

SITELINES

Bimonthly Publication of The British Columbia Society of Landscape Architects

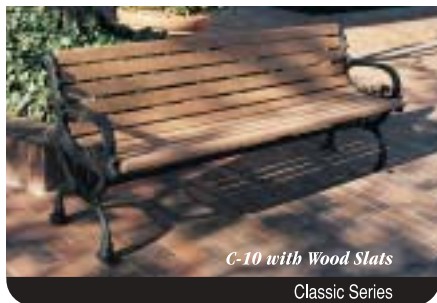


UBC Botanical Garden

Cultural Landscape • School Time • Borrowed Views • Topless

April / May 2004

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UBC Botanical Garden

BY PAWEŁ GRADOWSKI, MBCSLA

The UBC Botanical Garden & Centre for Horticulture Master Plan has generated a high level of excitement among those involved in the planning process as well as everyone on campus. The dramatic setting of a forest at the edge of the Pacific Ocean makes it unique in the world of botanical gardens. The Master Plan has capitalized on this magnificent setting with the intention of creating an outstanding showcase of scientific research and academic programming on a site that captures the public imagination.

110 - 355 Burrard Street
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Tel: 604.682.5610
Fax: 604.681.3394
Email: admin@bcsla.org
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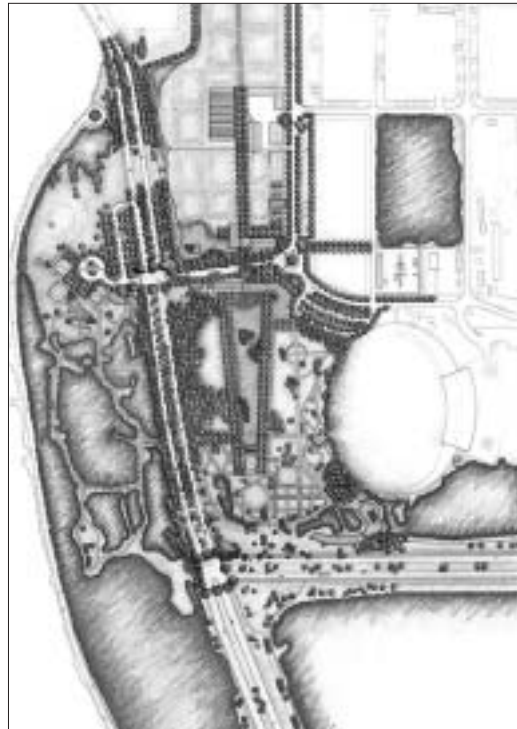
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Sitelines Group

Editors	Laura-Jean Kelly	604.730.4867
	Cameron Murray	604.730.8256
Advertising	Tara Culham	604.682.5610
Editor		fax 604.681.3394
Layout	Odette Hidalgo	604.733.1593
Printing	Print & Run	604.662.7772

The purpose of Sidelines 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.



CSLA Award winning Master Plan by Catherine Berris & Associates & Durante Kreuk Limited.

The intent of the Botanical Garden and Centre for Horticulture is to expand the scope of the existing Botanical Garden through stronger links with the research and learning activities of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and the University as a whole, and to serve as a focus for horticulture and plant biology research at the University of British Columbia.

The master planning process was a cooperative endeavour of Catherine Berris & Associates with Durante Kreuk Limited, and was guided at its inception by an imperative to "be bold". The ensuing Master Plan incorporates a re-thinking of the way the Botanical Garden presents itself to the public; while incorporating new functions of the Centre for Horticulture in an environmentally sensitive setting.

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A Cultural Landscape Approach to the Design and Management Plan for Rideau Hall

GREG SMALLENBERG, MBCSLA & MARTA FAREVAAG, MCIP

Cultural Landscape

The cultural landscape approach to planning and design for historic sites is demonstrated by the Rideau Hall Landscape Design and Site Management Guidelines prepared by a multidisciplinary team lead by Phillips Farevaag Smallenberg for the National Capital Commission. The plan owes its success to a detailed understanding of the historical development of the landscape in the context of the design and cultural traditions of every stage in its evolution.

The planning and design processes investigated the changing uses, programmes, and functions of the landscape and argued that a conservation of the historic landscape can be facilitated by a reinvention and reestablishment of traditional activities and programs. Efforts to understand Rideau Hall as a cultural landscape have been fruitful in directing both the future programme for use and the design expression for new interventions.



