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Introduction to the Profession of Landscape Architecture

The profession of landscape architecture has a client, the earth and its creatures. In order to meet this challenge, to respond to our client in a sustainable manner, the profession must ensure that it forms an alliance with the environmental sciences and that we come to be seen by them and the public as their agents for achieving felicitous, ecological adaptations.

—IAN L. MCHARG, *To Heal the Earth*¹

Overview of Landscape Architecture

Those less familiar with landscape architecture tend to think of the profession in relatively basic terms, involving plantings around a building or in a park, for example. The reality is quite different; much broader, richer, and far-reaching. The profession of landscape architecture is much more diverse than the public may imagine. So wide is the range of opportunities, in fact, that people with a variety of interests and from many different types of backgrounds are able to fit comfortably under the title “landscape architect” and build exciting careers for themselves. Landscape architects do, however, no matter what their specialty, have a number of important things in common: a deep appreciation for the environment, a commitment to the highest standards of design and planning, and pride in knowing that their work directly enhances the quality of people’s lives.



Gold Medal Park, Minneapolis, Minnesota. Designed by oslund.and.assoc. Photographer: Michael Mingo.

Landscape architecture can be thought of as a 360-degree profession because there are literally hundreds of different directions one can go with a degree in this field. Landscape architects design at many scales, ranging from a tiny roof deck terrace to thousands of acres of National Forest lands; from the private realm of a corporate office courtyard to the public realm of a neighborhood park and playground; from the specialized creation of a healing garden at a hospital to a customized rehabilitation of a native wetland. The next few chapters will highlight in greater depth the diversity of practice types, along with the professional possibilities available to someone with a background in landscape architecture.

Eighty-three percent of the earth's land surface has come under the influence of humans.² It is now recognized that much of that influence has not been positive, for either humans or the natural environment. However, every time humans interact with the land—whether to solve a problem, to move between places, or to build—there is an opportunity for landscape architects to become involved and assist in producing a positive outcome. A growing understanding of the capabilities of landscape architects and the value they bring to many types of projects accounts for the ongoing expansion of the profession.

The Many Definitions of Landscape Architecture

Many landscape architects would agree it is anything but straightforward to define their profession. The inherent diversity of the field is both an advantage and a disadvantage. The disadvantage is that, in being so broad, it is not easy to define, which makes it difficult for those outside the profession to understand it fully. The advantages are that its diversity enables so many people to benefit from the work of landscape architects, and, as mentioned above, allows individuals with a variety of interests and strengths to find a satisfying career in landscape architecture.

Perhaps a good place to start to define the field is with the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the national organization that represents the profession. It offers this definition of landscape architecture:

Landscape architecture encompasses the analysis, planning, design, management and stewardship of the natural and built environment through science and design. . . . It is a profession that is broad in scale and scope. Landscape architects receive training in site design, historic preservation, and planning, as well as in technical and scientific areas such as grading, drainage, horticulture, and environmental sciences. With this diverse background, landscape architects possess a unique blend of abilities to help address important local, regional, and national priorities.³

How do you define landscape architecture or a landscape architect?

› A landscape architect is *one who designs outdoor environments*.^{*} When asked that question by clients, we typically tell them it's conceivable that our scope of work could be anything outside of a habitable structure.

Jeffrey K. Carbo, FASLA
Principal, Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects and Site Planners

› Landscape architecture is *truly an art that integrates the idea of the built environment with nature* and, most importantly, how it relates to the individual—what a person feels like in a space is critical to the success of our profession.

Frederick R. Bonci, RLA, ASLA
Founding Principal, LaQuatra Bonci Associates

^{*}Author's emphasis added throughout.

› Landscape architecture is a discipline where design and research intersect, and more specifically, it is the *hybridization of art, science, economics, and politics* at different scales.

Julia Czerniak
Principal, CLEAR; Associate Professor of Architecture, Syracuse University

› Landscape architecture is about trying to find something that's really wonderful about the environment around you, and something that's really unique about the culture around you, and *combining all those things into a rich experience*.

Kofi Boone, ASLA
Assistant Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, North Carolina State University

How do you define landscape architecture or a landscape architect? (Continued)

› Design of the exterior environment that benefits humans, animals, and the planet.

Ruben L. Valenzuela, RLA
Principal, Terrano

› I often quip that it is “any modification of the surface of the planet,” but I find that definition too restrictive because it doesn’t adequately address issues of landscape preservation. By defining the profession this broadly, *creative work can be found in areas not historically considered* within the bounds of the profession, such as mined land reclamation and end-use planning.

Kurt Culbertson, FASLA
Chairman of the Board, Design Workshop

› Landscape architects work at the interface of cultural and natural issues. Landscape architecture is a unique profession in that *it houses a very wide range of scales and environments*, allowing for designers to work at the micro scale of designing playground equipment or benches, to macro considerations of urban development or environmental restoration.

Mikyoun Kim
Principal, mikyoung kim design

› Landscape architecture is *planning and designing the structure of the land, human-made and nature-made*. Nature-made is a green infrastructure of living things, including plant communities and their landforms. Nature-made infrastructures are remade by where and how we place them. Human-made constructions are things we design or place. They form a mosaic of circulation corridors, both animal and machine, buildings for shelter and gathering, utilities and familiar site amenities that grace the communities where we live.

