

## Landscape Design Course 4

Note to Students from Instructor David J Driapsa FASLA Landscape Architect

Welcome to Course Four of the National Garden Council Landscape Design School.

I thank Vicki Williamson, Sue Roberts, and the many folks who have made this course possible, and invited me to share my interest and passion for landscape architecture.

The conclusion of Course 4 leads to your Consultant Certification. You are on the path to developing a greater sense of pride, appreciation, and knowledge about the landscapes of private and public places.

As a credentialed Landscape Design Consultant, you are better prepared to provide leadership that promote well-designed, beautiful, useful, convenient, and ecologically sound landscapes.

Our course today covers chapters 21, 26, and 36 from the book *Stewards of the Land, a Survey of Landscape Architecture and Design in America*.

We begin with Chapter 21, “Contemporary Landscape Design,” written by Norman K. Booth, pages 138-145. It was exciting to prepare for teaching this chapter. Norm Booth was one of my professors teaching landscape architecture to me at The Ohio State University. I still vividly recall the first day of his course; it was a pure design course. We hadn’t advanced yet to the deeper study landscape architecture. Design and art are important elements of landscape architecture, and the starting place.

Profession Booth walked into the classroom and his first words were, “You can leave now.” That was a puzzling thing to hear, until he continued to say that at the end of the course, we would never see the world the same again. He had offering us an escape. I stayed on for the course, as did my classmates. Norm was right. I didn’t see the world the same. Through the course of that course I began to see the world as designed. Even nature, exhibited order, especially nature and that would become an inspiration.

To begin this chapter, I have included a brief review of the historic roots of landscape design that leads us to our topic of Chapter, 21, Contemporary Landscape Design.

Landscape architecture in America are is grafted on the roots of historical and ancient precedents. There were no schools of landscape architecture in America prior to 1900. The arts and sciences of landscape design were learned through apprenticeships, as in times of old.

Harvard established the first academic program of landscape architecture in 1900. It was taught along with the arts and sciences of architecture, until 1908 when it became the separate discipline, bolstered with contemporary artistic and technical skills to prepare students to enter into a professional career as a landscape architect, with the specialized knowledge and training that was lacking in the education of an architect or an engineer. The chief difference was and continues to be, nature; as we will learn to see, appreciate, and understand through the progression of this course.

Norman K. Booth, "Contemporary Landscape Design," in Marilyn K. Alaimo (Ed.) Stewards of the Land, a Survey of Landscape Architecture and Design in America (St. Louis, Missouri: National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc., 1999) pages 138-145.

A. Introduction

- a. Contemporary Landscape Design must consider:
  - i. Current trends in style
  - ii. Current trends in design theory
  - iii. Uses of materials at all scales of landscape architectural projects
  - iv. Applies to thoughts and design of public and private landscapes

B. Definition of Contemporary

- a. Contemporary design encompasses
  - i. Design ideas
  - ii. Concepts
  - iii. Techniques of the moment
    - 1. Digital communication
    - 2. Computer technology
  - iv. The focus is on topics that are current to today's practice of landscape design
    - 1. Climate Change
    - 2. Environmental degradation
    - 3. Inclusion

C. Contemporary verses the Modern Movement

- a. Contemporary is not the same as modern movement
  - i. The modern movement showed a rejection of past concepts of representation
  - ii. The philosophy of the modern movement was form follows function
  - iii. The modern movement was fascinated with machines

iv. Modernism lacks any feeling for the surrounding context

D. Modernism in landscape architecture is evidenced from the 1940s through the early 1980s.

- a. Characterized by be designs that use pure geometric forms
- b. Organization is in a non-axial or asymmetrical manner
- c. There are often large, uninterrupted expanses of pavement
- d. Plant materials, especially trees, were often used architecturally in rows and bosques

E. Other styles

- a. The Modern movement gave way to the Post-Modern style in design
  - i. This design style rejected the impersonal character of the modern movement
  - ii. Attempted to return to a more artful and humanistic design approach
  - iii. Classical architecture returned as a design expression of character and identity
  - iv. Building often fit their surroundings and gave meaning to their sites

F. In the late 1980's and early 1990's Post Modern gave way to Deconstructionism

- a. Characterized in buildings and artwork which appeared torn apart
- b. Designs appeared broken and fragmented as if by some explosive force
- c. An example is Wexner Visual Arts Center of the campus of The Ohio State University
- d. More an expression in architecture than in landscape architecture

G. Overview of Contemporary Landscape Design

- a. Characterized as following several parallel and sometimes converging paths
  - i. Outgrowth of previous styles modified to fit context of the environment
  - ii. Exhibited classical motifs with axial layouts
  - iii. Attention to context
  - iv. Richness in use of materials
  - v. Careful attention to decoration