Julian Smith, a noted Canadian heritage resources expert who worked with our firm on the Rideau Hall project, has been instrumental in helping us understand and then structure a cultural landscape approach. In his words, a cultural landscape is an idea embedded in a place. The idea is the

cultural part of the concept. The resulting place is the landscape part of the concept.

A cultural landscape is a conceptual view of landscape that brings into focus the perspective of the viewer as much as the object of perception. The term cultural landscape recognizes that landscapes have cultural meaning and that the value of a landscape can be found in its current cultural context, not simply in its intrinsic physical features and history.

The key premise in a cultural landscape approach is that the relationship between a people and a landscape must be understood in order to develop appropriate design and management tools. This relationship, when it works well, creates the sense of identity and the sense of attachment that are measures of social value. Good design and management practices allow intangible values such as ongoing patterns of interaction to remain in appropriate balance with the physical values that are more visual and measurable.



With a cultural landscape approach to site planning, many different types of information can be data in reading the landscape: a cultural, social, and economic history of the place and its context; historical maps and photographs; cultural artifacts; oral histories from people who knew the site well at some time in its past; and maps of natural, political, and cultural boundaries and features. Artistic representations of the landscape, in paintings, posters, films, can be extremely useful in revealing the cultural layers as they were perceived at specific points in time.

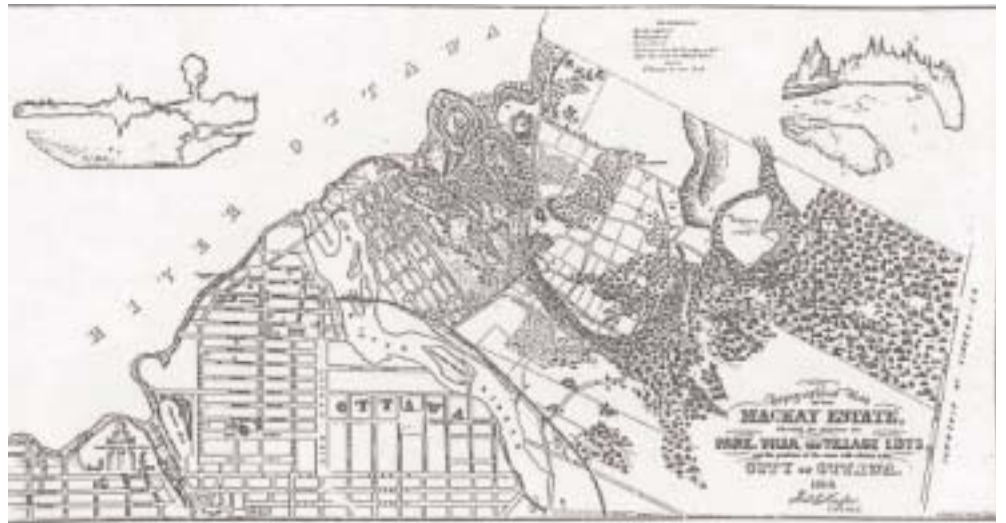
An analysis of many cultural layers permits the complexity of the place to be revealed. These many factors can then be evaluated to build agreement with a regard to the relative significance of historic, design, natural, and community elements. The planning process then involves consideration of competing ideas and values and the building of a consensus around the dominant idea that will bring clarity to future choices.

Rideau Hall

The evolution of the Rideau Hall landscape is presented in the Landscape Design and Site Management Guidelines through the work of Julian Smith and Mark Laird as the cultural landscape historians on the project team.

When Thomas MacKay built Rideau Hall in 1838 on a site that encompassed 445 hectares, he emulated the country house tradition of his native Scotland. This tradition reflected the principles of the English or Natural Style that favoured the subtle manipulation and composition of nature into forms that were asymmetric, sinuous, mysterious and suggestive. It was a style that embraced the casually framed vista and the illusion of extent.

In 1864, Lord Monck inspected the estate and identified a number of improvements to make Rideau Hall suitable as the vice-regal residence. As described in the History of the Rideau Hall Landscape by Edwinna von Baeyer: "Lord Monck's suggestions were highly influenced by the model of the



contemporary British country estate layout. This aesthetic and cultural bias continued to shape the evolution of the Rideau Hall grounds. Fiscal constraints, on the other hand, also tempered the desire to transform the Upper Canadian landscape into a vice-regal estate. The resulting tension played a part in forming the truncated version of the British model of a typical country estate which Rideau Hall presented to the public eye."