Edward L. Blake, Jr.
Founding Principal, The Landscape Studio

› I think that, finally, the economic and cultural climate is such that landscape architects can really prevail in design. Landscape architecture offers an opportunity to meld creativity with a love of the

land and *the ability to create places that are everlasting* in a way that is not detrimental to the ecology and the quality of a community’s life.

Roy Kraynyk
Executive Director, Allegheny Land Trust

› A landscape architect is more like *a sculptor who manipulates the earth, and the grade and horizon*. It is more of an art form versus a service. The work that we tend to do in landscape architecture has a much more sculptural bent to it.

Thomas Oslund, FASLA, FAAR
Principal, oslund.and.assoc.

› A landscape architect is more of a *holistic coordinator of many things that take place in spaces*, to create a harmonious and, ultimately, long-term sustainable whole.

Juanita D. Shearer-Swink, FASLA
Project Manager, Triangle Transit Authority

› Landscape architecture has a very broad agenda.... It taps in to issues of infrastructure, ecology, and environment, of urbanism and metropolitanization. Our approach deals with how you *set in place a framework that may evolve and be acted on over time*. These are not closed systems—ecological process, social process, even political process—it’s very open-ended. The goal of landscape architecture is to develop strategies that can respond to some of these conditions through time; whatever we’re making can have vibrancy and relevance for many, many years to come.

Chris Reed
Founding Principal, StoSS

› Landscape architecture is the acute awareness of natural systems and their function within built and nonbuilt environments. It is *the systematic comprehension and integration of these systems* with cultural program, social overlays, and design that enables large-scale and small-scale landscapes to exist for multiple uses.

Gerdo Aquino, ASLA
Managing Principal, SWA Group

› Landscape architecture is the restoration of the community, or humanity, with nature. It is *the opportunity to reconnect us as human beings with what happens out there that is generally considered nonhuman*. We have that unique privilege of making spaces or places for people to reconnect with the outside world in a way that they might not normally do in our contemporary culture.

Jacob Blue, MS, RLA, ASLA
Landscape Architect/Ecological Designer, Applied Ecological Services, Inc.

› Landscape architecture is the creation of spaces that improve the ability for people to use and enjoy the land.

Kevin Campion, ASLA
Senior Associate, Graham Landscape Architecture

› Landscape architecture is the coming together of the arts, natural sciences, and culture. It is a *design of place that connects land and culture*. And, it has many applications, from small-scale design projects to more large-scale urban design and regional planning.

Robin Lee Gyorgyfalvy, ASLA
Director of Interpretive Services & Scenic Byway, USDA Forest Service: Deschutes National Forest

› Landscape architecture is the design of space outside the façade of any piece of architecture—from the plaza, the streetscapes, the roadways—*everything outside the building is what we can help create, at any scale* from a backyard garden all the way up to a brand-new city.

Todd Kohli, RLA, ASLA
Co-Managing Director, Senior Director, EDAW San Francisco

› One of the things that we say in our office is, “The sky is mine.” Landscape architecture isn’t just confined to dirt and bushes, *it is all the things that are under the sky*. Landscape architecture is the places that people occupy, whether they are private locations or public locations. But they’re often part of someone’s life experiences in moving through space, being outdoors.

Jennifer Guthrie, RLA, ASLA
Director, Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, Ltd.

› I started out as an architect. In school, during the design of a theoretical new town, I decided I was much more interested in the space between the buildings than the building itself. So *I define landscape architecture as dealing with the space between buildings*.

James van Sweden, FASLA
Founding Principal, Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, Inc.

› It’s very broad but it has a really specific core for me and that is resanctifying the earth. Landscape architecture deals with the earth in a stewardship manner. So, to me, it’s almost like taking the earth and bringing it back into a human context. It is the only profession that does this; *it is the only design profession that is a steward of the land*. We do other things that engineers and architects do, except they do not do it with this stewardship value.

Stephanie Landregan, ASLA
Chief of Landscape Architecture, Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority

› There are a lot of hats under the landscape architecture umbrella: landscape planning through to graphic design. Landscape architects create designs and produce *solutions that make memorable spaces*.

Eddie George, ASLA
Founding Principal, The Edge Group

› It’s an application of science to art *and it goes beyond problem solving to creating new opportunities and regenerating biological integrity*.

Nancy D. Rottle, RLA, ASLA
Associate Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Washington

› I define [landscape architecture] as *the planning, design, and management of the landscape, which is external space*. As landscape architects we need to look beyond what Peter Walker talks about as the iconic landscape, which is only 2 percent of the designed environment. We need to look at forest and agriculture and apply the principles we learn to basically the whole landscape, as it is, both natural and managed.

Gary Scott, FASLA
Director, West Des Moines Parks & Recreation Department

How do you define landscape architecture or a landscape architect? (Continued)

› I have a simple definition of landscape architecture, and that's the design and construction of the outside world with plants.

