

2026 AIA SMC DESIGN AWARDS GUIDELINES

Welcome to the AIA San Mateo County Design Awards. Our chapter's biannual Design Awards program recognizes excellence and outstanding achievements in architecture and design.

Submission is open to both AIA members and non-members. Entries are submitted in multiple categories. Jury decisions are based solely on the materials submitted. Winners are showcased on our chapter website.

Schedule

- **Call for Entries:** Tuesday, September 1, 2026
- **Submission Deadline:** Friday, October 2, 2026
- **Awards Ceremony:** Wednesday, December 2, 2026

Eligibility

- All Licensed Architects / Firms practicing within the United States are eligible to submit projects located within San Mateo County.
- All Licensed Architects / Firms practicing or residing in San Mateo County are eligible to submit projects in any location.
- If a firm has multiple offices, the office located in San Mateo County is eligible to submit projects in any location.
- Offices outside of San Mateo County are eligible to submit projects located in San Mateo County only.
- Open to AIA San Mateo County members, members of other AIA chapters, and non-members.
- Projects must credit every substantial contributor.

Registration Fees

Entry fees per submission are shown below. All entry fees are non-refundable.

	Architecture, Residential, Interior Architecture	Small Project, Emerging Professional
AIASMC Member Rate	\$285	\$225
Non-Member Rate	\$385	\$325

Entry Categories

1. ARCHITECTURE

The Architecture Award celebrates outstanding achievements in architecture regardless of budget, size, style, or construction. Entries for Architecture Award may be submitted for consideration in one of the following categories, as appropriate:

- **Adaptive Reuse, Renovation, or Historic Preservation** - renovation or preservation of an existing building with or without a historic background; renovation of an existing building for a new purpose
- **Institutional/ Educational** - projects serving educational, healthcare, research, or institutional missions (e.g., schools, universities, hospitals, medical facilities, laboratories, research centers, religious institutions, etc.)
- **Civic/ Community** - public and civic infrastructure serving community needs in the public realm (e.g., government buildings, courthouses, law enforcement facilities, libraries, community centers, transportation hubs, cultural institutions, parks facilities, etc.)
- **Commercial** - projects primarily serving business, hospitality, or retail functions (e.g., office buildings, hotels, retail centers, restaurants, entertainment venues, co-working spaces, etc.)
- **General Architecture** - unspecified category or other project type not included in categories above

2. RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

Residential Awards celebrates dwellings that illustrate excellence in design. Entries may be new or remodel, addition, custom, prefab, or modular. Entries should be entered for a Residential Award under the appropriate category:

- **Single-Family Residential** - residential spaces intended for one family, including single ADUs
- **Multi-Family Residential** - residential spaces intended for two or more families. This category excludes university dorms, hotels, and any other commercial, institutional, or educational residential project
- **Other Residential** - unspecified category or other dwelling type not included in categories above (e.g., dorms, hotels)

3. INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

The Interior Award celebrates innovative and spectacular interior spaces that fulfill the true potential of a space and enhance user experience. Project types include new construction, renovation, tenant improvements, and any project where the interior of a built project has been designed, updated and/or enhanced.

4. SMALL PROJECT

The Small Project Award celebrates the power of small objects and spaces to have a big design impact. Entries for the Small Project Award may include:

- **Small Objects** with a fabrication and installation budget of under \$500,000 (such as an art installation or sculpture)
- **Small Structures** with a construction budget under \$1,000,000 that don't clearly fit into the Architecture, Interior Architecture, or Residential categories above

5. PEOPLE'S CHOICE

The People's Choice Award aims to educate and inspire the public by showcasing projects located in San Mateo County and/or designed by San Mateo County-based firms. All Design Award submissions in any category that are located in San Mateo County and/or designed by San Mateo County-based firms will automatically be eligible for People's Choice Award. The public will vote on the projects and the project with the highest number of votes will be declared the winner.

6. EMERGING PROFESSIONALS

The Emerging Professionals award celebrates individuals pursuing a career in architecture, from students to architects that have been licensed for 10 years or less and who have demonstrated an exemplary commitment to:

- The value of design, professional practice and learning in architecture, and the built environment;
- Giving back to the profession through participation and work within the AIA or other design and construction industry-related organizations; mentoring, volunteering, etc; and
- Giving back to the local community in some way related to the betterment of the built environment.

Criteria

Projects must have been completed after January 1, 2021. At their discretion, jurors may recognize multiple projects in any or all categories with Citation, Merit, and Honor Awards. Submissions will be judged on quality of design, resolution of the project or idea, energy and sustainability, innovation, equity, and social responsibility. Jury decisions will be based solely on the materials submitted. It is therefore important that submissions convey to the jury a full understanding of the project.

The AIA San Mateo Design Awards reserves the right to move entries between categories when clearly appropriate.

Submittal Requirements

ARCHITECTURE, RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE, INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE, SMALL PROJECT AWARDS

Entry Submissions for Architecture, Residential, and Interior Architects categories shall consist of the three (3) parts listed below. Submissions for Small Project Awards may be exempt from the Common App.

1. Digital Graphics Presentation:

Applicants must complete a Digital Graphics Presentation file for each submittal using a formatted PowerPoint template file that can be downloaded from the link below. Completed files shall be saved and submitted in PDF format and should be less than 35 MB to accommodate email transfer and viewing.

Digital images should thoroughly describe the project with interior and exterior photographs, floor plans, elevations, and context images.

Submittals shall not include any information identifying the Firm, Architect, or other key design team members in any text or graphics.

Download the PowerPoint template file from AIASMC's website here: [POWERPOINT TEMPLATE](#)

2. Digital Concealed Information Form:

Applicants must complete and sign a Concealed Information Form for each submittal using the form provided below. This information is needed for the chapter's records and to properly recognize award winners. It will not be shared with the jurors.

Download the Concealed Information Form file from AIASMC's website here:
[CONCEALED INFORMATION FORM](#)

3. Common App:

AIASMC has adopted AIA California's Common App as part of the submission requirements to measure and record the metrics for sustainability and resiliency. Please be sure to use the current version of the Common App.

Please note that some of the technical information requested on the Common App may require consultation with other members of your design/engineering team; be sure to take this into account when preparing your submission.

[Video walkthrough](#)

The current version of the Common App can be found here: [COMMON APP](#)

EMERGING PROFESSIONALS AWARD

Nominees may be AIA Associate or Architect members licensed 10 years or less. Nominators shall be AIA members or AIA firm members. Submittal material for this Award category shall include the following:

1. A Nomination letter from the Nominator, (max 1 page)
2. Nominee's Biography / Resume (max 1 page)
3. Statement of Nominee's Exemplary Contributions (max 1 page)
4. Exhibits illustrating Nominee's contributions/ activities/ work (max 8 pages total)

Submit materials through AIASMC's website at
<https://aiasmc.org/2026-design-awards-emerging-professionals-project-submission/>

2026 Jurors

To be announced