DECEMBER 2013

SITELINES

Landscape Architecture in British Columbia

HOPEFUL PRACTICE: OPTIMISM, STUDY, AND PROPOSAL

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The purpose of Sitelines is to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to the profession of landscape architecture. Individual opinions expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily of those of the BCSLA.

HOPEFUL PRACTICE:

Optimism, Study, and Proposal

By Caelan Griffiths, UBC MLA Candidate, BCSLA Student Rep.

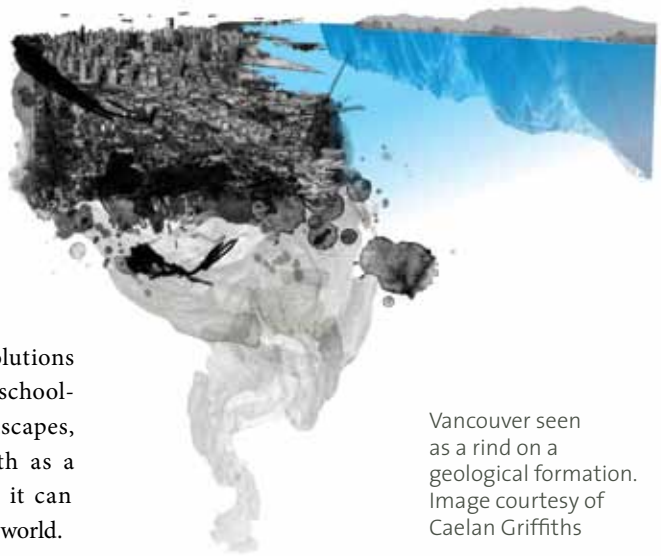
Imagine the fall semester as a gentle tide—it rolls in buffeted by gusty deadlines: a studio project, an elective course in hydrology or a Halloween party—and in no time, the student-led SITELINES issue is due. Why the inundation of metaphors you ask? Simply put: it reflects the steady preoccupation of many students of landscape architecture.

There is a perverse pleasure in finding the evidence for climate change in headlines. Climate change deniers still get oppositional viewpoints published, still sit across the table from pundits name-calling whistle-blowers: "Chicken Little!" The interdisciplinary consensus that the weather is different and will continue to swing wildly has been validated by real and tangible events.

Let's not diminish the human tragedy of Canmore, Calgary, or Toronto one bit; the prediction of greater variability in- and greater frequency of momentous storms has clearly come true.

Roman augury required fresh entrails. But what is a soothsayer who has predicted correctly, but proposed no change of course? A fool with blood on her hands. Students are full of hopeful projects, as you will see, with creative, sensitive, and measured solutions for affordable cities, playful schoolyards, productive urban landscapes, and meaningful places. Both as a criticism and a compliment it can be said: we want to change the world.

One design at a time. SL



Vancouver seen as a rind on a geological formation. Image courtesy of Caelan Griffiths

In this Issue:

Cover Image: This image presents a possible future where an abandoned lot northeast of Glen Drive and East Hastings Street has been repopulated as a Douglas fir forest and then subjected to controlled burns over time, creating again, a working agricultural forest within Vancouver. Image courtesy of Ryan Coghlan.

2014 BC LAND SUMMIT:

2014 BC LAND SUMMIT
COLLABORATIONS & CONNECTIONS

Collaborations & Connections

Wade Davis

Anthropologist, Author, Explorer

Image courtesy of Ryan Hill

Chris Hadfield

Astronaut, Former Commander of the International Space Station

Image courtesy of NASA

Louise Mandell

Queen's Counsel, Doctor of Laws (hon.)

Catherine Murray

Co-Host and Anchor for BNN, Former VP at Deutsche Bank

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Safe *versus* Sterile

Designing playground equipment for a regional school board was an excellent challenge. Trying to remember what was most fun outdoors when I was in elementary school brought back many memories. Crushing flowers into mud puddles, distance jumps off the swing set, and leaping on dumped tires found in the woods are just a few things that come to mind.

By Linzey Bedard, UBC MLA Candidate

LARC 503 – Design Development Professor: Kris Fox

A tactile, challenging, and exploratory playground provides children with opportunity even in Vancouver weather. Image courtesy of Linzey Bedard, Alissa Baker, Ryan Coghlan, and Erin Ramsay.

Unfortunately, less than 15 years after my childhood, playgrounds are surrounded with political red tape rather than mud puddles—or any puddle for that matter. Playgrounds have become zones of irrational fear rather than spaces for enjoyment and physical and mental development.

An internationally recognized standards association[1] which exists, is often mistaken for a federal committee. This association however, is a completely private company. This company sets forth guidelines for everything from safety equipment to sustainable energy. In recent years, however, this organization has gone a step further, going beyond setting guidelines and beginning to tackle "design".

Many of the safety guidelines put forth by this standards association are reasonable. These guidelines, for instance, limit fall height and regulate play surfaces to minimize the risk of head injury. But, development of safety guidelines and employment of safety guidelines as policy are two very different things. As cities, municipalities, and school boards adopt these guidelines as policy, catalogues with CSA approved playground equipment become the easy solution. Even with these playground safety guidelines in place as policy, designers have the ability to actually design safe playground spaces that can encourage tactile play and a broader range of physical and mental challenges. However, with a convenient catalogue of mass produced, powder coated, pre-approved equipment, school officials quickly forget that this catalogue is not the only solution for safe playground spaces.