Von Baeyer explains why the British landscape ideal was so potent, so taken for granted by all who worked on moulding the Rideau Hall landscape:

"Unquestionably it was a well-established element in the early Governor's General cultural background, part of the essential equipment, mental and otherwise, packed into their portmanteaus. The pervasiveness of British garden ideals was not solely tied to our colonial history — it was just as much a reflection of the predominance of British garden styles throughout the Western world. From the early eighteenth century onwards, Britain ruled the garden world as a style setter."

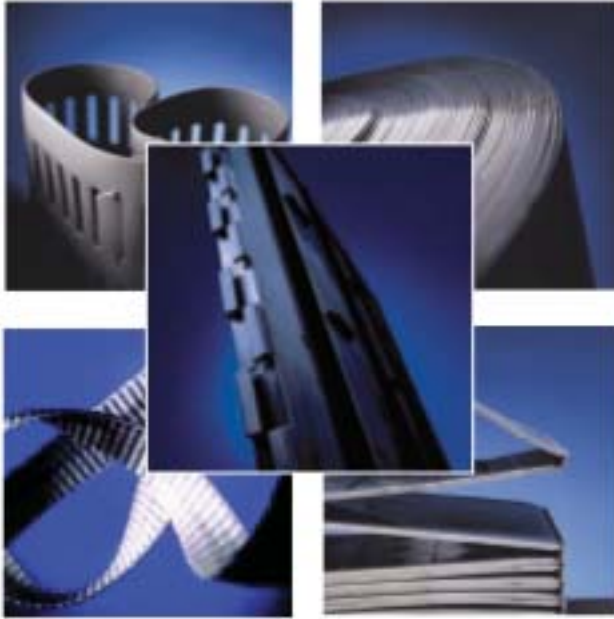
In aesthetic terms, the British landscape ideal involved the Natural Style and an interest in the Picturesque. In more practical terms, it involved zoning the site into a number of functionally distinct areas, but as parts of an organic whole. By the time Rideau Hall came into being, the British landscape ideal had been well established

on many of the most prominent private estates not only in England and Scotland but in other countries including Canada. It was also beginning to appear in the public parks emerging in urban areas on both sides of the Atlantic.

The British landscape ideal is the major formative influence at Rideau Hall, giving rise to the largely Picturesque aesthetic and the five functional/aesthetic zones within the site, each with clear precedents in the estate tradition. But comparison with eighteenth-century prototypes reveals the site's distinctiveness and its complex Canadian overtones.

Within the site, a variety of mechanisms were used to deal with the fact that the idea of an estate was achieved at compressed scale. Monck shifted the entrance drive to accentuate the circuitousness of the approach. He chose a more thickly wooded area to help conceal the residence and enhance the sense of extent. The farmland area at the east end of the site was used to extend the vista across the parkland.

The second difference from the British estate precedent is the relationship of public and private. The representational and ceremonial functions of Rideau Hall, as well as private and public facilities, led to a diversification of activities within this already compressed land-use structure. By the 1860s, taste was moving towards a reconciliation of formal and Picturesque traditions. (continued on page 6)



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Public parks were altering the aesthetic of the private estate.

Edouard André's 1867 application of French planning principles to Sefton Park illustrates both dynamics. The Deer Park and Lake of Capability Brown's Picturesque design were still maintained. Yet formal terraces and parterres embellish the ornamental gardens around the mansion (in this case a botanical garden with greenhouses). In such public parks, the diversification of activities, notably a cricket ground, with archery and croquet grounds in a compressed landscape surrounded by a residential neighbourhood resembles the structuring of Rideau Hall. Even the 'Review Ground' of André's design recalls the later use of the Rideau Hall parkland for military reviews. In this sense, the Governor General's grounds reflect a remarkable fusing of private and public landscape traditions.

The relationship of public and private has evolved over time. As suggested, one of the features of public parks is their more immediate interaction with their urban context. In the case of Rideau Hall, the 19th Century saw an active involvement of the Governors General

with the Rockcliffe Park landscape to the north and west.

