LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: A PROFESSION IN DEMAND

From city council rooms to corporate boardrooms, there is increasing demand today for the professional services of landscape architects. This trend reflects the public's desire for better housing, recreational and commercial facilities, and its expanded concern for environmental protection. Residential and commercial real estate developers, federal and state agencies, city planning commissions, and individual property owners are all among the thousands of people and organizations in America and Canada that will retain the services of a landscape architect this year.

More than any of the other major environmental design professions, landscape architecture is a profession on the move. It is comprehensive by definition-no less than the art and science of analysis, planning design, management, preservation and rehabilitation of the land.

In providing well-managed design and development plans, landscape architects offer an essential array of services and expertise that reduces costs and adds long-term value to a project.

Clear differences do exists between landscape architecture and the other design professions. Architects primarily design buildings and structures with specific uses, such as homes, offices, schools and factories. Civil engineers apply scientific principles to the design of city infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and public utilities. Urban planners develop a broad overview of development for entire cities and regions.

Landscape architects touch on all the above mentioned design professions, integrating elements from each of them. Having a working knowledge of architecture, civil engineering and urban planning, landscape architects take elements from each of these fields to design aesthetic and practical relationships with the land.

A Diverse Profession

Landscape architecture is one of the most diversified of the design professions. Landscape architects design the built environment of neighborhoods, towns and cities while also protecting and managing the natural environment, from its forests and fields to rivers and coasts. Members of the profession have a special commitment to improving the quality of life through the best design of places for people and other living things.

In fact, the work of landscape architects surrounds us. Members of the profession are involved in the planning of such sites as office plazas, public squares and thoroughfares.
The attractiveness of parks, highways, housing developments, urban plazas, zoos and campuses reflects the skill of landscape architects in planning and designing the construction of useful and pleasing projects.

From coast to coast, in every region of the world, examples of the landscape architecture profession can be found. Many landscape architects are involved in small projects, such as developing plans for a new city park or site plans for an office building, other members of the profession have contributed their expertise to numerous projects which include:

- Preservation of Yosemite Park and Niagara Falls
- Management plan for the Alaskan Maritime National Wildlife Refuge
- Design of the U.S. Capitol Grounds
- Design of Mount Royal Park in Montreal, Quebec
- Development of Stanford University site
- Creation of Boston's "emerald necklace" of green spaces tying the city to the suburbs
- Plans for Baltimore's park system and Inner Harbor area
- Design of "new towns" such as Columbia, Maryland, and Reston, Virginia
- Landfill reclamation for Fresh Kills in New York and Dyer in Florida
- Plans for Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco, California
- Sursum Cordan Affordable Housing, Washington, D.C.
- Design for water treatment and park facility in Hillsboro, Oregon
- Master plan for King Saud University in Saudi Arabia
- Restoration of the landscape along the Baltimore-Washington Parkway in Maryland

Depending on the scope of the project for clients, ranging from a local developer to the federal government, landscape architects may plan the entire arrangement of a site, including the location of buildings, grading, stormwater management, construction and planting. They may also coordinate teams of design, construction and contracting professionals.

Already, federal and state government agencies ranging from the National Park Service to local park planning boards employ a large number of landscape architects. More and more private developers realize that the services of a landscape architect are an integral part of a successful, more profitable project.

Tracing the Profession's Roots

The origin of today's profession of landscape architecture can be traced to the early treatments of outdoor space by successive ancient cultures, from Persia and Egypt through Greece and Rome. During the Renaissance, this interest in outdoor space, which had waned during the Middle Ages, was revived with splendid results in Italy and gave rise to ornate villas, gardens, and great outdoor piazzas.
These precedents, in turn, greatly influenced the chateaux and urban gardens of 17th-century France, where landscape architecture and design reached new heights of sophistication and formality. The designers became well-known, with Andre le Notre, who designed the gardens at Versailles and Vaux-le-Vicomte, among the most famous of the early forerunners of today's landscape architects.