As designers, we can't sit back and let playgrounds be predetermined by catalogue pieces that are developed through mass-production. Used tires, as briefly mentioned above, can be safely incorporated into the playground and give children a broader range of play and exploration opportunities. With a range of sizes easily available, there is no shortage of design possibilities and children will inevitably think of new ways to use something. This basic item can be re-purposed within playground design while meeting safety guidelines.

The guidelines for safety by this association can be met without limiting ourselves as designers, and restricting our children to catalogue pieces. Mass-produced playgrounds based on a culture of fear hinder our profession and the growth and development of our children. Playgrounds should be spaces designed with a range of mental and physical opportunities that are specific to regional context. Playgrounds should not be catalogue spaces stamped in every park and school across North America. As designers, we have a responsibility to represent the design profession and the target user group. In the instance of playground design, we represent children with minds and spirits that constantly grow. SL

1. This internationally recognized standards association is the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). It is often mistaken to be a federal committee due to "Canadian" in the title. This is a common mistake from both the general public and planning and design professionals based on questions and comments regarding the subject.

UBC MLA Student Project:

By Nina Cicero, UBC MLA Candidate

Professor: Patrick Condon

TRANSIT:IONS

TRANSIT:IONS is an affordable living development plan for the Marpole neighbourhood in Vancouver, BC which focuses on reviving the streetcar line along the existing Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) corridor.

Robust transit connections are essential for vibrant, sustainable communities. Providing at-grade transit, along with proposed adaptive re-use and sensitive infill, enriches Marpole and allows it to maintain an affordable way of life in North America's most expensive city.

Marpole's residents use the passenger car more than the rest of Vancouver to get to work, despite the Canada Line and multiple bus lines running along the north-south arterials. The lack of a strong east-west transit connection hampers the Marpole residents' use of transit both within the neighbourhood and ability to connect to the rest of the Vancouver region. While the Canada Line is a quick connection to other points in the city, it serves to move people out of Marpole, not within it. Bringing at-grade rail transit to the existing CPR rail corridor provides a neighbourhood-scale transit connection that is currently missing from Marpole. Serving an area with a heavy concentration of jobs in Marpole, the new rail service will increase transit options for Marpole residents. The rail service will allow freedom of movement and goods and will spur for economic development in the neighbourhood. Reduced needs for car ownership brought about by an inter-connected, multi-modal transit system will reduce the overall cost of living. A bikeway is twinned with the revived rail transport along the inter-urban railway, creating a connection to Vancouver's larger bikeway and greenway system. Rail moving at a humane speed will allow for interaction with the Fraser riverfront and the development of a lively waterfront community in Marpole.

Following the principle of adaptive re-use of the railway corridor, the proposed urban form for the streetcar corridor focuses on gentle density, adaptive reuse of existing light industrial buildings, and sensitive infill. Rather than erecting towers to achieve density above all else, this proposal for Marpole envisions an active ground plane responding to the streetcar corridor. The new development on the site will increase density while maintaining a human scale in the neighbourhood. Affordable, accessible movement allows Marpole to build on its assets, making it a place to stay and live, affordably. SL

MARPOLE RAIL Proposed Stops 10_31-01. Image courtesy of Nina Cicero.

UBC MLA Student Project:

By Ryan Coghlan, UBC MLA Candidate

LARC 582G - The Soul of Nature:
Representation(s) in Landscape Architecture

Burning Bushes

Prior to colonization by Europeans, many of the Douglas fir forests within Vancouver were regularly burned by First Nations to promote berry growth.

By burning the woods on a regular basis, the native Tsuga heterophylla were suppressed and prevented from shading out other species. In between these burns, species such as salmon berry and thimble berry would regrow rapidly providing an ample supply of edible fruits. SL

This image presents a possible future where an abandoned lot northeast of Glen Drive and East Hastings Street has been repopulated as a Douglas fir forest and then subjected to controlled burns over time, creating again, a working agricultural forest within Vancouver. Image courtesy of Ryan Coghlan.

By Jocelle Smith, UBC MLA Candidate

GROWING TOGETHER:
Landscape Architects and Urban Agriculture

The intent of the Philip Tattersfield Scholarship is to promote writing early in the careers of future landscape architects, to spark an interest in this form of communication, to diversify students' skill sets, and to improve the level of writing within the profession. Excellence in design writing should be critical and constructive in nature and engage the reader with a deeper understanding of the topic at hand.

Philip Tattersfield, LMBCSLA #001, FCSLA, (1917-2008) had a distinguished career as the first landscape architect registered in British Columbia. He was integral in shaping the BCSLA and contributed extensively to SITELINES magazine. Over his career, Tattersfield authored more than 150 publications, briefs, lectures, and television series in North America and overseas covering philosophical and technical aspects of practice.

