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March/April 2003: Land



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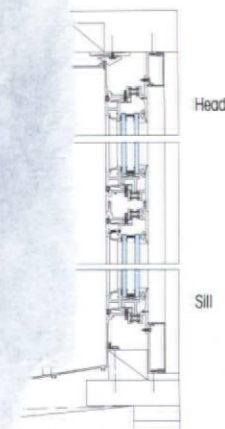
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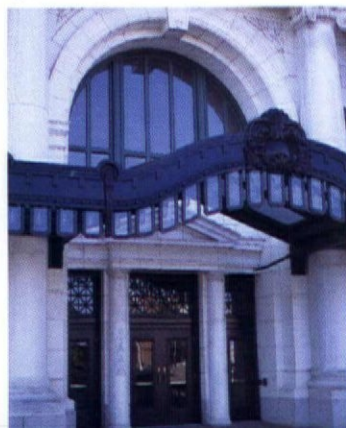
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ArchitectureBoston

March/April 2003

L a n d

Who knew? Who knew that the seemingly placid world of landscape architecture crackles with controversy? That its practitioners form factions hurling invective at one another? (Well, maybe not invective. Landscape architects do tend to be a good-natured lot. They're more likely to hurl expressions of extreme exasperation.)

Who knew? Chances are, not architects. Many architects are woefully ignorant of the world their landscape siblings inhabit and, worse still, they don't know that they're ignorant. Architects get a token dose of landscape education — perhaps a history course, maybe a plant class, possibly a few site-planning exercises. The assumption is that they will learn enough to be able to communicate effectively with the consultants they will someday hire (no matter that these "consultants" might well be in the position of hiring architects). But there is a difference between developing a common language, a design Esperanto, and understanding a culture with a distinct point of view.

The problem is that most architects don't recognize that landscape architecture does offer a distinct point of view, one that is often the inverse of architecture. Designers in both fields study figure-ground drawings, where buildings are shown in white and the spaces between are rendered black, in order to force the eye and mind to see space as a positive attribute. But architects nearly always revert to their building-centric ways. Landscape architects keep their focus on the space.

That focus on space leads to interesting distinctions. Architects, by definition, are manipulators of the built environment. Landscape architects work with gradations of the natural environment, from untouched land, to landscapes that strive to resemble the untouched, to the obviously designed, to the artful expression, to outright artifice. Architects sometimes speak of "time" as a shorthand for the experience of moving through a building. Landscape architects use a more conventional definition; it can take years for a landscape to achieve its designer's intention. A landscape can quite literally have a life of its own; untended, it can grow in unwanted, even unexpected, ways.

But if landscape architects must have a greater measure of patience than architects, they must also have thicker skins. Their work is judged daily, and the results can be painfully clear. As Marion Pressley FASLA notes, the public votes with its feet. A vacant park is eloquent testimony to failure. The occupants of a badly designed building are rarely given the opportunity to simply abandon it in favor of a more appealing venue.

Despite their differences, architects and landscape architects share a good deal — personal commitment to improving the world around us and an abiding sense of civic responsibility. They struggle with debates about similar issues: balancing respect for history with the need for contemporary expression; encouraging more informed public debate about design; nurturing the next generation of designers. Both disciplines could benefit from more dialogue and more joint endeavors.

And architects just might find that in learning more about the landscape architecture profession, they learn more about their own.

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Editor

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Letters



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For the first time in my life, (I have been a practicing architect in New York City for 24 years), I read an architectural magazine and actually enjoyed reading every single article. The roundtable discussion, "Buzz Cuts," [November/December 2002] was informative, intelligent, and highly entertaining. While I agree with all the nominations for over-hyped people/ideas/things (except for "The Anna Nicole Smith Show," which was unfairly mentioned several times), I would like to add a few of my own: "hype" itself is overrated; living in Soho and Tribeca; Rem Koolhaas' Prada Store; SUVs; and, of course, New York City neighborhoods.

What can I say, a great magazine and terrific writers.

Garo Gumusyan AIA
New York City

Thank you for your insightful editorial ["Editor's Letter," November/December 2002]. It caused me to recall the session at the AIA National Convention in Charlotte at which time the Gold Medal winners held forth on the subject of whether architectural design is an exercise in fashion or a true artistic endeavor. Let alone that such luminaries as Arthur Erickson, Michael Graves, and Richard Meier went 45 minutes long in their scheduled time, the folks on stage wore navy blazers, navy slacks, navy shirts, navy satin ties and all looked like Regis Philbin. What was seen was more convincing than what was said. We tend to entertain ourselves.

We here [in Texas] admire your fine publication.

John Nyfeler FAIA
President-elect, Texas Society of Architects
Austin, Texas

I enjoyed several of Joan Wickersham's perceptions ["Where Am I? The city as a place of healing," September/October 2002] and want to comment further. I think it has always been true that neither hospitals nor doctors cure the injured or make sick patients well, and it is refreshing to see people looking at emotional and cognitive well-being as issues. Certainly in crisis moments doctors and hospitals have the resources to make "smart connections" for a patient's recovery, but the body's ability to heal always has come from being out in the world and releasing energy deep within.

I have to agree further that the design of hospitals in my area has not embraced the healing process yet as a viable business plan. Perhaps the insurance industry's emphasis on diagnosable diseases has their hands tied, but hospitals are also closed in their architectural feedback process. Doctors themselves are very often taught to believe that their medical work is not a hands-on practice and that, with modern surgical advances, their involvement with the patient will become a metaphorical abstraction.

Contrary to Ms. Wickersham's opinion, promoting health is an ongoing educational process that I do think can be supported by designers. Many are just now learning the difference between users and patients. Her frustration with clinically sterile interiors and archaic paradigms is understandable, but if our buildings are an historical record of our thinking, then it is worthwhile to consider having a vital message.

One day the health of our minds, the structure of our bodies, and the spaces that engage them will not be separated in thought or by the design process. Creating healing environments is a restorative journey that can create health for people. I like the "body-building connection" mentioned elsewhere in your magazine, and encourage the profession to consider it also.

Douglas J. Pucci, Doctor of Chiropractic
Oradell, New Jersey

Charles Redmon is correct in stating: "An ever-expanding profession, made up of passionate practitioners pursuing diverse careers and collaborating in an ever-smarter marketplace, is far healthier than an increasingly narrow profession of isolated specialists." ["Two Views: Specialty Certification," November/December 2002]. Joan Saba appears to be saying that architects working on non-healthcare projects do no planning, programming, design, documentation, construction, or post-construction services. I must agree that healthcare facilities do involve the architect in a great deal of detail concerning the functional operation of the specific facility. But I know that the planning process is the same in any successful project, especially when the owner demands that the architects immerse themselves in the functional operations of the building in order to properly design for the owners' needs. The American College of Healthcare Architects [ACHA] is one of the strongest interest areas within the AIA and must be commended for its efforts in the education of architects as it pertains to healthcare facilities and recognizing good healthcare design. But if the ACHA effort goes beyond this education program, it will be exposing the AIA to the "splinter" virus for which there is no known cure. The debilitating effects to the AIA of the "splinter" virus are not perceived but real.

William J. Mello Jr., AIA
Bedford, Massachusetts

The ArchitectureBoston issue on "Hype" [November/December 2002] points out the contradiction at the heart of the architectural profession. As architects we need validity, trust, and realistic expectations in our relationships with our clients. Publications, awards, and the persona of "form-giver" all convey an aura upon the architect which can serve as evidence of credibility. We, therefore, deride the hyping of architecture and architects while continuously looking for ways to achieve the cultural status that hyping confers. Of course, our culture has completely lost its moral bearings, and hype has become a form of stimulation rather than a means of communication. But don't architects have a responsibility to promote the "substance" of architecture? Several contributors to the "Hype" issue described what this substance consists of. My short list includes leadership on quality-of-life issues such as sprawl and energy conservation, as well as life-safety and innovation in building technology.

A. Vernon Woodworth AIA
Sullivan Code Group
Boston

As David Dixon alludes to in his article, "Building the Bunker: Defensible space and defensible behavior" [September/October, 2002], we have been living with some examples of the buildings of the future in Boston (and other cities as well) since about 1975. On Washington Street near Downtown Crossing there is a building designed as "defensible space." Exchange Place offers the same street amenities as those proposed to defend against terrorism. Without windows or openings of any kind, the walls are a hard edge against which pedestrian movement is threatened by a lack of escape potential.

Other cities have their concessions to terror and security. The Bonaventure Complex in Los Angeles, Detroit's Renaissance Center, the Houston Center, and the Peachtree Plaza in Atlanta are examples of designs turned inward for security against violence. If this were the definitive design to resist terrorism and civil disturbance, every city in Israel would show this evolution after 50 years of random violence. There are, obviously, better designs to control access and exposure.

True protection and security comes from awareness, observation and familiarity. The North End was a safe place to live and raise a family for the first half of the 20th century because everyone was aware of those who belonged in and to the neighborhood and who was a stranger. The deterioration of that feeling of safety stems from the progressive disintegration of the neighborhood and the influx of disinterested strangers. Living in the area without participating in the daily activities, these new residents, many of them singles or working couples, take the place of the older overseers.

Some unique features of streetscape separating vehicles and pedestrians, such as planters, fences, grade separation, trees, and bollards (cast-iron hitching posts), have been utilized to provide safety and a feeling of security in the past. On Commonwealth Avenue in Boston's Back Bay, for example, pedestrians derive a feeling of security by the separation from the street by parked cars, a curb and a tree line with bollards. Residences are additionally separated by about 10 feet of iron-fenced grass or planted area and another curbing. The proximity of the residences to the street provides security for pedestrians without forfeiting pleasant outdoor use by stoop sitters. Each element of this existing design may be slightly exaggerated in an urban environment to harden buildings without obvious repulsion.

George Jessop AIA
Centerville, Massachusetts

Jerry Tepe asks in his letter ["Letters to the Editor," November/December 2002] about Kallmann McKinnell & Wood Architects' application for a building code variance: "Is it not our professional responsibility to ensure that our designs...are in total compliance with all applicable codes?"

We applaud his call for architects to inform themselves about the codes but also offer these words of caution. Architects forego a great deal of their professional responsibility to their clients and to society in general when they do not remain in a critical relationship to the laws and customs under which they are being asked to design. Unfortunately, the ethical codes for architects (issued by NCARB and AIA) currently seem to imply that architects must obey all laws without question.

Contrast this with the ethical codes of the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association which, quite to the contrary, demand that doctors and lawyers play an active and continual role in reforming the law when it does not fully support their capacity to render their services.

Taking the codes into consideration is only a starting point to rendering professional services ethically. Sometimes, seeking variances or even wholesale code overhauls is the more responsible, more ethical position when it comes to maintaining the high standards for the built environment that the public has entrusted to architects. Great improvements in our built environment might result if more architects resisted the temptations of passivity and emulated their more active professional colleagues in this matter.

Victoria Beach AIA
Brad Walker AIA
Chairs, BSA Ethics Forum
Boston

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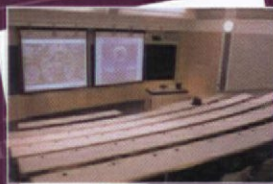
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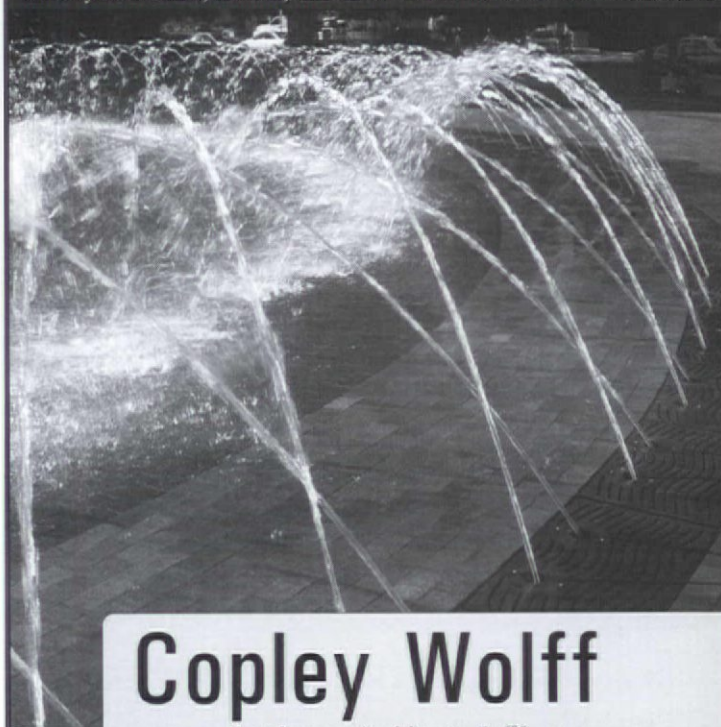
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Photo by Jerry Howard

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WATER & FIRE

Inspired European Kitchens and Baths

Burying Olmsted

The Riverway segment
of The Emerald Necklace
Boston

Design:
Frederick Law Olmsted

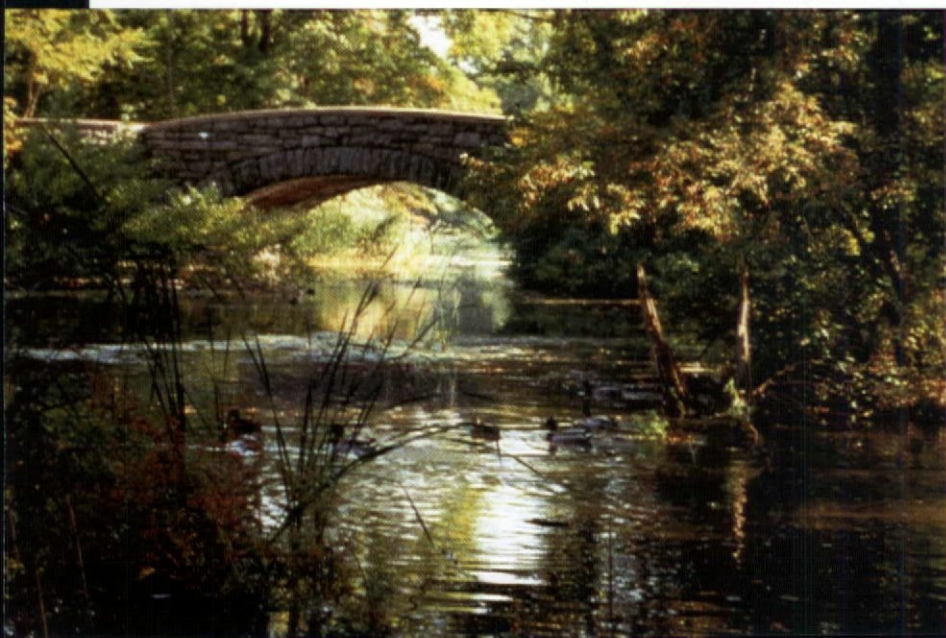


Photo: Karen Sparacio/Boston Parks Department, courtesy of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy

Participants:

Rebecca Barnes FAIA is chief planner of the City of Boston at the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and is a past president of the Boston Society of Architects.

Harry Fuller ASLA is the president of Carol R. Johnson Associates, Inc. in Boston.

Shauna Gillies-Smith is the principal of Ground, a landscape design and public art practice in Boston.

Mark Klopfer is a principal of Landworks Studio, Inc. in Salem, Massachusetts. A design critic in the department of landscape architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, he was a fellow at the American Academy in Rome in 2001.

Elizabeth Padjen FAIA is the editor of *ArchitectureBoston*.

Marion Pressley FASLA is a principal of Pressley Associates, Inc. in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She teaches landscape history in the Radcliffe Seminars program and at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Lynn Wolff ASLA is a principal of Copley Wolff Design Group in Boston.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: If you asked someone on the street to name a landscape architect, I would guess the first, maybe the only, answer would be Frederick Law Olmsted — if you were lucky enough to get an answer at all. And if you asked what Olmsted designed, you might hear Emerald Necklace in Boston and Central Park, and that would probably be the end of the conversation. I'd like to talk a little bit about Olmsted and his influence. Is his ghost still walking the streets of Boston and, if so, what do you think his continuing presence means in terms of landscape architecture? How has he influenced the ways the public sees landscape?

HARRY FULLER: I don't run into Olmsted a lot. I think we only really run into Olmsted when we're working on a site that he designed. Olmsted is well known in the Boston area because he had such a hand in the beginnings of Boston as we know it now. Boston is a place that relishes and sells history, so it's easy to fit Olmsted into that selling of Boston. But I don't think that applies to the rest of the country. And I don't think there is a ghost here.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: I disagree — I think that there's often a conflation of Olmsted as a symbol of the archetypal American landscape and our understanding of the naturalistic, English country style, which was part of the genesis of the Olmsted firm. One way to think about the ghost of Olmsted is in terms of our continuing comfort with naturalistic landscapes and a consequent discomfort with other types of landscapes.

REBECCA BARNES: One of the manifestations of that in Boston in recent years is the fact that so many people can think of only Post Office Square as an example of good park design. It's not classically Olmstedian, but it uses certain

elements — the trellis, the building, a nice little lawn, lots of plants — that seem Olmstedian in their inspiration. Maybe that's different from a ghost. It's more like a mesmerizing of people because it repeats in contemporary terms the instincts that Olmsted was playing out, but doesn't really offer an alternative. I feel similarly about City Square Park in Charlestown. Those parks haven't extended our imagination about what roles parks play in urban life.