In the 18th Century, most English "landscape gardeners," such as Lancelot "Capability" Brown, who remodeled the grounds of Blenheim Palace, rejected the geometric emphasis of the French in favor of imitating the forms of nature.

One important exception was Sir Humphrey Repton. He reintroduced formal structure into landscape design with the creation of the first great public parks Victoria Park in London (1845) and Birkenhead Park in Liverpool (1847). In turn, these two parks would greatly influence the development of landscape architecture in the United States and Canada.

Frederick Law Olmsted: "Father of American Landscape Architecture"

The history of the profession in North America begins with Frederick Law Olmsted, who rejected the name "landscape gardener" in favor of the title of "landscape architect," which he felt better reflected the scope of the profession.

In 1863, official use of the designation "landscape architect" by New York's park commissioners marked the symbolic genesis of landscape architecture as a modern design profession. Olmsted became a pioneer and visionary for the profession. His projects illustrate his high professional standards, including the design of Central Park in New York with Calvert Vaux in the late 1850's and the U.S. Capitol Grounds in the 1870's. Olmsted and the Brookline, Mass., firm he founded advanced the concept of parks as well-designed, functional public green spaces amid the grayness of the urban areas through the well practiced principles of landscape architecture and city planning.

Early Developments: Late 1800's

In the ensuing years, the profession of landscape architecture broadened. It played a major role in fulfilling the growing national need for well-planned and well-designed urban environments.

Urban parks, metropolitan park systems, planned suburban residential enclaves and college campuses were planned and developed in large numbers, climaxing with the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the century.
Although the profession itself grew slowly, its early practitioners, including Olmsted, Vaux and Horace Cleveland, were among the first to take part in the town planning movement and to awaken interest in civic design. Olmsted also joined other early landscape architects in working on projects in other urban settings, such as at Yosemite Valley and Niagara Falls.

In 1899, the American Society of Landscape Architects was founded by 11 people in New York - most of them associated with Olmsted. The Society continued to represent landscape architects throughout the United States. In 1900, Olmsted's son, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., organized and taught at Harvard University's first course in landscape architecture.

Broadening and Diversifying: The 20th Century

Landscape architecture continued to influence the city beautification and planning movement well into the 20th century, as growing cities used the services of professionally-trained landscape architects.

The L'Enfant Plan for the nation's capitol was revived and expanded by the McMillan commission of 1901. Chicago, Cleveland and other cities also used landscape architects to lay out comprehensive development plans.

By the 1920's, urban planning separated from architecture and landscape architecture as a separate profession with its own degree programs and organizations. Yet, landscape architecture continued to remain a major force in urban planning and urban design.

During and after the Depression, opportunities to design national and state parks, towns, parkways and new urban park systems broadened the profession. The orientation of American landscape architecture returned to its roots in public projects - a trend which has continued throughout the mid-20th century to today.

The Profession in Practice

Landscape architecture in the 1990s cannot be described in a few simple terms. The scope of the profession is too broad and the projects too varied.

A variety of often interwoven specializations exist within the profession, including the following: Landscape Design, the historical core of the profession, is concerned with detailed outdoor space design for residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and
public spaces. It involves the treatment of a site as art, the balance of hard and soft surfaces in outdoor and indoor spaces, the selection of construction and plant materials, infrastructure such as irrigation, and the preparation of detailed construction plans and documents.

Site Planning focuses on the physical design and arrangement of built and natural elements of a land parcel. A site planning project can involve designing the land for a single house, an office park or shopping center, or an entire residential community. More specifically, site design involves the orderly, efficient, aesthetic and ecologically sensitive integration of man-made objects with a site's natural features including topography, vegetation, drainage, water, wildlife and climate. Sensitive design produces development that minimizes both environmental impacts and project costs, and adds value to a site.

Urban/Town Planning deals with designing and planning cities and towns. Urban planners use zoning techniques and regulations, master plans, conceptual plans, land-use studies and other methods to set the layout and organization of urban areas. This field also involves "urban design" — the development of mostly open, public spaces, such as plazas and streetscapes.