The 2013/2014 recipient of the Philip Tattersfield Scholarship is University of British Columbia, Master of Landscape Architecture Candidate, Jocelle Smith, for her essay, "Growing Together: Landscape Architects and Urban Agriculture".

The role of landscape architects in the shaping of Vancouver's food-producing landscapes may be larger than what first meets the eye. In 2011, Margie Ruddick, an ecological landscape designer from Philadelphia and winner of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award, stood in court to defend the rhubarb and cherries growing in her front yard. The city had determined that her yard violated property maintenance codes which dictated that "weeds" should not be taller than ten inches. Margie won. The tides are changing; urban agriculture and local sustainable food are global hot topics. In 2011, the UN released an extensive report citing how small-scale farming could provide twice as much food globally. In January 2013, Vancouver released the Vancouver Food Strategy, a sustainable urban food systems plan. The plan covers not only the production of food, but also its distribution and the reduction of food waste.

Furthermore, in a recent documentary, James O'Neill, Social Planner for the City of Vancouver who specializes in food policy, stated that the city aims to increase its number of community garden food plots from 3,260 to 5,000 by the year 2020. Therefore, around 50 new community gardens would be installed over the next nine years. By 2020, the goal is for half of Vancouver's food to be produced locally. With these gardens will also come the need to create efficient systems of processing and

Situated on an old gas station site by Pacific Central Station, Vancouver's newest urban orchard by SOLEfood could provide opportunity for eco-revelatory design or enhanced connection to the urban fabric. Image courtesy of Jamie Wu.

distribution such as outdoor food prep areas and community kitchens; innovative access, such as mobile and permanent community food markets; and waste reduction venues such as community composting locations.

The execution of such a feat will undoubtedly draw on the skills of many from both the private and public realms. Landscape architects in particular are well-equipped to provide leadership in Vancouver's urban agriculture initiatives. There are the more obvious contributions, such as plant palette knowledge to increase pollinators, or the ability to choose a sustainable, locally-sourced stone to edge a pathway. But beyond these basics are four greater reasons. They are as follows:

Phenomenological Quality

"Phenomenology" in an architectural sense, means using sensory experience to instill a sense of place. Landscape architects can draw upon, emphasize, and enhance the phenomenological quality of gathering spaces in food-producing locations, whether they are a community garden or an edible planting scheme that spans neighbourhoods. Seating areas around stone ovens, long tables for warm summer night locavore dinners, small tucked-away amphitheaters for Shakespearean dramas or art shows, and allées and alcoves that meander through orchards are all potential additions that can be enriched with a sense of place and enable people to feel the serene peace of belonging to a community and being rooted in the land. A hastily thrown-together gathering space will serve its purpose, but a gathering space carefully constructed to encapsulate soul will be preserved as a keepsake to pass on to future generations.

Efficient Design

Second, landscape architects can bring economical design to the production, and to the adjacent processing and distribution areas of a garden or urban farm. Tool usage and storage, watering, washing, packaging, and various community events are just some of the activities that may take place in an urban farm or garden. Three-year waiting lists to acquire a plot at some existing community gardens also means that Vancouver needs to be efficient with its use of space. Efficient design can be realized, for instance, in an outdoor kitchen that has been set up so that the food travels in a single short line from garden, to washing station, to prep kitchen, to outdoor table, saving space, time, and energy. Landscape architects can create built form that people are drawn to through the way it predicts their needs before they are even aware of them.

Locavore dinners on the urban farm are just one of the many types of programming for which landscape architects can create memorable, experientially rich design. Image courtesy of Jocelle Smith.

Revelatory Design

Not only could landscape architects do wonders for the internal organization of a community garden or urban farm, they also possess the savoir-faire for revealing ▸

A starting point from which to grow together—Several UBC Landscape Architecture students lent a hand in designing and bringing Woodland Park's new community garden to life this past summer in Surrey, BC. Image courtesy of Jocelle Smith.

An inspirational precedent—Tall tree canopies, buskers, central gathering space, and abundant seating add phenomenological quality to Portland Farmer's Market. Image courtesy of Jocelle Smith.

embedded histories, phenomena, or ecology to people via revelatory design. One example is through eco-revelatory design. Eco-revelatory design is landscape architecture that is, "intended to reveal and interpret ecological phenomena, processes, and relationships". Many existing gardens, such as Strathcona Community Garden and Davie Village Community Garden are built on old industrial sites that were, during their former heydays, polluted with petro-chemicals or other toxic waste. Eco-revelatory design can acknowledge past use, highlighting both the environmental damage and bittersweet contribution to the growth of society, and educate the public regarding the remediation process. The landscape architect can use the land to speak to both the impassioned gardener and the casual passerby, telling them of its history, importance, and future trajectory.

Seamless Connection to the Urban Fabric

The fourth way by which landscape architects can lead Vancouver in the design of new community food spaces is by creating seamless, integrated connections from the garden into the urban fabric: blending the garden with the surrounding social areas, be they residential, commercial, or industrial; linking together individual agricultural sites at a larger scale; and using circulation routes that honor the community's desired modes of transportation, materials that speak to surrounding structure, and cues that draw one into or out from the garden, while keeping it safe and accessible. While many existing community gardens in Vancouver are aesthetically functional, they could be so much more, if a landscape architect enabled them to speak the language of the community in which they are situated.