MARION PRESSLEY: I think that the roots of that problem go back before Olmsted. There are other examples — our need to turn Copley Square from a hard landscape into a soft landscape, or our insistence that we can't live with a piazza design for Government Center. I think it can be laid very squarely on Thomas Jefferson's shoulders. It's really anti-urbanism in its rawest form. It's Mr. Jefferson who led us into an agrarian society, who said that cities are not safe and that we need to live in a rural condition. So by the time Olmsted arrived, there had been a lot of groundwork set in our way of looking at things. I think it's our anti-urbanism that is really at the root of a lot of what happens today. I wouldn't interpret Post Office Square or City Square Park as Olmstedian. They're too exposed to urban life, and if you look at the essence of Olmsted's parks, whether they're big or small, you find that the separation from the city is a very important part of them.

LYNN WOLFF: We're talking purely in terms of aesthetics. But Olmsted was really a social reformer. Much of Olmsted's work was about health and interaction among social classes. So I think in that respect, the Olmstedian tradition of interaction and designing places that are human is different from the more avant-garde forms of landscape. It's not just an aesthetic.

HARRY FULLER: But you could have what you're calling an avant-garde or very contemporary landscape aesthetic that would solve all of those social issues. I just don't think we have one in Boston yet.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: It is very interesting to read Olmsted or texts about Olmsted. There's very little discussion about the aesthetic. The discussion is about the program, about the separation of uses, about the mingling of classes. It's pretty hard to derive the aesthetic principles from the text, yet I think that when people describe an Olmstedian landscape, they tend to refer to the stylistic aspects of his work.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: One of the reasons Rebecca might have called Post Office Square Olmstedian is that it represents a romantic idea about the land and landscape. I wonder if that is still a pervasive attitude that affects the way people address landscapes, even in the city.

MARK KLOPPER: One of the keys to looking at landscapes is the education of the designers who built them and their understanding of what an Olmsted landscape is. We're talking about it now in terms of its social program. There have been some interesting critiques about Olmsted's social programs and the populations that were excluded in some ways. For example, he would often describe the parks as places for underclass women and children, but there was always an exclusion of young working-class men, whose activities were not wanted in the parks. But I'm not sure that much of that is taught in a typical landscape history course. The examination of Olmsted parks is usually based on more formal aspects. I teach at Harvard in the first-year program. We have a studio that looks at one of Olmsted's small parks in Charlestown, Doherty Park. Doherty has a lot of the typical set pieces of an Olmsted landscape and puts them on a very small site. It has a slope. It has a lawn. It has plantings around the perimeter. It has paths that wind through it. And it's always interesting to see how students interact with it. The amount of reverence that's given to the Olmsted piece — how they connect to it or deny it — is an interesting point of departure. It brings up some essential design issues in their first semester.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: Is the reverence due to the fact that they know the park is by Olmsted or are they responding to some inherent quality in the space?

MARK KLOPPER: The fact that it's an Olmsted landscape adds a level of complexity to the issues that they're dealing with.

MARION PRESSLEY: Doherty Park is a very interesting case study — many people are not aware of the fact that Olmsted did quite a few of these smaller neighborhood parks in both New York City and Boston. They were influenced by the small squares and parks that were developed as part of the park system in Paris during the 1860s and 1870s.

REBECCA BARNES: The word "system" is an important part of the power of the Olmsted legacy here in Boston because of the Emerald Necklace. There is also a system of Olmsted parks in Seattle,

Does Olmsted's ghost still walk the streets of Boston?

I vote to exhume Olmsted. I hardly think that contemporary painters are talking about burying, say, Carravaggio — or that many architects are trying to bury Sullivan or Wright. What I would like to bury is silly 20th-century decorative post-Olmsted landscapes that are pattern-obsessed and not spatial and those that fail to grasp the great and defining quality of landscape as a design art: that the medium of landscape is a living medium, that the felt landscape is the conveyor of crucial experiences and meanings in the modern city. What I would also like to bury is architects talking about landscape. They have added little except confusion in the conversation about the Artery project in Boston. Architects should get their own house in order; from my side of the fence, it looks rather muddled over there right now. Bury Olmsted? Hogwash. Honor Olmsted, study Olmsted, understand Olmsted. He left a legacy that few other designers in any profession could hope to exceed, let alone equal.

Michael van Valkenburgh
Michael van Valkenburgh
Associates, Boston

and there may be in other cities as well. It's a continuous landscape, it offers many experiences, and it connects many places in a city. I think that's part of the excitement that a lot of people feel about the Rose Kennedy Greenway, the Central Artery corridor — that it's being developed as a system, at a scale larger than a single park, to become a feature that makes connections among several parts of the city. But are there any contemporary landscape architects who are thinking and working at the scale of a city or region similar to Olmsted?

LYNN WOLFF: I don't think so, certainly not many. The land isn't available.

MARION PRESSLEY: Pittsburgh is one example, with the three rivers park system that it's developing. [The architecture firm] Chan Krieger has done a masterplan for developing land that would be considered brownfields — abandoned industrial sites — along both sides of the Allegheny and the Mon Rivers.

HARRY FULLER: A lot of the modern park movement relates to water — rivers, streams, harbors. The earlier movements focused on internal parks. Now many American cities are seeing a regeneration of the urban edges along waterways.

MARION PRESSLEY: And railways, too. There are whole systems of trails being developed along riverways and abandoned railways. That's another form of park system.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: I think interest in waterways and railways is because they've been ignored. They're the leftover pieces of land in the city.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: Marion mentioned Chan Krieger, which is an architectural and urban design firm. That brings up the issue of professional turf. Urban design started to emerge as a professional discipline in the '50s and '60s, but really came into its own in the '70s and the '80s. Since then, it has become a common ground or neutral turf, depending on how you look at it. Architects say they're urban designers. Landscape architects say they're urban designers. It's become a free-for-all.

REBECCA BARNES: I've often wondered if landscape architects don't feel as though something was stolen from them that was rightfully theirs in the creation of that discipline.

MARION PRESSLEY: Actually, planning came first as a discipline, before urban design. The irony is that Olmsted's son — FLO, Junior — was one of the early leaders of both the planning and landscape architecture professions in the 20th century. So you had planners and architects and landscape architects all eyeing this thing called urban design.

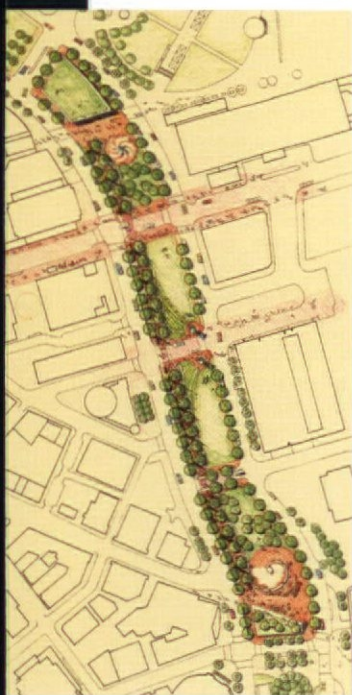
SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: I actually came to landscape architecture from the opposite direction. My degrees are in architecture and urban design and, when I graduated, I couldn't identify an urban designer who I wanted to work for. I realized that landscape architects could be working at that same scale in a more creative manner. Frequently urban design is limited to building envelopes with no clear authorship in terms of designing the public space. I envisioned an approach to urban design that carefully maps out the building uses and the streetscape but then uses the design of a specific area to create a very clear identity — rather than just leaving it as a vacuum for someone else to fill.

LYNN WOLFF: One of the differences between architects and planners versus landscape architects is that landscape architects study social interaction and how people use space. I think that landscape architects have a very good handle on the scale of outdoor spaces. That's what makes systems and spaces connect and interact and ultimately what makes cities work. We think how people walk through sequences of spaces — where they feel confined, and where they feel relaxed. Our training is very much based on social sciences and psychology and ecology. We really are specialists in the design of spaces for people.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: Then why are landscape architects at the end of the food chain? Aren't landscape architects and the landscape budget hit first in a recession?

MARION PRESSLEY: No, that's a typical misconception. When recessions hit in the past, the big firms carried on. Why? Because they all had public park work. I would say that for probably 75 percent of our business, we are the prime contractors, not subcontractors or subconsultants. We do very little work for architects directly. Often we're hired by the planner or the developer to design the whole project. And sometimes we even hire the architects.

HARRY FULLER: Our firm is a little different — about half of our work, maybe 40 percent, is with architects.



Central Artery/Tunnel
Wharf District Parks

Plan by:
EDAW and
Copley Wolff Design Group

MARK KLOPPER: I think we're starting to see a transformation, too, in the way some owners or clients view landscape architecture. An example is college and university campus planning and design. Some campuses are taking the point of view that the most important thing is a landscape that's cohesive, a landscape that gives the institution an identity. And then you can plug in buildings by different architects. The idea that a landscape is the thing that binds all these disparate architectural pieces together is gaining much greater acceptance.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: But, Mark, I do think there's a germ of truth in Elizabeth's comment — landscape architects are at the end of the food chain in terms of visibility. In terms of public recognition that they create an authored space. I think this has to do with the materials that we work with. They're very ephemeral materials. Going back to Olmsted, if you were to ask the person on the street if an Olmsted park was an authored space or if it was just naturally like that, everyone would answer that it's naturally like that. People have a comfort level with a naturalistic landscape in that if one thinks that landscapes are made by God, then there's a discomfort with a landscape that looks like it was authored by a strong hand.

HARRY FULLER: I think you're right. It's a problem that the profession is struggling with. It's easy for other professions to demonstrate need. You need a doctor because he's going to fix your body. You need an architect because you want to build a building. Why do you need a landscape architect? That demonstration of need is what the profession is struggling with.

MARION PRESSLEY: We've come a long way, though.

LYNN WOLFF: I also think that the value of open space has really been elevated. Look at any architecture magazine now. There are many, many articles talking about open-space developments. Ten years ago, you would never see an article in the paper about parks and open space.

MARION PRESSLEY: I think it's the public/private partnerships that brought this change about. We now have all these green groups that have come into being — and there are a lot of them in Boston. They've made a tremendous difference. The Emerald Necklace, for example, has 10 or 11 "friends" groups that independently call themselves friends of various pieces along its length. Those people are all educated about the value of open space. So I think it's the public/

private partnerships that have made a big difference, because you get to the laypeople who you're concerned about, and they understand the importance of open space.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: Let's go back to Shauna's phrase, "authored space," because it represents an interesting distinction. The relative visibility of authorship starts to define some of the differences we're seeing in landscape architecture today. On the one hand, we have a very romantic kind of landscape, a very green, nature-is-still-with-us view of landscape, and on the other hand we have landscape as art. And there are obviously pieces that are in between. I wonder what you think about those degrees of authorship and how they're represented here in Boston.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: I don't think that there's a visible authorship with respect to most public spaces in Boston. There are only a couple of spaces that I would send beginning students to as an introduction to what contemporary landscape architecture is about: Pete Walker's Tanner Fountain at Harvard and Stanley Saitowitz's Holocaust Memorial. I don't think the lack of contemporary work is peculiar to Boston, but it may be more surprising here compared to some cities. It goes back to Marion's point about an ethos of the agrarian. I think there's definitely a place for a natural landscape, but I think that there is also a place for expanding the menu of choices, and for accommodating a much stronger, more visible hand in the design of a lot of spaces.

HARRY FULLER: I think the naturalistic spaces that you see lack known authors because they all sort of meld together. Authors are known in very contemporary landscapes that are so distinctive that people will associate a name with it. That doesn't mean that kind of landscape is any better than the naturalistic landscape.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: But is it worse?

HARRY FULLER: It just means it's more noticeable. That also goes along with what is being published. A very contemporary landscape has a greater chance of being published right now and therefore you are more likely to know the author.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: I think it's very interesting that Boston is one of the hot beds of contemporary landscape architects in the country, and yet the people most associated with that are not practicing here. None of those people — Martha Schwartz, George Hargreaves — are doing any work in this city.

Does Olmsted's ghost still walk the streets of Boston?

Olmsted's ghost, if you look carefully, is still kicking and remains unbrainwashed by temporary fads and trends. What continues to be amazing is this ghost's ability to deal with space and transitions. Perhaps that is why landscapes such as New York's Prospect Park have stood the test of time and continue to offer lessons for the next generation. Olmsted is a friendly ghost to those who want to see him.

Craig Halvorson
Halvorson Design Partnership
Boston

Burying Olmsted

MARION PRESSLEY: Martha did the bagel garden here. What put her on the map was the bagel garden on the cover of the ASLA magazine.

LYNN WOLFF: I wonder if this phenomenon is due to the level of community participation here. It could be because public funding of landscape, which is the majority of it, requires community participation. Public money means that the design becomes a democratic design. And that process discourages the kinds of contemporary spaces you're talking about.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: But think of Portland, Oregon. Portland has a very progressive public landscape.

LYNN WOLFF: Maybe it has better leadership.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: The thing that interests me about Portland is that it continues to foster an exploration of the landscape that I think is much more progressive than its architecture. Lawrence Halprin did the Lovejoy Fountain in the '60s. Since then, Portland has hired Peter Walker. Robert Murase has done work there, as have Martha Schwartz and George Hargreaves.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: If we can use authorship or voice as a handle for this, it seems to me that one of the ways that young designers get known is to develop a voice and have someone discover it. It's something that is different that puts them on the map. It's the bagel garden maybe. But I wonder what the challenges are for young firms. Mark, I'll put this question to you since your firm is relatively young.

MARK KLOPPER: Well, we face an odd set of problems. A lot of mechanisms that were put in place a few decades ago to address firm ownership have made things really difficult for us. Our office is run by two men, and we're interested in doing public work and operating in the public realm. But it's extremely difficult to get there because landscape firms are often brought onto project teams to fill out a roster of minority- and women-owned businesses. And that's something that our office doesn't meet, and it's impossible to surmount. So our aspiration is to work on commercial projects where we can build landscapes that people, the public, will occupy. That's got to be our strategy because there's no other way to do it.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: And then there's the problem that a lot of public work is awarded on the basis of previous experience. So unless one has done that, one doesn't get it. It's the chicken and the egg.

MARK KLOPPER: There's also the issue of time and landscape. Michael Blier started our office six years ago, and it takes that long to actually have a project built and then to mature. At the end of construction, architects go in and photograph their buildings before they're too lived in, but a landscape really needs the time to mature. Some of the landscapes that Michael did at the very beginning are only now starting to show the intent.

photo courtesy Hargreaves Associates, Inc.



Sydney Olympics 2000
Sydney, Australia

Design:
Hargreaves Associates



The Bagel Garden
Boston

Design:
Martha Schwartz, Inc.

photo: Martha Schwartz

REBECCA BARNES: It's interesting to consider two of the Boston sites that Shauna mentioned earlier in that context. One is a fountain that's rocks and steam. That didn't take any time to mature. The other is a memorial to the Holocaust, which is primarily also a built structure. Think about what Mark was just saying about the maturation time. One might say, well, Mark, why don't you do some landscape art for a while then?

HARRY FULLER: But to some extent that is why you become a landscape architect. Part of the challenge is to be able to understand a place over time and to design for the fact that it has an existence over time.

MARION PRESSLEY: One of the things that Olmsted said was that he believed that the real test of a landscape was whether it could stand the test of time. He said that if his Central Park still existed in a hundred years, it would have passed the test of time and that would be a test of his philosophies. Things can appear to be on the cutting edge. But will they meet the test of time? One of the landscape magazines recently published a critique of Parc de la Villette, which was designed by Bernard Tschumi about 10 years ago in Paris. You probably all remember it: the little red structures — the "follies" — with no particular purpose, scattered across the lawn. It was considered a major cutting-edge thing at the time, much admired. It was part of the Deconstructivist thing that everyone was doing. But the people have voted — they voted with their feet, and they voted, *Non*. It is a desolate landscape. Very few people there. Things aren't functioning. The follies look beautiful in red in the landscape, but there are no people. But you can drive just five minutes away to Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, which was done in 1860, and find a picturesque city park functioning as it always has, fully populated by neighborhood people, the old, the young. What now will pass the hundred-year test of time? Will Hargreaves' landscapes? Will Martha Schwartz's?

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: Why does Boston have such hesitancy to be even a little bit experimental with the landscape? I actually believe that Boston right now is coming into a sort of renaissance of progressive architecture. But that's not reflected in landscape. Is it because of its status as one of the few historic cities within North America? Does that make people want to preserve it? Does that make them reluctant to do something that might not pass the test of time?

MARK KLOPPER: It's especially true in political circles. Why isn't Boston's park department interested in doing more modern landscapes?

REBECCA BARNES: Part of the answer is that typically it doesn't have money to invest in new properties, period. The budget is barely adequate to maintain what exists. One recent exception is Millennium Park in West Roxbury, where soil from the Big Dig was used to cap the old landfill.

HARRY FULLER: It may not look like a Hargreaves landscape, but that is cutting-edge work.

MARION PRESSLEY: I agree. There's a whole cutting-edge approach to the technology of taking a totally derelict landscape — brownfields, landfill — and then capping it, putting the soil on it, and bringing it back as a reforested or reconstituted landscape. It's not so much a picturesque landscape as much as it is an ecological landscape. And I don't think these projects are being recognized.

HARRY FULLER: A lot more of those projects are done in Europe than here.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: What are we missing in terms of these kinds of projects getting recognition? Why are they failing to call attention to themselves?

