

NAT

at home



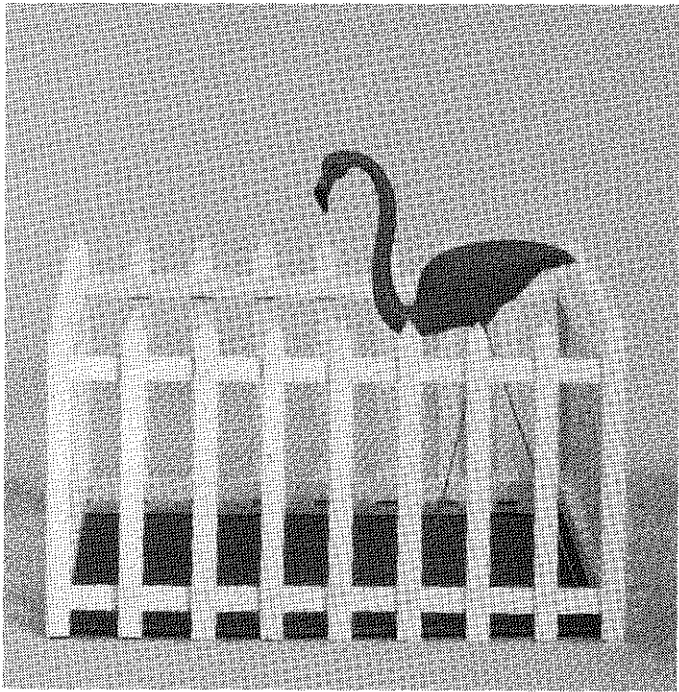
We

don't just talk and dream about our relations with the non-human world. We also actively explore them in the real places of our streets, gardens, and working landscapes. By crossing to the sunny side of the road on a winter's day, or by arranging some flowers in a vase, we both respond to and address the animals and plants, rocks and water and climate that surround us. Those working landscapes – the ordinary places of human production and settlement – are enormously complex places. Their history is in part a history of engineering – of how we build bridges, contain water, prune trees, and lay sidewalks. But it is also an aesthetic history. It is about shaping, defining, and making the world beautiful in a way that makes sense to us in the time and place that we live.

Alexander Wilson

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A Social Ecology of Postwar Landscape Design

Throughout the 20th century, landscape design ("landscaping," as opposed to landscape) has expanded into new spheres. Regional planning agencies have built new towns and reorganized entire watersheds, all of which require landscaping. In addition to traditional sites such as public parks and private estates, landscaping is now done alongside freeways and in industrial parks. We see landscaping at airports and outside restaurants and shopping centres, as well as inside buildings. Some of these sites either didn't exist before or weren't typically planted and tended by humans.

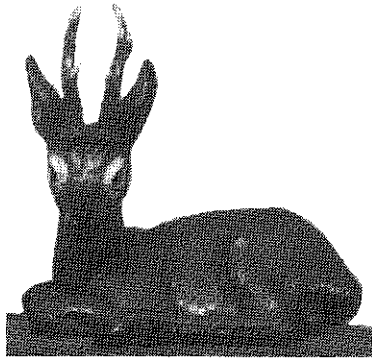
There have also been changes in the way people have come to make their domestic spaces fit their ideas of – or felt needs for – nature. In the 20th century, millions of North Americans left rural communities and settled in cities and suburbs, disrupting their traditional physical relationship with the non-human world. Yet in the construction of suburban yards, victory gardens, and, later, shopping malls, community parks, and "wild gardens," people have addressed and replicated nature in other ways, developing new aesthetics in the process.

Changes in North American settlement patterns have been slow and uneven, and they have had complex social and geographical repercussions. City and country can no longer be thought of as the two poles of human settlement on the land. As agriculture was industrialized and the economy shifted its centre to the city over the course of the last century, many people abandoned rural areas, leaving whole regions of the continent both socially and economically impoverished. By the 1960s, when this trend peaked, more than two-thirds of North Americans lived within the rough boundaries of urban agglomerations. But those boundaries have gradually become indistinct. In the postwar years, regional planners directed most population growth to the new geography of the suburb, which took over rural lands on the margins of cities. By 1970 almost 40 percent of US citizens lived in the suburbs, which became, ideologically at least, the dominant land form on the continent.

