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OLSON SUNDBERG KUNDIG ALLEN HONORED WITH 2008 MERIT AWARD FROM AIA SEATTLE FOR NOAH'S ARK AT THE SKIRBALL

Noah's Ark at the Skirball, designed by Alan Maskin and Jim Olson, FAIA of Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects, has received a Merit award for architectural excellence at the AIA Seattle Honor Awards for Washington Architecture. The project team includes Alan Maskin (lead designer); Jim Olson, FAIA (ark designer); Stephen Yamada-Heidner, AIA, LEED AP (project manager); Martha Rogers and Megan Zimmerman (architectural staff).

Noah's Ark at the Skirball Cultural Center strongly resonated with the honor awards program's theme: Perform/Transform. Co-Chairs Bill Gaylord, AIA and Mary Johnston, FAIA, called for projects that embody "how our values as architects shape our approach to building: environmental values, social values, cultural and communal values" and provide "the transformative experience of moving through well-designed places."

Noah's Ark at the Skirball is designed to values and challenges preconceptions about design for families. Located at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, it is a permanent interactive exhibit that draws on the ancient Noah's Ark story as well as approximately 500 flood legends from around the world. The exhibit aims to be a place where children and families of all backgrounds are welcome and encouraged to play together. It responds to three values the Skirball feels are highly relevant: a belief in diversity; the need for people to work together for survival; and the importance of second chances in life.

In preparation for creating the exhibit, the architects participated in an intensive three-month "Play Practicum." They studied early childhood education and psychology, and toured major children's destinations across the country. Challenging preconceptions about what children's museums "should" be, the project team developed an exhibit design that favored clarity over chaos, utilized a wide spectrum of colors and natural fabrics, and employed a hierarchy of vertical scales. They rejected written text in favor of a completely interactive exhibit that incorporates the leadership of docents of all ages.

The team designed and handcrafted 186 pairs of animals. Many animals are designed from repurposed and found objects such as bottle caps, bicycle parts, baseball mitts, croquet balls, mop heads and rear-view mirrors. Approximately fifteen pairs of animals are kinetic – puppets brought to life by visitors and staff.

The jury commented: "The creativity and sheer joy of this project make it remarkably convincing. Material inventiveness shapes the fresh but recognizable expression of the animals, creating an environment that can engage children on a variety of levels."

The owner of Noah's Ark at the Skirball is the Skirball Cultural Center. The design team worked with artists, puppeteers, folklorists, ropes course designers and engineers including: Lexington Fabricators (Exhibits); Chris Green (Puppeteer); Lynx Challenge Courses (Ropes Course Design); Nabih Youssef and Associates (Structural Engineers); Syska and Hennessy, Inc (Mechanical and Electrical Engineers); Yantis Acoustical Design (Acoustical Engineer); Candela Architectural Lighting Consultants (Lighting Designer); Somelab (Graphic Designer).

Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects began its creative existence with architect Jim Olson, whose work in the late 1960s explored the relationship between dwellings and the landscape they inhabit in the Northwest. Olson started the firm based on some simple ideas: that buildings can serve as a bridge between nature, culture and people, and that inspiring surroundings have a positive effect on people's lives. Rick Sundberg joined the firm in 1975, and its commitment to urbanism and civic life became evident as they began designing and developing modern urban buildings in and around Seattle's national historic districts Pike Place Market and Pioneer Square.

In 2000, Tom Kundig and Scott Allen joined Olson and Sundberg as owners, taking the firm to another level of creative exploration and helping it grow into an office with an international reputation. Alan Maskin and Kirsten Murray joined the owners group in 2008, continuing the evolution of the firm and furthering its commitment to the experience around architecture, articulated in exhibit design, interiors, and connections to urban and rural landscapes.

The firm now numbers over 85 employees. Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen's work, including museums, academic buildings, exhibit design, interior design, places of worship and residences, often for art collectors, is now worldwide. The office combines the capacity of a large firm with the intensity of a small one. The firm's commitment to vigorous, critical design review sessions has infused its designers with a shared sense of commitment to every project.

The partners lecture extensively on design, regularly serve as university studio critics, and are board members for civic institutions and jury awards programs. The firm's award-winning work has been widely exhibited in North America, has been published extensively, including in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Architectural Digest*, and *Architectural Record*, and has been featured numerous times on the covers of books and magazines. Books on the firm include *Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects: Architecture, Art and Craft* (Monacelli Press, 2003), *Art + Architecture: The Ebsworth Collection + Residence* (William Stout, 2006), *Tom Kundig: Houses* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), and *The Frye Art Museum: Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects* (Documentary Media, 2007). Among the firm's accolades are National and Regional design awards from the American Institute of Architects, American Architecture Awards from the Chicago Athenaeum, and Tom Kundig's National Design Award from the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt, and his Academy Award in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

More information about the **2008 AIA Seattle Honor Awards for Washington Architecture** can be found on-line at the AIA Seattle website at <http://2008honorawards.aiaseattle.org/>

More information about Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects can be found on their website: www.oskaarchitects.com