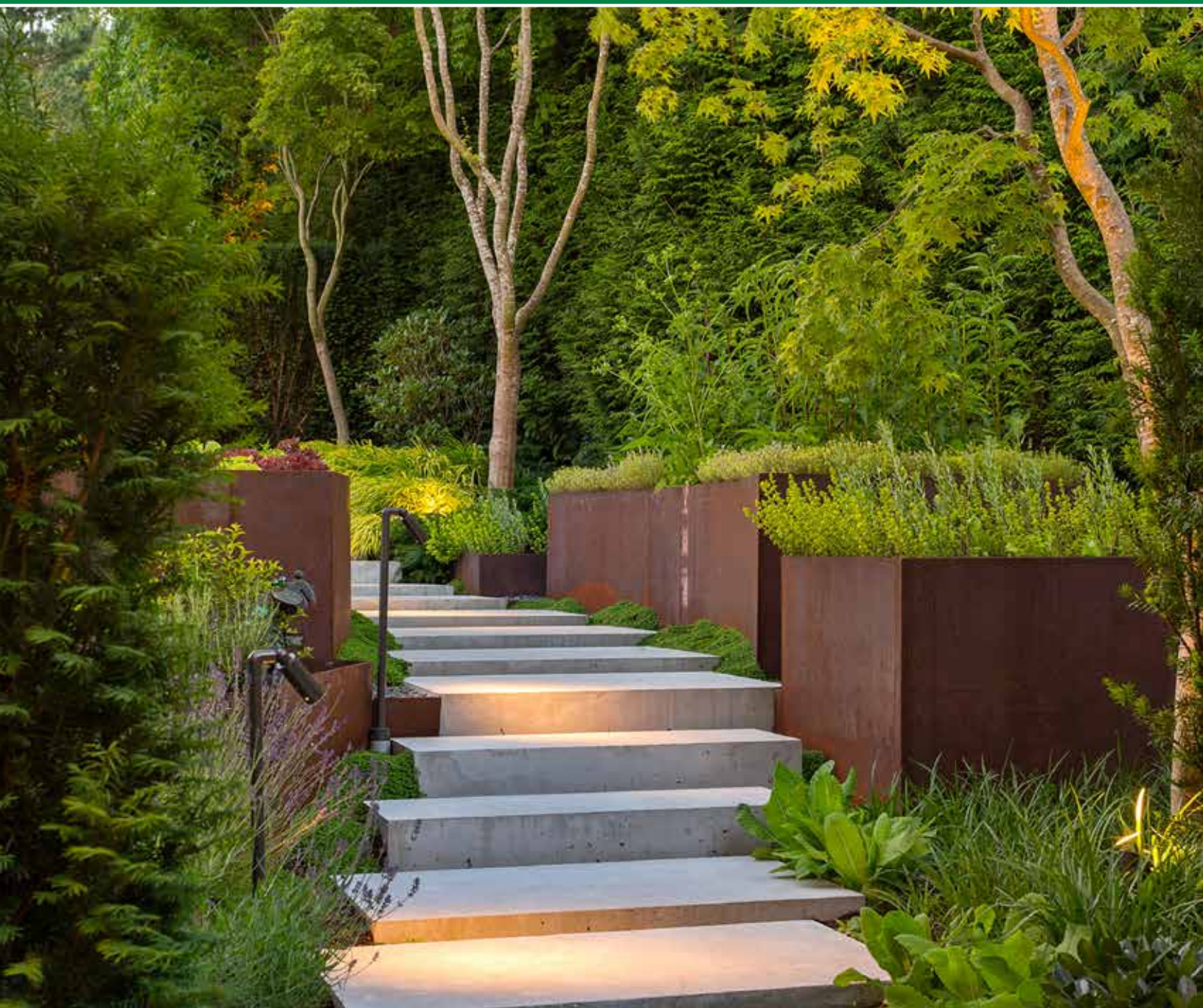


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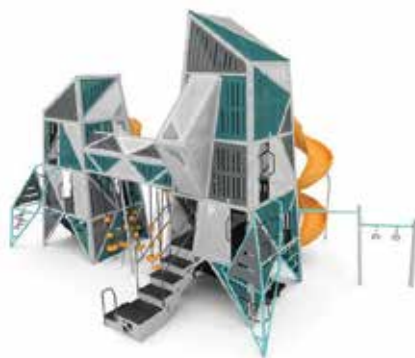


The Residential Design Issue

Private Gardens | Church and Halprin | Ron Rule and the UBC Garden Design Certificate Course
Arthur Erickson's "Secret Garden" | Get Out There | Is Vancouver Barking up the Wrong Tree? |
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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.

PRIVATE Gardens

Ron Rule, FCSLA

When Don Vaughan asked me to be a guest editor for Sitelines, I started recalling the various people that I owe so much gratitude to. I have been fortunate to have worked and taught with such dedicated and talented individuals.

Nancy Paul (one of the instructors of the UBC Certificate in Garden Design Program) worked in the office of the iconic Californian Landscape Architect, Lawrence Halprin, and shares her insights.

This issue of Sitelines also provided an opportunity to address the Vancouver tree by-laws that are having a significant impact on development in the Lower Mainland. Liz Watts begins a dialogue about these by-laws. Your feedback and points of view need to be voiced in this discussion.