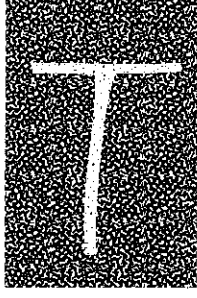
Yet the next 20 years brought further changes. Many people moved back to rural areas, or to more intact examples of the small towns that were engulfed by the rapidly expanding cities of the postwar years. In the 1960s the back-to-the-land movement (only one among many in

North American history) was merely one symptom of a much more systematic development that brought about an increasing interaction of urban and rural economies. Rural areas became very different places than they were two decades earlier. Agriculture, for its part, became closely (and perhaps fatally) linked with urban money markets. In legitimated scenic areas, the leisure industry – a sector that epitomizes many of these changes – propelled itself into existence through the mass marketing of raw land, recreational communities, resort condominiums, and second homes.

As the nature of the capitalist economy shifted towards information and commodity production, production was decentralized. Now, many industrial activities no longer rely on concentrated workforces or physical proximity to resources or markets. Data processing centres and small more specialized industries have parachuted themselves into forests and fields well away from metropolitan areas, giving rise to new kinds of exurban settlements that some commentators have called "technoburbs." All of these developments have intensified the reinhabitation of rural space.



These complex displacements and re-settlements – and North American society in particular thinks of itself as mobile – have contributed to a jumble of landscape design styles. Predominant among those styles is the aesthetic tradition which I broadly call pastoralism. Since the 1970s this tradition has collided with pronounced regional and ecological tensions that leave the future of landscaping (and landscape) wide open.



The Planting of the Suburb

The postwar suburb has had an enormous influence on modern landscaping practice and its aesthetic continues to influence human geographies the world over. Some of its forms – from mobile-home architecture to street layout to the choice of trees planted – have since followed urban emigrants “back” out to rural areas.

Mobility is the key to understanding contemporary landscape design, because in the last 40 years planners and builders have organized most land development around the automobile. This has had enormous effects on how most of us see the landscape. It has also changed the look and feel of the land itself. The car has encouraged – indeed, insisted on – large-scale development: houses on quarter-acre lots, giant boulevards and expressways that don't welcome bicycles or pedestrians, huge stores or plazas surrounded by massive parking lots.

The mass building techniques practised in North America both require and promote uniformity. To build on land, property owners first have to clear and level it. Everything must go. Once they put up the structures they replant the land. Biological life is allowed to reassert itself, but it is always a life that corresponds to prevailing ideas about nature. Obviously, building contractors cannot restore the land to its former appearance – an impossible task, because they've had the topsoil removed and heavy machinery has compacted the remnant subsoils. But it is also ideologically impossible. A suburban housing development cannot pretend to look like the farm, or marsh, or forest it has replaced (and often been named after), for that would not correspond to popular ideas of progress and modernity, ideas based more on erasing a sense of locale than on working with it. By and large, contemporary design and materials strive

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towards universality. Regional character, as Michael Hough points out in his book *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape*, is now a matter of choice rather than necessity. When buildings were made of local stone, wood, and clay, they had an organic relationship to the soils and plants of the region.

We can get a direct sense of these changes by considering what has been planted in the suburban landscape. First, the plantings have had to be species able to survive the harsh conditions of most North American suburbs: aridity, soil compaction, salt spray from roads, and increasingly toxic air and water. Where I live, the plants that “naturally” grow in such places are pioneer species like dandelion, sumach, tree of heaven, and brambles of various kinds – plants that, ironically, are usually considered weeds. Yet instead of recognizing the beneficial functions of these opportunistic species, university horticulture departments spent much of the 1950s and 1960s breeding

properly decorous plant varieties and hybrids able to tolerate the new urban conditions. The plants had to be fast growing, adaptable to propagation in containers, and, perhaps above all, showy. By definition these requirements preclude most native North American species – for the showy very often means the exotic. Unfortunately, with so much effort put into breeding the top of the plant for appearances' sake, the resultant hybrid invariably has a shallow, weak root system, a bare base, and needs frequent pruning, fertilizing, and doses of pesticides during its short life.