Overall, the plans are firmly in place to significantly alter Vancouver's urban fabric with the addition of an extensive new food system. This system's scale and permanence call out for the expertise of landscape architects. In the past, community gardens have often been built with minimal planning or design; there is much room for improvement. The role of a landscape architect in the food system's design is not exclusive. It will overlap with, support, and be supported by the knowledge of other professionals and citizens who are involved in its creation. However, landscape architects tend to be generalists by trade, and their ability and training to see many aspects and to bring them together as a whole, is what can enable Vancouver to become the proud home to an astounding and innovative network of food-producing landscapes in the next nine years. SL

Project4Pocket Farm at Scotia Street and East 4th Avenue is one of many innovative, community-minded growing spaces popping up around Vancouver. Efficient design could increase yields and space, and connections to the urban fabric could root such farms in their settings. Image courtesy of Jocelle Smith.

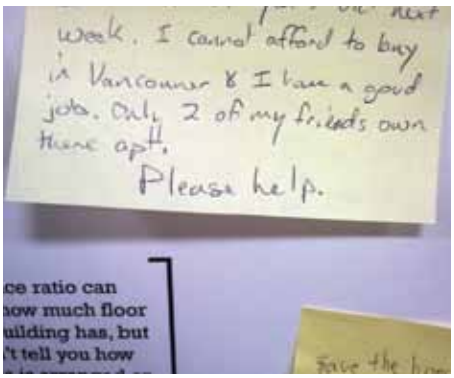
1. UN Agroecology report: http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20110308_a-hrc-16-49_agroecology_en.pdf
2. Architects of Change III, Painting The City Green (Ep. 4 of 10), Knowledge Network, http://www.knowledge.ca/program/architects-of-change-iii
3. Eco-revelatory design: nature constructed/nature revealed.. (1998). Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press.

UBC SALA Vertical Studio Tackles AFFORDABLE HOUSING in Vancouver

By Lindsey Fryett, UBC MLA Candidate

Studio 504: Occupy Marpole, Affordable Housing
Professor: Patrick Condon and Joanne Gates

The role of the global market and demand and density on affordable housing are subjects where little consensus is found, but they are subjects that touch on many of the concerns that UBC student's have about their ability to find a place to live in their own in the city after graduation. Inspired by Patrick Condon's "Seven Rules for Sustainable Communities", and a series of roundtable discussions with community members, a series of affordability strategies were produced by students in the Fall of 2012 in Patrick Condon and Joanne Gates' joint architecture and landscape architecture studio at UBC. Students were asked to imagine Vancouver in the year 2050 and then develop affordable housing strategies for Vancouver, set in the neighbourhood of Marpole.



A call to the city for affordable housing being made by a Vancouver resident. All images courtesy of Lindsey Fryett.

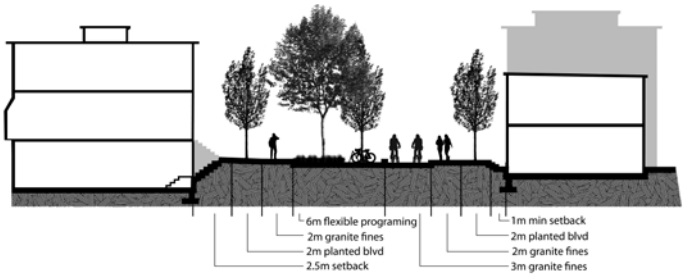
It is often difficult to imagine the future. What might an affordable city look like if density projections, demographic projections, and the Greenest City Transportation Goals were met? Throughout our round table discussions, strategies ranged from built form, zoning, and policy, to infrastructure and district energy. My project, "Softscape", was guided by the belief that density is necessary for shared land cost and should be guided by and benefit existing residents, and that community, infrastructure, and transportation contribute to creating affordable neighbourhoods.

The population in Marpole is older than the city average, and neighbourhood projections expect to see this age increase. Flexible zoning that allows for the division and sale of lots and increased allowance for the creation of rental suites means that residents will be allowed to access land equity and to continue living in their homes throughout retirement. One of the greatest criticisms of increasing density is that the character of a neighbourhood will be lost, but density introduced by residents is likely to be incremental and sensitive to the existing built form.