One of my favourite local gardens is the west side property of the late Arthur Erickson. Simon Scott, architect and photographer shares his years with Arthur and the evolution of this magical place. Simon Scott is offering tours to Mr. Erickson's garden. Get out there! [SL](#)

In this Issue:



Point Grey garden, Corten vegetable containers
Photo: Amanda Oster of Provoke Studios

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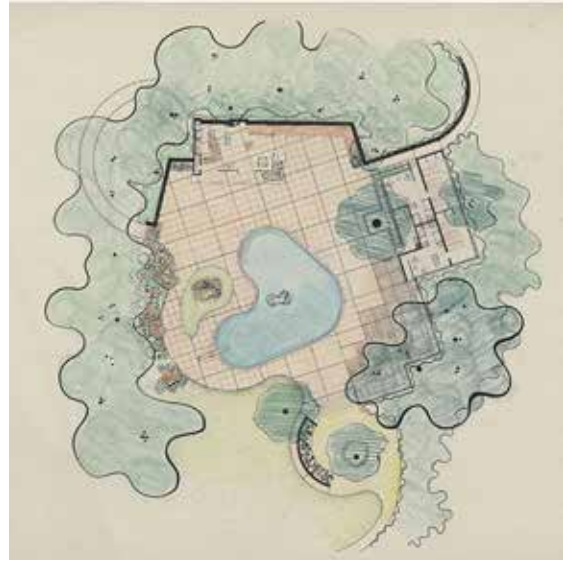


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All Images provided by author from the Online Archives of California.

Top: Donnell Garden by Thomas Church
Bottom: Donnell Garden by Thomas Church



THOMAS CHURCH AND LAWRENCE HALPRIN:

EXPLORING THE ORIGINS OF

The Modern Residential Garden

Nancy Paul, MBCSLA

There are many people and movements that contributed to the rise of the modern residential garden in the second half of the 20th Century. This article is in no way an attempt to cover them all. But if I'm to follow the adage, "write what you know" I am choosing to write about Lawrence Halprin and Thomas Church, because many years ago I worked for Lawrence Halprin, and he spoke often and fondly of Thomas Church.



In the preface to *Gardens are for People*, written by Thomas D. Church in 1955, and now in its third edition, Michael Laurie explains why the California School of landscape design was so pivotal in the rise of the modern garden. Laurie credits the following designers: "Thomas Church, Garrett Eckbo, Robert Royston, Theodore Osmundson, Douglas Baylis, and Lawrence Halprin"¹.

When I joined Lawrence Halprin's office in 1980, there weren't many examples of residential gardens in the office. The first thing that you saw when you walked into the studio, was a large model of the FDR Memorial. Although this was Larry's favourite project, it would be several more years before Congress approved the funding and construction began in 1991. ►



Top: Donnell Garden by Thomas Church
Bottom: Donnell Garden by Thomas Church

Larry worked for Thomas Church after the war, but opened his own office in 1949. In an interview taped in 1976 when the ASLA was awarding Thomas Church the ASLA Medal, Larry spoke fondly of his former boss and what made him unique in the world of designers. He explains that Thomas Church spent a great deal of time in the field, he was a “hands on” landscape architect who continued the design process while on site.

He handpicked plant material at the nursery and was respectful of the constraints of the site: saving unique trees, when possible, and land formations. When asked about the Donnell Garden, a very modern landscape he worked on while at Thomas Church’s office, Halprin explains, “Now the compositional devices seem less important to me ... instead of imposing something rectilinear, like an Italian Garden, which utilizes the landscape

and makes it very man made... here we were trying to use some of the many forms of nature itself and distribute them in a way... that it felt comfortable.”²

Larry’s explanation of how the Donnell Garden was a departure from the formal design process, is supported in the text of *Gardens are for People*. In his own introduction, Thomas Church gives a short history of garden design, crediting the Egyptians, the Romans, Greeks and Renaissance Italians for understanding the importance of the relationship between architecture and the garden. So what makes modern garden design different, how does it move away from the strictly formal, or the completely untouched landscape? “Today we take the best from these two schools of thought (once bitter enemies) — the formal and the informal — the symmetrical and the picturesque — the geometric and the natural — the classical and the romantic.”³

While Thomas Church spent most of his practise designing gardens for homeowners, he also designed several large scale projects with William Wurster. The opposite was true in Lawrence Halprin’s office, and I remember asking him why he wasn’t working on any residential projects at the time. Larry answered that he felt he could create more positive change through public landscape architecture and that by involving the public, through workshops such as are outlined in *The RSVP Cycles*, all different kinds of people could benefit from the use of public open spaces.

Lawrence Halprin chose to paint with a broader brush, and moved on to complete huge public landscapes and open spaces for the public. Nevertheless, the design principles used to create these open spaces, are consistent with Thomas Church’s design criteria, summed up by Michael Laurie: “Church’s gardens typically embodied several basic concepts. These include: careful siting and orientation of the house with regard to the sun, views, exposure, existing trees, and topography: a distinct *sequence* of arrival including entrance drive, parking area, and front door; a *direct connection* between house and garden, including provision for outdoor living... a selection of plants that would reinforce the structure of the garden and the objectives of the plan.”⁴

The influence of modern art, architecture, and ultimately landscape architecture created a tidal wave of change in the design world. When you look at the numerous photographs of Thomas Church’s projects in *Gardens are*

for *People*, the juxtaposition between the strong geometric forms of the architecture, decks, patios, swimming pools with the natural surroundings is striking. The designed outdoor spaces fit gracefully into the context of mature Live Oaks, rolling hills, and natural topography. The strong geometric forms in the landscape were inspired by revolutionary changes in the art world: Dada, Cubism, and Bauhaus. As Michael Laurie astutely observes, "Church had arrived on the landscape scene at a time of transition. He was traditional enough to see value in the old, open enough to consider the new, and sensible enough to know that each, to be good, must be the product of a thorough knowledge of the principles on which it was based."⁵

There is no question that the years immediately following World War II were very interesting and exciting times for designers, a revolution introducing new ideas and attitudes about how we live. Fortunately for us, there was sufficient talent to create a body of work that has endured. [SL](#)

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RON RULE AND THE U.B.C. Garden Design Certificate Course

Nancy Paul, MBCSLA



When Ron Rule asked me to join the teaching team for the U.B.C. Garden Design Certificate Course in 2011, the program was already in its 14th year. The program was a part time, certificate program that began in the middle of March and finished at the end of summer. The course was designed for people who were employed; most classes were held in the evenings or on weekends, with the exception of two separate weeks of intensive

studio work. The idea was that if you got two weeks of holiday a year, you would schedule these two weeks to be in studio. This model worked well, especially for landscape contractors who could keep working, but would also benefit from the studio experience.

