

A Tribute to

CORNELIA HAHN  
OBERLANDER



October 3, 2021

## A Message from the Lieutenant Governor



As Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, it is my sincere honour to pay tribute to Cornelia Hahn Oberlander. Cornelia was a renowned British Columbian, a dedicated member of Vancouver's Jewish community, and a true visionary, whose impact in landscape architecture is felt not only in our province, but throughout the world.

As a female landscape architect, Cornelia broke new ground. She was among the first class of women in 1947 to graduate from the Harvard Graduate School of Design with a landscape architecture degree, and the first woman to be awarded the Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe Award by the International Federation of Landscape Architects. She was a Companion of the Order of Canada, and a Member of the Order of British Columbia, well-deserved recognitions for her contributions to the country and province.

Cornelia's work reflected her passion for environmentally conscious design, breaking the meticulous landscaping trends of the day to focus on place-based sustainability, using native plants and community consultation to create livable landscapes for the benefit of all. Her unique vision resulted in some of Vancouver's most iconic landscapes, from the urban rooftop garden of the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch, to the serenity of the UBC Museum of Anthropology, to the beloved beach logs found on the city's public beaches.

Cornelia worked actively until she passed at 99, a long, remarkable life guided by her "5 Ps": Patience, Persistence, Politeness, Professionalism, and Passion. The extraordinary environments she created were truly an act of service to all British Columbians. On behalf of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I extend my gratitude to Cornelia Hahn Oberlander for her generous legacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Janet Austin".

The Honourable Janet Austin, OBC  
Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia

# A Message from the Mayor of the City of Vancouver



MAYOR KENNEDY STEWART



On behalf of my colleagues on Vancouver City Council, I am honoured to write a few words about Cornelia Hahn Oberlander.

In eight decades of promoting urban green spaces and environmental sustainability, Cornelia created playgrounds and parks in urban centres around the world. Her contributions

to our own city – the landscape architecture of Robson Square and the Provincial Court, and UBC’s Museum of Anthropology – exemplify her lasting vision. Cornelia Hahn Oberlander’s contribution to Vancouver continues to be experienced by all who live and visit in our city, including at civic facilities such as the logs as seating at Vancouver public beaches (1963), the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch rooftop garden (1995), and the Van Dusen Botanical Garden visitors’ centre (2011).

Cornelia Hahn Oberlander has received numerous local, national and international awards for her lifetime of work in landscape architecture, including the Vancouver’s Civic Merit Award, the Order of Canada, the Order of British Columbia, and the inaugural Governor General’s Award in Landscape Architecture. I was pleased, on behalf of Vancouver City Council, to be able to award her the Freedom of the City Award in May of 2021 to honour her lifetime of contributions to our city.

My thoughts are with the friends and colleagues of Cornelia Oberlander, who have gathered with the School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, to celebrate her incredible life and achievements.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "E. Kennedy Stewart".

Mayor Kennedy Stewart

## A Message from BCSLA



Honoured guests, colleagues, and friends,

The British Columbia Society of Landscape Architects is very proud to have had Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, LMBCSLA - O29, FCSLA, FASLA, CC, as one of our longtime members. Cornelia was a world-renowned and respected landscape architect who led by example. Her guiding principles were “The 5 P’s”: Patience, Persistence, Politeness, Professionalism and Passion. Always eager to share her passion with others, her collaboration and mentorship shaped the careers of hundreds of landscape architects and young professionals.

Cornelia touched the lives of countless people around the world through her landscape architecture projects. Here in Vancouver, some of her most notable contributions include the landscapes at the UBC Museum of Anthropology and Robson Square, the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch rooftop garden, the VanDusen Botanical Garden visitor centre, the Vancouver General Hospital burn unit garden, and the log seating on Vancouver’s beaches. Cornelia was passionate about creating green oases in urban areas and connecting people to nature. These ideals are reflected in her designs which blur the lines between indoors and outdoors, incorporating natural forms and native plants that blend with the surrounding environment.

Cornelia’s work focused on community well-being and nature in multiple realms, including housing, transportation, and playgrounds. She designed over 70 playgrounds throughout Canada - most notably the Children’s Creative Centre at Expo ’67. Drawing inspiration from her own family, her playgrounds allow children the freedom and creativity to express themselves through their use of the space. She was an early proponent of community engagement on design and would spend hours on research to inform her community projects, often incorporating plants of cultural and medicinal value to Indigenous peoples.