Meredith Upchurch, ASLA
Green Infrastructure Designer, Casey Trees Endowment Fund

› Landscape architects are like the glue between several professions that deal with the development of the land—the transformation of the lithosphere. *We are like renaissance people in that we need to be good at many things but not a master of any particular one.* That makes it more exciting because we deal with architects, engineers, land managers; we need to understand what the natural scientists are telling us because our medium involves all those disciplines. Landscape architecture is the consummate multidisciplinary profession in that it is related to managing the resources of the planet.

Jose Alminana, ASLA
Principal, Andropogon Associates, Ltd.

› Landscape architecture is one of the design disciplines, together with urban design, planning, and architecture. Landscape architecture primarily deals with the design of open space: from the residence to the community park to urban spaces and city form to the regional level of land uses and environmental planning. Luis Barragán, (a great Mexican architect and landscape architect) used to *define landscape architecture as architecture without roofs.*

Mario Schjetnan, FASLA
Founding Partner, Grupo de Diseno Urbano

› I would say it's the ability to manipulate our environment in order to *create places where people can connect to nature* through the aesthetics, functionality, or spirituality of the spaces created.

Emmanuel Thingue, RLA
Senior Landscape Architect, New York City Parks Department

› Landscape architecture is a profession that helps shape, by design and definition of activities, cities, and other places, and includes the highest respect for the natural and human-made elements that

are brought together in a mutually supportive manner. Landscape architects should help shape public policy to achieve these designs and activities.

Tom Liptan, ASLA
Sustainable Stormwater Management Program, Portland Bureau of Environmental Services

› The profession of landscape architecture falls alongside Ian McHarg's intent—to *place mankind's impact softly upon the earth.*

Karen Coffman, RLA
NPDES Coordinator, Highway Hydraulics Division, Maryland State Highway Administration

› Landscape architects encourage their clients to think about what it is they want—we provoke them to think deeply about that. We then help interpolate those ideas into a solution that matches not only the client's needs with the capabilities of the land, but *does so in a way that it is a positive for both the client and the earth.*

Douglas Hoerr, FASLA
Partner, Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects

› *We're a combination of art people and engineering people*—civil engineers and artists. To give a really good idea of what it takes to be a landscape architect, get a civil engineer and an artist together and get them married and have children, then the children would be a perfect fit to be landscape architects.

Scott S. Weinberg, FASLA
Associate Dean and Professor, School of Environmental Design, University of Georgia

› Landscape architecture is about helping people to have and build relationships with the landscape by creating spaces for outdoor use. It has also *broadened to become a sustainability and an earth-care profession*, at least in parts of the field where restoration for the other beings on the planet is really important.

John Koepke
Associate Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Minnesota

› Landscape architecture is the design and planning of outdoor spaces. Actually, *the definition of landscape architecture is less of a challenge than defining the term landscape*. If you look back at its Dutch origin, it was literally “making land” or “making territory.” In German and Scandinavian, it is sort of a synthesis of natural and cultural processes. Then there is the other meaning, which is basically a view, or what you can see with a single glance, which became more prominent with the English landscape movement. So the definition gets tricky

not in the term of what a landscape architect is, but in defining what landscape means.

Frederick R. Steiner, PhD, FASLA
Dean, School of Architecture, University of Texas

› *Landscape architecture is placemaking*, which I understand as the act of designing outdoor environs that hold significance to people because of societal, ecological, and/or spiritual implications.

Nathan Scott
Landscape Designer, Mahan Rykiel Associates

How would you characterize the difference between landscape architecture and allied professions, such as architecture, planning, or engineering?

› I’ve worked with many architects and engineers on teams. The biggest difference is a focus on the natural environment. There is an interface between the natural and built environment, which landscape architects are really adept at. All three professions look at the bigger picture, but landscape architects are more in tune to the natural processes, and also pay more attention to the social components and the people who use these places.

Robin Lee Gyorgyfalvy, ASLA
Director of Interpretive Services & Scenic Byways, USDA Forest Service: Deschutes National Forest

› The primary distinction is that landscape architecture always deals with process, and architecture doesn’t necessarily deal with process. We deal with systems that continue to grow and change, that are affected by everything from climate to tectonic movement. Architecture generally deals with defining something that is more discreet, more self-referencing.

Mark Johnson, FASLA
Founding Principal and the President, Civitas, Inc.

› Landscape architecture is, in some ways, more what people imagine planning to be—designing communities, and parks, and so on. The major difference is, until fairly recently, design has been marginalized within planning. Planning education has emphasized social sciences and law. Engineering education is very narrow. Engineers end up doing a lot of things that they really don’t have an academic background in, but they are very well prepared in an analytical tradition. A lot of landscape architects get involved in site engineering, and many get involved in city and regional planning.

Frederick R. Steiner, PhD, FASLA
Dean, School of Architecture, University of Texas

› The medium we work with is endless. It is the thing that connects all the engineering and buildings together. In addition to that, it is a living system. It is putting plant materials in the ground and being able to understand what they will do in the next 10 to 100-plus years. It grows. One of my mentors said, “When a building is built, it looks

How would you characterize the difference between landscape architecture and allied professions such as architecture, planning, or engineering? (Continued)

best when it's first built. When a landscape is built, it's at its worst, and it only gets better." I think that is definitely the difference between architecture, engineering, and landscape architecture. And one more thing: landscape is experiential. You touch it, you move through it; it touches all of your senses; it is seasonal; it is a memory maker.