To be honest, when I first started teaching in 2011, I had my doubts. How could a part time course actually teach a person everything they needed to know to be a garden designer? After all, I spent three years completing my Master's degree in Landscape Architecture, and when I entered the work force I still had a lot to learn. Much to my surprise, and delight, at the end of the summer, when all of the students presented their designs to our panel of guest critics, the transformation was remarkable. Students who were initially afraid to draw a line, had transformed into competent draftsmen, illustrators, with well thought out garden spaces.


The success of this program was due to Ron's clever structuring of the course material. The course was made up of 4 sections: History and Theory of Garden Design, Drafting and Design Communication, Conceptual Garden Design, and the Hard and the Soft Landscape. Each section laid the foundation for the next. In the History and Theory section, there were six evening lectures covering the history and evolution of the garden as we know it. Ron's extensive slide collection introduced garden design in Italy, France, England and explained how these styles influence the present day West Coast modern garden. The Japanese and Chinese landscape lecture was presented by Daniel Roehr, another very impressive slide collection.

By beginning the course with these lectures, and assigning a research paper on a specific garden designer, Ron established the academic rigour of the program. Paper writing is not everyone's cup of tea, but Ron challenged the students to find a designer they liked, and analyze why they were successful. At the same time, the students had to begin a sketchbook that they would fill with a minimum of 50 sketches by the end of the course. The idea was to make the students really "look" at the visual world. The sketchbook was their camera, and unlike a camera, drawing forced them to understand scale, and how things fit together.

Students who were completely unfamiliar with drawing, or just felt they needed extra help, could enroll in a workshop taught by

All photos: Nancy Paul)

Top: UBC Garden Design Class Site Visit
Inset: UBC Garden Design Class Tour Arthur
Erickson's Garden



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Terry Harrison prior to the beginning of the program. In 'Drafting and Design Communication', Tony O'Regan and Terry Harrison, both architects, taught drafting basics. The students learned how to create a simple site plan through triangulation, and then create a simple landscape outside the UBC Landscape Architecture building. For those of you unfamiliar with Tony O'Regan, he is an extremely talented artist in addition to being an architect. His ease with a pencil, pen or piece of chalk was exhilarating to watch, and inspired the students to perfect their drawing skills.

With 'History and Theory', and 'Drafting and Design Communication' under their belts, the students were ready for 'Conceptual Garden Design'. This part of the course took the form of a week long, intensive studio. In the mornings there were guest lecturers who spoke about client relations, running a small business, and advertising. Early in the week there were garden tours, always the Erickson Garden, and other gardens designed by Ron Rule. Everyone loved the garden tours: they were living examples of what was achievable through thoughtful and intelligent design. Many of the principles taught in 'History and

Theory' were there on display to photograph, discuss and critique.

It was at this point in the program, that the "magic" started to happen. Students were put into groups of four, and they were given a real site to work on. They met a "client" and they visited a site that needed a redesign. One year the site was an empty one, with architectural drawings for a proposed residence. They had to work on their concepts as a team, and they had to justify all design decisions they made. There were long days of collaborating, drawing, going back to the site, getting "crits" from the instructors, changing their minds. It was exhausting and inspiring at the same time. At the end of this very intense week, often with late nights, they presented their concept drawings to a team of guest critics. Exhausted, defensive, but mostly proud, the presentations gave the students an opportunity for feedback, reflection, and to learn.

The second, and final, design week covered the Hard and the Soft Landscape. If the design team had a strong concept coming out of the last studio, they might use that for their final design. Others started from scratch and completely redesigned their site. Presentations on site grading, different use of paving materi-

als, structures in the landscape, drainage and plant selection took up the morning lectures. Afternoons were spent in the studio getting critiques from the instructors, there were four instructors available for desk "crits". Ron used to announce, "I never got this much attention at University!" The energy in the studio was palpable, it was a race to the finish and everyone wanted to produce their best work.

The final presentation was exhilarating, but at the same time, bittersweet. Over the months the class had become a single unit. Long days and late nights in the studio: arguing, collaborating, the students had become a family. I know this to be true because each year has formed their own network, they keep in touch, they refer each other on garden design jobs.

The UBC Garden Design Course was retired in 2015 by the Continuing Studies Dept. It was a unique program that made it possible for people to learn how to design a garden, without getting a degree in Landscape Architecture. Ron Rule had the vision and the talent to make this program a success, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have been part of the team. Thank-you Ron! [SL](#)

ARTHUR ERICKSON'S “Secret Garden”

Simon Scott

Behind a simple cedar fence in Vancouver's Point Grey neighbourhood, lies a “secret garden”, a place of quiet, an “oasis”, where Canada's famed architect, the late Arthur Erickson, made his home for over fifty years.

“A sanctuary for the creative spirit”

When Arthur Erickson returned from service in Asia during the Second World War his thoughts were for a life in the diplomatic corps. That was, until he saw a magazine photograph of Frank Lloyd Wright's recently completed and brilliant “Taliesin West”! If this can be accomplished in architecture, he thought, that will be my challenge and goal. Arthur studied at the School of Architecture at McGill University in Montreal and upon graduating he won the travel scholarship, which then took him to Egypt, the Adriatic, Mediterranean, Europe, Britain and Scandinavia for a very extended period of time.

On his return, and while lecturing at UBC, he found and purchased two side-by-side, 33-foot lots on a corner site in Point Grey. They were undeveloped except for a single garage and a shed, both on the lane at the back of the property. On the site were two very large, old growth, Douglas Fir trees standing in the NW and SE corners. On the west side was a mature Pine tree and in the SW corner by the intersecting roads stood an extremely large and most impressive Dogwood tree. The remainder of the site contained an English style garden with two apple trees, all surrounded by a picket fence and open to the surrounding streets.