Cornelia has been described by many as a “trailblazer” in the field of landscape architecture – always steps ahead with her dedication to social and ecological issues. For decades, she emphasized the importance of sustainable landscapes and mitigating and adapting to climate change. Cornelia was one of the first people to research and design green roof technology for cooling and stormwater management. Her innovative and beautiful site-focused projects have positively impacted the health and happiness of numerous communities and will continue to do so for decades to come.

In a 2012 interview with CBC, Cornelia expressed that her wish for the future was for landscape architecture to be fully understood by the public and help more people connect with nature. Cornelia was instrumental in demonstrating the value of the profession for community and ecological well-being. Through her lifelong work and mentorship, she inspired – and continues to inspire – so many of us to continue carrying out her dreams.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erik S. Mustonen".

Erik S. Mustonen, MBCSLA  
BCSLA President  
October 2021

## A Message from ASLA



It is with great sadness but also with fond memory that the American Society of Landscape Architects remembers the life and legacy of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, who was an ASLA Fellow and the 2012 recipient of the ASLA Medal; the Society's highest honor.

Landscape Architecture Magazine noted upon Cornelia's passing that she left behind "an unparalleled legacy of designed projects and a lifelong commitment to advocacy for the profession." That lifetime of influence and activism was reflected on social media, "where she was called a 'visionary,' 'icon,' and 'legend.'" Elizabeth Meyer, FASLA, who served on the Oberlander Prize Advisory Committee tweeted, "We stand on Cornelia's shoulders. Great talent, creative risk taker, generous mentor." This sentiment was echoed by Chris Reed, FASLA, who said, "Cornelia leaves a stunning legacy of work and leadership, and humanity."

Cornelia's status as a trailblazer for women in landscape architecture cannot be understated. John Beardsley, former Director of Garden and Landscape Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, remarked, "As one of the first women in the post-World War II era to establish her own practice, she has been an inspiration to the many women who have entered the profession in her wake."

One such professional, Susan Cohen, FASLA, remembers Cornelia as "one of the great visionary landscape architects of the 20th and 21st centuries – a consummate professional whose creativity, work ethic, and energy [were] rivaled only by her generosity toward the younger landscape architects to whom she enthusiastically [offered] encouragement and support." Susan adds that for many, including herself, Cornelia "provided an inspiring example of the highest standards of practice."

Over her long career, Cornelia's innovations set the precedent for other landscape architects to follow. Indeed, Charles Birnbaum, FASLA, argues she is "the dean of postwar female landscape architects." Cornelia, he continues, "was a pioneer in the profession's embrace of environmentally responsible design and an early champion of the green roof, a design idiom that has become nearly ubiquitous." But more important than her considerable record of built work, publications, and lectures, was Cornelia's belief that "our profession can make the world a better place – and she has done more than her fair share to prove that point."

It is for this final reason, above all, that ASLA would like to remember and honor Cornelia. She was someone who believed in the ability of landscape architecture to provide a better, greener, and more equitable world for all people. And she brought this belief to fruition through her many years of service to the profession. She was a gift to landscape architecture and to the world.

## A Message from AIBC



**ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

The AIBC community was saddened to hear of the passing of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, Honorary Member of the Architectural Institute of British Columbia.

The AIBC Honorary Membership recognizes individuals who have made especially noteworthy contributions to the profession of architecture in British Columbia. In 1997, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander was nominated and subsequently granted Honorary Membership to the AIBC. As required under the Architects Act, this prestigious honour was bestowed with endorsement from AIBC architects. To this day, she is the only landscape architect to be conferred AIBC Honorary Membership.

Cornelia was closely involved with the AIBC community. She attended many Institute events, such as the Recognition Ceremony, which acknowledges the professional lifetime achievements of architects. This AIBC event is held at the VanDusen Botanical Gardens Visitor Centre, which Cornelia inspired and designed in partnership with Perkins + Will Canada Architects Co. and Sharp & Diamond Landscape Architecture. Cornelia significantly contributed to the built environment over her decades-long career, having designed hundreds of urban plazas, parks, playgrounds, and rooftop gardens. Many of these projects were in collaboration with architects, whom she worked closely with throughout her professional life:

“Cornelia Hahn Oberlander was a practitioner, educator, and tireless advocate for her field of landscape architecture. She was particularly cognizant of the ability of landscape to support the expressive intentions of architectural conceptions.