In the 20th Century, this involvement diminishes noticeably, and the site begins to turn more inward. Interestingly enough, this apparent privatization of the grounds has made them more vulnerable to public intrusion. With public access understood as an external pressure, it has been necessary to draw tight boundaries between public and private space in a landscape that was never intended to have these distinctions. Only in the last year or so, with the arrival of Governor General Adrienne Clarkson, has there been a return to the earlier concepts of landscape, allowing the site to re-engage its urban context and blurring the boundaries between public and private. The grounds are once again coming alive in their historically unique fashion.

A third difference from the typical British precedent is the additive nature of the Rideau Hall design. With changing incumbents and an uncertain future, there has been a pattern of continual evolution in the articulation of the site. Coherence initially was sustained by adapting British gardening traditions to the

specific conditions, both cultural and climatic, of the Canadian site. This eventually gave way to a more indigenous pattern of evolution. By 1931, Rideau Hall had successfully absorbed 200 years of British landscaping prowess, while interpreting those influences in a distinctly Canadian way. The period of simplification that followed thereafter removed horticultural ornamentation but without destroying the integrity of the whole.

What is significant in reviewing this evolution is to remember that, despite the additive nature of the design and the emphasis on short-term rather than long-term solutions, the underlying structure and aesthetic of the site has proven remarkably resilient. Even with the many changes identified, there is still a high degree of cohesiveness and historical integrity.

The most important cumulative difference between Rideau Hall and its British antecedents is its Canadianness. The Canadian countryside, climate and culture dictated a new engagement with wildness and winter. The rugged terrain of the winter recreation park was suggestive of English picturesque

aesthetics – notably the 'sublime'. Yet the celebration or cult of 'winter' as such made Rideau Hall a remarkable Canadian interpretation of the British landscape ideal. Historic photos reveal the fascination with winter, especially in the early period from the 1860s to WWI. Typical images show an outdoor skating rink, indoor curling, tobogganing, and cross-country skiing with a mystique that seems to disappear in the ensuing years; but that still survives as important historic precedent.

In the horticultural area, there was ongoing experimentation with the planting of Canadian-bred species and varieties, notably in Lady Byng's rockery, and the acceptance of the 'northern' garden as a legitimate expression of a particular place and time. The nature of Canadian influences is also reflected in the other differences alluded to above: the compactness, the additive quality, and the creative tension between public and private.

Underlying this more tangible evidence of Canadian adaptation is the evolution of the very office of Governor General. The gradual transformation of this institution into a uniquely Canadian Head of State provides a subtle counterpoint to the evolution of the landscape itself. Part of the present challenge on the site is to elucidate the character derived from a uniquely Canadian interpretation of the Natural or Picturesque tradition, and to explore the possibilities for a contemporary design layer that expresses the new symbolisms of Canadian identity.

Three ideas, all recognizable as trends in the current cultural landscape, were options for the dominant idea around which to envision the future of Rideau Hall. One potential future was as a destination for visitors to Ottawa to learn about the history of Ottawa and of the role of Governor General in our society. At the time of the planning study, a design was being prepared for a new Visitors Centre on the site.

A second direction was to encourage the trend toward the site being used as a public open space. In recent years public use was increasing and the site was being programmed for public events, including the popular outdoor concerts on the lawn. With these trends, times when the site was closed to the public, such as when the Governor General

was entertaining heads of state, were the source of complaints from citizens.

The third idea under consideration was that Rideau Hall is a residential cultural landscape and the home of the Governor General. In this view of the estate, the privacy of the Governor General was important and should be protected from public intrusion into the house and other areas with a residential function. The public would not have unrestricted right of access to the grounds in this scenario. Rather the public would be invited into the gates by the Governor General for specific purposes and the choice would be hers. While the concerts could continue and the cricket pitch used by local clubs, there would be no need to apologize for necessary closures. This idea was most consistent with the cultural landscape of this National Historic Site and ultimately was endorsed as the basis for the Design and Site Management Guidelines.