Arthur combined the existing garage and the shed, with a connecting structure, to make them one. This formed his personal and small living quarters of just eight hundred and fifty square feet. The remainder of the property, well over eight thousand square feet, he dedicated to a simple but very clever and charming open landscape space.



He began by excavating the centre of the site to create a mound towards the south of the property so as to screen the view of the road as well as the house beyond. Within the excavation, in the centre of the space, Arthur formed a large reflecting pond. He incorporated reflecting water into every one of the projects he designed throughout his career whether residential, cultural or commercial.

Arthur brought in rhododendrons, azaleas, many grasses and bamboos. The south side of the site now has a high thick cedar hedge to the sidewalk and road and on the inside dense bamboos. Along the west of the property, adjacent to the adjoining street, is a simple vertically boarded cedar fence. Black trunks of numerous Laurel trees with their broad shiny leaves create a sheltering canopy overhanging the fence.

The east boundary borders the neighbour's property where a regulation height fence would not afford Arthur the privacy he wished. Three feet inside the property line, with no such height restriction, he built a second and higher fence, which begins three feet from the ground and goes up above head height. He called this the "baffle fence" and it runs the length of the garden's east side. Between the two fences, Arthur planted blue bamboo. Its clustered stems are visible below the baffle and its leaves cascade above.

There is a second, smaller and hard-edged, reflecting pond beside the house in front of Arthur's work area. Beside this pond, with the help of students, Arthur built a Dolmen. Three large vertical rocks support a larger moss covered capstone. Three large vertical rocks support a larger moss covered capstone. Such ancient structures date back two or three centuries BC.

On the south side of the mound is a now very well established, lone Arbutus tree. A species known impossible to transplant, Arthur claimed it was a gift from the birds. "It just started growing" Arthur said.

Even though the property is a corner lot, it is entirely secluded and private from the bordering streets. All windows of the house face the sunny south, into the magic calm, charm and unique seclusion of this private garden.

Counter to convention, Arthur placed the entrance on the long side of the lot rather than at the street address side. This idea of entering at a right angle to the main axis, is

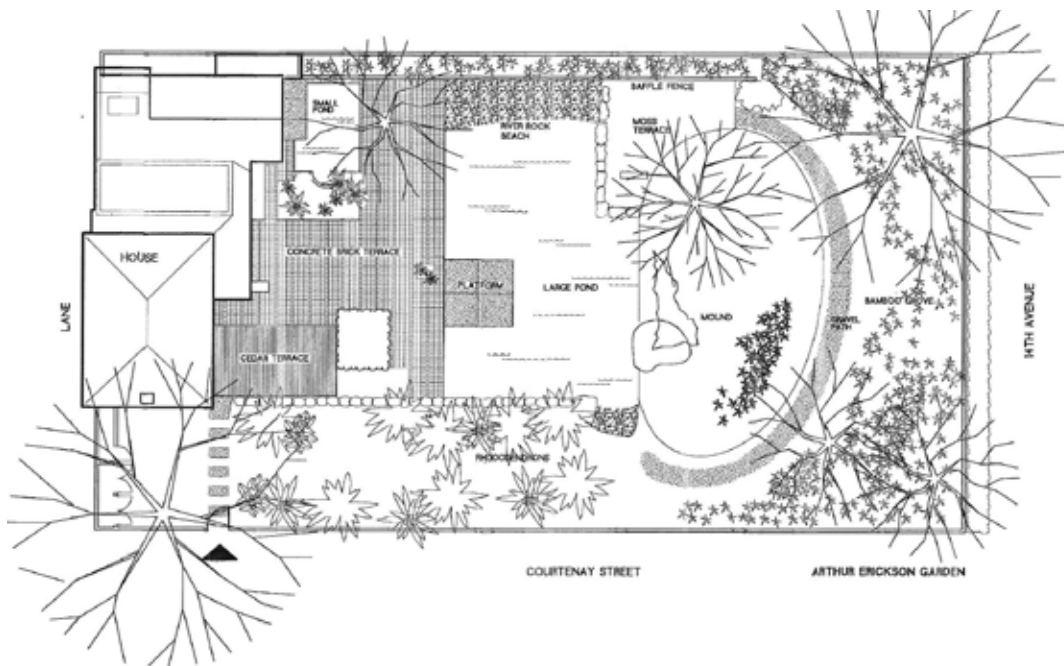


Image Top Facing Page: Arthur relaxing in his secret garden

Image Bottom Facing page: View of garden from Arthur's study

Image Top: Garden Plan

Image Right: Black Swans on the pond

All images provided by Simon Scott.

also found in the early 1950s Filberg House, the 1960s Simon Fraser University and the 1980s Bagley-Wright House in Seattle.

Once through the gate in the fence and the initial woods, one is almost in the center of the lot before the vista of the axis and openness is apparent and appreciated. From this point, as well as from the windows of the house, the waters of the reflecting pond disappear beyond foliage giving an elusion of spaces beyond.

The entire garden is monochromatic green, year round. The exception is in late spring, when the rhododendrons and azaleas inject their vivid colours, which reflect across the pond. Later, in the heat of summer, water lilies cover the surface of the pond. Arthur would also put out a few strategically placed

brilliant red potted geraniums on the grey brick paving surrounding the pond.

Residing in his very minimal lane house with its beautiful interior finishes and large skylights, Arthur looked out to a contemplative garden landscape of reflective water and lush evergreen foliage. He described its essence as "a clearing in the forest"

Indeed, this is where Arthur had the quiet he so cherished, away from the business of his office and the outside world. This was his oasis, where he worked alone on so many of the beginning concepts and visions of his enduring master projects.