Cornelia was a valued collaborator on projects ranging from private residences, multi-residential, and institutional projects. Her work on the desired urban center in Vancouver consisting of Robson Square, the

Provincial Law Courts, and the Vancouver Art Gallery Plaza, was a testament to her contributions. Her relentless dedication to research for appropriate planting reinforced architectural intentions. This was prominent in the allée of trees and cascading roses emanating from the linear planters along Hornby Street, which transitioned the buildings to the pedestrian precinct. The landscape over the stepping public terraces, guides the pedestrian movement.”

- Nick Milkovich Architect AIBC, FRAIC

“Amazing Cornelia. Inspiring and passionate until the end. Cornelia leaves a huge legacy of beautiful landscapes and gardens, but even more so, a lesson on how to live. Passionate, thoughtful, persistent, selfless, resilient, beautiful – some of the words that come to mind. I was fortunate to work with her on VanDusen Botanical Garden Visitor Centre, the Vancouver Art Gallery Plaza and Vancouver Central Library Rooftop Garden.”

- Danica Djurkovic Architect AIBC, Past AIBC Council President

# A Message from the Cultural Landscape Foundation



## The Inimitable Cornelia

The scope, scale, and impact of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander is only hinted at by the awards, commendations, and other recognitions she received during her long and productive lifetime. There are the projects Cornelia created that will hopefully endure, though landscape architecture is among the most ephemeral of artforms. They are the surroundings and the framework within which people and communities interact, a vital continuum in our social compact. However, apart from the built work, it is her ongoing impact on the profession of landscape architecture that is inestimable, palpable, and, most importantly, ongoing.

Practitioners young and old have their Cornelia stories, whether as part of an audience being inspired by stories about her practice or in one-on-one conversations where Cornelia imparted knowledge or advice with her signature clarity, assurance, and authority. We have all in some way or other been jolted into action by her conviction, sense of principle, insatiable quest for knowledge, and example as a thoughtful and generous collaborator.

There is another way we hope her legacy will endure. Two years ago, an advisory panel crafting the intellectual infrastructure for a new international landscape architecture prize determined that a laureate should be “exceptionally talented, creative, courageous, and visionary.” It was clear that Cornelia embodied these qualities and

that led to a discussion that resulted in the prize being named for her. The announcement of the first Cornelia Hahn Oberlander International Landscape Architecture Prize laureate on Thursday, October 14, 2021, is the beginning of an ongoing effort to not only recognize the work of a landscape architect, or group of practitioners, but to raise awareness about the import of landscape architecture among the general public. In so doing, we hope more people will learn about the extraordinary life and astonishing legacy of this great titan named Cornelia Hahn Oberlander.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR  
President and CEO