MARK KLOPPER: They're starting to. But it's also an imageability issue. How do you hype a huge 50-acre site that has this biomediation happening on it? It's very difficult to make that compelling enough to put in a non-trade publication.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: Some of the leading research on those kinds of landscapes is being done at Harvard. I'd like to talk a bit about the presence of the schools in this region. Here we have at Harvard the oldest landscape program in the country, we have a program at RISD and at UMass. The University of Rhode Island offers a landscape degree, as does the Conway School in western Massachusetts. You can study landscape at the Radcliffe Seminars and the various programs at the Arnold Arboretum. And there are others. They are all part of a universe of educational opportunity in landscape architecture for people who have varying needs or expectations. I wonder how that coalesces to create a community of landscape architects. Does it? I frankly see very little effect from this number of institutions that are all within, perhaps, 75 miles of one another. I would think there would be greater vibrancy. Is there something we should be expecting of the schools in terms of visibility?

Does Olmsted's ghost still walk the streets of Boston?

Of course. From Olmsted we inherited a 19th-century legacy that defines and articulates Boston's historic landscapes. The issue in front of us today is how to bring forward an equally compelling vision on sites such as today's typical urban infill situations, which are completely different from the countryside parcels of yesteryear. The public, government officials, and private benefactors must understand the ground is different, and designers must lead as Olmsted once did.

George Hargreaves
Hargreaves Associates
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Burying Olmsted

Should we expect the schools to insert themselves into the public discussion?

MARK KLOPPER: A lot of schools do. Cornell, for instance, is really interested in developing a community-based program, and it is trying to have an extension capacity that works with the public and works in elementary schools and high schools as a way of educating another generation about what landscape architecture is and why it's important.

HARRY FULLER: I don't know that it's up to the professional schools. We in the profession need to get into the high schools. If I weren't my children's father, they wouldn't have any idea what a landscape architect does. It's up to us to tell people.

LYNN WOLFF: But I think also the invisibility is due to the fact that landscape architects are generally really nice people. They don't have a very flamboyant demeanor. Generally. And they're not very political. I think that more landscape architects need to be involved in public affairs — to be visible and make their opinions known.

REBECCA BARNES: I've always heard that — that there's a different personality profile in landscape. But I wasn't going to bring it up.

MARION PRESSLEY: I think it's true. I think landscape architects are more of the second-man-in, the one who doesn't have to make the big statement. In other words, the person who can live with what somebody else has done and extend it and keep going with it.

MARK KLOPPER: I'm horrified by that. Maybe one of the reasons is that I know we have at least two converts here. I was trained and worked as an architect and Shauna was as well. And so, I always go back and question why I made the switch. For me, it had to do with opportunity. I love architecture, I still do, and I miss it in some ways, but I think that landscape, because it's so young as a discipline, offers great opportunities to make of it what you can. You're only hemmed in by your own creativity and your own motivation. We've talked about the factors that limit us, and how we feel oppressed by this or that aspect of practicing landscape. But wow, there's such an amazing opportunity because it's not really defined. It works in the realm of urban design. It works in the realm of planning. It works in the realm of architecture. It works in the realm of art. And it moves among those things in a much more fluid way than other disciplines.

MARION PRESSLEY: You know, I always find it interesting when people say landscape architecture is a very young profession. What was Le Nôtre doing in 1656? What about Capability Brown in the 1700s? What about Pirro Ligorio, who designed Villa D'Este in Tivoli in the 1550s? They were all landscape architects, designing massive estates. In this country, New York City was designed as a whole series of squares when it was still New Amsterdam. Look at Savannah, at Philadelphia. The heck with that, go back to St. Augustine. We need to think of ourselves as part of a profession that existed long before Olmsted.

MARK KLOPPER: Yes, but it was not a discipline distinct from architects or engineers or artists-poets. That began a hundred years ago, almost to the year, when Harvard decided to start a landscape program. In today's world, the disciplines are defined and, for me, this one has an elasticity that the others don't.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: Where do you see landscape going in terms of public response to it? If Post Office Square is the accepted gold standard for public spaces in this city, that defines one set of expectations. Will those expectations change with the presence of people like George Hargreaves and Martha Schwartz? Are they some kind of magnetic influence that will eventually draw everyone in another direction? Or will they become isolated?

LYNN WOLFF: I think that there's a place for both approaches and that it depends upon the site and it depends upon the use. I think we need more of the George-and-Martha type of landscape in Boston, but I think that both are correct as long as they accommodate people.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: We've been focusing on Martha and George, but there are others. One person who hasn't been mentioned is Dan Kiley, although he represents an older generation of designers.

LYNN WOLFF: I was going to bring up Dan Kiley because I think he has an interesting design ethic — instead of copying nature, he abstracts it.

HARRY FULLER: It's a very pure approach to design.

photo: Landworks Studio, Inc.



Wooster Group retreat
Western Maine

Design:
Landworks Studio, Inc.

MARK KLOPPER: I was going to mention Dan, too, when the question was raised at the very beginning about landscape architects people have heard of. A lot of people who know something about art know about his work. It's especially significant in its relationship to art and architecture.

LYNN WOLFF: Lawrence Halprin is another one.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: Garrett Ekbo and Thomas Church were part of that generation, too. But if we mention George and Martha, we have to mention Pete Walker and Michael Van Valkenburgh.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: I think of Michael as having a different aesthetic from the other three.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: Probably because he uses plants so effectively. He works with the natural landscape as a partner, and so his work is not as visible.

MARION PRESSLEY: I think he hasn't been published as much as the others.

MARK KLOPPER: It's the imageability issue again, and its relationship to being published. How do you photograph a Van Valkenburgh? But it's a wonderful thing to experience, and a wonderful thing to own. It's a very difficult thing to represent.

LYNN WOLFF: I think it's interesting that these discussions always get back to imageability, which means they always get back to the way things look. I'm sure architecture is the same way. It means you don't really recognize the socially significant contributions or the fact that the process may be as valuable as the product.

HARRY FULLER: I agree. A lot of things are produced in and of their own sake. Contemporary design for the sake of contemporary design. It's not honest. That doesn't mean that they've solved all the problems and that they are good design. But they get published. And because they get published, we notice them and we know who their authors are.

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: I was a principal designer with Martha Schwartz for quite a few years, and I wouldn't say that any of the projects that I worked on were contemporary design for the sake of doing contemporary design. The majority of our discussions in the office were practical discussions. I think the thing that Martha has been most significant for, probably more so than anyone, is opening up the palette of what is possible in

landscape architecture. There are waves of students and landscape architects who are now approaching things in a much more open-eyed manner. But we still have the problem of getting over the impression that landscape architecture has to be a certain way in Boston.

LYNN WOLFF: I think you need more private money.

MARION PRESSLEY: A lot of Martha's early cutting-edge stuff was private work. As was George Hargreaves' and Peter Walker's — individuals, private businesses, and corporations. But the big question is the one that Elizabeth posed. Who will be the next layer down who are trying to imitate these people? It happens in architecture, too — you get the big names and then you get the imitators who follow, the smaller firms who break off.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: But there's a big difference between being an imitator and being influenced by someone. I'm curious about the nature of that influence, if indeed we'll be able to identify an influence a few years from now, and what the conditions might be that would foster a change in public tastes and expectations.

LYNN WOLFF: I mentioned public money and community process. A lot of public art is done for a few people, paid for by a few people, and they have strong opinions. I think that if public money is involved, we need strong design leadership in the BRA [Boston Redevelopment Authority] and the Parks Department that can say, let's do something else.

REBECCA BARNES: Is the BSLA [Boston Society of Landscape Architects] participating in the search for a new parks commissioner? That seems to me to be one of the biggest opportunities. I think it would be a mistake to think that change is going to happen only in the private sector. Both sectors, public and private, have to be committed. That also suggests that landscape architects need to cultivate and inform their clients. If, for example, there are three groups that are Olmsted champions, historicists, or preservationists, is there a fourth group that's about a different kind of landscape? Who's doing that education? Who's responsible for that communication? Maybe that's something that architects and landscape architects can do together. I think we all share an interest in having our physical world and our social world reflect our values and aspirations, and the landscape does that at least as much as buildings do it. I was fascinated by Shauna's observation that architecture in this

Does Olmsted's ghost still walk the streets of Boston?

There is no ghost of Olmsted. There is the sad relic of a synthetic landscape infrastructure in Boston, barely discernable among its poisoned waterways, broken parkways, and listless governing authorities. Yet there is also the profound lesson in Olmsted's career that deeply held and rigorously pursued convictions about urbanization and change could overcome our culture's tendency toward conservative, regressive building. If we believe that the landscape can be an expressive force for the democratic city, as Olmsted did, then we'll stop making things that pretend to look like Olmsted's, and we'll stop preserving mere fragments of his work, and instead follow his real motivation: Reform.

Gary R. Hilderbrand
Reed Hilderbrand
Watertown, Massachusetts

Burying Olmsted

Field of Stories
West Palm Beach, Florida

Design:
Ground



rendering: S. Gorman

Does Olmsted's ghost still walk the streets of Boston?

Unfortunately, yes — but as a cheap designer knock-off, decades removed from cultural and social context.

Chris Reed

StoSS landscape urbanism
Boston

Olmsted brought the landscape into the city for the "refreshment" of its citizens. His ghost still walks, searching for spaces that promote well-being. He moans a lot, but sometimes he smiles.

Julie Moir Messervy

Wellesley, Massachusetts

city has somehow passed over a hurdle and that it's not stuck in the same time warp. I know other people feel quite differently. But it suggests that the kind of communication I'm talking about has been working in the architectural field. Is there, for example, a landscape architecture critic on any major newspaper?

HARRY FULLER: I don't think so.

REBECCA BARNES: That's how a lot of people get their ideas about architecture.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: How would a landscape architect's vision of public space be different from an architect's?

LYNN WOLFF: I can answer that with an example: City Hall Plaza. An architect's idea of how that space could be enlivened is to enliven the edges and the buildings — in order to make the space successful, you have to get people to the space, even by filling the void. Whereas a landscape architect feels that the space itself is an attraction. That the space can generate activity. An architect often thinks that you have to have commercial development and you have to have real estate to activate a space. Landscape architects feel that there are ways to activate the space and bring value to the surroundings through the open space.

REBECCA BARNES: I want to know what you all think we should be doing with City Hall Plaza.

MARION PRESSLEY: I wish you wouldn't green it. That's all I can say. We need a TV show that goes to Florence and shows all of the piazzas there and how they operate as public space — that was the premise of City Hall Plaza. And then it could go to the Piazza Maria Novella and see the disaster of green placed into an urban space in an Italian city.

LYNN WOLFF: I agree, it shouldn't be green. I think there should be a series of temporary installations. Get people down there.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: The response is that you would all agree that you'd like to see it stay hard?

SHAUNA GILLIES-SMITH: I would.

HARRY FULLER: Yes, certainly more hard than soft.

MARK KLOPPER: And I think this is where a landscape architect can make that open space much, much better.

ELIZABETH PADJEN: This is fascinating — the landscape community just said it should be hard. I suspect a lot of people would find that counter-intuitive. But, more important, that point of view hasn't been loudly expressed in the public forum.

REBECCA BARNES: This makes me go back to the idea of a landscape architecture critic for the newspaper, because I think one of the things that [*Boston Globe* architecture critic] Robert Campbell does for people who have no design background is to help them understand something about the space. Not just how it looks, but how it feels and what it means. Our culture is not good about talking about feelings and experience. Everybody thinks that when they look at a wall, they see the same thing, and that of course is not true. Yet we all think we have a common understanding.

MARK KLOPPER: We also need theoreticians, which is something that's evolving only now. What is landscape theory and how does one start to make an intellectual argument about it?

MARION PRESSLEY: I think that is one thing that distinguishes Olmsted. He was a tremendous writer and communicator. He was a tremendous politician. We could learn from his strategies.

REBECCA BARNES: So maybe this discussion should be about uncovering Olmsted instead of burying him.

MARION PRESSLEY: I had a professor in college who gave a whole lecture about how landscape architects do not create gods. He said that the architects can list their gods — Wright, Saarinen, and others — but we tend to tear down our gods. Even Olmsted. You have to remember this was in the '60s, so you've got to put that into the equation. Things have come a long way since then. But we still don't celebrate people like Hideo Sasaki — a big name, an international practice with his office here in Watertown, but I bet half of the people in Boston don't know his name or the public spaces that he designed here. We haven't had a tradition of creating gods for ourselves, and yet I have the feeling we're now starting to. We haven't got Zeus yet. But there may be little gods and goddesses down here. ■■■

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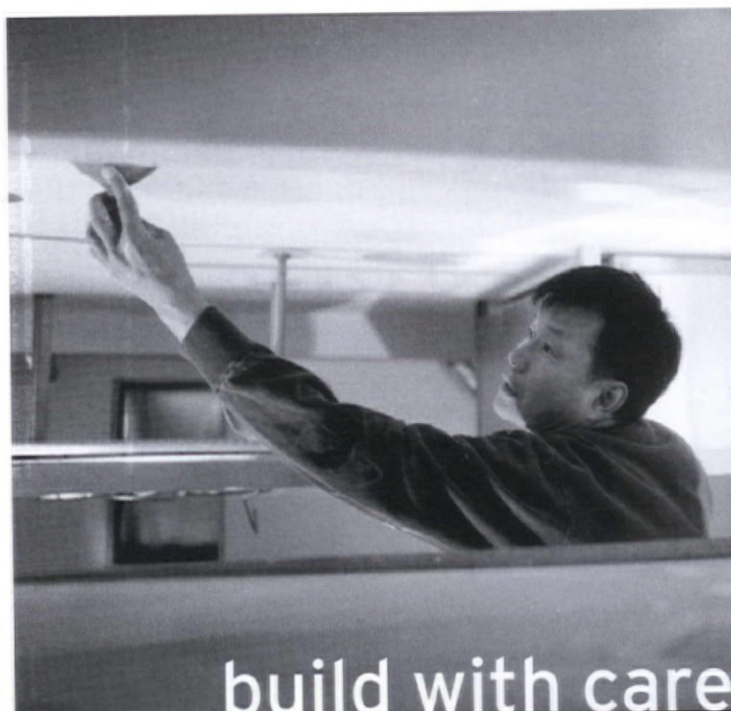
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Lessons from the Little Dig:

The Problem of Landscape Preservation

by Gina Crandell

While planners and designers ponder the future of the land above Boston's Big Dig, work has quietly begun on a project that poses equally challenging questions about the ways we address the past: the \$93-million dredging and restoration of Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace. The Big Dig may someday influence other large urban projects, but this "Little Dig" represents everyday issues facing landscape architects and planners in communities across the country.

In 1878, Olmsted established the world's first linear park, synthesizing engineering and tidal flow to cleanse what had become "the filthiest marsh and mud flats anywhere in Massachusetts." Olmsted's vision went far beyond the solving of technical problems, embracing the notion of landscape contributing to civic life. His stream was idealized and democratic, and he hoped that it would also carry a flow of people through diverse parts of the city, from the Fens all the way to Franklin Park.

The 20th century brought the undoing of much of that vision. The damming of the Charles River in 1910 made Olmsted's tidal cleansing system obsolete. After World War II, land was regularly taken from the Emerald Necklace for roads and elevated highways. Since it now nearly takes a police escort to cross from one Emerald of the Necklace to the next, Olmsted's civic vision is long forgotten.

The former Sears parking lot site in the Riverway section of the Necklace brings questions of restoration into focus. In the 1960s, the Sears department store claimed yet more land when the city agreed to lease part of the Emerald Necklace for the store's parking lot. In the 1990s, grass was planted where the parking lot and river had been; Sears is now Landmark Center, comprising theaters, restaurants, stores, and office space. The plan for this segment of the Emerald Necklace is to pretend it is still a river. Plans call for building a gravel-lined, trapezoidal channel that looks like a river and reconstructing a piece of a shoreline that Olmsted proposed more than a hundred years ago — albeit at a different elevation, in a smaller confine, and in an entirely different context. Could this project, which does no more than gesture nostalgically to the past, possibly respect Olmsted's design? Would Olmsted himself have proposed something with so little vision? Of course not.

We should worry that such a Band-Aid approach to preservation at this location seems palatable to so many people. Perhaps Boston is motivated by regret for having given Olmsted's great work over to cars; perhaps the city is now hostage to what's left. But however guilty Bostonians may be, are they so blind that they cannot tell the difference between a Band-Aid and an authentic monument?

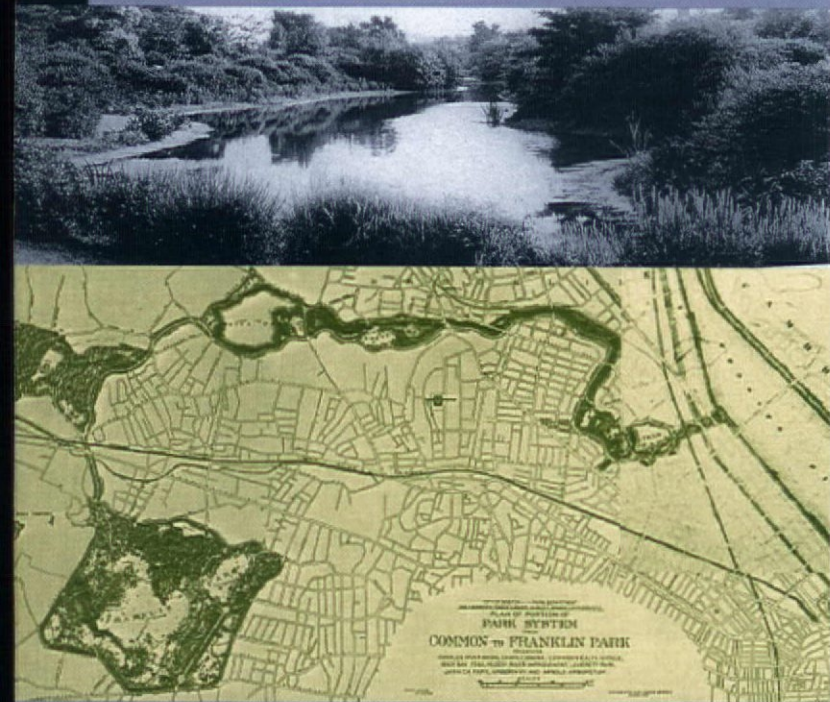
The most pressing question of all is: Where are the advocates of contemporary design? Surely there are citizens who desire lively public places, but it seems that many are debating restoration issues when the need today is the same as it was in the 19th century: the design of great civic spaces.