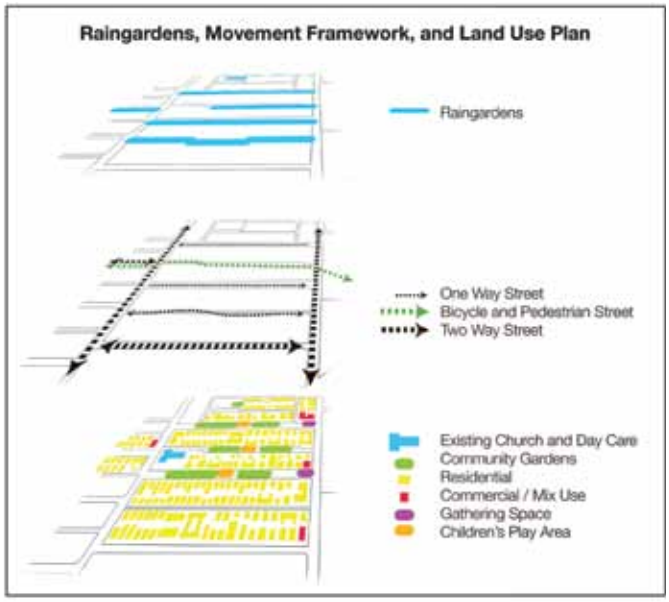
In order to test this density planning, a series of additional zoning regulations were projected forward using 3D modeling to test their effect on street character, sun and shadow, housing capacity, and cost. A strategy was settled on, that included laneways as new "fronts", a four-story height restriction, 4.5 units per lot, a floor space ratio increase from 0.65 to 1.2, and a set back reduction to 1.2 metres. The three-block projected site is located within a five minute walking distance of the Southwest Marine Drive Canada Line station making it the ideal place for imagining how a block might look if the Greenest City transportation goals were met. The currently disrupted pedestrian and cycle network where West 67th Avenue dead-ends is transformed and becomes a strong east-west connection from the neighbourhood to the Canada Line station. To further reduce car dependence, mixed-use corners were created to build a sense of community and provide opportunities for small businesses, which are supported by corner gathering spaces built into the street. Once these initial zoning regulations were projected, it created an opportunity to expand the design conventions in order to make these gathering places appealing for community members.

The gentle southern slope of Marpole makes the north side of the street ideal for community gardens, picnic and outdoor cooking facilities, and even play areas. Local east-west streets with low-use become one way streets and are programed to mitigate the reduction of yard ▸

Programing opportunities in the laneway connecting West 67th Avenue to the Canada Line station: Community gardens, shared cooking facilities, and gathering places. Pervious surfaces and wooden curbs are locally sourced, carbon sequestering, and sustainable.



Making bicycle and pedestrian connections—the laneway between West 67th Avenue and the Canada Line station. Showing density with the laneway front.



Soft Streets.

space. Children's play areas built into these streets mean more access to a park-like space within a short walking distance, and better opportunities for an "eyes on the street" approach to childcare.

Another tenet of affordability that the class agreed upon, is Condons' "lighter, greener, cheaper, smarter infrastructure". The City of Vancouver is currently working to upgrade the outdated combined sewer system in a number of Vancouver neighbourhoods, but not in Marpole. On the south side of the street, the creation of east-west running "rain garden boulevards" would be large enough to mitigate the volume of average rainfall landing on impervious surfaces. The organic material of these gardens would increase perviousness and, many elements of the rain garden are local, carbon sequestering, and sustainable which allow the garden to be a quicker and more cost effective alternative to the proposed sewer system update in the Marpole neighbourhood.

The issue of affordable housing in Vancouver is a wicked one—and although this project exemplified the complexity of the problem, the range of approaches and solutions produced is hopeful. Affordability through density, facilitation of an affordable lifestyle, and smarter infrastructure are able to provide more people with the opportunity to buy into the housing market while supporting and enhancing vibrant communities like Marpole, and making neighbourhoods across Vancouver more environmentally sound. SL

Children's play areas built into the street mean more access to park-like space within a short walking distance, and better opportunities for an "eyes on the street" approach to childcare.

Ideas Built into Reality:

THE **DESIGN BUILD** EXPERIENCE

By Stephanie Aitken, UBC MLA Candidate

Design Build Croatia was a unique exploration seminar through the University of Washington, running from August 25 to September 22, 2013. It brought together students from across North America, from various faculties to participate in a cross-cultural design build to create a therapeutic garden at the psychiatric hospital on the island of Rab.

In the second year of collaboration between the University of Washington and the hospital, a three-way collaboration emerged when students and staff from the Landscape Architecture program at the University of Zagreb joined the project. The site chosen for this year's project was a low-lying grassy area with sporadic plantings of mature trees and shrubs. Located between the road and the future site of an enclosed dementia garden, the aim of the project was to create an area of transition between these two spaces. It needed to be welcoming and accessible to draw people in from the public realm of the road while creating spaces that felt quiet, contemplative, and intimate. One of the biggest challenges was to create a feeling of privacy with while maintaining full visibility for security reasons. The end result was a design inspired by the sea. Elements such as a pier, a "sea of grasses", and a sculptural boat were combined with wheelchair accessible pathways and a variety of seating options. By drawing on the memories and healing potential of the sea, the garden encourages remembering, contemplation, and reflection from its users.

As the lone student from Canada I was fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in this unique international project. From the beginning I was excited to get out of the studio and see what it took to fully realize a design. The unique location and cross cultural collaboration were sure to offer new methods of thinking and working. With only one week to design and three weeks for construction, we had little time to waste. Upon arrival to the psychiatric hospital we were quickly acquainted with our Croatian peers and new home for the next month. The Lavender House, aptly named as it sits in the lavender field used for occupational therapy by the hospital, became a design studio and a home. Right away we were divided into three groups of five students each. In the following days we worked long hours to simultaneously do site analysis, consult with hospital staff and patients, and to produce three separate site designs to be presented to the staff and to our professors.

