

Honoree Citation: Sinclair Black

Austin Foundation for Architecture | Form: Function

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For over 50 years, Sinclair Black has been both educator and student, both architect and urban designer, both uncompromising advocate and quiet visionary. His imprint is visible in the buildings he has created, in the cities he has helped shape, and in the perspectives of the countless people he has impacted.

From his birth in 1940 in Tyler, Texas, Sinclair was always surrounded by the tools of an architect: drawing instruments and paper. Early in his childhood, his family moved to San Antonio, and his visual and spatial acuity became evident from his first day of school, when he relied on his recognition of buildings, signs, and street design to walk home after deciding to forego nap time. His skills, innate talent, and passion for the profession carried Sinclair to The University of Texas at Austin, where he received a Bachelor of Architecture in 1962, and the University of California, Berkeley, where he received a Master of Architecture in 1970.

Sinclair returned to the UT School of Architecture to teach in 1967 at the invitation of his former dean, Alan Taniguchi (tan-ih-GOO-chee), and remained on the faculty for a record 50 years. During his distinguished academic career, Sinclair taught urban-design theory classes and design studios, led student teams in national urban-planning competitions, and served as acting dean (at age 32), assistant dean, and chair of the design faculty. From 1989 through his retirement, he held the Roberta P. Crenshaw Centennial Professorship in Urban Design and Environmental Planning. Over the decades, Sinclair's students have often returned to work for him or collaborate with him on projects, a testament to the impact his analytic and creative approach to design has on those he teaches.

In the same year that Sinclair began teaching, he established his own small practice, Sinclair Black, AIA, which soon became Black + Vernooy (vurr-NOI) Architecture and Urban Design, as it is still known today. It did not take long for his practice to develop a reputation for regionally inspired architectural designs. His work is based on a commitment to the client, an understanding

of the needs of the end users, a thorough analysis of each site and its context, and an emphasis on natural materials. It is also grounded in years of study of the vernacular architecture of Central Texas.

Sinclair's numerous award-winning residential projects sit alongside his legacy as a "citizen architect" working through human-scaled design and tireless advocacy to make Central Texas a more compact, walkable, livable, and environmentally connected place. Among his most influential projects are the community-enhancing Central Market and Central Park, the intimate Kinney Mues, the catalytic Cedar Street Courtyard Complex, the peaceful Austin Nature Center, the visionary Austin Creeks Plan, the transformative Great Streets Master Plan and its first implementation, the lively Second Street District, the hard-fought Seaholm Power Plant adaptive reuse, and the bold Reconnect Austin vision to depress I-35 through downtown and cap it with a new civilized boulevard.

The impact of these diverse efforts and designs has not gone without recognition. Sinclair's firm has earned over 30 national, state, and local design awards across the decades, and in 1984, Sinclair was inducted into the American Institute of Architects College of Fellows. In 2004, Black + Vernooy received the Firm Achievement Award from AIA Austin. The Congress for the New Urbanism recognized Sinclair's contributions to Austin's urban design in awarding him the organization's highest honor, the Athena Lifetime Achievement Medal, in 2008, and this year selected Reconnect Austin as one of 10 freeway-removal campaigns across the country to be highlighted in the biennial *Freeways Without Futures* report. And finally, in November 2016, the Texas Society of Architects recognized Sinclair for his significant architecture and urban-design legacy with the prestigious TxA Lifetime Achievement Award.

After teaching for 101 semesters at the UT Austin School of Architecture, Sinclair has now retired from the faculty, but he continues to work at his practice and in the civic sphere and support design education and advocacy through his philanthropy. He recently donated a record \$5 million to the UT School of Architecture to establish the Sinclair Black Chair in the Architecture of Urbanism the the Sinclair Black Endowed Excellence Fund in Urban Design.

Sinclair has also recently given \$25,000 to the Austin Foundation for Architecture, to start us on the path to create great programs in our community.

Each day, Sinclair Black argues for urban design solutions for a better Austin, many of those solutions not yet fully understood in their genius. Each day, he helps further his firm's legacy of insightful and context-sensitive architectural design. Each day, his countless students serve as design practitioners, planners, government officials, and conscientious citizens, in arenas where skills and perspectives he helped shape will continue to impact the quality of our environment. And each day, people live in homes, walk down streets, and enjoy public spaces in a city that, over a lifetime of uncompromising vision and with immense talent, Sinclair has helped shape.

In recognition of his distinguished career, unrelenting efforts, and remarkable legacy, the Austin Foundation for Architecture is pleased to present this Honor Award to Mr. Sinclair Black.