Arthur repeated this strong visions of a tranquil open space surrounded by towering trees years later, in his equally brilliant Robson ►

Square. As he knew they would, large towers have grown up to surround his low profile, horizontal, open and green public space, creating an oasis in the centre of our city.

Together, Arthur Erickson's house and garden were his inspiration and his haven and one of his most delicate design accomplishments; a work of art, unique, and intact. His garden is considered to be one of the finest small gardens in North America.

To the public Arthur has been a superstar architect, a jetsetter, world citizen and this is all true. To those who knew him, he was also a very kind, quiet, thoughtful and considerate man, living a Zen-like life. He enjoyed one on one connections as well as occasions of small groups and large gatherings. Many of them took place in his garden when he invited locals as well as international celebrities for festive evening gatherings. One notable occasion was his after-party following the Queen Elizabeth Theatre performance of London's Royal Ballet attended by Rudolf Nureyev and Margo Fonteyn. On that occasion Arthur brought in two black swans for the reflecting pond.

The garden today remains a very significant place of intrigue, of inspiration and of learning for visiting scholars, students and the public. The house and garden are now held as part of the Arthur Erickson legacy, by the Arthur Erickson Foundation whose vision is—

"A better world through inspired architecture"

"You" are invited to be inspired by a visit to "Arthur's secret garden". Become a member of the Foundation in support of one of Canada's most prominent citizens and help save, protect and promote his "secret garden" as a Vancouver and Canadian Heritage site.

Both membership and tours may be arranged through the Foundation, formed in Arthur's name. www.aefoundation.ca

We invite and welcome your interest and your participation.

Simon Scott

*Friend and colleague from 1965
AEF board director and tour guide*

Get OUT THERE

Ron Rule, FCSLA



There are any number of things you can do to improve yourself as a garden designer. Indenturing yourself to someone whose work you admire is one way to go, spending your extracurricular time wading through books, pouring over magazines and tearing through websites that offer visual inspiration and practical advice, are others. These endeavors have merit for sure, and I have benefitted from every one of them at one time or another over my long career.

Without question, though, the single best thing I have done to refine my skills and strengthen my understanding of garden design (plus improve my ability to provide better background and context for the ideas I share with clients) has been to get out and see amazing gardens firsthand.

Gardens are three-dimensional, and the most thorough way to understand how their disparate elements work in combination (or don't) is to view them from the inside out. Physical exploration will give you a much clearer picture of how great gardens come together, rather than random nuggets gleaned from photographs, or plans, or bird's-eye videos shot from drones.

Thirty years ago, I made my first trip to England to look at great historical and (what were then considered to be the best) contemporary gardens. Since that time, I have continued this odyssey, personally visiting and leading

garden design tours to investigate more than 300 original landscapes in England, France, Italy, Japan, and North America.

This voluntary immersion has opened my eyes to the everlasting inventiveness of garden designers, and reinforced my ideas about what makes a garden interesting, three of which I've outlined below.

Circulation is the key to engagement

The shortest distance between two points may be a straight line, but when it comes to moving through a garden, it is rarely the most interesting route. This is particularly true with small, city plots like the ones most of us have to play with. Typically, small properties can be cruised in a heartbeat and scanned at a glance, factors that undermine the impulse to explore.

If you want to make a small garden more engaging and interactive, you need to find inventive ways to encourage visitors to advance through space without retracing their steps, and provide them with enticements that ensure they keep moving.

Of all the gardens I've perused, the nondescript 1970s suburban backyard belonging to the late Graham Stewart Thomas, a colossus among British horticulturalists, accomplished this best.

To mitigate the monotony of a shallow, denuded lot, Thomas planted trees along the



back to blur the boundary between his and the landscape beyond. Then he focused on creating a captivating foreground, laying out a grass pathway that wound through every sector. Along it he discreetly strung a surprising variety of experiences that kept visitors keen and observant.

The big impact of Thomas's little choices—using a single step up or down to announce a new experience (a different kind of border to inspect, or a patio to sit on or an ornament to admire), interrupting soft lawn with a stretch of pea gravel to add crunch underfoot—would have been muddled for me with only words and pictures to tell this story.

Water is an imperative

Like magpies attracted to shiny metal, humans are drawn to water. Think about it. Have you ever been near a body of water and not felt compelled to stare at it or to walk up to the waterline? Is this attraction hardwired? Does proximity to water subconsciously reconnect us to those ancient days when our earliest ancestors crawled out of the primordial soup?

Whatever the reason (water's magical, it's dramatic, it's always doing something, etc.), the allure is there, and I can count on one hand the number of well-conceived gardens I've seen that don't have it. Water is simply the most direct way to introduce calm or

create excitement outdoors, even if it's only in miniscule amounts.

Geoffrey Jellicoe's extravagant water garden at Shute House in Wiltshire—a modernist mix of formal and naturalistic rills, ponds and cascades with numerous ways for visitors to engage with them—demonstrates all the grand ways a garden is more exciting for including water, but small bits of bright liquid tucked into corners also make the point that water hits the spot.

Two of my favorite tiny examples are strategically placed stone sinks I saw in England: one on the edge of a grand terrace belonging to writer Penelope Hobhouse, the other surrounded by boxwood and buried at the back of photographer Andrew Lawson's modest plot. Both gardeners filled their reflective eyecatchers from a water bucket, proving that neither construction nor expense needs to be an issue.

Every garden should have a surprise

At the turn of the 21st century, creating garden rooms inspired by early 20th century English designers was in vogue, and everyone was talking about carving up their property the way Vita Sackville West did at Sissinghurst, or Major Lawrence Johnston did at Hidcote Manor.

All photos credit: Ron Rule

Facing page: Graham Stuart Thomas Garden, Godding, England

Left: Moat Garden, Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Kent, England

Right: Cascade, Shute House, Devon, England

The beauty of classic garden rooms is that they are completely enclosed, often with solid barriers that offer opportunities to create something unexpected inside. At Sissinghurst, for example, each room has its own little revelation, from plant architecture, to color choice, to ornament.