# Event Schedule

Hosts: Susan Herrington, BCSLA & Daniel Roehr, MBCSLA

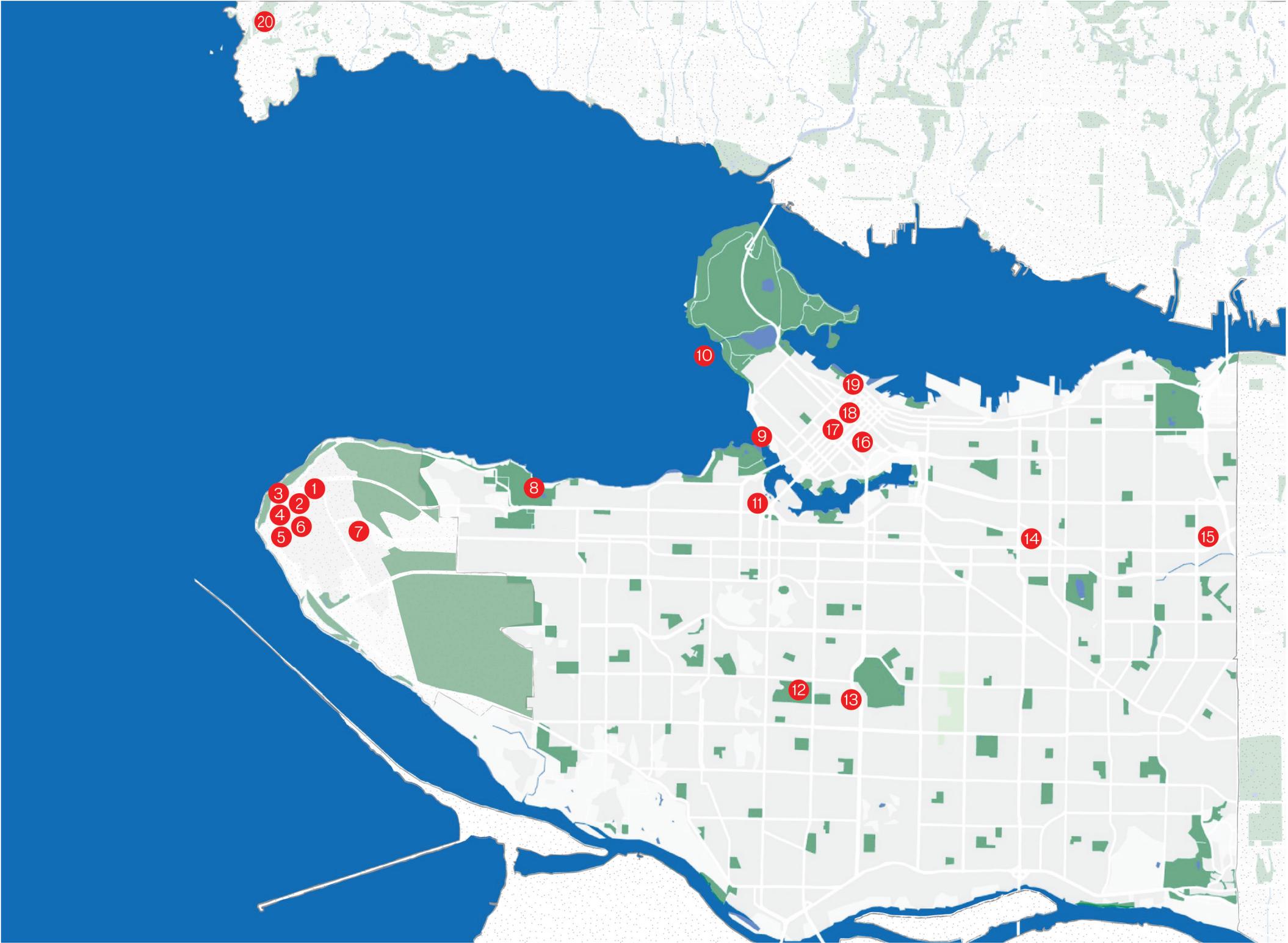
Slideshow	Sonata in G-major, BWV 1021: Adagio, Vivace J.S. Bach (1685-1750) Chloe Meyers (Baroque violin) & Alexander Weimann (harpsichord)
Welcome	Ron Kellett <i>Director and Professor, UBC SALA</i>
Speaker	Susan Herrington <i>Professor, UBC SALA</i>
Video tribute	Martien de Vletter <i>Associate Director Collection, Canadian Centre for Architecture</i>
Film clip	<i>City Dreamers</i> , a film by Joseph Hillel
Speaker	Hilary Letwin <i>Administrator/Curator of the West Vancouver Art Museum</i>
Reading	<i>Cornelia Hahn Oberlander: Making the Modern Landscape</i> Susan Herrington

Slideshow	Cello Suite No.4 in E-flat major, BWV 1010: Sarabande J.S. Bach (1685-1750) Joseph Eggleston, cello
Speaker	Susan Herrington
Speaker	Eva Matsuzaki, PP/FRAIC, Hon. AIBC, Hon. FAIA <i>Architect</i>
Video tribute	Marc Treib <i>Professor, University of California, Berkeley</i>
Video tribute	Hank White, FASLA <i>Principal, HMWhite, New York City</i>
Video tribute	Tim Ferguson & Virginia Burt, FCSLA, FASLA <i>Virginia Burt Designs and Tim Ferguson, North by Northwest Ventures Inc.</i>
Speaker	Daniel Roehr <i>Associate Professor, UBC SALA</i>

