Press Release

# Rafael Viñoly Architects 2009 Research Grants Awarded

## Four teams from five continents to explore the needs of communities under stress

**March 4, 2009** Rafael Viñoly Architects (RVA) are delighted to announce the award of four independent Research Fellowships for 2009.

The global call for entries saw over 180 proposals from 39 countries with a wide approach to the suggested general theme: how architecture can better meet the needs of communities undergoing social and environmental stress. The successful teams include researchers from Mexico, Australia, Colombia, France, China and the USA. They explore architecture from both standpoints of designer and user, in locations as diverse as Bogotá and Shanghai, the slums of Mexico City and the tsunami-torn villages of Aceh, Indonesia.

Two previous rounds of research grants focused on environmental and scientific themes, including green roofs and the performance of carbon-fiber composites. This year's grants represent a shift towards themes of architecture in society, as well as a significant expansion of the program.

Teams for 2009 are made up of both academics and practitioners and will harness research techniques drawn from environmental psychology, anthropology and documentary photography, in addition to architecture and urban planning, in order to analyze the performance of buildings and urban projects under real-world conditions and propose plausible, improved, real-world solutions.

RVA will provide over $160,000 in cash stipends plus in-kind support including design, engineering, graphic, and modelling services. Research Fellows will make regular visits to the New York office to share ideas. In 2010, RVA will publish their work as a book and will sponsor a New York conference highlighting the results.

Rafael Viñoly says of the grants, "Research is the lifeblood of the profession. And in these difficult times it is especially important to reaffirm our commitment to architectural investigation that goes not only to design and technique but also to basic questions of human welfare."

Ned Kaufman, program director, adds that "These four projects get at the essence of the question behind this year's grant round: how can architecture promote livable settlements in the face of environmental stress, global poverty, and social turbulence? By supporting and disseminating research from all four hemispheres, we look forward to promoting global dialogue on these themes."

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# Notes to Editors

**Researchers from Mexico - Richard De Pirro (1) with Ana Rita García Lascuráin (2), Mayra Gamboa (3), Juan Carlos Zavala (4) - will explore the transformation of squatter settlements into urban neighborhoods and propose design guidelines for progressive urban development in Mexico.**


Urban sprawl is engulfing cities around the world. Unlike the suburbs of US cities, those of developing countries are poor, densely packed, unplanned, and lacking in basic services like water, sanitation, and electricity. Some experts estimate that by 2030 the population of such urban slums will explode to two billion. What can be done to make them livable? De Pirro and his colleagues will develop guidelines to help local officials, residents, and social service agencies ensure that these informal settlements can develop into stable neighborhoods. Architects and urbanists based in Mexico City, they will focus on site selection, layout, provision of infrastructure including land for public services such as schools and playgrounds. They will also propose amendments to the legislative framework for urban development. While focusing on cities in their home country of Mexico, they will also study comparative examples in Colombia and Brazil. Ultimately they plan to publish their work as a book called *The Barefoot Urbanist*.

**Researchers from Melbourne, Australia - David O'Brien (1) and K. Iftekhar Ahmed (2) will investigate relief efforts after the 2004 tsunami in the worst hit region of Aceh, Indonesia, and propose guidelines for future efforts.**

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In 2004 a tsunami devastated the western coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, killing hundreds of thousands of people and rendering half a million homeless. Worst hit was the Aceh region at the island's northwestern tip. While international aid and government assistance flowed into Aceh following the disaster, the relief efforts were not always perfectly successful. For example, post-tsunami emergency housing typically abandoned the region's timber-based traditions in favor of concrete, sacrificing the spatial flexibility and natural ventilation of traditional construction to rapid industrial-scale production. How have the new houses performed for their residents? One index is the numerous alterations which residents have made to them. These provide the starting point for researchers O'Brien and Ahmed. Architects teaching at the University of Melbourne, Australia, they bring a wide knowledge of disaster relief issues and of the entire Indian Ocean region. They will document the ways residents have altered their houses to better suit their lives and customs, interviewing residents, local builders, agency and government officials. By studying what happens to relief housing after it is provided, they hope to develop guidelines for future efforts, in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere.

**Researchers from Grenoble, France - Nicolas Tixier (1), with Ida Assefa (2), Ricardo Atienza (3), Camilo Cifuentes (4), and Celine Rouchy (5) - will critique the performance of large-scale urban projects in Bogotá, Colombia.**

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Since 1999, the city of Bogotá, capital of Colombia, has won nearly a dozen international awards for innovative urban planning, including the prestigious San Marco Golden Lion award, given at the 10th Venice Biennale. For a city once plagued by social disorder and crime, this represents a remarkable comeback. But how have Bogotá's urban interventions performed for residents? As a researcher at the National Superior School of Architecture of Grenoble's Sound Space and Urban Environment Research Centre (the Cresson Laboratory), Nicolas Tixier brings a unique set of skills to the question. With a team of Colombian and French colleagues and a battery of equipment ranging from traditional drafting tools to cutting-edge multi-media devices, he will seek to experience and describe Bogotá's prize-winning parks, government buildings, and public spaces from the perspective of the people who use them daily. The result will provide not only a critique of what has been done but also insights for future planners and architects tasked with reshaping the world's growing cities.

**A team of researchers - Hai Zhang (1) from New York City, with Marcel Baumler (2), based in Shanghai, and Guochuan Feng (3) from Shenzhen – will look at housing in China, exploring steps toward a solution.**


With some of the world's largest cities, China faces an intense demand for new urban housing. While the government and developers have taken major strides towards housing the wealthy, attention is now shifting to the majority of city dwellers. One result is that China's urban villages, offering the last available center-city development sites, are being increasingly targeted for redevelopment. But what forms of housing will best meet the needs of ordinary Chinese city-dwellers? Zhang, Baumler, and Feng will bring the disciplines of architecture, urban planning, and documentary photography to the problem. They will investigate both urban villages and new development projects in Shenzhen, as well as an emerging housing form in Shanghai, the group rental, in order to gain insight into the needs and desires of residents. To supplement the statistical information which already exists, they will live alongside and interview residents. They will also organize public meetings in order to initiate dialogue among residents, local officials, designers, and developers.