Courtesy of the Francis Lee Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University

**The Emerald Necklace
Boston, Massachusetts**

**top:
The Fens, twelve years
after planting**

**bottom:
Olmsted's masterplan
for the park system
from the Boston Common
to Franklin Park**



The notion of preserving landscapes is problematic because they change and grow even when they are maintained. Historic issues are now often intertwined with a more recent movement — ecology — and both slide easily toward nostalgia. But even recasting the proposal to reconstruct the “historic shoreline” as an ecological challenge might yield a difference in attitude with significantly different results. The nostalgic gesture of recreating the river may improve water quality by exposing the flow to light and air, but so would an aerating fountain that also could be the centerpiece of an accessible, well-designed contemporary public park. At the larger scale, the \$93-million cost of the current plan, largely for dredging the Emerald Necklace, is considered historic (ridding the Necklace of invasive phragmites reeds that obscure Olmsted’s “views”), ecological (improving oxygen levels), and hydraulic (providing temporary improvement to flow), but as a civic contribution, it is mute.

The preservation movement emerged in this country at the same time Olmsted was designing the Emerald Necklace. Since then, the machinery of preservation has grown from preserving historic buildings and landscapes to rehabilitation (adaptive re-use), restoration (which freezes a period of time and removes evidence of other periods), and reconstruction (which re-creates property for interpretation). Now we have “cultural landscapes,” which the Secretary of the Interior defined in 1996 as “a geographic area associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.” Not only is the term redundant when it tells us that every landscape is cultural, but it also suggests every landscape has the potential to be saved from the future. What is missing is contemporary design as a means for understanding history and ecology.

In a recent project by the Olin Partnership that changed the nature of Bryant Park in New York City from a dangerous drug haven to a vital public place, questions of rehabilitation and restoration arose. Laurie Olin refused to describe the 13-year project in the National Park Service language of a restoration or rehabilitation. Instead he called it a “transformation.” He found the preservation community to hold an oversimplified view of the issues and frequently to advocate positions hostile to change and especially to contemporary design, regardless of quality, while supporting all forms of the past: “Time’s arrow,” he stated, “moves in one direction.”

By contrast, a recent controversy has favored preservation rather than reconstruction in the case of the Dumbarton Oaks garden in Washington, DC, designed by Beatrix Farrand in the 1920s. A proposal in 2000 to build a library under the North Vista’s terraced garden created a firestorm of debate until an alternative location for the library was chosen. A significant garden designed by a founding member of the profession could not be destroyed even if it would later be authentically reconstructed.

European landscape architecture tends to follow the 1964 Charter of Venice, which mandates that preservation should retain only exceptional character and that additions should be distinct and carry the stamp of their time. A design will lose its credibility if it seems to be old but is not old. Guido Hager, an historical garden designer in Zurich, Switzerland, believes that the designer’s responsibility to a place that has been drastically changed is to design anew so that it can age and achieve something we love about historic places: having history rather than pretending to have history.

On a postindustrial site north of Duisburg, Germany, Latz and Partner transformed a defunct steel plant into a park that draws bicyclists, scuba divers, and rock climbers to the ruins left behind. Fern, rose, and water lily gardens are set within obsolete coal and ore bunkers and cooling-tower pools framed by industrial fragments. According to Peter Latz, “The task of dealing with run-down industrial areas and opencast mines requires a new method that accepts their physical qualities as well as their destroyed nature and topography. This new vision should not be one of restoration, for this approach negates the qualities that they currently possess and destroys them for a second time.”

With all the respect for Olmsted that Bostonians tout, they have yet to create a forum that honors his vision instead of emulating his style. By weaving together issues of engineering, ecology, history, and contemporary civic culture, we can make the Emerald Necklace a world-class public park that continues the real spirit of what Olmsted envisioned more than a century ago.



Gina Crandell is a landscape architect. The former senior editor of *Land Forum*, she teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design.

photos: © Michael Latz



Transformed industrial sites in Duisburg, Germany

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Land Fear:

Wildness and the Bewilderment of the City Dweller

by John Stilgoe

Suburbs end where streetlights end. On moonless nights, rural America is dark. Not gloomy. Dark. Despite modern halogen headlights, many metropolitan motorists dislike driving away from rural Interstate highways themselves almost bereft of streetlights. Why do rural and wilderness roads become almost sinister after sundown? Perhaps the dark crowds the car. Perhaps the dark landscape snuggles too closely. Uninvited intimacy disturbs and disgusts when it does not confuse or terrify.

"Bewilderment" once meant mind-numbing fear caused by wild beasts. In Old English, "wylder" designated all wild animals dangerous to people; "ness" identified the lair of such creatures, as it still does at Loch Ness. Atop Old English terms squat words dating from after the Roman conquest. "Panic" means the shoving aside of mental clarity by Pan, and "pandemonium" designates the terrifying sounds wayfarers once heard in forests away from houses, inns, and villages. Europeans brought the whole wilderness concept to North America, where it thrives still. Indeed, mind-numbing fear of wild beasts may be on the increase among bewildered city dwellers and suburbanites, who worry about deer ticks carrying Lyme disease, mosquitoes infected with West Nile fever, coyotes feasting on the family cat, even mountain lions stalking children.

By the 1850s urban growth produced a new bewilderment involving country people disoriented in cities, especially after dark. Nathaniel Hawthorne focused on the mindset in a short story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," as did Herman Melville in a novel, *Pierre*. Nowadays rarely read, these narratives were among the first to focus on nighttime cities as psychological wilderness. George Foster's 1850 *New York by Gas-Light: With Here and There a Streak of Sunshine* produced a string of successors like James McCabe's 1872 *Lights and Shadows of New York Life*, but only scholars intrigued by urban architecture, crime, artificial lighting, and disorientation know them. Far better known are the opposite works from around 1900, in which urban-reared people grow bewildered in alien rural and wilderness darkness or fields or forest. Edith Wharton analyzed such bewilderment in her 1911 novel *Ethan Frome* and in another almost forgotten one published six years later, *Summer*.

Now an increasingly urban national population fears any intimacy with uncontrolled nature, especially darkness, vast expanses, cold, and wet.

Darkness shrivels the psyche simply because too few urban Americans exercise hearing, smell, and touch outdoors. Medical-school scientists and other scholars interested in healthful environments now suspect that sensory deprivation produces all sorts of illness: we are too visual to be healthy. In "Beyond Toxicity: Human Health and the Natural Environment" in *The American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (April 2001), Howard Frumkin demonstrates that direct contact with the natural realm improves health, helps cure physical and mental illness, and may improve intelligence. My contribution to that issue, "Gone Barefoot Lately?" focuses on the long-term design implications of many issues he analyzes. Underlying the medical and design research is the hypothesis Edmund O. Wilson presented in his 1989 *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species*: humans need nature in more than aesthetic and other cultural ways. (See facing page for other related texts.) All the related design-focused writing involves medical and sociological research ranging from the biochemistry of fear to early 20th-century medical warnings about urban sensory overstimulation to late 20th-century findings about the causes of depression. The biophilia hypothesis, however, shifted research away from the visual toward far more encompassing paradigms involving the ways human senses respond to a wide range of environmental stimuli. Modern urban life tends to reduce such response: a society intrigued by deodorizing itself may unwittingly weaken response processes that contribute to health. Not surprisingly, developers of resorts and similar concatenations of space and structure prove remarkably intrigued by such research.

But our instinctive biophilia has been challenged by growing biophobia and distrust of the outdoors. Sedentary, indoor lifestyles coupled with some medical research have fostered the weird situation in which our instinctive fear of the dark is now matched by a fear of the sun. Yet medical researchers have suspected for decades that indoor living, and especially the



photo: Andy Kohn

ingestion of artificial light, may produce serious health consequences. Women's breast cancer rates vary by latitude in the United States: the rate is lower in sunny cities like Phoenix and Fort Lauderdale and higher in cloudy northern cities like Bangor and Cleveland. Some federal authorities advise women to expose neck and shoulders to sunlight for 15 minutes every day, something not especially comfortable in winter-chilled places. Relationships among breast- and skin-cancer rates, casual sunbathing, and even spending part of every noontime outside now vex advice-givers wary of offering conflicting guidelines. If sunbathing forestalls and even cures depression in ways tanning-salon equipment cannot match, savvy adults learn to evaluate multiple risks. Resort developers think about designing according to Frumkin's findings, and backers of planned residential communities wonder if healthfulness will dominate middle-income buyer thinking as it already shapes upper-class decision-making.

Indeed, class matters: socio-economic status affects the way we think about nature. Traditionally educated upper-class children learn differently about body-nature-space relations: their formal and informal education emphasizes outdoor activity. Urban public school educators tend to keep children indoors, while private-school and home-schooled children are sent outside. The difference is physical as well as cultural. For example, newly arrived English colonists correctly thought African slaves did better in Georgia heat and humidity than they. But their reasoning was wrong; it turned out that the children of English settlers did as well as the Africans, simply because intense physical activity in high-heat, high-humidity environments activates all sweat glands in prepubescent children of any race. After puberty, however, no matter how hot and

humid subsequent environments, dormant glands remain so; the adult will never be comfortable in such circumstances. Children who play and explore the outdoors grow up to be adults able to enjoy vigorous outdoor activity in heat and humidity, while other children grow up not merely liking air conditioning, but demanding it while not knowing why.

Controlled indoor environments stimulate a taste for controlled outdoor environments. Skiers demand groomed slopes; the few ski areas that offer only natural conditions are considered quaint, if not economically doomed. Air-conditioning is now common on sailboats with homeports south of Annapolis. Even "adventure tours" — biking and walking vacations — typically feature chase vehicles so participants can escape to the comforts of a luxury van if the terrain or the weather become unpleasant. That which we cannot control makes us anxious.

University education ignores circa-1850 writing about country people finding cities confusing. Instead, today's faculty focus on the 1900-era urban dislike of rural and wilderness places, thus infecting yet another generation with a cultural fear of nature. For every thousand undergraduate readers of *Ethan Frome*, professors find only one reader of *Pierre*. But lately students extrapolating from healthful diets and regular physical exercise encounter the biophilia hypothesis and begin to wonder if depression and other illnesses do not originate in avoided intimacy with nature. Some are even questioning their own fears: Is walking down a pitch-dark rural road an activity that strengthens the senses and restores the psyche? ■■■

Author of *Outside Lies Magic* and other books, John Stilgoe is Orchard Professor in the History of Landscape at Harvard University.

Related reading:

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"The Experience
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(editors)
*Humanscape:
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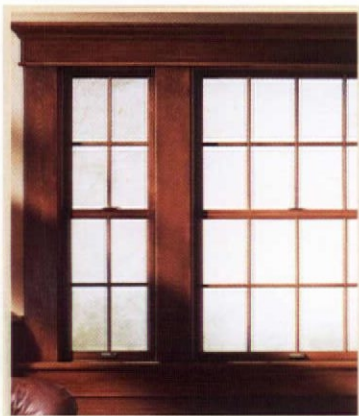
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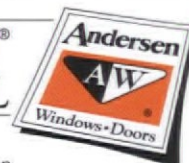
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Alex MacLean: The Landscape of Play

by Elizabeth Padjen FAIA

photo: © Alex MacLean, Landslides



Alex MacLean is the principal of Landslides in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He has piloted his Cessna 182 over much of the United States documenting the American landscape. His photographs have been exhibited internationally and have been acquired by many corporate, private, public, and university collections. He is the author of *Look at the Land: Aerial Reflections on America*, and the

co-author of *Taking Measures across the American Landscape and Above and Beyond: Visualizing Change in Small Towns and Rural Areas*. He is currently at work on a book that will examine the landscape of human play.

Elizabeth Padjen FAIA is editor of *ArchitectureBoston*.

Psychedelic-colored theme-park rides
Orlando, Florida

Many landscape architects today urge us to look beyond our traditional understanding of landscape — gardens, parks, plazas — to consider all forms of manipulated ground as landscape. Perhaps no one makes the case more clearly than photographer Alex MacLean. His astonishing, beautiful, aerial images document the myriad ways we make our presence known across the land.

The “landscape of play” is, of course, a centuries-old notion; recreation and healthful repose in nature are concepts deeply embedded in the human psyche. What is different today is how and where we play. We invent new games and new recreations and, increasingly, we invent new places to accommodate them, places that are often aggressively *un-natural*. At-home batting cages nudge out vegetable gardens. Paddle-tennis platforms dot suburbia. Kiddie trampolines beat out the backyard pool. And woe to the community without a skateboard park.



above:
Beachside go-cart track
and mini-golf
Panama City, Florida

right:
Six baseball diamonds
in Central Park
New York City

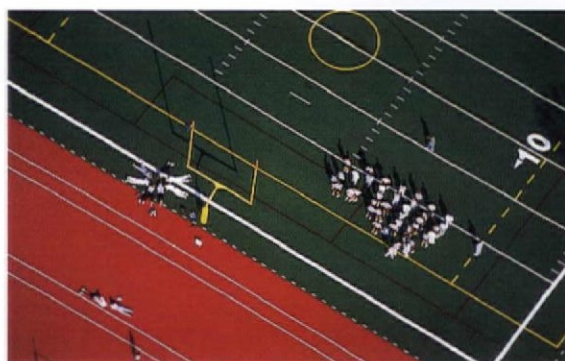
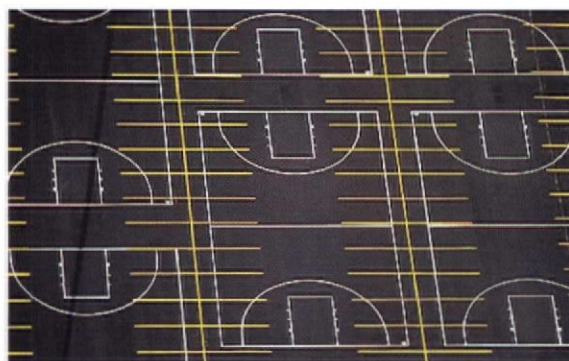


Our new recreations celebrate speed, risk, and exhilaration. Study these new landscapes of play and imagine some future archaeologist who will declare that ours was a society fixated on winning and losing, on dominating both the land and our competition. That archaeologist probably won't know that we were also a society of birdwatchers, hikers, loafers, and dreamers. ■■■■

top:
Ski slalom course waterslide
Orlando, Florida

bottom left:
Basketball courtlines over
parking lot grid
Waltham, Massachusetts

bottom right:
Team warm-ups in playing-field
endzone
West Point, New York

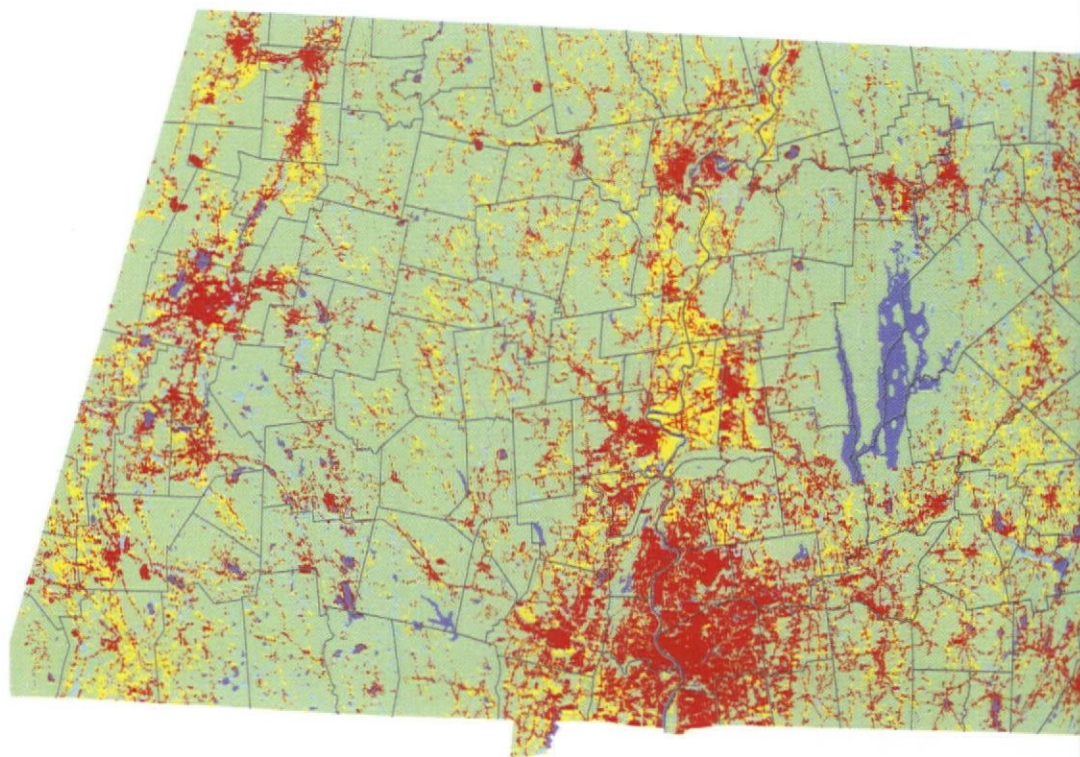


How Much Land is Left?