# Event Schedule

Hosts: Susan Herrington & Daniel Roehr

Speaker	Sandy James, Planner <i>Walk Metro Vancouver</i>	Video tribute	Jaclyn Kaloczi <i>SALA Alum, Martha Schwartz Partners, London</i>
Video tribute	Gemma McLintock <i>SALA Alum</i>	Speaker	Bryce Gauthier, MBCSLA <i>Principal, Gauthier &amp; Associates Landscape Architects</i>
Video tribute	Thäisa Way, FASLA <i>Resident Program Director for Garden and Landscape Studies, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC</i>	Speaker	Dr. Katherine Dunster, MBCSLA, FCSLA <i>Canadian Society of Landscape Architects</i>
Film clip	<i>City Dreamers</i>	Video tribute	Shirley Blumberg, CM OAA FRAIC AIA <i>Founding Partner, KPMB Architects</i>
Slideshow	Sonata for violin in C major BWV 1005: Largo J.S. Bach (1685-1750) Conor Stuart, violin	Film clip	<i>City Dreamers</i>
Speaker	Daniel Roehr	An invitation	Susan Herrington & Daniel Roehr
Speaker	Adele Weder <i>Writer and curator</i>	Slideshow	Johann Sebastian Bach, Sonata in G-major, BWV 1021: Largo, Presto J.S. Bach (1685-1750) Chloe Meyers (Baroque violin) and Alexander Weimann (harpsichord)
Speaker	Peter Busby, C.M., FRAIC, LEED Fellow <i>Principal, Perkins+Will, Vancouver</i>		





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NW Marine Drive

University Blvd

## A Selection of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander's Works in Vancouver

- 1 UBC Chan Centre for the Performing Arts, with Liz Watts, Associate Landscape Architect, Bing Thom, Architects (1992-1997). When you enter the Chan Centre's Glass Lobby notice the glass walls that provide views to the trees and shrubs that Cornelia saved and planted. This was another idea of Cornelia's: to link the interior space with the forest.
- 2 Renovation for Classrooms, Former Faculty Club, UBC Phase II B. Gordon Hlynsky Architect (1960- 2008). Cornelia worked on this site for many decades. Look to the northeast corner of the garden and you will see a square fountain spilling into the water basin. That was the first design element she created for the Faculty Club.
- 3 Museum of Anthropology landscapes with Arthur Erickson Architects (1975-2013) Walk through the planted mounds at the entrance, they are made from soil excavated to build the Robson Square project. Note the grasses, Cornelia was one of the first to use a native grass mix at UBC. When the pond is full, walk around the Erickson's building and see the museum reflected in the Yosef Wosk Reflecting Pool.
- 4 Liu Centre for International Studies landscape, U.B.C. Arthur Erickson Architects (1998-2000). Note all the mature trees saved by Cornelia and her forest plantings.
- 5 Asian Precinct Study, U.B.C. Vancouver, B.C. with Architect Eva Matsuzaki (1993) Walk through the majestic Douglas Firs and native understorey that Cornelia preserved.
- 6 C. K. Choi Building for the Institute of Asian Research at UBC, with Matsuzaki Wright Architects (1993-1996). When you walk past the building, notice the irises, sedges, and reeds planted between the building and sidewalk. Cornelia planted these plants to filter water coming from the building and rooftop. Also note Cornelia's signature trees - Ginkgos.
- 7 Jim Everett Memorial Park, University Endowment Lands, Vancouver, B.C., (2000-2001). This is a play space and a soccer field. For the soccer players, Cornelia created a sunken oval with a retaining wall at a height for parents to sit and watch the game; the low wall also helps contain stray soccer balls. The grass field drains to the wetland, circular in form, making it possible to disconnect the park from UEL's storm sewer system. Soil removed for the field created mounds for play. The concave wetland's corresponding convex mound provided a place to climb and roll and sled during Vancouver's occasional snowfall.
- 8 Jericho Beaches, Sunset Beach, First and Second Beaches
- 9 Take a break and have a seat on one of the many logs that line the beaches of Vancouver. This practice of saving logs and arranging them
- 10 on the beach was Cornelia's idea dating back to 1963.
- 11 Waterfall Building green roof and courtyard, Vancouver. B.C. Arthur Erickson Architects, Nick Milkovich Architects (1996). You can enter this beautiful courtyard, but the planted green roof areas are private. However, you can see these planted rooftops from the Granville Bridge exit ramp to West 4th Avenue.
- 12 VanDusen Botanical Garden Visitor Centre roof garden and rain garden, Busby Perkins + Will, Sharp and Diamond Landscape Architects (2008). If you walk down from West 37th Avenue you can see Cornelia's planted roof of the Visitor Center. Inspired by Cornelia's research on the white bog orchid, the architects translated the petals of the orchid into a roof structure, a virtual building-sized corolla with a single petal raised above the others to signal the building's entrance.

