various other disciplines — this competition in contrast sought to look deep with the discipline of architecture itself, re-examining assumptions about building practice, in order to advance and expand the field from within. The competition brief featured the waterfront and its piers including a ferry station and various related programmatic functions (hotel, restaurant, terminal), but the jurors understood that their purpose this year was to recognize ideas that transcended the simple resolution of site and program.

The challenge was to develop a strategy that would optimize a proposed method of construction — such as prefabrication, CNC manufacturing, modular elements — with the goal of minimizing on-site fabrication, increasing speed of delivery, and reducing the number of trades in the field. This required adopting a material palette and developing a unit of fabrication integrating structural, environmental, and performance criteria in a coherent system. Designers needed to demonstrate a thorough control of the strategy as it was manifested at different scales and different conditions; jurors placed great emphasis on the success with which organic relationships were established between surface and space, interior and exterior, as well as structure and skin.

The entries addressed these problems with a broad array of strategies, but the two finalists prompted the most debate. Robert Genova AIA offered an impeccably drawn and detailed set of boards, concentrating on materials and assemblies. Mason Pritchett offered an equally compelling set of images, whose details and articulation may have fallen short of his competitor, but he also advanced an argument about mass-production and customization that challenged the very means and methods in which architecture is conceived. If Genova's visions displayed the power of architectural materiality, his scheme also fell prey to material as fetish. Pritchett held back from the kind of zealous inquisition of materials research that the competition *seemed* to provoke and instead offered a more critical response to the deeper questions about material and fabrication processes. ■

Nader Tehrani is a principal of Office dA in Boston and was chair of this year's final-competition jury.

The Rotch Travelling Scholarship was established in 1883 to advance architectural education through foreign study and travel. Rotch Scholars today are selected through an annual two-stage competition. For more information and more detailed jury comments and competition images, go to [www.rotchscholarship.org](http://www.rotchscholarship.org).