The design phase proved to be a rather challenging process. We were a large group of students, who had only just met, coming from different cultures and varied educational backgrounds attempting to come to enough consensus to produce a design we could all be happy with. Somehow each group managed to overcome language barriers, differences in working methodologies and conflicting ideas. After the presentation of three unique designs, the staff was invited to ask questions and provide feedback on the designs. Further consultations between our professors and the director of the hospital resulted in the synthesis of two designs. By the end of the week, a master plan was ready and construction began September 2. This first week of the project proved to be emotionally and intellectually draining, but it was also the time in which the strongest bonds of friendship and understanding were formed.

The construction phase was full of triumphant highs and crushing lows. Many of us were far outside our comfort zones, our boundaries and patience tested, learning on the go and through necessity. Small construction details that were over looked in the design phase became instant regrets as they delayed progress or forced us to go back and figure out new solutions. Our ►

Before

The original site was grassy and green but had no access and provided little reason to enter the site.
Images courtesy of Elena Umanskaya.

Construction

Major hardscape elements - The pier, traditional dry stone walls, and a pathway system, start to give form to the site.

After

Looking over what will eventually form a "sea of grasses", the sculptural boat creates an intimate space for remembering, contemplation, and reflection.

workshop was the old kitchen-turned-storage-shed and looked like something straight out of a horror movie with old hospital beds laying in disrepair. Our greatest asset was the number of helping hands which was often restricted by the number of shovels, wheelbarrows, paint brushes, etc. available. It was an exercise in adaptability and time management.

The first week of construction was spent laying out the design, moving earth, surveying, and building traditional dry stone walls. Our first great team triumph was the laying of the drainage pipe. Soon after, we learned that our initial site survey and drainage plan had not been accurate nor aggressive enough to drain the water off the site. It was decided that weeping tile should be placed under the entire pathway system and that a second pipe at the correct grade would be placed over the first. At the same time, we were saying goodbye to the first group of Croatian students who had to return to Zagreb to write exams. Sad to see them go, we tried to welcome a new group of students. Surely there must have been an air of despair around the project as we dug up pathways that had already been laid and tamped, filled in trenches that had been previously dug for edging; hours of work were erased by more hours of work. In moments like these, the amount of work to be done felt insurmountable, we could not possibly finish the project on time.

However, there were small victories along the way that kept us going. When the pier, who had been personified and named Pierre was complete, or each time a bench came out of the workshop, there was a renewed sense of optimism and enthusiasm for the project. The patients also inspired us as some worked along side us as volunteers, or simply enjoyed the garden as it came to life. The official opening of the garden that took place on September 22 was almost a surreal experience, especially for those of us who had been there from the initial design phase. To sit on the benches, to walk the freshly graveled and tamped pathways, to say a few words from atop the pier; all of these elements tangible and real, that only weeks before had been nothing but ideas in our heads and lines on paper.

I would not say that the project ran smoothly or that every problem was fully resolved, however I still consider the project a great success. The aim of the project was to create an area of transition, both physically and metaphorically. It was clear before the garden was even complete that it had succeeded in its aim to draw people in, to take patients out of their daily routines and into a different space reminiscent of the seascapes of their memories. The project was also successful in its aim of cross-cultural collaboration. The ability to work harmoniously with people from different cultures and educational backgrounds is not easily won but its application in the future, both professional and personal, will have immeasurable value. SL

UBC MLA Student Project:

By Mickella Sjoquist, UBC MLA Candidate

BIOMORPHIC: Enclosed on 3 Sides

First Year Studio
Professor: Patrick Condon

This project is part of a six model series, in which we are challenged to design a space and represent our design in the form of a model.