- vi. Attempt to make each design have a “sense of place”
  - 1. Meaningful to the user on intellectual and emotional levels
  - 2. Goes beyond functional organization

b. Designs are based on the philosophy of “design with nature”

- i. Based on a concern for welfare of the environment
- ii. Attempts to create landscapes requiring minimal maintenance
  - 1. Low input of energy
  - 2. Cleanse the air
  - 3. Require minimal use of water
  - 4. Contribute to health of environment

H. Organization of Contemporary Landscape Design

- a. Rejected the simplicity and pure utilitarian philosophy of form follows function
- b. Favors designs that are complex artistic expressions

I. There are certain distinct organizational patterns in contemporary landscape design

- a. Design is organized around humanly scaled central axis
  - i. Similarly found in many classical gardens
  - ii. Design evokes a feeling of history
  - iii. Employs new interpretations of elements and details of earlier times
  - iv. Sometimes suggests a feeling of stability and security because of historical recall
- b. Organization of complex patterns of grid lines
  - i. Grid lines sometime are completely evident in some work of Martha Swartz
  - ii. Grid lines sometimes are implied in points by varied ways throughout the design
    - 1. creates interesting and unexpected juxtapositions of forms and elements
- c. Other contemporary landscape design appears to have no organizational pattern at all

- i. They look completely natural
- ii. They are carefully planned to imitate natural settings
  - 1. With native plants
  - 2. Soft edges around areas and forms
  - 3. Semi-transparent spatial walls separating one space from another

J. Concepts and Objectives of contemporary landscape design

a. Symbolism in design

- i. Certain elements or areas mean or suggest something else
  - 1. A water channel in the ground may suggest the “river of life”
    - a. As it did in Persian gardens
  - 2. An area of parallel lines of plants may symbolize the agrarian landscape
- ii. Often, symbolism is meant to recall an historically significant event or element
  - 1. Events or elements that had previously been located on the site

b. Design Philosophy of symbolism

- i. Landscape designs should engage the user on an intellectual and emotional level
  - 1. Make the user become a participant in the design
- ii. Symbolism gives a unique quality or “sense of place’ separate from all others
- iii. People today demand personalized garden spaces that reflect their interests
  - 1. Reaction against faceless quality in the Modern movement

K. Outdoor Living

- a. Contemporary landscape designs frequently are based on the concept of outdoor living
  - i. Integral to many Modern movement designs, especially in California and Florida
  - ii. Continues to be prominent in contemporary design as well
  - iii. Homeowners request that the outdoor environment around the house to be useful

1. Useful as much as the interior spaces of the home
- b. The most suitable uses for outdoor spaces can include many of the same inside uses
  - i. Sitting
  - ii. Relaxing
  - iii. Socializing
  - iv. Dining
- c. As homes and sites become smaller, outdoor living becomes more crucial
  - i. Greater concern to take full advantage of limited space indoors and outdoors

#### L. Lighting

- a. Lighting is one more critical element of contemporary landscapes
  - i. Many people can appreciate the landscape during the daylight only on weekends
  - ii. Outdoor lighting extends the usefulness of the landscape into the evening hours
  - iii. Additionally, lighting provides a varied dimension by creating
    1. Accentuate selected plant materials and objects
    2. Create a relaxing atmosphere
    3. Emphasize water features
    4. Provide for safety
    5. Provide for utility functions

#### M. Self-Sustaining Landscapes

- a. Many contemporary landscape designs are self-sustaining
  - i. That is, a landscape that requires minimum care from people
- b. This design approach attempts to address several issues
  - i. maintenance
  - ii. energy conservation

- iii. respect for natural processes
- c. Most public and private landowners cannot afford the time or money to keep landscapes that require a great amount of attention or resources such as water
  - i. Post-construction maintenance requires a great amount of attention or resources
- d. Use of native plant materials
  - i. Use indigenous plants as the foundation of a self-sustaining landscape
- e. Design and use lawn areas wisely

N. Materials in Contemporary Landscape Design

- a. Hardscape materials
  - i. Pavement
- b. Softscape materials
  - i. Grasses
  - ii. Perennials

O. Conclusion

- a. Designing contemporary landscapes is an exciting undertaking
  - i. The landscape designer has more freedom
    - 1. to be creative
    - 2. To use a wide variety of materials
    - 3. Just about everything goes
      - a. As long as it looks pleasing
      - b. As long as it is environmentally sensitive
- b. It also is inspiring to see that “art” has once again returned to the landscape
  - i. With detail
  - ii. With craftsmanship

- iii. The limits are only by one's imagination