Eighteen years into this century, this rigid, very English, system of outdoor compartments is no longer the design darling it once was, and it's just as well, really, because garden-room gardens compete with the demand for open, recreational space that characterizes our North American lifestyle.

Still, traipsing around gardens with formal rooms like those at Sissinghurst remains immensely worthwhile. Not just for their Arcadian beauty, or the fact that their individual spaces present themselves like birthday presents ready to be unwrapped, but for reminding us, as garden designers, that every landscape we put our mind to, is more exciting and memorable when there's surprise attached. [SL](#)

IS VANCOUVER Barking up the Wrong Tree?

Liz Watts, BCSLA, MLA, BES

We recognize there are competing values and objectives in dealing with trees. The new strategy will provide a clear and balanced approach to protecting and expanding the urban forest in our city.

City of Vancouver Policy Paper – Urban Forest Strategy: <http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/urban-forest-strategy.aspx>

As it stands, Vancouver's Tree Protection By-law, combined with its iron-fisted interpretation, is not as fair or balanced as intended. The pressure within the City to grow the declining urban forest has tipped the balance with such strict technical criteria for removal and stringent application of the by-law that property owners are being saddled to eternity with misshapen, overcrowded and out-of-place trees. The City's insistence on retaining poor tree specimens unfairly puts the burden on property owners to compensate for urban forest losses largely caused by the development industry. Retaining malformed, diseased, and overcrowded specimens interferes with people's legitimate enjoyment of their property and does not contribute to a healthy urban forest. Worse, many very fine, healthy trees are mown down by builders because they happen to be within the large building envelopes allowed in "outright" zones.

It is always sad to see a beautiful healthy tree being demolished in the course of new construction. Of course we landscape architects care about trees; protecting and enhancing our urban forest is core to our professional ethos. We only wish that more respect for the character of our neighbourhoods and urban forest values was required of builders.

So why are landscape architects so frustrated with the City of Vancouver's Tree Protection Bylaw? The word on the street – according to many arborists and landscape architects – is that it is nigh impossible to get a tree removal permit under By-law 9958.

A Declining Urban Forest: The Policy Driver

In 2014 the City of Vancouver issued its Urban Forest Strategy,ⁱ a policy document upon which Tree Protection By-law 9958ⁱⁱ was based. In 2013, the City measured a rapid and shocking decline in the urban canopy over the prior two decades, and, of the trees removed over half were removed on private property. Canopy cover refers to how much ground area is covered by the canopies of trees as seen from the air.

This excerpt from the City's website "Developing Vancouver's Urban Forest Strategy" states laudable objectives underpinning the strategy (underlines added):

The City is developing an urban forest strategy for Vancouver, which will provide tools for growing and maintaining a healthy, resilient urban forest for future generations.

Vancouver's urban forest includes every tree in our city – on streets, in parks, public spaces, and back yards. Our urban forest plays important environmental and social roles: it cleans the air, absorbs rainwater, provides bird habitat, and improves our health and well-being.

We recognize there are competing values and objectives in dealing with trees. The new strategy will provide a clear and balanced approach to protecting and expanding the urban forest in our city.

<http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/urban-forest-strategy.aspx>

Why is Vancouver's urban forest shrinking? The City cites "competing interests" driving the removal of trees on private property, such as: new development, sun, infrastructure conflicts, and views etc. The elephant in the room is current zoning for some neighbourhoods which permits such large single-family houses and garages, that very little space is left for trees or green space. Another problem not addressed is that people unwittingly plant trees that outgrow their site and/or become too crowded. Lots of planting mistakes are made with unintended negative consequences down the road.

From Policy To By-Law – A Shift In The Fine Print

Vancouver's 2014 by-law eliminated the right to remove one healthy tree per year without conditions. The 2014 Policy Report to Council states that, "...tree permit issuance will be linked to proper justification and rationale by qualified arborists and other professionals". The City home page for Tree Protection By-law

9958 summarizes the conditions for removing a tree on private property as follows:

- The tree on a development site is located within the building envelope
- The tree is located such that a proposed garage or other accessory building cannot be located so as to retain the tree
- An arborist certifies the tree is dead, dying, or hazardous
- An arborist certifies the tree is directly interfering with utility wires and cannot be pruned and still maintain its reasonable appearance or health
- An accredited plumber certifies that the roots of the tree are directly interfering with, or blocking sewer or drainage systems

At face value these conditions sound reasonable, but there is a big hole. Other than the clause with regard to "dead, dying, or hazardous", the conditions are engineering-based and sidestep qualitative issues of a tree being a poor and undesirable specimen. Failing to deal with this is a lose-lose proposition for owners and the City. If a tree loses its characteristic form and beauty through storm damage, disease, or overcrowding, and is unhealthy and unsightly, why can its removal not be justified?

The language of policy shifts to far more limiting language in the by-law. (For the full text of By-law 9958, refer to the City of Vancouver website.) This excerpt from Tree Protection By-law 9958, section 4.5, "**Issuance of tree permit**" states that:

The Director of Planning may issue a permit to remove a tree from, or relocate or replace a tree on, a site only if:

- (g) an arborist certifies that damage to the tree has occurred to the extent that the tree is likely to suffer from disease or die prematurely; or
- (h) an arborist certifies that the tree is dying and is likely to be dead within six months or is dead. (Underline added)

The "dead, dying or hazardous" condition in the policy document has morphed to require certification that the tree "is likely to be dead within six months". This is absurd, as who can be that precise about the trajectory of a dying tree? Even if both the arborist and City staff were to agree that the tree will live beyond six months, is it right to force people to live

with a diseased or dying tree for an undefined number of years until the tree *finally* dies? Which contributes more to the urban forest's ecological and aesthetic functions, a dying tree or a newly planted healthy tree that can grow?