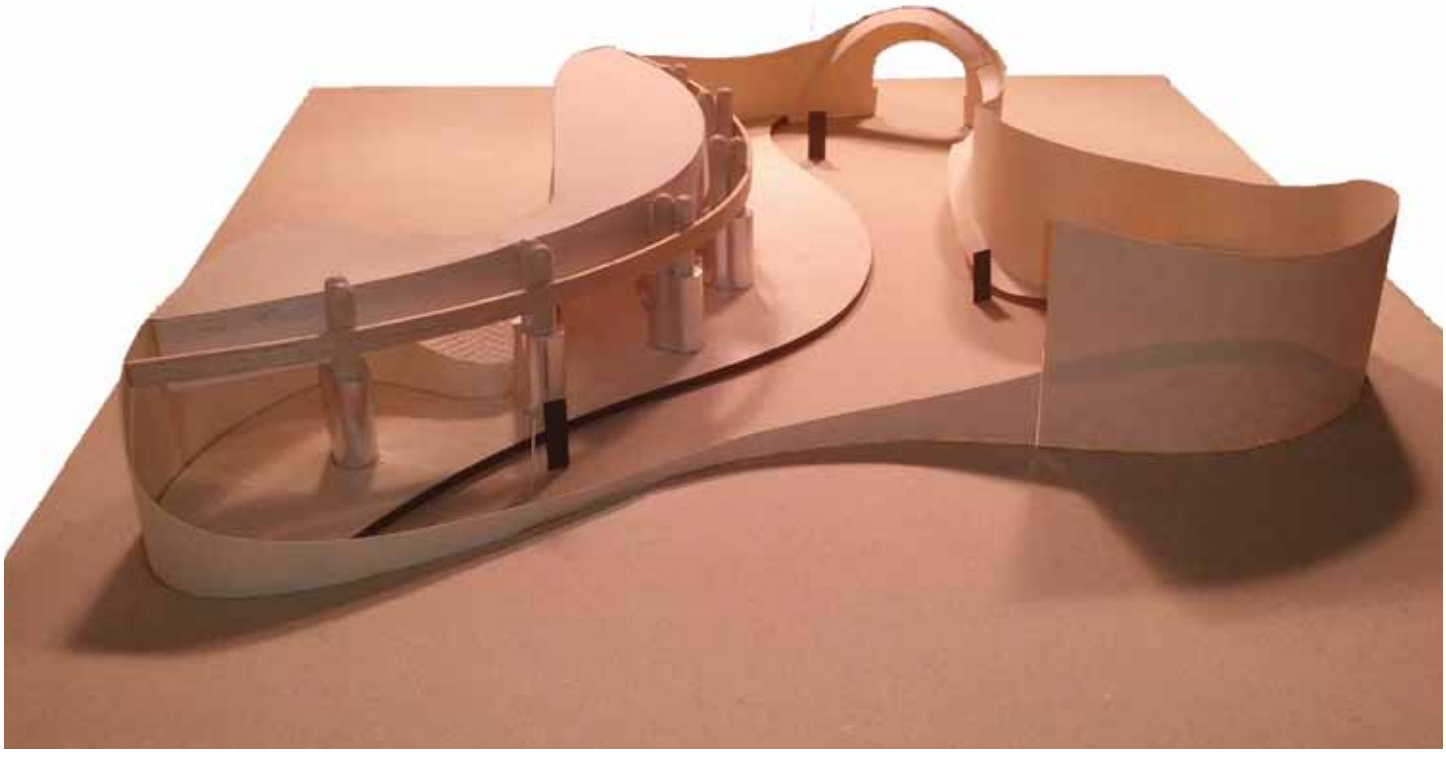
Each individual has two rules to follow when designing their space:

1. A form vocabulary (rectilinear, arc/tangent, biomorphic, or geomorphic)
2. A boundary style (open on all sides, closed on all sides, closed on three sides)

The models can be in whatever material communicates our design best. There is no program, site, or scale given to the students, as the goal of the project is to focus on designing a space that condones a "walk," and has many sub-spaces that support the greatest multitude of activities possible. In this project, students were encouraged to take full advantage of the structural possibilities available in landscape architecture.

The Model

When entering the space, the view is framed by the biomorphic shaped pergola and the path leading into it. The bench undulates up and down on the wall and acts as a sculptural element, creating seating areas that focus towards the view. The rooms are created by the shapes of the three nodes; the central and left node are connected by the pergola. The wall captures light in different ways and rises at the important points of the space and the undulating perimeter creates the walk. The mesh allows individuals to connect the central and left nodes through sight. Tension is created by the structural pergola versus the empty node. SL



Biomorphic Structures Model—An Undulated Space with a View.
Image courtesy of Mickella Sjoquist.

Gasoline Nomads

Landscape Architecture and the Recreational Vehicle

By Caelan Griffiths, UBC MLA Candidate, BCSLA Student Rep.

There is a whole way of life that takes place on the road. It is something that is ingrained in the North American way: wagons west, riding the rails, rebel without a cause, easy rider, and gold rush fever. All the tumultuous mass migrations of the last 500 years of European history have led to the motorized culture of the 21st Century. Riding in a recreational vehicle (RV), an automobile initially built for the sole purpose of holidaying while driving, has become a whole way of life. On the west coast of Canada, this kind of living has become a phenomenon: RVing, living in trailers, and even house-boating has a seemingly universal appeal. Some take up permanent residence in these portable quarters. Is there something to be learned from this form of inhabiting?

A relatively open border between the United States of American and Canada and the relative affordability and abundance of fuel sources through the 20th Century has allowed for a kind of gasoline nomadicism. The "snowbirds" are a community that retires to their RVs and travel south at the onset of winter. About 1% of the rolling stock in the United States of America is classified "recreational vehicle".[1] Numerically, this represents approximately 1.4 million vehicles. Without this long, permeable border and continental standardization of roadways and laws, this kind of ranging of supra-territory would not be possible. The standardized RV length, connection, and turning radius, defines the eventual settlement it occupies. The mobile habitation is the same regardless of the territory.

The extraordinary feature of these contemporary nomads is that the purpose of mobility seems to fulfill two contradictory needs:

- Freedom and independence – the ability to keep on truckin'. The novelty and discovery of moving on is tied to respite from responsibility.
- Flocking together for basic ceremonial-cultural life. A society outside of society is still a society.