Many specific guidelines then flowed logically from this idea:

- Lawns that had been paved to facilitate public events should be returned to grass and used within their carrying capacity.
- Curbs and contemporary paving treatments should be eliminated over time.
- In place of the public park-like furniture found on site, the more residential wooden two-seat bench should be the inspiration for any future site furniture strategy.
- Commemorations, garden art donations, and VIP tree planting shall undergo a more rigorous process of selection and placement.
- Night lighting can be limited to the historic pole mounted globe fixtures, avoiding the use of multi-globe and flood lights.
- The influence of tour buses should be diminished by restricting and limiting on-site bus access and parking and by halting plans for expanded on-site parking facilities.

This project halted plans for a new visitor centre, which had it gone ahead, could have altered the fundamental relationship that the principal building enjoys with the landscape. It influenced the decision to adaptively reuse

existing buildings on site when needed to accommodate staff expansion. The strategy replaces earlier capital plans that would have seen at least one new office building that could have had significant impact on the composition of Rideau Hall. The plan emphasizes the importance of authenticity and vitality on the site. It strongly supports such traditional activities as the continuation of the annual sugar bush tapping, reinvigoration of the flower and vegetable gardens,

and a reinvention of the farm lands to maintain an agricultural flavour.

The Design and Management Plan for Rideau Hall has recently been recognized with a CSLA Award.

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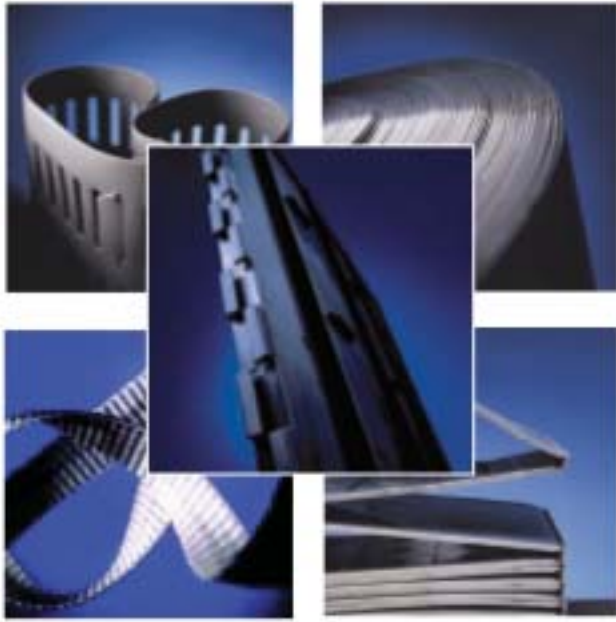
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School Time

Experiential Greening the Evergreen Way

BY KAREN J. MYSKIW

Who do you know that gets to work with paints and plants, outside on a rainy morning with thirty children under twelve, and to chew on drawing pens and plans in the afternoon? As an Evergreen Associate, all this is part of my job and more!

Evergreen is a national non-profit environmental organization with a mandate to bring nature to our cities through naturalization projects. Evergreen motivates people to create and sustain healthy, natural outdoor spaces and gives them the practical tools to be successful through its three core programs: Learning Grounds, Common Grounds and Home Grounds. Learning Grounds transforms the schoolyard through local stewardship efforts, creating vibrant neighbourhoods, a healthy natural environment and a sustainable society for all. With each school ground garden created, hope is planted for enhancing the learning experiences of children.

The Learning Grounds Initiative is in its third year helping schools redesign their grounds and providing students with healthy and safe places to play, learn; while developing a genuine respect for nature and each other. As one of six Learning Grounds Associates across the country, I fill the role of teacher and design captain.

As teacher and designer, part of my job is to deliver four participatory workshops. The first one is called Getting Started and earlier this fall I organized the first of the sessions. Eight school greening committees came together for an overview of a participatory design process. Armed with a store of slide imagery, a video, introductory remarks and snacks we began an enthusiastic session. Each school has the opportunity to share their vision and project concerns.

Subsequent site visits and a design development process with the support of the school Principal and the approval of the facilities department of each school district ensures the

project moves forward. Typical to most design processes is the site assessment and programmatic requirements. What allows this program to germinate is its level of community engagement and the direct investment of the stakeholders. Energy and caring flow from amazing people and their synergistic response to the challenge at hand. So many of the schools have bleak grounds. There is little shade, often surfaces are hardpan, asphalt or gravel, and play structures are limited to plastic equipment. With the right community mix however, this reality can change.

I have developed the design workshop into a model-making charette that engages the imaginations of the students. Working with design captains who have generously volunteered their time for the event, garden visions begin to manifest themselves. A hive of buzzing begins each event as groups gather around and brainstorm their intentions.