Here are some examples of situations where some gaps in By-law 9958 and its rigid application fail to serve the interest of both the urban forest and property owners.



^ **Photo 1. The tree beyond saving**

In 2014 City staff refused a permit to remove this sickly, malformed 13" DBH **Birch** infested with Bronze Birch Borer disease, from a tiny, north-facing garden of a duplex. The tree had grown too large for the location, and radical pruning long ago to clear the branches from service lines and the house destroyed its form.

The arborist certified that the tree warranted removal. Removal was refused on grounds that, even though the tree was diseased, it was not likely to be dead in six months, and the utility lines it interfered with were *only service lines to the house, not distribution lines*. Five years later, the struggling tree was clinging to life and looking worse. It was just wrong, and the homeowners were exasperated. The case was appealed and, happily, a removal permit was granted in 2018. Kudos to the City. However, despite the tiny lot size, a replacement tree is required, which is not reasonable as the space already accommodates two Japanese maples.



^ **Photo 2. The invasive species, also sickly.**

A Tree Removal Permit request is in process for this dying English holly tree, one of an ancient dying pair. English holly is an invasive species that proliferates in nearby Pacific Spirit Park and its removal consumes a great deal of Stewardship volunteers' efforts. The verdict is eagerly awaited.



^ **Photo 3. The overplanted site**

Shows a house enshrouded by misguided plantings of conifers that were allowed to outgrow the space. To let in more light and improve curb appeal for sale, the trees have been limbed up close to the point of destroying their characteristic form. The surplus trees do not meet the conditions for removal. To be balanced, the By-law should consider the number of trees on a lot. Old derelict hedges pose similar problems.



^ **Photo 4. The novelty tree of no ecological merit**

Shows a short young Windmill Palm with minimal canopy, already exceeding the 8" DBH, and thus qualifying for protection. What is its ecological contribution to our urban forest, now or ever? The canopy remains tiny, water interception is low, and wildlife habitat is naught. How does this tree contribute to Vancouver Urban Forest? Should a property owner be forced to live with a horticultural novelty plant, out-of-character with our region, just because it has a thick trunk?

Here Are Some Suggestions To Improve The By-Law

DELETE:

The tree "dying likely to be dead within six months" clause

PERMIT REMOVAL OF:

- A dying or diseased tree beyond recovery
- A poor specimen: e.g. it has an unbalanced form, damage due to natural causes, or is misshapen due to overcrowding and inexperienced pruning (as opposed to intentional terminal pruning)
- Trees of lesser quality if a site has too many trees
- A tree that conflicts with necessary outdoor circulation or accessibility
- Trees of less than 10" caliper – revised from 8" caliper. ►

TREES THAT SHOULD NOT BE PROTECTED:

Allow unconditional removal of English Laurel, Holly, and exotic novelty trees with minimal canopy, such as Monkey Puzzle Trees, Palm Trees, Serpentine Cedrus, etc. The hollies are invasive. The latter species, apart from being incongruous with our region, provide negligible wildlife habitat, and intercept minimal rainwater.

RETOOL THE REPLACEMENT TREE REQUIREMENTS:

- Revise Schedule D to be better scaled to small city lots. Imagine a *Liriodendron tulipifera*, a *Platanus acerifolia*, or a *Sequoiadendron giganteum* on your 33' city lot!
- Revise the automatic, unconditional replacement tree requirement so that the number of trees required relates to lot size and number of existing trees. Do not require a replacement tree if the property already meets the number.
- Delete English Holly, Windmill Palm, and Monkey Puzzle Trees from the Replacement Tree Schedule entirely.



Photo 5. shows a 36" caliper Purple Beech, with a 75 foot canopy, situated in the building envelope of an outright zone of Point Grey. The developer who purchased the property is not interested in accommodating the tree. The neighbours are hoping to work with the City to encourage retention of the tree.

PENALTIES:

Charge persons who willfully damage trees to kill, downsize or mutilate them with meaningful penalties. Penalty fees should be transparent.

TREES THAT THE CITY SHOULD PROTECT

The City needs more tools to protect beautiful healthy trees in "outright" zones.

The City's Take:

I met with Katherine Isaac, Manager of Urban Landscape Development in Planning & Development Services at the City of Vancouver, to discuss my perceptions of the By-law and the way it is enforced. Katherine listened attentively to the cases I presented and was genuinely interested in my feedback. She responded that the City recognizes there are areas of the By-law that need to be fine tuned and staff is in the process of doing that. In addition, the City wants to clarify expectations and give industry tools to meet best practices. Special training and certification for Arborists and Landscape Architects are being considered to that end.

Get active landscape architects! Here is an opportunity to voice your opinions and participate in helping the City make a better tree protection by-law. [SL](#)

i. City of Vancouver Urban Tree Strategy, April 15, 2014. <http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/Urban-Forest-Strategy-Draft.pdf>

ii. City of Vancouver Tree Protection Bylaw, April 16, 2014. <http://vancouver.ca/your-government/protection-of-trees-bylaw.aspx>

CSLA Fellows

PROFILE OF Ron Rule

CSLA

—Jessica Natale Woollard



The intuition of a friend helped set the course of Ron Rule's career in landscape architecture. Ron began his university education in the liberal arts in 1965 in his home state of Oregon. Sensing Ron's skill in sculpture and painting would translate well into designing outdoor spaces, a friend from high school recommended Ron try courses in landscape architecture. Ron found his niche and changed programs, completing the five-year Bachelor of Landscape Architecture program at the University of Oregon.

His first job was with the Portland firm Arthur Erfeldt, working mostly on large estate properties. In 1971, he moved to Design Collaborative, another Portland firm, where he collaborated with a team of architects,

graphic designers, interior designers and urban planners all under one roof.