Evergreens became another common feature of the suburban aesthetic. The junipers, spruces, yews, and broadleaf evergreens planted throughout the temperate regions of the continent constantly say “green” and thus evoke nature over and again. The implication is that nature is absent in the leafless winter months (or perhaps all too present), because by some oversight she does not produce green at that time of year. So evergreens are massed around the house as a corrective.

But what are the economic strategies of the culture in remaking the domestic landscape? Certainly some already existing ideas were carried over to the postwar suburbs. Many people planted fruit trees and vegetable gardens when they moved to the suburbs, and indeed, some even brought their pigs and chickens – at least until municipalities passed anti-husbandry legislation in the name of sanitation. Yet the backyard could not serve as a displaced farmyard. Too much had intervened. The suburb quickly became locked into a consumer economy in which agriculture, energy, transportation, and information were one consolidated industry. Sanitation and packaging technologies further mediated relations with the environment. So while suburban hedges and fences could recall the now ancient enclosures of farm and range, for example, they also promoted reinvigorated ideologies of private property and the nuclear family.

Most of the North American suburb was built quickly in the years following the Second World War. One result of such an immense undertaking was a standardization of landscape styles. Several extant styles were drawn upon to create an aesthetic that everywhere is synonymous with modernity and that until very recently dominated landscaping practice. In its caricatured form, the most prominent feature of the modern suburban aesthetic is the lawn, in which three or four species of exotic grasses are grown together as a monoculture. Native grasses and broadleaf

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plants are eradicated from the lawn with herbicides, and the whole is kept neatly cropped to further discourage "invasion" by other species, a natural component of plant succession. Massive doses of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, and water are necessary to keep the turf green.

into rounded or rectangular shapes. The driveway and garage otherwise dominate the front of the lot. A hard-surfaced area for outdoor cooking and eating is off to the rear or side of the house and a bed for vegetables or flowers is usually at the far side of the backyard. The house's posi-

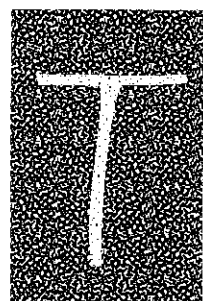
Andrew Jackson Downing, Frederick Law Olmsted, and others. Following this style, workers thinned forests and planted meadows with scattered groups of trees to create a landscape of woodland edges and openings. Sheep kept the meadows shorn, and the enclosures that had been built of



In a perverse example of this trend, the lawn industry removed dutch clover from grass-seed mixes because the clover was incompatible with 2,4-d, a common broadleaf herbicide. Besides being drought-tolerant, clover can retrieve nitrogen from the air, making supplementary fertilizers unnecessary. The aesthetic value of the lawn is thus directly proportional to the simplicity of its ecosystem, and the magnitude of inputs. The "by-products" of this regime are now familiar: given the intensive inputs of water and fossil fuels, there's a related output of toxins that leach into the water table.

Typically, the suburban lawn is sparsely planted with shade trees and occasionally a small ornamental tree bred to perform for its spectators: it either flowers or is variegated or somehow contorted or stunted. These species are planted to lend interest to an otherwise static composition. The house is rung with what are called foundation plantings, very often evergreen shrubs planted symmetrically or alternated with variegated or broad-leaved shrubs. These are usually clipped

tioning on the lot has little to do with the movement of the sun or any other features of the place. The determinants of the design are more often the quantifiable ones: number of cars per family (the industry standard is 2.5 cars, plus recreational vehicles and lawnmowers), allowable lot coverage, and maximum return on investment. Such is the suburban garden as it has been planted in countless thousands of communities up, down, and across the continent.