Studies show that, "RV owners feel like they live simultaneously in two worlds, partaking of adventure and vacation while enjoying the comforts of their own home."[2] If we take the view that the territory of the continent is their home, perhaps a different view is possible. There is a fascinating potential in that these temporary dwellings could harness the advantages of landscape in capturing experiences of topography, seasonality, water- and forest-scapes, and all with a much-reduced impact on the land based on servicing (everything is on-board).

At first blush the consumption of fossil fuels is inherent to the lifestyle of the RVer. The cost of moving the machine to and from summer grounds to winter camps is costly. Fuel economy is not the hallmark of the recreational vehicle. This is the key difficulty for this form of migratory behavior. In some accounts as early as 2008, the numbers of migrating RVers was seen to drop. [3]

However, an interesting observation can be made about the patterns of consumption accorded by the space and resource constraints of the recreational vehicle. An informal interview with a perceptive friend of mine who spent six months living in an RV revealed that he spent a lot of time limiting his water use and intake as to limit how much he would take on. Similarly, he limited water use to reduce his need to dispose of wastewater.

In the case of heating and cooling, and electricity, the same rules apply: reduce consumption, as resources are finite and scarce onboard. Each device added to the overall load on the system is weighed benefit against cost. In this self-serviced environment, every little piece costs. Material goods are largely kept at a minimum as well as weight and space limitations are tight.

Number of People	RV Water Use/Day		Home Water Use/Day[1]	
1	6 gallons	22 liters	56 gallons	213 liters
2	12 gallons	44 liters	112 gallons	426 liters

This consciousness has two effects on landscape:

- Living lightly and minimally is a necessity.
- The temptation to litter is strong–both in illegal dumping of black- and grey-water and of rubbish.

In using the principles of site adaptive design to create RV landscapes, it is important to understand the opportunity that RVs can provide. If used responsibly, they need not create undue pollution and will require minimal infrastructure. The form of RV parks must grow beyond the conditions of its birth; it must mature beyond the suburb to which it refers. There is a future for these places—but there must be a revolution in the way they are made. The RV nomad of today expends great energy to experience a wide variety of landscapes while simultaneously alighting in the most banal ones in layover.

The failure is that the RV needs its rest too—and those places of temporary roosting are standardized suburbia: RV parks. RVs arose as a way to escape the suburban form but to take all the comforts along for the ride; it is a great contradiction that the places where RVs stop-over are replicas of the suburban form. The other great contradiction is that although RVing arises from suburbia, it also represents the suburban need for wilderness… and sprawling urban land use has swallowed up large tracts of wilderness and has deteriorated the underlying natural systems that sustain wilderness.

RV parks – spontaneous or intentional – distinguish themselves in that they are all unfortunate byproducts of bygone notions of suburban privacy and comfort. In a plan view survey of several dozen RV parks which were sufficiently technologically savvy to have their plans online, one thing stands out: cul-de-sac. The intensity of land use can be impressive. But the resulting urban form is remarkably consistent.

What landscape requirements does a RV park need? A RV park inhabitant wants a certain territory. She occupies but a small inhabitation in that territory to maintain mobility and independence. What landscape does she need to fulfill her territorial needs? There is clearly a need to have a vantage over a natural landscape. From first-hand accounts of the experience of RVing there is a preference for the aesthetic and quality-of-life benefits of "boondocking". This is where the land authority, such as the State of Arizona, gives access to large tracts of wilderness ▸

with an appropriate license for as long as four months. This is not only for the minimum of cost to the RVer. Many seek solitude or natural environment.

The prevalence of "boondocking"[4] is a strong argument that the mainstream RV park has missed a certain segment of the RV market who wishes to have a different experience of the landscape. An alternative mode is one that examines what the landscape can offer and highlight these features for the RVer. The RV is not tied to servicing. This offers an incredible opportunity for the siting to be extremely remote while leaving minimal ecological damage.

The following design guidelines for a site adaptive approach to RV parks arose from this research:

1. Common use spaces are of upmost importance in nomadic communities. Provide common use facilities within 400 metres of campers.
2. Maintain maximum tree cover. RVs are not insulated beyond a basic layer: tree cover will reduce cooling needs and emphasize landscape qualities.
3. To RV park owners: what is intrinsically interesting about the landscape you are offering? RV parks are not to be slipshod environments; they can be high performance, experientially stimulating places. Using landscape planning techniques such as environmental, social, and economic inventories will provide clues as to what form the RV park should take.
4. Don't be afraid to use view cones! RV parks must respond to the basic nomadic need for vantage points.
5. Minimize road widths and implement one ways. It's as much about getting there as it is about being there. The "path" of the vehicle should be one of interest, perhaps designed as a slow paced, smaller-scale parkway.

These qualities in the kind of territorial occupation that RVs can achieve can result in highly site adaptive strategies. These site adaptive strategies will also offer experiential highlights to the RVer: these can be as a function of season, time, or some intrinsic quality of the landscape. It is into this landscape that a site adaptive RV park will insert the RV. SL

Excerpted from research for Advanced Site Planning seminar with William Marsh, Fall 2012.

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