In 1973, Ron relocated to Vancouver and joined Vancouver firm Don Vaughan and Associates Ltd., now Vaughan Landscape Planning and Design Ltd., doing mainly large-scale public projects such as ICBC claim centres.

Two years later, Ron launched his own firm, Ron Rule Consultants Ltd., working on commercial, residential and public spaces mostly in the Vancouver area but also elsewhere in B.C., Alberta, Oregon, California, Washington and as far away as England, Azerbaijan and Anguilla.

Ron was made a fellow of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects in 2004. Over the years, his firm has helped launch the

careers of notable designers in B.C. including Bill Harrison, Nenagh McCutcheon, Paul Sangha and David Thompson. As a director of the BCSLA, Ron spent 10 years helping set up registration exams for landscape architects, similar to those given by the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Asked to list some memorable projects over the years, Ron mentions area development at Expo 86, a romantic orchard in Roberts Creek on the Sunshine Coast, and the installation of a tree on the rooftop of the 17-storey Eugenia Place building in Vancouver's West End. Ron worked on the original tree, a pin oak, planted in 1987, and was brought back to help with its replacement in 2017. The tree in the clouds is an icon in the city.

Elevating the profession

Educating the public on the value of landscape architecture was a primary theme of Ron's career.

A sought-out public speaker, he has given guest talks at garden clubs across Canada and the United States and was a featured speaker at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle for 13 years. *Gardenwise Magazine* also published a monthly column of Ron's for several years.

In 1980, Ron travelled to England to research the gardens of Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll for a client. A reception he attended led to a chance meeting with an executive from British Airways, prompting Ron to develop and lead a tour to visit gardens in England. The tour's popularity grew, and Ron was featured in the *Globe and Mail*, *Vancouver Sun* and other media outlets. To date, Ron has led 16 tours to England and France with more than 450 garden visits, managing to gain access into many historically important private gardens that are closed to the public.

The tours led to friendships with some of the world's most influential gardeners including Christopher Lloyd, Rosemary Verey, Beth Chatto and Penelope Hobhouse, plus volunteer

opportunities at both Great Dixter House and Gardens southeast of London and Barnsley House in the Cotswolds. What is more, the English garden tours helped Ron forge a long-time relationship with the University of British Columbia. When Ron moved to Vancouver in the early '70s, no post secondary institutions in the lower mainland offered landscape architecture programs. By 1979, UBC had established one, and in the late 1980s, a direct result of his garden tours, Ron began teaching the history of garden design through continuing education, a course that remained in high demand for a decade.

UBC asked Ron to develop a garden design certificate program for mature students through continuing education. The Garden Design Certificate Program launched in 1997, with Ron serving as the program's director for 17 years. The program had more than 425 graduates before UBC cancelled it due to financial issues in 2015.

Ron continues to work with UBC's School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture helping bring in some of the world's top landscape designers to Vancouver for the department's speaker series, which is free and open to the public.

Reflecting on all these "extra-curricular" activities, all completed while he was working as a full-time garden designer, Ron laughs. "I'm not quite sure how I did it, actually, now that I think back."

Connecting with clients

Over the years, Ron began specializing in private residential design, which today makes up 90 percent of his work. "One of the reasons that I prefer private gardens is that you get feedback. Clients are often very truthful about what direction you're taking with them. You can tell if you're succeeding or failing."

He remembers a story from a client, who said she asks people who work on her garden to sit down in the garden for 20 minutes before they do any work and think of why the garden is special.

"I wish I'd thought of that myself," Ron says, "how each space becomes unique to itself is always a challenge."

More than 40 years into his career, Ron still loves the hands-on aspects of his work: selecting plants, working on the site, placing the plants.

"The client's got to feel that you are totally engaged in the project," he explains. "I try to do as much as possible to make the site special to that client. I do believe that gardens take on a life of their own." **SL**


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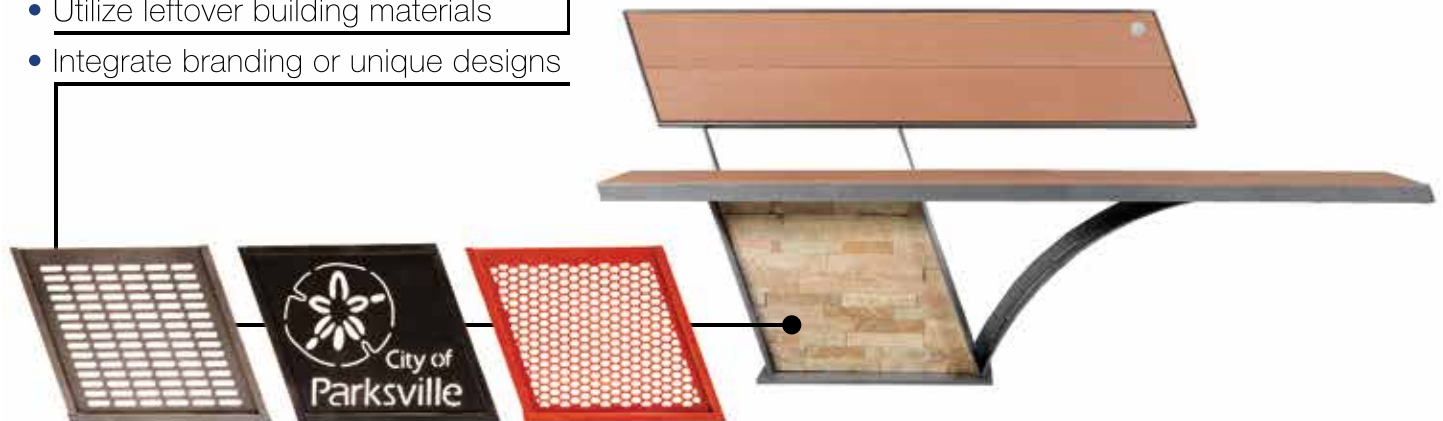
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