The Persistence of Pastoralism

The lawns and trees that are so important to the postwar suburban landscape derive from the English landscape park of the 18th century. Lance- lot ("Capability") Brown and others designed country estates in a pastoral style that was revived in the United States in the 19th century through the "rural cemetery" movement and later popularized by

hedging and walls were replaced by hedges, sunken fences that allowed garden to recede unbroken into countryside. Some landscape gardeners even had vistas culminating in ruins – usually manufactured – of medieval abbeys or Greek temples, in this way placing a human presence in the middle ground, just as the landscape approached the wildness of the forest. These landscapes were above all idealized versions of the pastoral, and their own antecedents stretch back to the classicist painting prominent in the salons of the European continent.

But what interests me here, looking back from the very different situation of the North American postwar suburb, is how this pastoral tradition continues to have meaning today. Versions of the English park persist right through the Romantic, Victorian, and Modernist landscape work of the 19th and 20th centuries, and an impoverished version of it – lawn-and-trees – is still the mainstay of contemporary municipal park work.

Pastoralism has a long history in Western culture. It promotes a view of nature as a kindly mother, a refuge from the

demands of urban life. The Earth, in this view, is a garden of Eden, generous and fertile. Mother Earth provides us with food, rest, diversion, and solace. Nature in this tradition — and it is an ancient tradition, predating both science and Christianity — is an analogue of the female

against mining. Yet as Mary Daly, Marilyn French, and other feminist historians have documented all too well, the identification of women with nature and men with culture was used to justify the emergent power of men and their machines over the land and its history. It was far easier to

most sacred abodes. The persistence of the English park has to do, I think, with the impulse to create and inhabit edges, the diverse and dynamic places that connect, that bind the planet together. The woodland edge is the principal model in the design of most parkway landscaping



body. The pastoral tradition is the obverse of another Western tradition — equally primal — which understands nature as chaos and death.

Pastoralist ideas flourished during the European conquest and settlement of North America. Colonial explorers and promoters lavishly described the Atlantic seaboard — and later, the upper St. Lawrence and the Transappalachia — as bountiful gardens, as virgin lands to be tamed and cultivated. The historical record is ambiguous on this point, however. The accounts of many Europeans suggest that North America, a continent so unlike their own, troubled and lured them in ways their dominant spiritual traditions hadn't prepared them for. Judeo-Christian civilization emerged in the inhospitable semi-arid zones of West Asia. But when that civilization encountered the Americas, whose indigenous peoples lived mutually with nature, the rush to destroy this land and its inhabitants was by no means universal. As the 1990 movie *Dances with Wolves* documented, some white people — more than our historians teach us — resisted the impending genocide. Some of them even “went native” — an inconceivable act that was interpreted by the priests and administrators of the day as a kidnapping and punished with incarceration or death.

By and large, the Western pastoral tradition has been compatible with the idea of nature as a resource to be manipulated by human enterprise. Very often in this tradition, the image of nature presented is that of a passive mother and bride to an active male spectator. The image of the Earth as a benevolent female is an ancient anthropomorphic gesture, and one that in pre-modern societies had a normative function. Before the rise of a mechanistic world-view, for example, proscriptions against rape could be used to argue

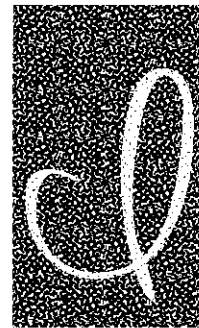
turn pastoralism on its head than to incorporate more marginal traditions that understood nature as a unity of male and female principles.