## A Selection of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander's Works in Vancouver

- 13 Wong Residence, Duncan McNab Architects (1954-1958). Check out the large rock outcrop in front of a house on Cambie Street near Queen Elizabeth Park. The rock was created by volcanic activity that resulted in nearby Little Mountain (now Queen Elizabeth Park) millions of years ago. The city insisted that any building on the site needed to remove the rock. Cornelia argued that saving the rock and situating the house behind it would reduce traffic noise from Cambie Street and create a visual barrier. Keeping the rock would also avoid added costs, environmental damage, and loud disruptions to the adjacent neighbors. Cornelia prevailed and the rock remains.
- 14 McLean Park Rental Housing, Vancouver, B.C. Semmons and Simpson Architects (1960-1963). This was one of Cornelia's first projects for CMHC and she saved the Chestnut trees and planted numerous other stately trees, and several play areas.
- 15 Skeena Terrace Rental Housing, Vancouver, B.C. Underwood McKinley, Cameron, Wilson & Smith, Architects (1961-1965). A CMHC housing project where Cornelia worked with the very steep grades of the site to accommodate housing, gardens, and play areas. She included numerous stately, deciduous trees like Copper Beech. This was the first site where she planted her signature Ginkgo trees.
- 16 The Phillips, Hager and North Garden, Vancouver Public Library, with Moshe Safdie Architects (2015-2018) Take the elevator to the 9th floor and visit Cornelia's rooftop garden with spectacular views and plantings of honeysuckle, white roses, lavender, arbutus hedges, and coral bark maple trees.
- 17 Robson Square landscape architecture and the Law Courts (interior and exterior) government complex in Vancouver, with Arthur Erickson Architects (1974-2012). Walk down Hornby Street under Cornelia's street trees.

At the time of their installation, street trees in the city were to be planted approximately ten meters apart, a spacing often practiced today. However, Cornelia felt the trees should be spaced half that amount, about five meters apart. She fought for this closer spacing, and you can tell the difference. Cornelia planted over 50,000 shrubs and trees for this project, and her favourite spot was the mound at the corner of Hornby and Robson Streets. Take a hike up to the top and enjoy a picnic on the lawn.

- 18 Cathedral Place, Vancouver, B.C. Paul Merrick Architects in association with Christopher Phillips Associates Landscape Architects (1987-1991). Step up into the contemplative garden between Cathedral Place Building and the Bill Reid Gallery.
- 19 Laxton Building roof gardens (now Evergreen Building), 1285 West Pender St. Vancouver, B.C. Arthur Erickson Architects (1980-2009). A great spot to view the rooftop plantings that Cornelia re-installed in 2009 is at the corner of Jervis Street and West Hastings Street at the Coal Harbour Community Centre.
- 20 Monteverdi Estates landscape, Caulfield Plateau, West Vancouver, B.C. Arthur Erickson Architects (1979-1982). The Monteverdi site featured outcrops of some of the oldest rock formations in the area, Caulfield gneiss. In addition to the bedrock and nearly vertical grades, the site was covered with mature western red cedars, Douglas firs, and maple trees. The design team worked together to position the roadway and structures in consideration of the trees, slope, and orientation. Compare Monteverdi Estates with housing recently developed around it. Many of the newly constructed houses are oriented to the street and constructed on standard building pads, two decisions that have resulted in extensive grading and the subsequent removal of trees.



Photo by Kiku Hawkes