by Oliver Gillham AIA

MASSACHUSETTS LAND USE, 1999

Map courtesy of Massachusetts Geographic Information System

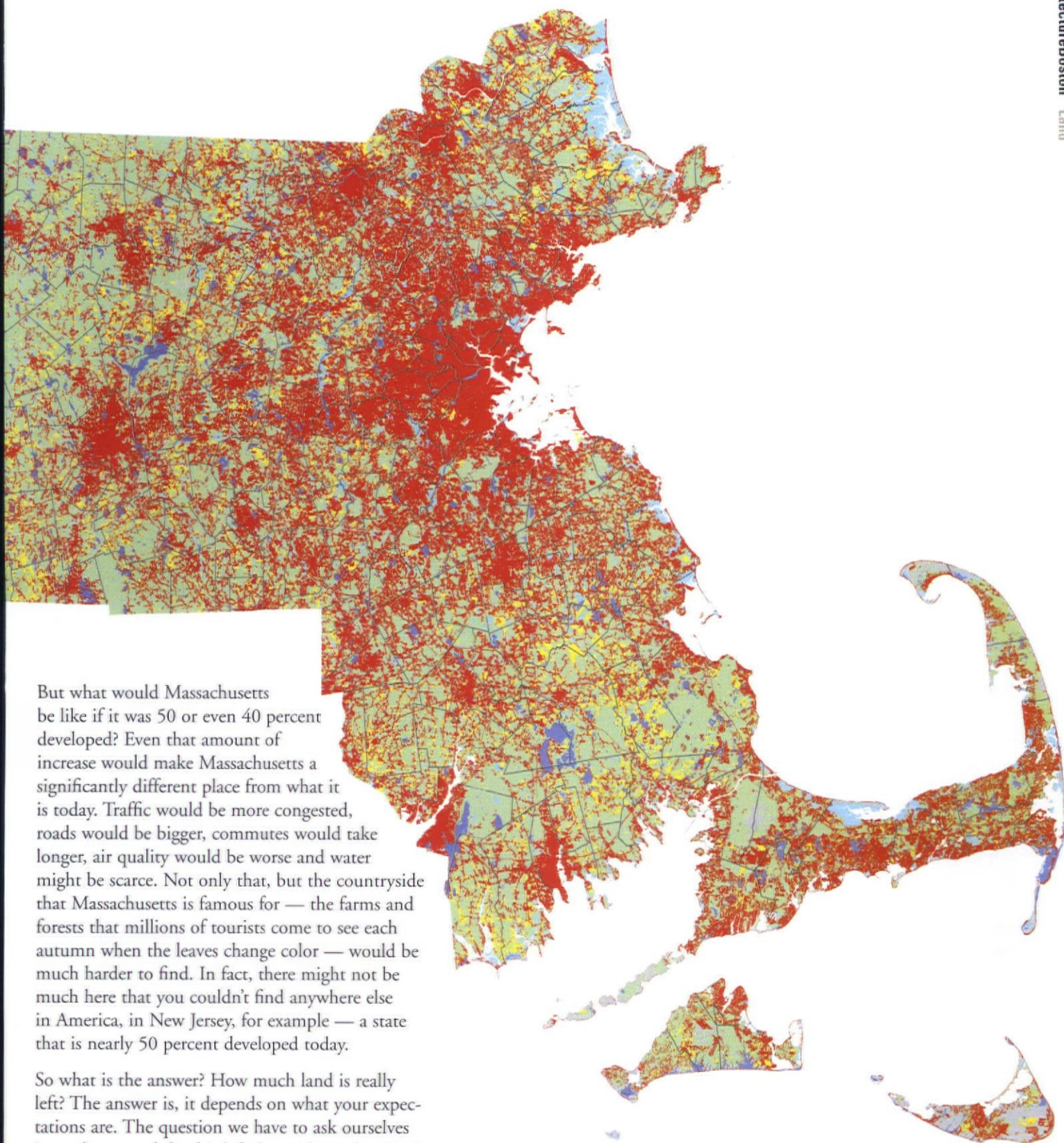


Each day, more and more people are waking up to find new tract housing, shopping malls, and parking lots right next door. The open fields and woodlots that used to be a part of many neighborhoods are being consumed by new suburban growth — a phenomenon many call urban sprawl. Those who are concerned about it often cite alarming figures. For example, we are told that the US is losing nearly 400 acres of open space to new development each hour, and that New England alone is losing farmland and forest at the rate of 1,200 acres per week. Those numbers are so terrifying that it is little wonder that loss of open space has become a top issue among many voters. According to a National Association of Realtors poll, 88 percent of Americans now favor preserving open space from new development. That is a lot of concerned people.

But alarming figures and worried people don't necessarily make vanishing open space a real issue. In fact, America still has a lot of land. Only about 6 percent of the United States is actually developed — and that statistic doesn't even include Alaska. At current development rates, some analysts have estimated that it would take at least 15 years to add another percentage point to that number. If that is true, it would take nearly 300 years to develop just 25 percent of the territory of the contiguous United States, and that's a very long time indeed. So what's all the fuss about?

Well, the truth is, how much land is left depends a lot on where you live. Most Americans (about 80 percent of them) live in metropolitan areas. And it is in metropolitan areas that land is scarcest and where the next 1 percent of development will actually occur — not out in the Great Plains or atop the snowbound peaks of the Rocky Mountains. The fact is that a 1 percent increase in developed land nationally can mean a 20 percent increase in developed metropolitan land area — and that can seem like a lot of land, especially when it's right next door to where most of the nation lives.

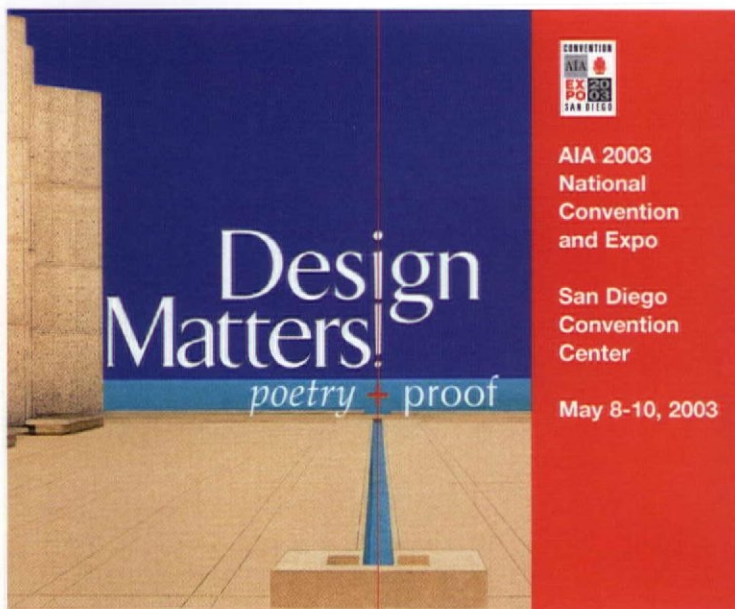
This phenomenon can have serious consequences in a place like Massachusetts. Unlike the rest of America, Massachusetts is not just 6 percent developed. About a quarter of the developable land in Massachusetts has already been used up, and, according to the US Department of Agriculture, the state could be as much as 86 percent developed by 2050. True, 50 years is still a relatively long time, and a lot can happen between now and then. Prices will probably go up as land gets scarce, and protest will almost certainly get louder. Most likely, the state will never even come close to that level of development.



But what would Massachusetts be like if it was 50 or even 40 percent developed? Even that amount of increase would make Massachusetts a significantly different place from what it is today. Traffic would be more congested, roads would be bigger, commutes would take longer, air quality would be worse and water might be scarce. Not only that, but the countryside that Massachusetts is famous for — the farms and forests that millions of tourists come to see each autumn when the leaves change color — would be much harder to find. In fact, there might not be much here that you couldn't find anywhere else in America, in New Jersey, for example — a state that is nearly 50 percent developed today.

So what is the answer? How much land is really left? The answer is, it depends on what your expectations are. The question we have to ask ourselves is not how much land is left, but rather, what kind of place do we want to live in tomorrow, or next year, or 10 years from now? Ultimately, that is up to us. If we don't do anything, Massachusetts may be a far more suburban state in the future than it is today. ■■■

Oliver Gillham AIA is an architect and planner based in Richmond, Massachusetts. He is the author of *The Limitless City: A Primer on the Urban Sprawl Debate* (Island Press, 2002), available from the BSA: www.architects.org



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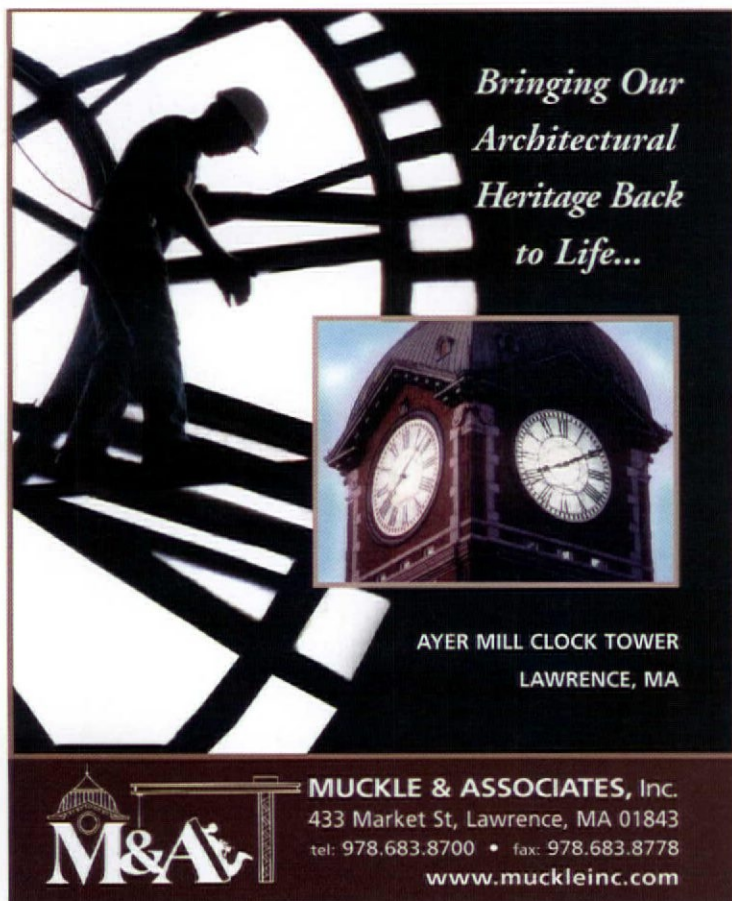
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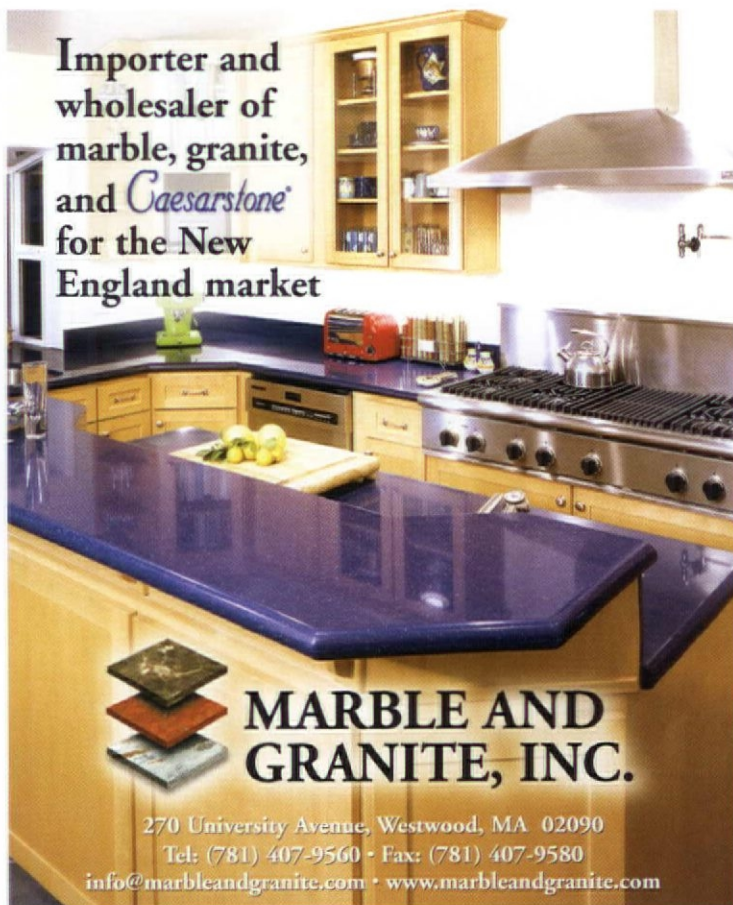
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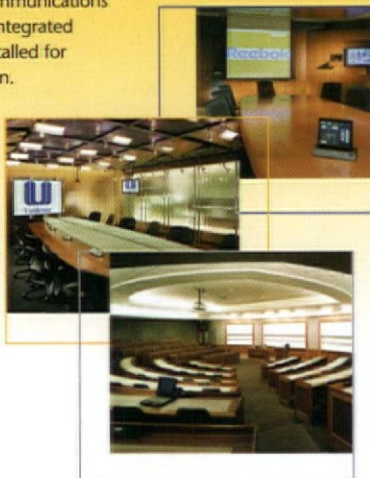
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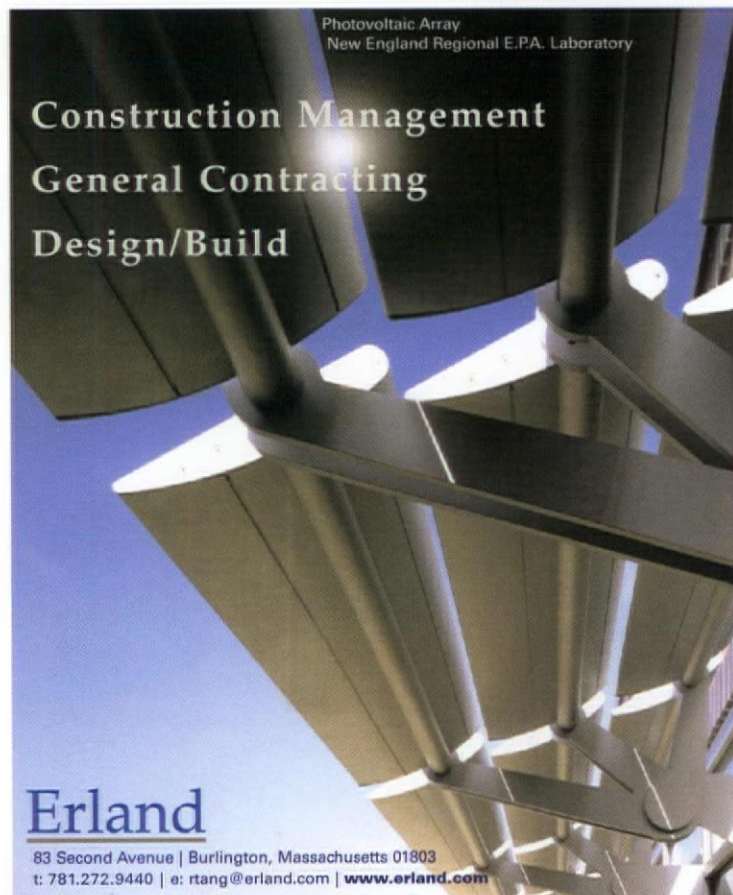
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Martha Schwartz talks with Nina James

Martha Schwartz, a landscape architect and artist, is the principal of Martha Schwartz, Inc. in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and an adjunct professor of landscape architecture at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. She is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes including a fellowship from the Urban Design Institute, several design awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects, and visiting residencies at Radcliffe College and the American Academy in Rome. She has lectured both nationally and internationally about the landscape, and her work has been featured widely in publications as well as gallery exhibitions.

Nina James, PhD, is the Mellon Fellow in Landscape Studies at Smith College, where she teaches in Smith's new landscape studies program. She previously taught in the department of art at Smith and held research positions in the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Her research work focuses on British and American modern landscapes, socialized spaces, and women in landscape architecture.

Jacob Javits Federal Plaza
New York City

Design: Martha Schwartz, Inc.



NINA JAMES: In conversations with design professionals, both architects and landscape architects, I sense that landscape architecture is often relegated to a sort of secondary status — not only by architects, but also by clients. Is there a lack of understanding about what landscape architects can contribute to the built environment?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: That is an important issue. I think architects and the profession of architecture are really myopic. The idea that there's a master designer — a master artist — is still being taught. The issues and challenges surrounding the landscape, meaning everything outside the building, are so extensive and so complex that the idea that architects would have a handle on all of it is absurd. But because of their self-image of being the master artist, architects feel that anything outside the building is secondary. My point of view is that architecture is actually secondary, because I think the design of the land is the most important design issue we have on our table in the 21st century. The design of specific buildings, as interesting and valuable as that is, is not particularly useful in terms of solving the biggest problems that we have, such as urban sprawl. The way that we use the land in terms of development is something that can't be solved by architecture.

NINA JAMES: These issues are bigger than just architecture alone.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: They certainly are bigger. I have a lot of sympathy for the issues that architects have to deal with and for the strength that they need in order to get anything of substance done. But the issues are too big for them to design their way out of. The issues today are political, they're economic, they're cultural, and there is no way that architects can control or even know the vast amount of information you need to deal with landscape. Landscape architecture is its own profession. We have a hard enough time trying to teach our own students what they need to know to go out and be useful. So the idea that somehow it's a subset of architecture and that it can be taught under the wing of architecture is an antiquated idea.