In any event, it is easy enough to see why pastoral traditions in landscape design have persisted in an urban industrial society. While Romantic landscaping practice tried to reintegrate the human and non-human worlds, the dynamo of modernity required a passive image of nature for the dual purposes of escape and exploitation. In our own day, this trajectory has perhaps run its course. American art critic Lucy Lippard argues that the identification of the Earth with a woman's body need not only reinforce the inferior and submissive role relegated to women in male-dominated societies like our own. It can also be an abiding source of female strength. Moreover, there is a growing feeling in North Atlantic culture that the Earth will no longer yield to human (or male) domination; that unless we reinvent pre-modern conceptions of nature, the present “environmental crisis” may be the last.

But the persistence of pastoral traditions in landscape design can't be explained only in terms of domination. The English landscape park and its North American reinterpretation are landscapes of woodland edges, a place where several plant and animal communities overlap. In temperate climates, the woodland edge — where forest and meadow meet — is the most complex and textured ecosystem of all. There the number of species is greatest, the degree of cooperation and symbiosis the most advanced. The edge is the richest feeding ground for all animals, including humans who rely on hunting and gathering. It is one of our oldest and

in the eastern part of this continent, for example.

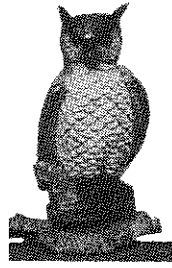
In the mass-produced bungalow and ranch houses of the 1950s and 1960s, much of this impulse was brought under control or stylized beyond recognition. There, edges are not so much about diversity and interrelationship as they are about separateness. In the suburban landscape the edge is typically the property line, an assertion of conformity to the ideology of the home as private domain.



Men and Women in the Suburban Garden

In postwar North America, patterns of management and domination suffused popular culture. The pastoral lawn, for example, not only predominates in suburban frontyards, but also stretches across golf courses, corporate headquarters, farmyards, school grounds, university campuses, sod farms, and highway verges. For such enormous expanses of this continent to be brought under the exacting regime of turf management, an entire technological infrastructure had to be in place. There had to be abundant sources of petroleum and electricity to provide for an increasingly mechanized horticulture. Power mowers, clippers and edgers, weed whips, leaf blowers, sod cutters, fertilizer spreaders, and sprayers brought nature under control. Hedges and shrubbery were closely clipped. Each housing

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lot needed its own driveway (a large one, to accommodate the 2.5 cars). In colder climates this often necessitated the purchase of a snow plough or blower. In the 1950s, the new petrochemical industry introduced chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides as virtual miracle products that would liquidate unwanted weeds, insects, or fungi. Popular horticultural literature reduced the soil – the very source of the ancient metaphor of the life-giving mother – to a lifeless, neutral medium that did little more than convey water-soluble fertilizers and help plants stand up. As a site of mediation between humankind and nature, the postwar garden had become technologized.

While contemporary garden chores may still be a source of pleasure, the chores themselves have changed. Many people talk fondly today about climbing onto a tractor mower and cutting an immense lawn – not unlike the way a combine harvests a field of grain. This is an activity that ends up integrating the human body into a mechanistic view of nature. The idea of the body as machine has been around since the Enlightenment and the beginnings of industrial capitalism; gardening had also begun to be mechanized by the early 19th century. But in postwar North American culture, a great many people became gardeners for the first time, for street trees and parks were no longer the only horticultural presence in the city. The space that surrounded the suburban tract home was of a new kind, however. It was neither the kitchen garden and barnyard familiar to women nor the rural field or urban street that was most often the domain of men.

As gardening became both less exacting and more technologized – in other words, as it came to be synonymous with turf management – it was increasingly an enterprise carried out by men. Previously, for men technics had always been confined to the workplace. The home, and the symbolic clearing in which it stood, had been thought of as a refuge from the world of alienated labour. But changes in the economy brought changes in the relationship between work and home. In some ways the workplace has been demasculinized as industry has shifted away from primary production towards what are called “services.” As consumption, rather than production, came to dominate Western economies in the second half of the 20th century, men often took up more exacting “hobbies” to compensate for the loss of physical labour. Care of the garden was one such hobby.