Jennifer Guthrie, RLA, ASLA
Director, Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, Ltd.

› Architects—not all, but most—do not think as much in a contextual context. They tend to be more “object oriented.” They often do not come from as strong an environmental orientation. Architects are working hard, however, to catch up. The New Urbanist movement is one example of a reclaiming of community planning lost to landscape architects. Engineers, in my experience, do not aspire to lead a project as often, but rather want to concentrate on the details of their field. In many ways, landscape architects are leading civil engineering toward more environmentally sensitive design in such areas as stormwater management and roadway design.

Kurt Culbertson, FASLA
Chairman of the Board, Design Workshop

› Landscape architecture, architecture, and engineering are similar because they all require the ability to synthesize numerous ideas and follow the same procedures to achieve a project. The main difference is that landscape architecture deals with a final product—nature—that continually evolves. Although buildings age, it's a static change, which shouldn't be considered a true evolution. Nature is anything but static. The landscape architect must be able to design spaces in anticipation of the evolution of nature and its impact on the programming and functionality of the spaces created.

Emmanuel Thingue, RLA
Senior Landscape Architect, New York City Parks Department

› I started in architecture, so I have just as much of an interest in architecture and engineering as I do in landscape architecture. I think the understandings and the influences are very similar. The one difference is that we as landscape architects have control of the horizon, whereas architects have control of the vertical. Philosophically, that's one of the bigger differences, but the principles are the same in terms of inspiration and approach to how you solve design problems.

Thomas Oslund, FASLA, FAAR
Principal, oslund.and.assoc.

› We are the most collaborative of all our sister professions and are the ideal bridge between the professions—having the expertise and knowledge base to marry site, building, nature, and technology into an integrated and sustainable solution. The design professions have become too focused on solving only their issues. This is the single largest detriment to creating great places. We all need to be more collaborative and engaging. Our profession's rich history, from landscape preservation and urban design to parks and public open spaces, legitimize us and make us equal players. Ours is the one profession that deals with the quality of outdoor spaces and the ability to create meaningful places that enhance life. No other profession can claim this.

Frederick R. Bonci, RLA, ASLA
Founding Principal, LaQuatra Bonci Associates

› Architecture is to structural engineering as landscape architecture is to civil engineering.

Karen Coffman, RLA
NPDES Coordinator, Highway Hydraulics Division, Maryland State Highway Administration

› Part of the equation that doesn't figure into the other professions is time—growth, maturation, aging. In outdoor environments there are rooms of different sizes and scales that will be defined by a

landscape component, such as trees, hedges, and so on, but much of what you are trying to accomplish will be created in time, as these things grow and evolve. That is the most satisfying part, but potentially the most frustrating.

Jeffrey K. Carbo, FASLA
Principal, Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects and Site Planners

› The similarity is that we are all problem solvers; however, each of these allied professions tries to solve problems within the building industry in different ways. The difference between architecture and engineering is function versus image. I would go out on a limb and say engineering is more focused on making things functional, while architects and landscape architects are always challenged by making a place functional and making it into the image we've envisioned.

Kevin Campion, ASLA
Senior Associate, Graham Landscape Architecture

› Whereas our colleagues in architecture are focused on form, usually a building, and our engineering colleagues are more supportive of the way things function, we are the ones that bind all of those together. Because of landscape architecture's integrative approach, we look at ways to deal with, for example, stormwater and runoff, instead of just getting rid of the water, as engineers have done. We look at how we can use that end product. We carry the responsibility of making sure that the natural systems work, as opposed to just applying the built

systems. That's a difference between engineers and landscape architects.

Juanita D. Shearer-Swink, FASLA
Project Manager, Triangle Transit Authority

› Architecture, very simply, deals with habitable structures. Engineering structures are not necessarily habitable, and engineering represents a wide range of systems—environmental, structural, information. Landscape architecture is about issues pertaining to the management and inhabiting of the land.

Elizabeth Kennedy, RLA
Principal, EKLA Studio

› Landscape architects generally have a greater sensitivity to the overall picture. Landscape architects can easily slide into the profession of planning, and go back and forth between that larger picture and the specifics, much easier than the architect or the engineer can. A lot of times the engineer has been charged with such specific problem-solving functions that he or she kind of loses sight of the whole picture. A lot of architects that I run into are keyed in on satisfying the client's concerns about making sure that the building has certain features, but they are not so much concerned with what the impacts of the building might be on the overall site. So I think the landscape architect tends to have this general awareness of the larger picture.

Jacob Blue, MS, RLA, ASLA
Landscape Architect/Ecological Designer, Applied Ecological Services, Inc.

Background on the Profession



Terrace of One Hundred Fountains, Villa D'Este, Tivoli, Italy, circa 1550.