NINA JAMES: So it starts with educating the architect?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: The positioning of architects as master designers has to be revisited along with the role of collaboration and training. A lot of visually oriented people don't see the landscape as an appropriate place for design. And those attitudes run within the field of landscape architecture as well,

which is why we as a profession give mixed signals as to what it is that we're doing. One way of thinking about it is that we're taught that a good landscape is a landscape where you don't see the hand of man. That's also our picture of who we are as a culture — the idea of living in a beautiful wilderness. And the wilderness is not a designed entity. It's nature. So what opportunities are there to design the landscape? Those people who are ambitious to design and who have egos and want to exercise those egos don't see the landscape as a good place for that. They'd rather go into architecture, where that behavior is appropriate.

NINA JAMES: It sounds like a problem rooted not just in our culture, but in individual personalities.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: Let me put it this way: the environment that we're living in now is a design problem. We're no longer living in an environment that is defined by nature. We're living in an environment that's defined by us and how we use it, and therefore it's a design issue. We must bring form and meaning and value to it through our imagination. And yet people get stuck in this very romantic idea about what landscapes must be. That's true here in the United States and here in New England, in particular. Europe is doing a much, much better job in terms of making contemporary landscapes that deal with urbanization and suburbanization.

NINA JAMES: Why are Europeans more receptive to contemporary design?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: I think one reason is that they are much more secure in their sense of history. They can make a clean break between what's old and what's new. In the United States, the idea of creating new things that look old seems attractive, whereas in Europe that would be laughable. Also, art and design infuse everyday life in Europe in a way that Americans don't quite understand. Europeans want a good quality of life that they know design and art can bring. And they're willing to pay for it. I feel like the United States has been in some kind of retrograde motion for the last 10 years in terms of thinking about the future. In particular, thinking about the landscape is not seen as being very important. Our landscape is no longer nature, but as a culture we're reluctant to give that notion up.

NINA JAMES: Is it because we're so focused on details and the landscape is really a sweeping panorama? It's just too big for Americans to focus on?



photo courtesy Martha Schwartz Inc.

The Citadel
City of Commerce, California
Design: Martha Schwartz, Inc.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: It's because of our fantasy about the landscape. "Panorama" pretty much captures that fantasy. It's this big, sweeping, gorgeous, tree-filled, river-filled, Hudson River Valley painting that we're living in. It's the Marlboro Man. That fantasy of nature sells over and over again. It's used to market all sorts of things because it appeals to our self-image. But the city isn't that, and the edges of the city aren't that, and the strip isn't that. Nothing is really like that unless you go to a national park. Everybody immediately thinks of Yosemite when you say landscape. Nobody thinks about the parking lot at Wal-Mart as the landscape, but that *is* the landscape. That's more our landscape than Yosemite.

NINA JAMES: I have my students read J.B. Jackson just so they can understand the importance of what he calls "ad hoc public spaces," because when they come to our landscape studies program at Smith, they usually come to it through an interest in gardens. And on day one I say this isn't just about gardens. It's about parking lots. It's about malls.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: Right. It's all that stuff that we do out there. And it's about our future — how our land is being used. One of the other reasons why the Europeans are doing it better is that they have created pressure. They have more people per square inch. The density causes them to be advocates for the land. Germany is eight times as dense as we are. But we will have used up our available land way before we ever populate the United States with that density. If we wait until that point, we really won't have anything left except that which has walls around it — the national parks. So the question in this country becomes, what is our role as educators and practitioners? We're going to have to get smarter faster if we don't want to see the land used in the way it is. Now, I'm bringing my values to this. You can find some theoreticians and writers and economists who say, well, hey, the strip is great. That there's democracy in the strip and that sprawl is something that everybody wants. You know — everybody wants the American dream, everybody wants a three-car garage, everybody wants a parking space at the mall, and in fact, that is true. It is a very pure expression of economics. But it looks terrible, and these spaces are degrading.

NINA JAMES: Are you able to bring these values into the classroom? Are you able to impart some sort of advocacy through design?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: I hope so. The classroom may be the only place where I have any kind of effect. When you're hired, it's harder because you're up against values that other people carry with them. And you're often arguing over a very limited amount of resources, and you're arguing against architects who need a piece of it. It is the same thing over and over again. People tell you how much they love nature, but when it comes to paying the bill for the environment, they basically care very little about it. They don't want to tangle with issues around

design. They don't have enough money in the budget for the landscape. They don't want to spend money on maintaining it. We can talk about sustainability and the ability of the project to last over time, but if you're given \$7 a square foot to make a major civic plaza, that's less money than you put on your bathroom floor, and no, it won't last. If it were up to me, I'd put stone in every project because stone lasts. I love concrete, but I can't tell you that it's going to last as long as stone, no matter how well it's crafted. I have this discussion over and over again: Number one, you don't have enough money for the landscape. Number two, you don't have enough people who are going to maintain anything. And if you don't have any maintenance and if you don't have enough money, then number three: you're not going to be able to build anything that is going to last. The budget is a cultural value.

NINA JAMES: And yet people's interest can endow a landscape in another way. I think of a place like Birkenhead Park in England, which historians like me study as the first publicly funded park. There's trash and graffiti and vandalism throughout the park and yet it's as populated now as it probably was when it opened in the 1840s.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: Sustainability isn't just about ecological systems that somehow are able to repeat themselves endlessly. There's a cultural aspect, too. If the culture is not interested in what is built, it will not be sustained. So even if you have a self-cleaning, self-perpetuating park or plaza, if it's not of interest to people, it will not be kept and all the energy and effort and resources brought to building the project will be torn out and redone. It has to be of service. The question of sustainability needs to include a question about how well the design is going to survive culturally.

NINA JAMES: And a question about what we value.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: It seems like there is such an obvious value in public spaces like Birkenhead Park, yet we don't seem to collectively value them. I wonder whether the value for nature is becoming more of an abstracted kind of fantasy in our heads than in any actual place. A trip to the nature store or images on a screen-saver or buying a T-shirt made out of recycled materials — these things are becoming a replacement for any real relationship that we have with nature. People don't like to see designed landscapes. They want it natural. And so these "natural" landscapes appear in the most unlikely places — on top of garages and on top of bridges and it's all a way of slathering the balm on a wound to make you feel better. The Dutch are much better about viewing their landscape as something that's built, because they dredge it out of the ocean and they actually build the landscape. They know they have to design it, and so they've developed a landscape culture and an architectural culture

that is much more advanced than we have, because they haven't had our mythology to deal with.

NINA JAMES: But Bostonians have done that, too — dredged and created the land. Why don't they share something closer to the Dutch design culture? Boston hasn't been a very hospitable locale for you in terms of design — perhaps it's harder to design in your own back yard

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: Talking about Boston is hard. I love Boston. It's a great place to live. It's a great place to raise your children. It's a beautiful little city. And yes, it makes me sad that, in fact, there's so little interface with the enormous amount of design talent that runs through this city. Boston at this point is notorious for being a black hole for design and designers, not just me. It has not always had a tradition of being anti-design or being so retrograde, but right now what I hear is, "Boston is an historic city." Yes, it's historic, but it's not exactly the oldest city around. And yet Bostonians feel that they have something of particular value here, which they do. But what that should allow them to do is to reach more aggressively into the future. I've worked in Orlando, Florida, where they wanted a historic plaza in the middle of the downtown. Now, they've been there for 15 minutes and their historic courtyard is a concrete Neoclassical building that was built in the '30s. It's clear that what they were asking for was an imported history; one guy said, "When I see it, I'll know if it's history." You might be able to understand that in Orlando, but here in Boston, where they have the tradition of architecture schools and landscape architecture schools, where they have *real* history, this is a place where the contemporary and historical could easily live side by side. But I don't think that Boston has anybody at the leadership level who actually feels design can positively impact the environment here, and that's the sad truth. The universities could and should do more to be able to support architecture and landscape architecture, but they don't, because they're their own fiefdoms. It's ironic — there was a period in Boston where Modernism and contemporary architecture existed, but that tradition has been basically put in a closet. Instead, people are focused on the tradition of the old Georgian brick context.

NINA JAMES: Can we revitalize that Modern tradition with projects like City Hall Plaza?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: I think that the plaza could be solved as a landscape problem, not as an architectural development problem. I testified against the proposal to put a hotel on the site. People turn to architecture for solving these urban problems and what do you get? More buildings. My vote would be to just shelve it for right now — don't do anything if you can't figure it out. But the answer will have something to do with the activity around the edges. You can't make things happen through design. People make things



Mesa Arts and Entertainment Center
Mesa, Arizona

Design: Martha Schwartz, Inc.

rendering: Martha Schwartz, Inc.

happen. But I don't know how to change the environment here, which is pretty hostile to design and certainly hostile to contemporary design. You would have to have a mayor who was really ambitious in terms of creating spaces and buildings that were of design significance. Mayors are very, very important people in terms of envisioning what a city can be and setting the tone for what happens in the city. And you would need people who were sitting on the various boards and committees here who knew about art, architecture, and design and were given a charge to go and seek those designs that reflect contemporary thought and were able to make those kinds of choices. But Boston is disturbingly a black hole for contemporary design in anything.

NINA JAMES: Do you think that same thinking is at work on the Central Artery?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: I think that the Central Artery Project will be hacked to death. The quality of that open space was never questioned. Nobody ever really thought to determine what that open space was going to look like. It's probably going to look very humdrum. That's my prediction and it's because the aspirations were set so low.

NINA JAMES: Can you think of any American cities that are doing a lot of contemporary work, really changing the face of their landscape and improving it to suit the needs of the coming century?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: That's a good question. I haven't really been working that much in the United States, but I think Portland, Oregon is very conscious about its architecture and its open spaces. There are a lot of interesting designers up there. San Francisco has some interesting work. Minneapolis has always had a tradition of putting a lot of effort into public space. We're working in Mesa, Arizona, which has brought in good architects for a performing arts center in the downtown core area. They're really invested in doing it right.

NINA JAMES: What about contemporary designers? Do you find anyone working today as inspirational as, say, Isamu Noguchi was to you earlier in your career?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: Oh yes, absolutely, but by and large they're not in the United States. There are some good designers in the States, but most of the contemporary work that's being done is abroad. I would say it's even true for the art world now. We're losing our edge. We seem to be a little lost culturally.

NINA JAMES: It's surprising because you have equated a healthy culture with a healthy society, and yet we're a relatively healthy society if you judge us against other countries. We are certainly politically powerful. Why aren't we culturally powerful? Why don't we have that clarity of voice?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: Well, because we don't have clarity of voice. I am a very big patriot and my disillusionment is because I think we could be doing a lot better. I love that we have a tremendous amount of diversity and that our culture reflects that. But I think that it's impossible for us to get a general read on what we represent as a country. We were an immigrant country and we remain an immigrant country. It's hard for us to have a single voice about anything. You almost have to see what bubbles up in the broth. And what haven't been bubbling up recently are really wonderful pieces of architecture or urban design or landscape architecture. We seem to have lost our belief in the future. I don't know why. We were kind of goofy — maybe even stupid and naïve — but we believed in science and what science was going to get us. You know — baby formula was going to be the answer to everything and we put those great fins on automobiles. There were a lot of great futuristic ideas, and there weren't so many dark views of the future. I think we're generally much more cautious and not as optimistic.

The sad part is that the way to the future is through education, and we're taking art and music out of educational curriculums because people don't want to pay for them. I think this adds up to why people don't know the value that art and design can bring to a culture. Even those people who are doing well, who we consider successful, don't really have much education in terms of culture and art. There's a lack of understanding of how beauty — the B word — affects our lives and our sense of well-being and that everybody wants it. Everybody would love to lead a life of beauty, whatever that means, as opposed to a life of degradation. And yet that really is not seen as a practical part of one's education. And it shows. It's pretty ugly here. Here in the States, our homes are our castles, but outside that doorstep, there is not much desire to make a collective environment that suits us. We get in our car and hold our nose when we travel through it to get back to our house. But in the end, it degrades all of us.

NINA JAMES: What can change that? Can the profession? Can an institution? What do you think the ASLA [American Society of Landscape Architects] could do, if anything?

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: You're asking a difficult question, and I don't belong to ASLA. I probably should, but I haven't really been given any compelling reasons to join. I think that in general the ASLA represents a good body of professionals, but I think that most of the work that landscape architects do is pretty insignificant. And that's because of the culture — they have not made a very good case about why they are needed and what they do.

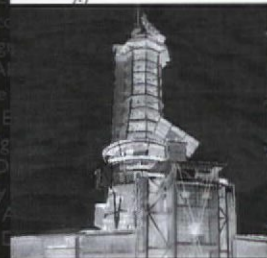
NINA JAMES: Some of your strongest critics, if not all of them, come from within the profession.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: We go through styles, just like architecture — Decon, PoMo. Right now we're onto this kind of eco revelatory stuff, which is just as contrived as anything else. It's the notion that a site must tell the story of its geology, that it has to tell a landscape story, and of course, this is completely insane. Maybe you want to do that once because it makes sense. But the context has to be relevant. And then you have people within the profession who are still appalled by the idea of design in the landscape, because the landscape needs to be saved from people. You find little wars get waged within the profession over that kind of unclarity. I clearly stand for design.

NINA JAMES: And yet, any profession should be challenged.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ: Absolutely. The editor of *Landscape Architecture* himself said that he doesn't like my stuff, but I'm great fodder for the magazine. The profession absolutely needs to be challenged. Landscape architecture is such an important design field today. There are so many incredible opportunities, and there's so much that needs to be done. Ideally, we should be making things that are culturally significant and that work ecologically and sustainably. There is so much ugly landscape out there. If you were to have every building on the strip designed by a signature architect, you wouldn't change it. Maybe it would make it worse, but it wouldn't really change a damn thing. The landscape is a very, very important topic and I wish that the quality of people involved in it were higher. We're getting people who are more aesthetically oriented, more design oriented, who are more verbal and critical and who could challenge the status quo. Getting people in there who will carry the discussion further and push is very important. It's important to try new things. And that's the worst thing about all this historicism that's happening in Boston. It's stopped progress. You have to be able to try out ideas to go into the future. Looking backwards doesn't take you anywhere. ■■■

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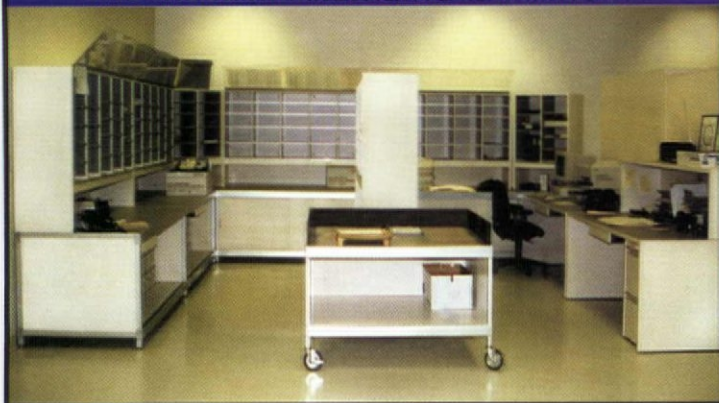
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Letter from the Rocky Mountain West

by James A. Murray, PhD

I live in Colorado. You often hear how dry it is; the average yearly precipitation is between one-third and one-fourth that of locations east of the Mississippi River. We are in a drought now. This is not something new for us. Most people know about the drought in the 1930s and the resulting Dust Bowl. In Colorado and New Mexico, the condition lasted the entire decade. Drought occurred again in both the 1950s and 1960s. There was another in the late 1970s. Skip ahead 20 years. In 2000, drought returned and has yet to subside. This past summer, Colorado and Utah recorded their driest 12 months since record-keeping began in 1895, and Wyoming had its second driest.

Arid conditions notwithstanding, our region's population has almost doubled since 1970. Today the population of the six states of the Rocky Mountain West — Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming — is nearly 11 million. The Census Bureau projects 15 million by the year 2020.

The population growth brought with it a proportionate increase in water consumption. You might ask, how was so much additional water supplied from such a dry region? Clearly it does not rain and snow more as the population grows. Was there a large surplus before? No, there was not. Rather, water developers created vast structures for capturing runoff in reservoirs so it could be used here rather than flowing out of the region. They built networks of intermountain tunnels and pipelines for transferring water among basins and through the mountains to population concentrations. Large quantities of water are also being drawn from the region's underground

aquifers. These measures met the increased demand — until the drought returned. Last summer, in many locations, water was rationed and water-rights disputes erupted.

Some of the highest rates of residential growth in the region have been in the mountains. New homes have nudged into privately owned wooded sites adjacent to or within the vast tracts of national forest land. This past summer, the ravenous, drought-enhanced wildfires were a powerful threat to residents in these areas. Even when the fires did not destroy homes, the surrounding mountain environment was transformed.

This summer's fires were spectacular media events. We watched as subdivisions were evacuated. We saw firefighters working to exhaustion. There were tanker crashes and pilots killed. We viewed vast tracts of burned acreage. When we were shown the inevitable loss of wildlife and their habitats, we recalled a panicked Bambi running for safety. It was noted that the devastation caused by the wildfires was directly related to the drought. Less noted was that it was also directly related to the proliferation of housing in the forested areas.

The impacts of the wildfires and drought for hikers, campers, hunters, as well as farmers and city dwellers and the water agencies that supply them were less noticed. But these groups were affected, too. Researchers have shown droughts to be among the most costly of all natural disasters.

With the recent reminder of the power of drought, you might think there would be interest in changing development patterns in the region.