After the workshop I translate the model to a plan creating a native species planting plan. Native plants offer lower maintenance alternatives to ornamental plants. They also offer more opportunities for children to become engaged with

(continued on page 6)



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the outdoors, appreciating that insects, birds, spiders, bats and frogs are part of our world. Evergreen calls these planting projects 'outdoor classrooms', as they are designed to offer real, hands-on learning for students that can be incorporated into the everyday curriculum. These outdoor classrooms also fill a need within schoolyards by providing a place for quiet reflection, or for games like tag, or just places where prospect and refuge possibilities prevail.



Going the next step beyond design and planting, Evergreen offers support to teachers to help make the 'outdoor classroom' really come alive. Evergreen offers curriculum materials and workshops for teachers. Patterns, Plants and Playgrounds is a curriculum resource for grade 4-7 teachers on teaching outdoors. The module Patterns in Relationships includes specialized lessons that explore ethnobotany, while another module Patterns through the Seasons focuses on school food garden activities.

Evergreen plays a crucial role in bringing together community partnerships whose funding dollars and grant programs help implement school ground projects. Additional workshops on fundraising and working with native plants continue to provide guidance and suggestions necessary for school ground projects to develop.

Planting the garden is a time of excitement: the fruits of our labours are to be transferred to the earth with care. The first summer, a

maintenance regime of weekly watering shared by the community enables the plants to become established. Even with the drought of last summer, the gardens planted have displayed resounding resilience.

Going back to school has been an education. As the Evergreen Learning Grounds Associate I have grown as much as the gardens we have planted.

For more information about the Learning Grounds Program visit: www.evergreen.ca

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Welcome to UBC

Cynthia Girling, formerly Head of the Department of Landscape Architecture, at the University of Oregon has arrived to take on the role of Director of the Landscape Architecture Program at UBC. Please join us in welcoming her to the program.

Associate Professor Girling has taught design studios at all levels, professional practice, landscape technologies and open space planning. With Professor Ronald Kellett, she co-directs the neighborhoodsLAB, an interdisciplinary research and community service group who will join the UBC Centre for Landscape

Research in July. The lab assists communities and professionals with the design of neighbourhoods that will be more energy conserving, lower environmental impact, of better design quality and more affordable. They are co-authors of *Green Neighbourhoods: Planning and Design Guidelines for Air Water and Urban Forest Quality* and a forthcoming book to be published by Island Press in 2005. With Kenneth Helphand, Girling co-authored *Yard Street Park the Design of Suburban Open Spaces* in 1994. Cynthia can be contacted at 604-822-0438 e-mail cgirling@interchange.ubc.ca

Borrowed Views

BY SUSAN HERRINGTON

The following are two response papers from students enrolled in a Landscape Architecture Theory course at the University of British Columbia. In this course we examine competing theoretical positions and explore how theory arises from, interacts with, and elaborates designed landscapes. The following responses are based on two theoretical writings central to the course.

A hermeneutical approach to landscape is proposed by James Corner in 'A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics'. Corner views hermeneutics as a viable alternative to the tyrannical grip of positivism, the use of paradigms, avant-garde, which have each drained creativity and meaning from the act of landscape architectural design. Here, Elise finds an example from the 1960s of a hermeneutical approach in the work of the late landscape architect, A.E. Bye.

In 'Gray World Green Heart', Rob Thayer describes how we have split technology into two roles, good and bad, as a way of reconciling the truth that our daily consumption and use of technology is causing an environmental crisis. Thayer contends that we view good technologies as "personal things that help and define us." These range from computers to kayaks. While technologies deemed bad are "impersonal omnipresence systems" like highways and power lines. Here, Leysa challenges Thayer's rigid categories of good and bad technologies and gives us examples, which demonstrate that landscape, memory, and technologies are not just gray or green.



Photograph by Blair Guppy

The Stein Bog as a Hermeneutic Landscape

BY ELISE MENARD

The Stein Bog created by A.E. Bye and Associates is an example of a hermeneutic landscape as described by James Corner in his essay, 'A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics'. In his paper Corner states that the basis of hermeneutics is formed by situational interpretation, the primacy of perception and the happening of tradition (Corner 1991, p.127). These three assumptions are all applicable to Bye's approach to his client request for a pond. In particular, Bye accomplished Corner's definition of hermeneutics in his design in the way he captured and preserved the Bog as the essence of the site.