Regional Landscape Planning has emerged as a major area of practice for many landscape architects with the rise of the public's environmental awareness in the past thirty years. It merges landscape architecture with environmental planning. In this field, landscape architects deal with the full spectrum of planning and managing land and water, including natural resource surveys, preparation of environmental impact statements, visual analysis, landscape reclamation and coastal zone management.

Park and Recreation Planning involve creating or redesigning parks and recreational areas in cities, suburban and rural areas. Landscape architects also develop plans for huge natural areas as part of national park, forest, and wildlife refuge systems.

Land Development Planning can be on large-scale, multi-acre parcels of undeveloped land and smaller scale sites in urban, rural and historic areas. As such, it provides a bridge between policy planning and individual development projects. Landscape architects working in this area require a knowledge of real estate economics and development regulation processes, as well as an understanding of the physical constraints of developing and working with the land. The challenge is to integrate economic factors with good design and thus create quality environments. Due to this blending of expertise, landscape architects are often selected to head multi-disciplinary design teams.
Ecological Planning and Design studies the interaction between people and the natural environment. It is concerned with interpretation, analysis, and formulation of design policies, guidelines and plans to ensure the quality of the environment. Heavily landscape architect and planner Ian McHarg, this specialization includes, but is not limited to, analytical evaluations of the land and focuses on the suitability of a site for development. It requires specific knowledge of environmental laws such as the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, Federal wetlands regulations, etc. This specialization also encompasses highway design and planning.

Historic Preservation and Reclamation of sites such as parks, gardens, grounds, waterfronts, and wetlands involves increasing numbers of landscape architects as growing populations lead to additional development. This field may involve preservation or maintenance of a site in relatively static condition, conservation of a site as part of a larger area of historic importance, restoration of a site to a given date or quality, and renovation of a site for ongoing or new use. Landscape architects often participate from the research through the actual restoration stage.

Social and Behavioral Aspects of Landscape Design focus on the human dimension of design, such as designing for the special needs of the elderly or the disabled. This field requires advanced training in social sciences, such as behavioral psychology, sociology, anthropology and economics. Areas of study include design evaluation of existing environments, environmental perceptions, and effects of environments on people.

The Profession of the Future

The years ahead promise new developments and challenges to the ever-broadening profession. With environmental concerns becoming increasingly important, landscape architects are being called upon to bring their expertise to the table to help solve complex problems. Rural concerns are attracting landscape architects to farmland preservation, small town revitalization, landscape preservation, and energy resource development and conservation. Advances in computer technology have opened the field of computerized design, and land reclamation has become a major area of work for members of the profession. Landscape architects have even begun to use their skill within indoor environments (e.g. atriums) and enclosed pedestrian spaces have been incorporated into commercial development projects. From southern California to the Maine coast, the names of landscape architecture firms appear on signs heralding future developments, as more people seek the expertise and services of the profession.

Furthermore, the future also promises increase cooperation among landscape architects and other design professionals. As interest in the profession continues to grow, students
are studying of the profession in increasing numbers nearly 60 universities and colleges in the United States and Canada now offer accredited baccalaureate and post-graduate programs in landscape architecture. Forty-five states license landscape architects. Today, headquartered in Washington, D.C., the American Society of Landscape Architects has grown to nearly 12,000 members in 47 chapters.

During the past decades, landscape architects have responded to the increased demand and professional responsibilities with new skills and expertise. More and more businesses appreciate the profession and the value that it brings to a project. The public praises the balance achieved between the built and natural environments.

According to landscape architectural educator, author and ASLA Fellow, Lane Marshall:

"The future of (the) profession is bright. We are growing in size and stature each day. The profession is expanding its borders constantly and stands at the cutting edges of exciting new practice areas. There are landscape architects who are mortgage bankers, developers, business managers, architects, engineers, and lawyers. Since 1899, the profession has grown steadily and now stands at the threshold of a new period of growth."

The profession of landscape architecture continues to evolve as it meets the challenges of a society interested in improving the quality of life and the wisdom with which mankind uses the land in many ways, landscape architects are shaping the future.