So far, this does not seem to be the case. There are strong vested interests in continuing the current rate of growth. Much of the economic prosperity of the region depends on development and construction. Also, there is an undiminished demand for mountain homesites. So, for many, the need is simply to supply more water at a cost that will not slow development. This points toward new water development projects in the mountains. After a 20-year hiatus, there is renewed talk of building new dams and reservoirs, and more trans-mountain diversion systems. Experience indicates that much of the costs could be slipped into the federal budget, thus sparing the consumer higher water prices.

One of the most outrageous proposals targets the mountainous public forests that cover as much as 35 percent of the region and are central to its identity. These contain watersheds that convey the spring runoff from melting snow into surface streams and recharge the underground aquifers. A proposal by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources is to clear-cut 25 percent to 40 percent of the trees in the watersheds. The aim is to reduce the evaporation of snow from the trees, thereby increasing water on the ground and in the stream. Great swaths would be cut into several million acres of federal and state forests to gain 10 to 20 percent more surface runoff. Proponents claim such clear-cutting would also reduce "fuel" for wildfires. Of course it would be a boon for the region's logging industry. Because additional water would only be gained in "wet" years, new reservoirs would be needed as well. If you think this is a joke, consider the response of US Representative Scott McInnis, R-Colo., chairman of the House Forest Health Subcommittee: "With scientific data showing active management can result in more water for Coloradans, this is right near the top of the list of things we need to look at. Heaven knows we can use all the water we can get."

Notably absent in the torrent of ideas are ones sensitive to the carrying capacity of the natural environment here. Periodic drought is a natural phenomenon. If it doesn't snow enough to supply the surface streams and recharge depleted ground-water to support an ever-growing number of residents, perhaps we should think about making a few accommodations to Mother Nature. So far, it seems that the single tactic has been to try to

bludgeon her into an altered condition. We could start by getting serious about obvious measures for increasing the efficiency of water use. Green grass is a fixture in lawns here. Irrigation is the single largest water use for municipal systems in the region. Although Xeriscape (landscaping that conserves water) is a well-known alternative for lawns, it is seldom the homeowner's choice. Few homes employ "low flow" appliances, though they are widely advertised. Use of recycled gray water is only occasionally considered, even for irrigation. These measures could conserve enough water to literally save our forests and preserve the vitality of our aquifers, and at the same time allow a reasonable rate of growth.

The greatest obstacle to this common sense approach is the pricing of the water product. Big-project water development in the West is so heavily subsidized that only a fraction of the true costs are included in the price of the water. Water developers do not pay the environmental costs associated with their projects. They pay little or nothing to the government owners of the public land they use. Federal funding is often provided. These subsidies fuel water-dependent economic development with cheap water. Furthermore, with cheap water readily available, there is little incentive for the consumer to conserve.

Once again we are battering Mother Nature. We recently read in this magazine ["Letter from Florida", *ArchitectureBoston*, Spring 2001] about the woes of the state of Florida. The best that could be said about that state is that it has "a tradition of transformation" and that this tradition will help it persevere in the face of the growth-related damage to its natural beauty. Note that a small part of its transformation will be achieved with billions of federal tax dollars to "restore" the Everglades. It is distressing to watch my region follow a similarly insensitive path. At what point will we realize that the pioneer spirit that served us so well in the past must be adjusted? Will it hit home only when we have incalculable restoration costs to bear? ■■■

James A. Murray, PhD, is an urban and environmental economist. He has lived in Colorado for 30 years, working for the cities of Boulder and Denver, and as a private consultant. He earned advanced degrees from Harvard University and University of Oregon.

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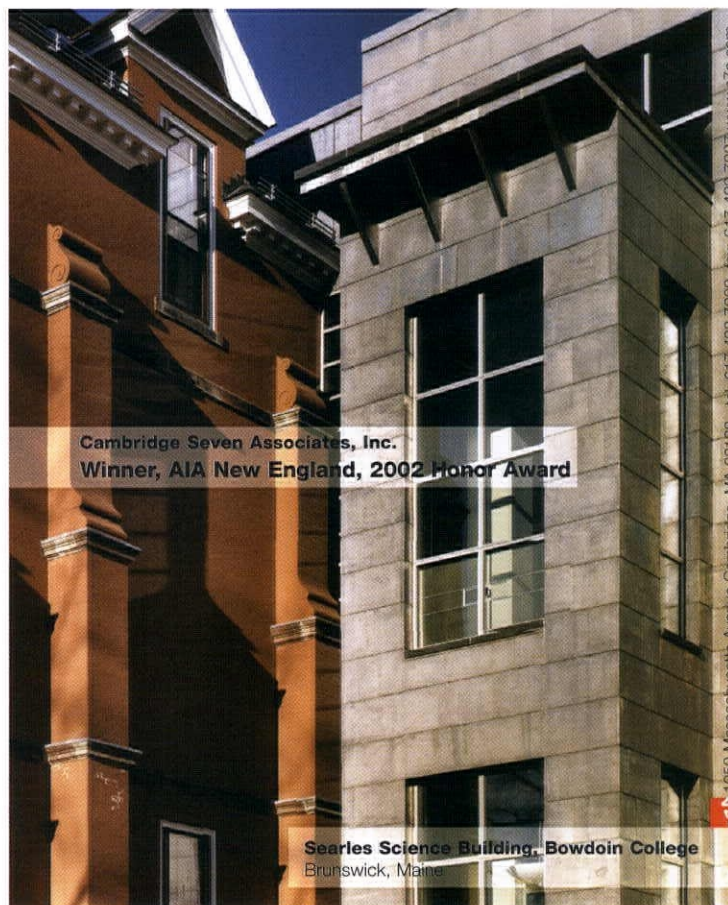
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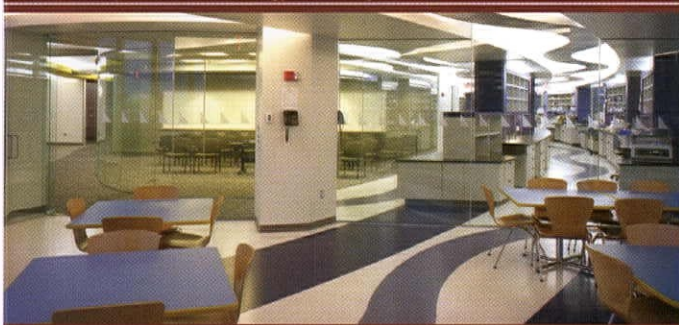


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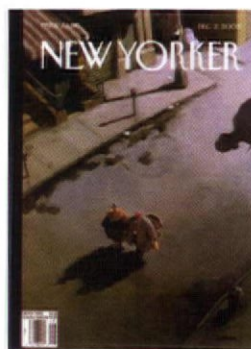
Covering the Issues

Periodical roundup

by Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA

Standing tall... With all the recent talk of cable bridges and tall buildings, ever wonder what it'd be like to construct them? In *The New Yorker* (December 2, 2002), Gay Talese takes us to the men who built and now maintain the big structures of New York, especially the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. With both deference and awe, through anecdote and interview, Talese's "On the Bridge" tells a very human tale of the people who created these extraordinary city-shaping structures. From a somewhat different and markedly less nostalgic point of view, Witold Rybczynski writes of some of the same tall structures in *Discover* (October 2002) magazine. The title says it best: "What We Learned about Tall Buildings from the World Trade Center Collapse." No doubt this is one of countless articles emerging on the subject. An architect writing in a popular science magazine, Rybczynski argues for full disclosure so we can use the buildings as case-studies, to learn what worked and what didn't. As he points out, buildings, unlike cars, can't be crash-tested before use. He speculates on imminent modifications to our building codes, as Rybczynski-the-historian reminds us of similar catastrophe-inspired changes. Making a case for lower buildings, he observes that "the most important lesson we've learned is that we have underestimated the real cost of building skyscrapers."

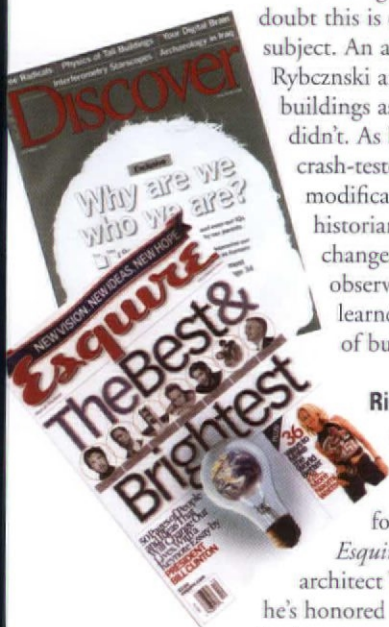
Rising stars... Bill Clinton introduces "The Best and the Brightest," the 43 men and women who are "changing our world," according to *Esquire* magazine (December 2002). (The former president and Hilary were honored in *Esquire*'s 1984 list, while still unknowns.) New York architect William Massie makes the new list. Notably, he's honored not for his personality nor for his personality, but for *how* he builds. As Reed Kroloff explains, Massie "has devised a new computer-driven building process that could finally make quality architecture affordable." Kroloff argues that Massie's work — "customized pre-fab" — critiques both the building industry's standardization and architects' custom design. Massie's house designs, for example, incorporate smaller parts that he often manufactures himself on computer-driven laser cutting and milling machines. The parts are delivered and assembled on site "like a giant puzzle." The cost of one such piece, a rolling-contour, custom concrete sink? \$40. Home Depot can't beat that. Kroloff comments, "The direct connection between architect and building is something the profession has never had."



Big Green... In *Wired* (October 2002), Josh McHugh reports on Dartmouth's newly wireless campus: "The wireless network is changing life at Dartmouth," he writes in "Unplugged U." Most students have laptops, and all are "connected," whether in the library, the pizza shop, or a park bench on the Hanover green. Omnipresent e-mail communication renders cell phones virtually obsolete. Dartmouth is one of a dozen campuses nationally experimenting with a wireless network. As McHugh notes, "The network is subtly but profoundly altering teaching techniques, social interaction, study habits, and personal security." Faculty and students give it rave reviews. Is this the way of the future? The spatial, architectural, and urban implications are still to be seen.

And speaking of green... The same issue of *Wired* also offers a fascinating ode to all things Pantone. (Remember the old days of colored film that stuck to everything but the desired drawing?) In "Living Color," J.C. Hertz describes the company's 1940s beginnings as a standardizer of lipstick and nail-polish hues to its current, extraordinarily scientific system of color definition, sold to us in color wheels and swatch books, and now embedded in every major computer graphics program. "If color is a language, Pantone is the *Oxford English Dictionary*," writes Hertz, and its system ensures that Starbucks Green is the same in Somerville, Seattle, and Shanghai. Hertz reports that Pantone has recently turned its expertise into profitable predictions, advising designers what the next hot new color will be: "Across all industries, billions and billions of dollars ride on color decisions." Big Brother meets Technicolor: ■■■■

Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA teaches the architecture studios at Smith College and maintains a practice in Boston.



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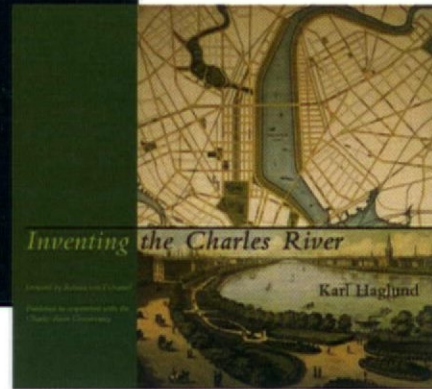
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Books

Inventing the Charles River

by Karl T. Haglund
MIT Press, 2002

Reviewed by Max Page



Most Bostonians know something about the extensive landfill that filled out the narrow peninsula that was Boston in the 17th and 18th centuries. But even the most knowledgeable are likely to be ignorant of most of Karl Haglund's vast research showing how utterly man-made is the thing we call the Charles River. Once we are jolted out of the unconscious belief that the river is a "natural" landscape, *Inventing the Charles River* makes it hard to think about the Charles in the same way again. From a series of often-fetid mudflats and salt marshes has come haltingly over three centuries, a grand public space, one of the defining features of Boston's landscape. This has been urban renewal on a scale of which Robert Moses would have been proud.

Haglund, the project manager for the New Charles River Basin at the Metropolitan District Commission, tells this story through the remarkable series of proposals for "refining" the river basin. It is a remarkably comprehensive history of the series of planning visions, many on paper, and others made reality. (It is also, at times, too comprehensive: Haglund spends far too much time narrating planning projects that are only tangentially related to the river.) Some are fascinating flights of imagination in their own right. In 1844, for example, Robert Gourley, a Scottish visitor, drew what became Boston's first comprehensive plan: a vast reorganization of the city around a transportation network with a new island in the middle of the Charles at the heart of the scheme. In 1907, Ralph Adams Cram proposed the creation of a new island, what he called St. Botolph's, where Bostonians would find a grand cathedral and, at the other end of a grand axis, a new municipal building for the modern metropolis.

The most powerful theme that runs beneath Haglund's chronological history is the fitful story of the very idea of a great public space. Haglund reminds us that the vast majority of the riverfront was held in private hands well into the 20th century; in 1893 only 65 of the 224 miles of river banks in greater Boston were in public ownership. Before the Charles River could become that most cherished of Boston's open spaces, "the river had to be reimagined as a public space." This was not a simple process: it took new attitudes toward the natural landscape, new notions of government's role in American life, the power of charismatic individuals, important legal developments, and the pressure of traffic planning to lead to the creation of this public space. In our present age that has seen virtually every type of space and institution privatized, the development of a powerful belief in public spaces for the enactment of public life is something worth reflecting upon.

This book was published in cooperation with the Charles River Conservancy. It shows, in good ways and in bad. The support from the Conservancy surely made possible the large number of beautiful illustrations — there are close to 400 images, many in color — and the generous layout of the pages. The book is, without apology, a work of scholarly boosterism, celebrating "Boston's great public space." All this is made clear in the final pages, as Haglund takes his readers on a floating tour down the Charles, accompanied by contemporary and historic photographs of each landmark alongshore, and rounded out with a postscript from the Charles River Conservancy. A subversive book this is not.

And yet, *Inventing the Charles River* will likely cause some consternation among those who wish to preserve and improve the Charles River. By focusing on the ways the Charles has been invented and reinvented, Haglund subtly poses some very difficult questions about the very idea of "preserving" the river, indeed about the very idea of preservation. For what, exactly, is "historic" or even "authentic" about the Charles that needs to be "conserved"? Many of the best-loved spaces are quite recent and are the result of massive transformation of earlier landscapes, which were themselves radical alterations of a natural ecosystem. Many environmentally minded people would fight to the death to preserve the Esplanade, for example, or the bikepaths on the Cambridge side of the River. But they might more logically be sympathetic to the sentiment of the poet James Russell Lowell, who lamented the passing of the salt marshes to make way for new, genteel riverfront roads.

Protectors of the Charles River may find that Karl Haglund's *Inventing the Charles River* offers as much to those who would radically remake it as to those who are fighting to preserve it. ■■■

Max Page is an assistant professor of architecture and history at University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He is the author of *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), winner of the 2001 Spiro Kostof Award of the Society of Architectural Historians. He is also co-editor of the forthcoming *Building the Nation: Americans Write about Their Architecture, Their Cities, and Their Environment, 1789 to the Present* (University of Pennsylvania Press).

Haglund's *Inventing the Charles River* is available from the BSA: www.architects.org

Books

Hands on the Land: A History of the Vermont Landscape

by Jan Albers
MIT Press,
2000 (hardbound);
2002 (paper)

Reviewed by
Tom Hotaling AIA

Vermont is a state that lives vividly in the minds of most of us, whether or not we've actually been there. For some, it conjures up images of cows, maple syrup, or skiing; for others, summer camp, idyllic villages, or country inns. But perhaps more than anything, what remains with us is the setting for all these images — its very beautiful landscape and its color — green, then red, then white — a place where seasons have real impact.

While *Hands on the Land* is subtitled "A History of the Vermont Landscape," it is in fact an interdisciplinary study that examines the romance and the reality of the state through its natural, social, and economic histories. Author Jan Albers begins with the pre-glacial period, a time when Vermont had a seacoast and mountains as high as the Himalayas, and progresses through the probable first habitation by man in 9000 BC, to the indigenous Abenaki who met the Frenchman Samuel de Champlain in 1609. She traces the claiming of the land through logging and trapping to the creation of an agrarian economy and village life in the 18th century (what she calls the "switch from an economy of extraction and trade to one of production and development") and then describes the failure of farming in the 19th and 20th centuries.

of today — a state that is 70 percent forested and 30 percent cleared, as compared to the reverse ratio in the 19th century. It is a state whose entire population is now only some 600,000 people (roughly that of the City of Boston) despite its location in the densely populated Northeast.

It is a state where private and public initiatives have supported fine stewardship of the land, where with the passing of Act 250 in 1970, Vermont became a model for other states in the control of land development. It is a state that, despite all this, is a victim of a national phenomenon that Albers calls the "single greatest landscape change of the second half of the twentieth century...the erosion of local identity."

If this book has a shortcoming, it is the lack of footnotes that would have amplified and detailed the text and allowed us to delve deeper into those points that leave us wanting to know more. However, the book's messages are consistently evident: when we touch our land, we leave a legacy to future generations; and in order to make informed decisions about the future of a place, we need to understand its many histories. These messages are lavishly supported on every page with period maps, landscape and portrait paintings, historic photographs, and well-designed graphics, all of which contribute to the pleasure of reading this book.

Tom Hotaling AIA is a principal of Ann Beha Architects in Boston.

