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Annual photo competition focused on the city's connection to nature

Y/Our Denver helps us look at the city, and see ourselves



By **RAY MARK RINALDI** | media@rayrinaldi.com | The Denver Post

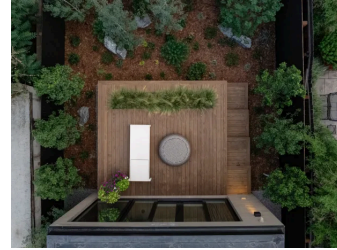
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The Y/Our Denver photography competition is an annual shot of self-esteem for the people who live and work in the city.

The contest is surely a casual affair, a side project of two local cultural groups — the [Denver Architecture Foundation](#) and the [Colorado Photographic Arts Center](#) — with a common interest of encouraging people to take, and view, images of the region's buildings and landscape.

The photographers can be amateurs or professionals. They can shoot anything they want. Most viewers of the work see it via an online slideshow rather than an in-person gallery visit.

But the photos that get produced each year offer testimony to just how attractive a city Denver can be when you look at it in new and creative ways, or capture a scene at just the right moment. Denver never wins the prize for being a great urban beauty when it comes to its buildings and parks. It is not, for example, San Francisco or Chicago or New York, but these photos make you realize that it is a contender.



The best landscape architecture photo, "Rooted Geometry," was taken by Rae Scott. (Provided by the Denver Architecture Foundation)

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This year's contest yielded a particularly interesting batch of images, and that likely resulted from the theme chosen for 2025: Architecture and Nature in Harmony. If there is one thing we have going for us here that those other cities mentioned above lack, it is a connection to the air, the animals, the trees, the mountains that are always in Denver's sights.

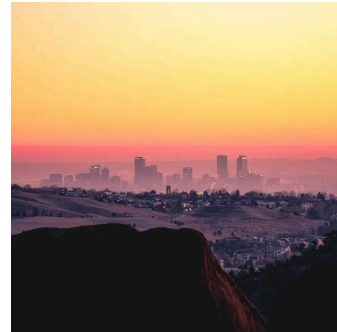
And so it inspired shooters to consider the weather, like the fog that sometimes lays low over the Cheesman Park Memorial that was captured by photographer Kathryn Levi, or the way a morning mist can filter through the skyscrapers downtown, as in a shot by Alex Gamble, which took the

The theme encouraged photographers to pull back and create wide vistas of the city as it exists in the larger environment. That included Marvin Anani's "Denver Layers," a wide shot of the skyline, taken from a distant hill, that shows the city during the early evening as the setting sun creates bands of yellow, orange and red in the background. Anani's photo won the top honor as best in show.

Some of the most interesting images came from photographers who made images of nature under control within the urban landscape. Rodney Gene Mahaffey's "The Brutalism of Spring" captures blossoms appearing on the perfectly planted grid of fruit trees in front of the Clyfford Still Museum.

The photo that won best interior landscape is centered on a single tree, kept in a planter, at the Colorado Convention Center, taken by Steven Jones, who noticed its shadow at the perfect time of day.

The award for best landscape shot went to Rae Scott, a Denver professional known for her images of interiors. The photo captures a newly landscaped backyard in LoHi from above, using a drone. The shot is full of distinct bits of geometry: a square, wooden deck, rectangular planters, neat rows of shrubs, all confined in the sharp edges of a fence.



"Denver Layers," by Marvin Anani, took the top honor in this year's "Y/Our Denver" photo competition.

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She said that the image was part of a commission by the project's designer and architect.

"Instead of tilting the camera at an angle, I directed the lens all the way down for a top-down view of the outdoor space," she wrote in an email. "I'm a big

In all, the contest garnered 191 submissions, which this year's juror, David Laurer, narrowed down to the 30 that currently appear on the websites of both sponsoring organizations. I viewed the show on both a laptop and my cellphone and saw different aspects of the work through these different-sized formats; it's worth taking a look both ways.

The Y/Our Denver photo competition is more than a contest; it is a living document of the city's ongoing evolution as the metropolis grows and reshapes itself, and fresh buildings, parks and vistas emerge. Each year, the photographers set their sights on scenes old and new, so it really does serve as testimony, of sorts, to the way Denver looked in the past, the way it is changing, and the potential it has if the citizens put good design first when it comes to development.

That, of course, is the goal of both the Denver Architecture Foundation and the Colorado Photographic Arts Center: to raise awareness and encourage progressive civic thinking, to honor good work through a hyper-local lens.

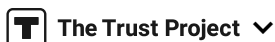
The competition's easy-to-participate setup of soliciting work from both people who make their living through photography and hobbyists makes the exercise very democratic. It puts the responsibility for making Denver a more forward-thinking place in everyone's hands, not just the professionals who oversee design.

And, every year, it serves as a point of pride for residents, an enjoyable moment reminding ourselves that it is nice to be a contender.

IF YOU GO

To view the show, go to denverarchitecture.org or cpacphoto.org. The exhibits will be up through the end of the year.

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