As long as humans have roamed the earth, they have been modifying their environment. The term *landscape architect* was coined in the mid-1800s; however, many contend that the design of the landscape—in other words, purposeful, meaningful manipulation of land—began occurring well before that. In ancient Egypt and Central America, for example, ceremonial events and processions occurred in landscapes specifically arranged and designed to accommodate these special activities, or to draw the users' attention to a particular place, such as a sacred tomb. There are also numerous examples over the centuries and around the world of walled or meditative gardens, ceremonial courts, villas, and hunting grounds that illustrate the determination of humans to creatively change their environment to meet their needs and desires.

In the early 1800s, most notably in England and Europe, a shift occurred in landscape design: No longer was it just for the well-to-do; it began to include expansive parks for the public. This

shift can be attributed to growing concerns about the deteriorating quality of living and working conditions among the public-at-large, many of which were brought on due to advances in the Industrial Revolution.⁴ These public parks were designed in the pastoral “English landscape garden” style, whose designers sought to create places of respite from the increasingly congested and polluted city environs. These public landscapes had a tremendous influence on a young Frederick Law Olmsted, who visited them when he traveled abroad. It was Olmsted who first used the term “landscape architect” after he and architect Calvert Vaux won a competition for what would become New York City’s world-renowned Central Park. To this day, many believe that Central Park is simply land that was never built upon; however every acre of it was, in fact, carefully designed. Thousands of trees were planted; lakes created in low areas; and the landform underwent major contouring. All this was designed with

the express purpose of providing outdoor social spaces, to accommodate both large gatherings as well as intimate settings—to create a sense “of enlarged freedom” in contrast to the cramped conditions of the city streets.⁵ The landscape architecture profession was thus founded on the idea that nature is an “ameliorative force,” which should be employed to guide design for the public’s welfare.⁶

The profession became official in 1899 with the founding of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the national organization that advocates for the profession. Shortly thereafter, in 1900, Harvard became the first school to offer formalized training toward a degree in landscape architecture.

During the early decades, those interested in this budding profession followed two main directions, both rooted in concerns about the problems of the nation’s growing cities and a belief that the built environment had the power to improve people’s lives.

One direction emerged following the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, specifically its Columbia Exposition. There visitors could view a full-scale example of desirable civic design—a stark contrast to the look of most U.S. cities at the time. Called the City Beautiful Movement, landscape architects taking this direction worked to improve living conditions in cities. These landscape architects were also engaged in town planning and community design. An offshoot of the City Beautiful Movement,



Aerial view of Central Park, New York City, in 1938. New York City Parks Photo Archive.

often called the Country Place Era, featured the design of large metropolitan park systems and college campuses, as well as estates for the wealthy. While having a more formal flair, this group took on a stewardship role toward the land because of mounting concerns about the widespread development of the countryside.⁷

The second important development, which coincided with the birth of the landscape architecture profession, was the creation, in 1872, of Yellowstone National Park, the first such park in the nation. Landscape architects were instrumental in helping to establish these early parks. As the number of national parks grew, the federal government formed the National Park Service (NPS), which eventually included its own Division of Landscape Architecture. One of the many responsibilities for NPS landscape architects was to design and maintain a master plan for each park.⁸

The Great Depression brought changes to the profession of landscape architecture. One aspect of President Roosevelt's New Deal, his national recovery program, was the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC employed thousands of young men in conservation efforts, such as reforesting logged areas. The program also called for the construction of park facilities, such as scenic byways, lodges, roads, trails, and picnic pavilions. Hundreds of state parks were established through the CCC, and many national parks were enhanced. This translated into jobs for many professionals, including landscape architects, who served as designers and supervisors of the work. Involving landscape architects ensured that the park designs would meet a high-level of craftsmanship, and that the work fostered respect for the natural environment.

In the last half of the twentieth century, following the Second World War, landscape architecture continued to grow and diversify. For example, with more people attending college, there was an increasing need to program and design college and university campuses. And, with changes in mobility due to the popularity of the automobile came the need to design suburban communities, out of which evolved a "new towns" movement. Many corporations likewise began relocating to the outskirts of cities, giving landscape ar-



The Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina. Photographer: Timothy P. Johnson.

chitects the opportunity to design expansive headquarters campuses. Shopping center design also became a growing area of professional practice, with the most innovative offering an inviting setting focused on the pedestrian. The interest in providing unique shopping experiences also took place in some cities as part of urban revitalization efforts. “Festival marketplaces,” for example, were developed to reinvigorate waterfronts and create new uses for old industrial areas.

With the advent of the first Earth Day in 1970, which followed closely on the heels of the publication of Ian McHarg’s seminal book *Design with Nature* (Garden City, NY: Natural History Press, 1969), landscape architecture professionals refocused on the importance of ecology in the design process. Then, during the last decades of the twentieth century, and taking cues from innovative work being done in Europe, the urban landscape once again came more sharply into view. The profession continued to expand throughout the closing decades of the twentieth century, to include landscape conservation, preservation, restoration, and the reclamation of despoiled land called brownfields.