Bye's situational interpretation of the site was not of a place that was uninviting or lacking value (traditionally the site was viewed as a less appealing place to experience and that's why his clients wanted a pond); rather he saw the bog as an environment full of life and opportunity. Bye gave special consideration to the history of the location, which was formed by years of constant work by the various native life forms of the bog. This ongoing natural process resulted in the state of the site which Bye was faced with upon his arrival. Bye's knowledge of and respect for an existing environment's ability to evolve (in this case the bog) gave him insight into what the landscape could become in the future. Only an individual's physical and mental involvement with the site could allow them to perceive the success of such a site as it existed. This type of understanding of the existing site matches well with Corner's idea that "the objective is to devise new meanings (futures) from a critical and yet imaginative reinterpretation of our tradition (past)" (Corner 1991, p.127). With his intimate understanding, Bye challenged his clients to re-evaluate the perception that, as a landscape, bogs were an eye-sore and a nuisance. Exposing his clients to other sites with similar qualities helped Bye to educate them, and convince his clients that the incorporation of the bog as part of the landscape plan would be a beautiful and dynamic feature adjacent to their residence (Bye 1998, p.84).

According to Corner, "the landscape is itself a text that is open to interpretation and transformation" (Corner 1991, p.129). By exposing himself to the Stein Bog, Bye gains a clearer understanding of how the bog exists on a daily basis, and through repeated visits the changing seasons showed him its subtle, yet evocative, transformations. This directly relates to Corner's meaning of interpretation and transformation in his explanation of the hermeneutic landscape as the Stein Bog was a landscape that was not initially understandable, but with interpretive effort proved its potential as a significant part of the landscape design.

Sources

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Corner, James. 1991. "A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary Theory and the Alternative of Hermeneutics" in Landscape Journal (fall) 10(2)

Writers, Designers, Artists, Photographers, Landscape Architects

Sitelines Journal invites your contributions on all topics pertaining to Landscape Architecture. Tell us of your favourite parks, gardens, courtyards, existing or imaginary. Send us your traveller's tales.

Sitelines is published six times per year in February, April, June, August, October and December by the BCSLA. We request that submissions arrive one month prior to publication. Please contact Co-Editors Laura-Jean Kelly and Cameron Murray or the BCSLA office with any questions you may have.

Topless in Vancouver

BY CATRIONA HEARN

My walk to work each day takes me past the newly refurbished Victory Square Park, where Vancouver's oldest street trees, stately 107-year-old maples, still grace its Pender Street perimeter. A block away on Cambie Street, it's a different story. Three healthy, young shade trees have just been gratuitously topped and severely pruned - destroyed, in effect, by an increasingly common but misguided act of "landscape maintenance." Planted with the obvious design intent of mitigating a large, blank wall of the Vancouver Community College, these trees were neither too tall nor too broad for their context.

Those charged with their care apparently believe that this kind of pruning is somehow justified. It never is. The victims are big, beautiful *Liriodendron tulipifera*, Tulip

trees, members of the magnolia family, one of North America's most magnificent, native shade trees. Their crude truncation has ensured they will never recover from this disfigurement, nor achieve the characteristic form for which the species is renowned. Ironically, this kind of "landscape maintenance" at a prominent educational institution demonstrates and possibly even propagates the belief that tree topping is an acceptable way to "manage" tree growth. It is not.

Tree topping is expensive, dangerous and destroys the natural beauty of the tree's crown. Topping is not only ineffective for managing height, it is also proven to initiate bizarre regrowth and greatly increase susceptibility to insects and disease. Responsible arbourists will refuse to top a

tree, or prune its limbs back to awkward stumps. Most landscape trees need little or no pruning, and we plant them because they are naturally beautiful.

Appropriately selected and placed, most trees neither require nor benefit from our intervention. Trees know how they should look, without our help, and there are few views that can explain the topping and pruning that is becoming epidemic in our otherwise tree-friendly environment. A healthy and beautiful urban forest is our legacy to the next generation. It is a gift that only we can provide for those who will walk our streets 100 years from now.

Reprinted from the Vancouver Sun, Monday, March 29, 2004

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