The fascination of *Hands on the Land* lies in its beautifully orchestrated build-up to the Vermont

Ten Landscapes
(series featuring Michael
Balston; Tophér Delaney;
Raymond Jungles; Shunmyo
Masuno; Mario Schjetnan;
Stephen Stimson)

edited by
James Grayson Trulove

Rockport Publishers

Reviewed by
Laurence A. Clement, Jr., JD, ASLA

With the success of its *Ten Houses* series, Rockport Publishers has recently followed up with six monographs in the *Ten Landscapes* series (ten refers to the number of projects featured in each book). Focusing individually on the work of an innovative designer, each volume is intended as a source book showing "how the work gets done." The books are diverse and engaging visual-verbal compositions. Essential tools these are not, as many site plans are frustratingly small, but the series boldly captures the range of scale in current landscape architecture practice.

These slim but beautiful books portray the delightful reciprocity that can exist between interior and exterior realms. Each explores the temporal and spatial aspects of creating real places, by illustrating themes of infrastructure, structure, materiality, light, connection, process, and meaning.

Michael Balston — a British architect, landscape architect, garden designer, and builder — designs with a concern for tradition, pragmatism, and technological innovation. The work of Stephen Stimson — featured here through estates on Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and other East Coast properties — reflects the influence of Harvard teachers Michael van Valkenburgh and George Hargreaves. This volume is the strongest in the series as a visual synthesis of words and

imagery; the graphic design is as compelling as the work itself.

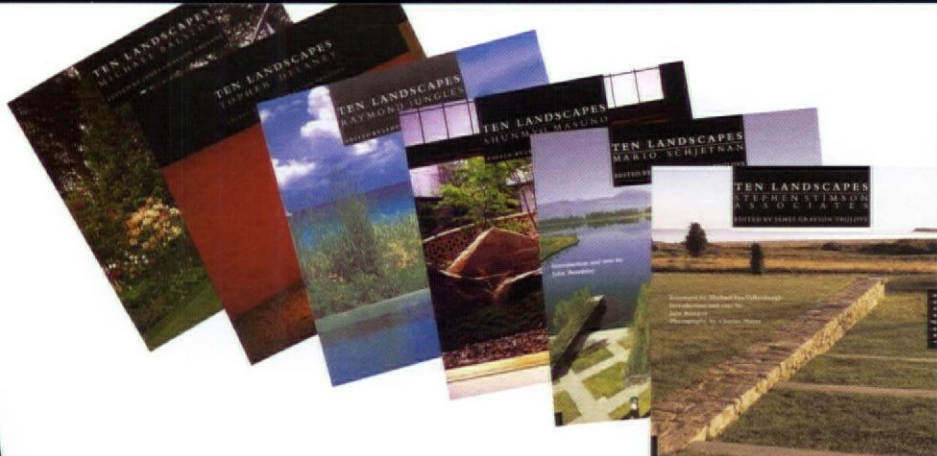
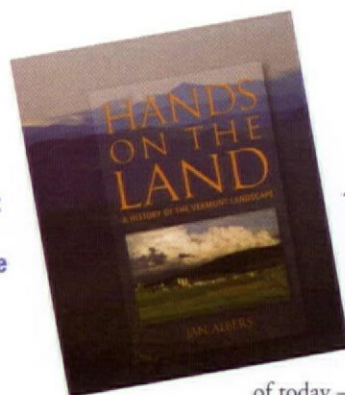
The Florida work of Raymond Jungles, including exotic gardens for wealthy patrons, draws its inspiration from mentor Roberto Burle Marx, the legendary Brazilian landscape architect. Tophér Delaney's California residential work might be described as powerful and intensely personal, even risky. Unfortunately, this text is marred by small annoyances such as omission of a citation and misnamed plant material.

But not all the featured designers have a wealthy private clientele. Shunmyo Masuno, a Zen priest and landscape architect who has worked on public projects in both Japan and Canada, creates arresting spatial compositions that incite changing perceptions of connections in time and space.

The volume on Mario Schjetnan might make practitioners and scholars pause and reflect on the direction and substance of their own efforts. His work in Mexico (in association with his firm, Grupo de Diseño Urbano) includes public parks that serve some of Mexico's most underprivileged people through an inclusive design process. Schjetnan's parks are ecologically and culturally based, responsive to the local conditions, but also strong in visual and spatial expression.

As a whole, the series is "wonderfully extravagant," to borrow a phrase from Michael Balston. Despite small site plans and diagrams, each volume is visually engaging and the texts are well written. They are indeed good "source books."

Laurence A. Clement, Jr., JD, ASLA, teaches in the landscape architecture program at Kansas State University.

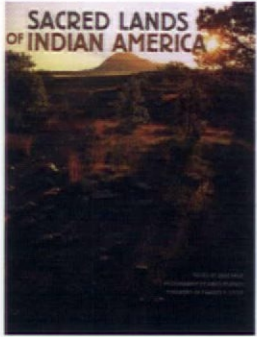


Sacred Lands of Indian America

edited by Jake Page;
photography by
David Muench

Harry N. Abrams, Inc.,
2001

Reviewed by
Julie Moir Messervy



Spotlighting endangered sites across the United States, *Sacred Lands of Indian America* offers an in-depth account of the threats facing the holy grounds of Indian people. A collaboration between Indian and non-Indian essayists, the book details the struggles of 23 tribes to preserve their sacred lands; its photographs movingly capture the sense of the sacred in each of many different landscapes.

What makes a site sacred?

These special gateways to the spiritual world are places where native peoples gather traditional materials, collect medicines, or perform vision quests or spiritual bathing. Different tribes find different aspects of their land holy. For the Lummi tribe, who managed to preserve part of the old-growth forest in the Arlecho Creek basin near Washington State's Mount Baker, sacredness can be "heard" in its sounds that become songs "rising from the lips of the listener into the heavens." For 20 Plains tribes, Devils Tower in northeastern Wyoming is sacred partly because of the stories of its origins. Other holy grounds include such diverse landforms as caves, rivers, lakes, cascades, deserts, mountains, and grasslands.

Threats to these sacred lands are maddeningly diverse. The Lummi had to counter routine clear-cutting, encouraged by government officials and the forest-products industry; the Plains tribes called for a recreational climbing ban on the Tower in June, their sacred month. Energy companies are a frequent threat to these lands, including wind farms and geothermal, coal, and nuclear-power developers. Mining companies target these sites for pumice and open-pit gold mining, or as asbestos dumping grounds. Recreational developers, including ski companies and motor-sport enthusiasts, along with road and highway construction, pose yet another threat to these lands.

The book is a call to action: "Think of this volume as a two-by-four — a book that can be used to get the attention of people who make a difference — the members of Congress, the federal and state officials, the business and civic leaders who have all too often demonstrated a woeful ignorance about the loss of sacred land." A postscript entitled, "Toward a Sacred Lands Policy Initiative" explains the inadequacy of federal authorities and programs and suggests some explicit programs and legislation that would help remedy the lack of federal policy regarding sacred lands.

Why should we get involved? Because these sacred lands are under attack and need preservation now. *Sacred Lands of Indian America* makes a compelling case for action. As Christopher H. Peters of the Seventh Generation Fund, a Native American advocacy organization, writes: "In the native belief system, sacred places are not sacred because native people believe they are sacred. They have sacredness in and of themselves. Even if we all die off, they will continue to be sacred."

Julie Moir Messervy is a landscape designer in Wellesley, Massachusetts. The author of three books including the award-winning *The Inward Garden: Creating a Place of Beauty and Meaning*, she is designer of the acclaimed Toronto Music Garden, as well as institutional and private gardens around the Northeast. Her Web site is: www.juliemoirmesservy.com

Connecticut Valley Vernacular: The Vanishing Landscape and Architecture of the New England Tobacco Fields

by James F. O'Gorman;
photographs by
Cervin Robinson

University of Pennsylvania
Press, 2002

Reviewed by
Ann McCallum AIA

"Then disaster struck. On August 20 a hard southeast storm brought winds that 'hurt' the tobacco in the fields and 'Broke the trease down.' The next day was worse: 'the Tobacco shead Blew down All to Smash,' wrote George, adding that they dismantled what was left standing and 'piled up the stuff.' On August 31 they began all over again."

Accounts such as this provide a fascinating and often amusing glimpse into the life of the tobacco farmer, and really are the heart of James O'Gorman's *Connecticut Valley Vernacular*. This not-quite-coffee-table book takes a new look at the tobacco barns that still populate the Connecticut Valley, looking at their architectural forms, as well as the social history surrounding the tobacco-growing industry that dominated Valley agriculture from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s.

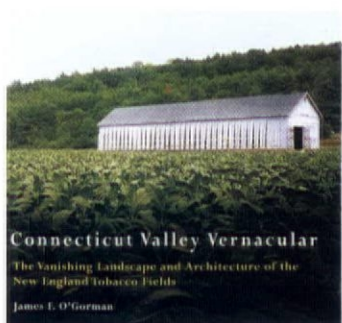
Don't buy this book for gorgeous color photographs, because these often fine images are not printed on high-quality paper and lack the richness and depth we have come to expect from new vernacular-architecture books. Buy it instead for the black-and-white images, which are endlessly fascinating. Lewis Hine, famous for his National Child Labor Committee photos of harsh urban working conditions, was also sent to record more rural conditions, and his photos of children working on the tobacco fields are haunting. So, too, are photos from the Howes Brothers collection, an underused archive recording the life and architecture of western

Massachusetts from 1882-1907. Several superb prints document farmers, their hired hands, and their children planting, "suckering," hanging to dry, and sorting the tons of tobacco that were the mainstay of this rural economy for more than a hundred years.

I only wish O'Gorman, a respected professor of art and architectural history at Wellesley, had dealt more with the aesthetics of the architecture. There is something very affecting about the abandoned cities of groups of tobacco barns on the flat fields, the spaces between them, and their similarity and simplicity of form. Tobacco barns have a unique architectural feature: they must be ventilated and yet not allow rain to enter, and mid-19th-century farmers developed a system of vertical siding where every third or fourth board was hinged at the top and could be propped open at the bottom. There is something primitive and rational, in the Aldo Rossi sense, in the repetition, both in the individual buildings — think columns and repeated vertical shadows — and as collections of identical primal forms. There is also something distinctly modern in the repetitive slats — think Herzog and de Meuron's Ricolla storage building.

For those who draw inspiration from vernacular architecture, this book is a must. In fact, we have already figured out the perfect chapel for a Valley site in a flat field....

Ann McCallum AIA is a principal of Burr and McCallum in Williamstown, Massachusetts.



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Site Work

Web sites of note

The Boston Groundwater Trust

www.bostongroundwater.org

Forget Venice. Boston has another kind of worry about water levels. Groundwater deterioration threatens wood-pile foundations of buildings in 2,000 acres of metropolitan Boston, including the historic neighborhoods of Back Bay, Fenway, Chinatown, South End, Beacon Hill, and Bay Village. The Trust is the source for information.

Beyond the Big Dig

www.boston.com/beyond_bigdig

www.bigdig.com

Wondering what exactly is supposed to happen once the Big Dig is done? These sites offer commentary and images of the park designs.

Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

www.lincolninst.edu

The Lincoln Institute is the center for the discussion of land use, taxation, and policy. Its newsletter, Land Lines, is available online, with details of upcoming workshops and seminars.

PARKitecture in Western National Parks

www.cr.nps.gov/habshaer/parkitect

"Celebrates the concept of designing with nature through the exhibition of black-and-white photographs and measured drawings of representative structures and sites in 10 well-known parks." Can't argue with the concept. And if you can't visit the real sites, this virtual one isn't a bad substitute.

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Xeriscape Colorado

www.xeriscape.org

A terrific introduction to the principles of Xeriscape, a "systematic concept for saving water in landscaped areas." No, you don't have to plant cacti in Bangor.

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Other Voices by Ricco Villanueva Siasoco

B o s t o n C o m m o n



photo courtesy Nanosoft Inc.

The Boston Common before daybreak: the fields blue, dewy; the tall lamps positioned like fenceposts, emitting an electric hum. It's early spring, and the homeless men and women sleep beneath canopied trees. On the courts, a tennis ball bounces softly, a kind of metronome, and a woman calls out, "Love-15." Lucy, my four-year old retriever, tugs her leash and leads me toward an empty patch of grass.

This is my favorite hour of the day. Before sunrise, five-thirty in the morning, the park silent and melancholy. Even the clinking of bottles by an old Chinese woman searching for empties has a dolefulness that rings true. A pair of bike messengers pedal casually, cycling with no hands, their canvas bags slung across their backs. One of them holds a cup of coffee as if he were a commuter from the suburbs pulling into South Station. Lucy leads me past the large tiered fountain in pursuit of a squirrel. Despite her domesticity, I forget she's hard-wired for hunting.

Blue mornings on the Common remind me of the only job I've held that required my wakefulness at this hour: the graveyard shift at an Internet company, working from eleven o'clock each evening until seven the next morning. My sole responsibility was a few hours' worth of data entry, and then four hours of dead time. Night watchmen and newspaper printers understand where I'm coming from. The policemen and groundskeepers who tend this park might

commiserate, too. By two o'clock each morning, the entirety of my data entry was done. I would sit in that cavernous office and read *The Odyssey*, Joyce's *Ulysses* or another great book for the graduate program I was in — books that required not only fierce concentration, but also a solitude absent from the harsh light of day.

I remember the vast space where I worked had a peacefulness similar to the sloping hill where I now stand, overlooking the Frog Pond, waiting for Lucy to do her business. During the day, in the summertime, the Frog Pond teems with playful toddlers and parents, wading to their ankles in the water, or, in deepest December, skating in circles on the clean ice. In those pre-dawn hours at the Internet company, I felt like an anthropologist, studying the empty desks overflowing with coffee mugs, computers, and unfinished reports. The remnants of industry, of people working and playing without me, pervaded the office at night. Now, overlooking the Frog Pond, there's a similar sense of isolation: weathered green benches, an empty flag pole, a plastic bag caught in a branch, snapping against the wind.

Then a jogger runs past, panting hard, making his way up the hill toward the State House.

What I often forget about the Common — like that office years ago — is that I'm not alone. Despite my lonely recollections, there were others who shared the graveyard

shift: Carmen, the loud-mouthed cook who manned the cafeteria; Shane and Sebastian, co-workers who also entered data; and a lanky, affable security guard whose name I never knew. In the same way, the Common balances our need for community with a desire for solitude.

Lucy sniffs the root of a huge oak tree, her tail wagging in the air. For more than 350 years, this odd-shaped piece of land has served many masters. About its early days, the great Boston historian Walter Muir Whitehill described it as a "versatile community resource useful for pasturing cattle, training military companies, and hanging unwelcome Quakers" as well as the perfect spot for "promenades." To the outsider, it would seem impossible to find a quiet place among the crowds on a Saturday afternoon. But walk to the top of the hill and you'll find a peaceful summit overlooking the playing fields and the wide expanse of Charles Street. Somehow this spot, in the very center of it all, feels accessible enough for tourists to feed squirrels yet intimate enough to sit on the towering monument by Martin Milmore and read a book. This is the Common's original purpose and its greatest pleasure: to be everyone's backyard.

Down the hill Lucy leads us, to the gazebo near Boylston Street. In the lofty chasm formed by the Ritz Millennium, sunlight warms the glass and steel monoliths. It looks like the doorway to a lighted room. I unzip my jacket, wanting to feel the warm breeze. Then there's Lucy again, tail wagging, anxious to move on. ■■■

Ricco Villanueva Siasoco has published work in *Boston Magazine*, *The North American Review*, and *The Boston Globe*. He teaches writing at Boston College.

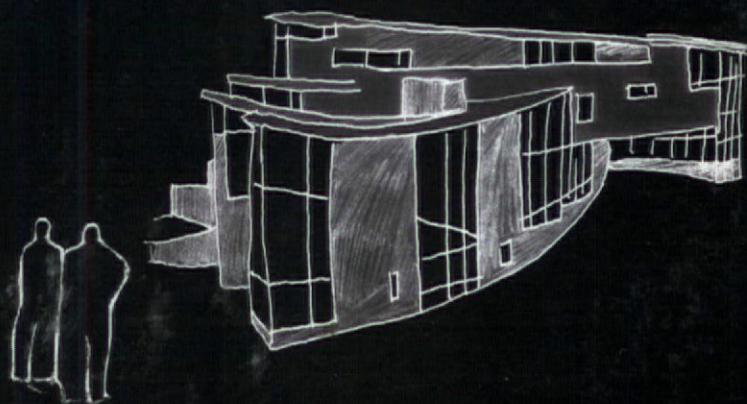
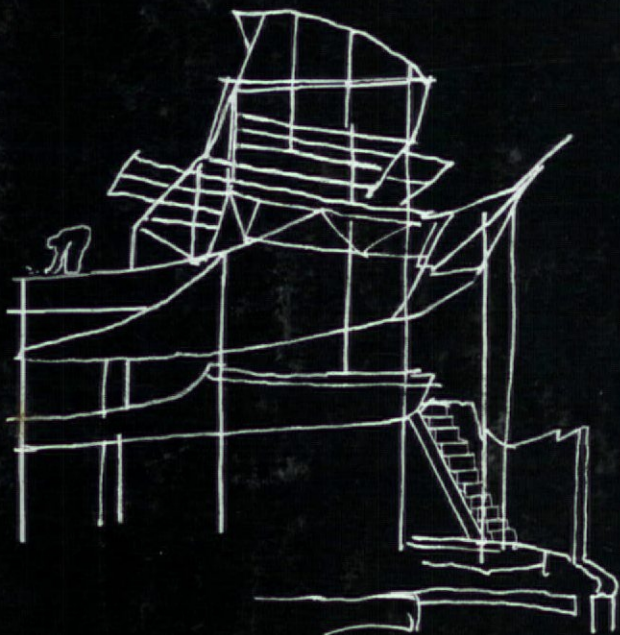
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