Now, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, landscape architects are increasingly involved in projects around the globe. There is also a growing public recognition of the important role the landscape plays in human health and well-being, which brings us back to the origins of the profession and Olmsted’s ideas behind early park designs. Today, as principles of sustainability take hold, it seems that landscape architecture has never strayed too far from its roots. The sense of “nature in peril,” a strong theme in earlier eras, is once again informing the practice of landscape architecture.⁹

Note: To learn more about the history of landscape architecture, refer to the references listed in Appendix B.

What does it take to become a successful landscape architect?

The landscape architects who addressed this question cited a number of characteristics and skills they regard as essential to achieve success in the field. These include:

- Business sense
- Curiosity and lifelong learning
- Design and aesthetic sense
- Team player, collaborator, and negotiator
- Stewardship of the environment and understanding of natural resources
- Commitment to people and communication skills

- Perseverance, persistence, and patience
- Integrity
- Passion, dedication, and conviction
- Balance
- Ability to synthesize information and/or be a big-picture thinker

Business Sense

➤ A knowledge of the realities of business and politics. You need to understand what people are talking about in terms of politics and business.

Roy Kraynyk
Allegheny Land Trust

What does it take to become a successful landscape architect? (Continued)

› It takes a business sense, especially if you are going to be in private practice, because it ends up being a business.

Nancy D. Rottle, RLA, ASLA
University of Washington

› In a recent conversation with a colleague about her business, she was begrudging all of the work that it took to run the business. I told her she should get out of business or embrace that. If you're going to lead a firm in private practice, you either have to have the business skills, or find those skills and rely on those people to put them in the right position for your venture to succeed.

Patricia O'Donnell, FASLA, AICP
Heritage Landscapes

› You have to be a good salesperson. A lot of times we're selling our ideas, and it's hard to sell ideas. I've found that people don't really understand what's on paper, so what you're doing, in essence, is selling yourself. You're selling a belief in your skills.

Scott S. Weinberg, FASLA
University of Georgia

› You have to know how to make a successful business—very important. It is unusual to find a really a good designer who understands the business part as well.

James van Sweden, FASLA
Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, Inc.

› You have to have a good sense of business. Whether you work in the public sector or the private sector, you have to use money in a way that makes things work, not because you're spending it but because those are the best choices. So, you have to have a reasonable understanding of business.

Juanita D. Shearer-Swink, FASLA
Triangle Transit Authority

› I'll admit to being a landscape architect first and a businessman second. But I could not have had my own practice for over nine years now without some business skills.

Ruben L. Valenzuela, RLA
Terrano

Curiosity and Lifelong Learning

› Landscape architecture is a creative endeavor that requires an interest in lifelong learning and growth. Each project brings new challenges into our office and asks us to listen, invent, and learn with our clients and the sites they bring to the table.

Mikyung Kim
mikyung kim design

› A never-ending quest for knowledge.

Mike Faha, ASLA, LEED AP
GreenWorks, PC

› The most important thing is an almost insatiable curiosity, because to be a good landscape architect you have to know so much about so many different things. Landscape architects, more than other professions, are the ones that sit in the middle and have to understand what everyone else is doing, and how it all comes together.

Jim Sipes, ASLA
EDAW

› Always look at your current project as a stepping stone to the next one and always strive to do better and better on every job. Learn from every job and don't feel that you've ever mastered this profession, because it's impossible.

Frederick R. Bonci, RLA, ASLA
LaQuatra Bonci Associates

› Constantly being an observer, to be humble, and study how things come together in mutually beneficial ways. So I think it's a really, really careful observation of the world around you.

Kofi Boone, ASLA
North Carolina State University

› You have to be willing to continually build your skills, continually be aware of what's going on socially and culturally, and gain new knowledge about the natural environment, as well as of new technologies.

Nancy D. Rottle, RLA, ASLA
University of Washington

› Landscape architects have to get out of the box almost on every project, and then decide whether they should get back in the box. Many professions count on something that has been done before. I think if you are really a responsible landscape architect, you have to step out and say, “Okay, Liptan did it like this, but is that really the best way to do it? Or the code says I have to do it this way, but is that really the best?” You need to ask the questions.

Tom Liptan, ASLA
Portland Bureau of Environmental Services

› The ability to continue to learn is the most important thing—the ability to be a reflective practitioner so that you learn from your projects; you learn from your successes and failures.

Frederick R. Steiner, PhD, FASLA
University of Texas

Design and Aesthetic Sense

› A measure of success is the mark you've left on the landscape and the quality of built work: Are people enjoying what you have designed? Is the environment performing better and healthier after you've left than before you got there?

Kofi Boone, ASLA
North Carolina State University

› An important aspect of the profession is the way we as human beings form, shape, and interface with the evolving systems of the environment.

Mikyoung Kim
mikyoung kim design

› Obviously, I think they need good design skills and they need to know what those are.

Gary Scott, FASLA
West Des Moines Parks & Recreation Department

› To be successful in landscape architecture you have to have the design, talent, and aesthetic sense.

James van Sweden, FASLA
Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, Inc.

› It is good for a landscape architect to have a degree of understanding about the multisensory qualities of space. It's also important to have good three-dimensional perception and a sense of perception through movement—we often talk about a sequence and choreography and the intended effects.

