

Basilica architect honored

The American Institute of Architects has presented its highest honor to the architect who restored the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore.

John G. Waite Associates of New York was one of 25 recipients from around the world selected to receive the AIA Institute Honor Award, the profession's highest recognition of works that exemplify excellence in architecture, interior architecture and urban design. More than 700 entries were submitted.

The basilica project was honored in the architecture category, along with awardees including the architects of the Cathedral of Light in Oakland and the Charles Hostler Student Center in Beirut, Lebanon.

The basilica restoration was highlighted for removing 150 years of "obscuring alterations" to return the nation's first Catholic cathedral to the vision of the original architect, Benjamin Latrobe, who designed the building to be a luminous symbol of religious freedom.

"The project is in very elite company," said Mr. Waite, "and I think it's recognition of how important the building is."

It wasn't just the restored architecture that won AIA accolades, according to Mark Potter, executive director of the Basilica of the Assumption Historic Trust. The jury was also impressed with the way the building was brought up to 21st-century standards and how it is being used today for worship and other events. Mr. Potter noted that since reopening in 2006, the basilica has attracted more than 300,000 visitors.

The award will be presented in April at the AIA 2009 National Convention and Design Exposition in San Francisco.