Patricia O'Donnell, FASLA, AICP
Principal, Heritage Landscapes

Team Player, Collaborator, and Negotiator

› Successful landscape architects are team oriented; working with other design disciplines throughout the project.

Joanne Cody, ASLA
National Park Service

› To be really successful we need to concentrate on understanding allied professions very well—visual arts, performing arts, and architecture, in particular. I think we really need to learn how to collaborate.

Frederick R. Bonci, RLA, ASLA
LaQuatra Bonci Associates

› A landscape architect who is a team player stands a better chance of producing relevant, successful projects.

Cindy Tyler
Terra Design Studios

› Interpersonal skills are critical. You have to be able to negotiate in a way that is diplomatic and to the point where you are not sacrificing your values and your integrity. You need to have the personal skills to be able to compromise and not offend people, and stand up for what you think is the right thing from a professional perspective and from a design perspective.

Roy Kraynyk
Allegheny Land Trust

What does it take to become a successful landscape architect? (Continued)

› I think they need good facilitation skills, because a successful landscape architect often brings together people from multiple disciplines. He or she needs to be able to manage those people and facilitate their input and synthesize it into a solution.

Gary Scott, FASLA
West Des Moines Parks & Recreation Department

› A successful landscape architect needs to be a collaborator. That is a really important factor—a collaborator with a sense of art, science, technology, and ecology or nature.

Tom Liptan, ASLA
Portland Bureau of Environmental Services

Stewardship of the Environment and Understanding of Natural Resources

› See the adjacencies and complexities of the earth: To become a successful landscape architect, you have to realize that connectivity.

Stephanie Landregan, ASLA
Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority

› You have to have a good understanding of natural systems. You need to be aware that the consequences of what you see on the land is the result of years of evolution; that doesn't mean you have to be an expert in geology or an expert on soil, but you need to know enough to ask questions and find out where to get those answers.

Jose Alminana, ASLA
Andropogon Associates, Ltd.

› To be a landscape architect one has to act as steward, engage and change the planet in a manner that shifts with each new environment and context that we work in.

Mikyoung Kim
mikyoung kim design

› Passion for nature.

Mike Faha, ASLA, LEED AP
GreenWorks, PC

Commitment to People and Communication Skills

› The most important thing is to be a really good listener, because what people say and what they mean are two different things. You have to listen to what they are really saying, not what their words are, and understand their concerns, their objectives, and the constraints being placed on them. If you can listen, you can go forward a lot faster because you are able to respond to the real issues and not the perceived issues.

Jacob Blue, MS, RLA, ASLA
Applied Ecological Services, Inc.

› A love of people, because a very important thing that we do is help others realize their visions for the places they want to be. The only way that we can understand their vision is to get to know them and feel very comfortable with them like you would a good friend.

Edward L. Blake, Jr.
The Landscape Studio

› Passion for people.

Mike Faha, ASLA, LEED AP
GreenWorks, PC

› It takes clarity of thought and speech, to be able to think through a story that makes sense and that is explainable to others—whether they are on your immediate team or in other disciplines working with you to develop an idea—and of course to the client itself.

Jennifer Guthrie, RLA, ASLA
Gustafson Guthrie Nichol, Ltd.

› To draw the best ideas from our team, we must be able to communicate our ideas and listen to theirs.

Cindy Tyler
Terra Design Studios

› The ability to promote your ideas and your work.

Frederick R. Steiner, PhD, FASLA
University of Texas

› The ability to communicate verbally and in writing, and using visual language skills, I think has made many landscape architects really quite successful.

John Koepke
University of Minnesota

› An ability to communicate with clients through good listening skills, quick sketches, and understandable dialogue.

Joanne Cody, ASLA
National Park Service

› In working with clients and other professionals, being a good listener and a good communicator (graphic, verbal, and written) are important attributes.

Douglas C. Smith, ASLA
EDSA

Perseverance, Persistence, and Patience

› It is time and patience and insight and intuition.

Kofi Boone, ASLA
North Carolina State University

› Perseverance.

Gerdo Aquino, ASLA
SWA Group

› It takes that ability to kind of move across barriers. I always talk about thinking like water. When you come to a barrier, you can either go over it, around it, under or through it. You have to be able to sort of back up and figure out what the next tact should be in order to address the problem or issue, or whatever it happens to be, successfully.

John Koepke
University of Minnesota

› To become a successful landscape architect, it takes a lot of patience.

Dawn Kroh, RLA
Green 3, LLC

› A landscape architect needs a lot of perseverance.

Gary Scott, FASLA
West Des Moines Parks & Recreation Department

› Persistence, persistence, persistence. In our work, it often takes so long to be realized.

Edward L. Blake, Jr.
The Landscape Studio

› You have to have a lot of patience to be a landscape architect, especially when you're in school. You're learning all the steps to be a landscape architect but you really don't get to do it until you get an internship and see something that you've designed being built, or when you get out and see your first project being built.

Scott S. Weinberg, FASLA
University of Georgia

Integrity

› You need to develop and grow a reputation as someone who has integrity and is trustworthy and fulfills his or her promises.

Roy Kraynyk
Allegheny Land Trust

› You have to be willing to hold on to your core values while adapting to the changing world that surrounds you.

Juanita D. Shearer-Swink, FASLA
Triangle Transit Authority

› I say diligence, because I believe you really feel principled about what it is you're doing.

Jeffrey K. Carbo, FASLA
Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects and Site Planners

› Practicing landscape architecture with passion, while being balanced, automatically makes one successful. The balance that I refer to is the ability to prioritize one's values in order to achieve a greater good. Compromise is not a bad thing, if the alternative will deny the community of a much-needed amenity. Having said that, there are times when one has to take a stand. Use your judgment, because only you can truly evaluate if you're successful; not others.

Emmanuel Thingue, RLA
New York City Parks Department

What does it take to become a successful landscape architect? (Continued)

Passion, Dedication, and Conviction

› You have to find what your passion is. We're lucky enough to do that and get paid for it. We're discriminating with the kind of work that we take so that we're not swimming upstream trying to convince somebody who is not interested in what we're about to do. The hardest thing is trying to define what you're about and what your practice wants to be about. If you make that decision and define that and stick to it and not try to change it with every new fad that comes through, you will be successful. Be genuine to yourself.

Thomas Oslund, FASLA, FAAR
oslund.and.assoc.

› Energy, enthusiasm, and initiative are what's necessary.

Chris Reed
StoSS

› If you make landscape architecture part of your soul, if you take on responsibility, if you promote the profession, and you want to push it further—if you have that passion, you will be successful.

Todd Kohli, RLA, ASLA
EDAW San Francisco

› Success for any professional is achieved through finding your passion for what you do, and then feeding that passion.

Cindy Tyler
Terra Design Studios

› It is a passion for what you focus on, and what I mean by that is there are so many different kinds of practices. I know landscape architects who do people's gardens; they're almost horticulturalists, they know so much about plants; but that is not me. My passion is as much for research as it is for design, and my practice reflects that, so it is really identifying your niche within both the discipline and the profession.

Julia Czerniak
CLEAR

› To be truly successful you have to be passionate; to view it as a calling rather than a profession. It requires an enormous amount of hard work, discipline, and commitment. To assume that success can come from anything else would be misguided.

Kurt Culbertson, FASLA
Design Workshop

› It takes passion for what you do, probably above all else. It takes tenacity; you have to be competitive and you have to want to win.

Dawn Kroh, RLA
Green 3, LLC

› You really need to be passionate about what you are doing, and in order to be passionate, you better really love it so it doesn't feel like work.

Jeffrey K. Carbo, FASLA
Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects and Site Planners

Balance

› There are probably two pathways to being successful. One is being exceptionally talented and the other is being exceptionally driven. Probably most people who would be regarded as successful have some measure of both. Each of those people finds a way to balance the relationship between their talent and their drive to pursue what they are particularly good at.

Mark Johnson, FASLA
Civitas, Inc.

› There are two answers, and it all comes under the umbrella of balance. First is balancing a number of skills, aptitudes, and knowledge sets that you need to be a good landscape architect—horticulture, geology, art history, and so on. Then you also have to balance the practical versus the creative. You need to have a business hat and a creative hat and you need to know when to put each one on, and that's not always easy.

Kevin Campion, ASLA
Graham Landscape Architecture

› Great landscape architects are good at engaging both sides of the brain—they are really good at this translation of science into an art. People who are able to continually make that translation are the people who end up being really great.

Nancy D. Rottle, RLA, ASLA
University of Washington

› They have to have what I would call a pragmatic sense of how things go together in the environment. You can't just have an idea—how does it actually get built, how does it come together, and how does it get created?

Gary Scott, FASLA
West Des Moines Parks & Recreation Department

Ability to Synthesize and/or Be a Big-Picture Thinker

› A successful landscape architect is someone who is like a hub and provides a connection to all the moving parts. A successful landscape architect can, as a generalist, take a lot of different opinions and actually forge them into something better: a better design, a better place, a better way for people to interact with the land. It's someone who not only pays attention to the details and the process, but can see the bigger picture and has a vision for how it all fits together and continues.

Robin Lee Gyorgyfalvy, ASLA
USDA Forest Service: Deschutes National Forest

› Systems thinking: to translate or to apply knowledge or findings to create solutions. To be able to synthesize, integrate, and apply information for people and places to solve problems.

Barbara Deutsch, ASLA, ISA
BioRegional North America

› The ability to lead clients toward designs that exceed their vision, goals, and expectations.

Ignacio Bunster-Ossa, ASLA, LEED AP
Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC

› Vision.

Gerdo Aquino, ASLA
SWA Group

› At some point in the future the success of a landscape architect won't necessarily be building landscape architecture or physical stuff, but it will be the thinking about how the world works and how to really find the best of all opportunities for all of us to share this place; that will be the measure of success.

Kofi Boone, ASLA
North Carolina State University

› The ability to bring all of that information in, organize it, synthesize and figure out what to do with it—that's the essence of what we do.

Jim Sipes, ASLA
EDAW, Atlanta