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That's not to say that women stopped gardening, any more than they stopped cooking when men began to preside over the backyard barbecue. But women's presence in the garden tended to become associated even more with everything that could be generalized as “flowers”: perennial borders, herb gardens, arbours and trellises, window boxes, bedding plants, and greenhouses. The landscape profession often dismisses this horticultural work (and horticulture is not a strong tradition in North America) as being too fussy or labour-intensive, when it is perhaps better thought of as evidence of a keen awareness of and interest in the other communities of the biophysical world. For women, the domestic spheres of food and sanitation had also gradually

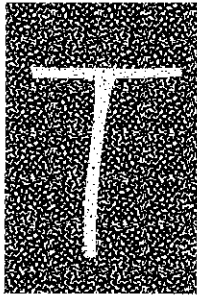
become mechanized; flower beds remained one of the few household locations not mediated by technology. Men wielded a lawnmower over the grass; women dug into the soil with a trowel.

The suburb was a new form of human settlement on the land, a new way of living. Often far from friends and kin, and “independent” of neighbours (as the suburb was supposed to be independent of city and country), the nuclear family of the 1950s clung to newly revived ideologies of togetherness. Yet the suburban form itself accentuated the feeling of absence at the centre of middle-class family life. The new houses replaced fireplace and kerosene stove with central heating, thus dissipating social experience throughout the home. A fridge full of “raidables” and supper-hour TV programs broke down the pattern of meal-times. Separate bedrooms for all or most of the children and the evolution of men's spaces like the workshop and the “yard” further encouraged rigid gender distinctions. At the same time, communal experiences within the family often became more a matter of choice than necessity. The growing independence that children felt from their parents and siblings opened up the possibility for an affective life outside the confines of the nuclear family for both men and women. These changes were as subtle as they were contradictory; many of their social implications are still not entirely clear.

The suburb stands at the centre of everything we recognize as “fifties culture.” Beneath its placid aesthetic appearance, its austere modernism, we can now glimpse the tensions of a life that for many had no precedent. Until these tensions were brought to the surface in the 1960s, the suburb was a frontier. There were no models for a family newly disrupted by commodity culture, any more than there were for garden design in a place that had never existed before. It was as if nature and our experience of it were in suspension. Things were unfamiliar in the suburb, and it's no surprise that people who could afford it fled whenever they could. Weekends and summer holidays were often spent not in the ersatz idylls of Don Mills, Levittown, or Walnut Creek, but in what was imagined to be nature itself: newly created parks and lakes and recreation areas. Here, at last, out the car window or just beyond the campsite or cottage, was an experience of nature that was somehow familiar. In fact it seems that this holiday place – and not the suburb – was nature.

But the idea of nature that was invented by postwar suburban landscaping was not a unitary one. The distinction I've made between "lawn" and "flowers" – and the parallels with gender roles – were and continue to be refuted by many people's gardening habits. Organic gardening, for example, is a very old practice that allowed many people to resist the technological incursions of the 1950s. And technology was resisted in more obvious ways, too. The mass movement against the bomb was perhaps the earliest expression on this continent of modern environmentalism.

Outside of the suburbs, in the older settled areas of the cities themselves, other forms of resistance gathered strength. The social movements whose beginnings we casually ascribe to the "sixties" – civil and human rights, feminism, peace, free speech, sexual liberation, as well as environmentalism – were in part struggles over the nature and use of urban land. Urban activism developed its own very different ideas about landscape design – ideas that are now more influential than ever.



The Ecological Imperative

The suburban landscaping of the immediate postwar years is still the spatially predominant model, but it has come to mean something different today. As modernity itself is being questioned right across the culture, we experience its expressions with much more ambivalence. Consider these examples: the "no-maintenance" garden of coloured gravel that was once popular in Florida and the US Southwest is on the wane. Its matrix was the Japanese-Californian work of the early 1960s, and when well done it was striking. But it turned out that no-maintenance meant that you got rid of weeds with regular doses of 2,4-d or a blast with a blow torch or flame thrower. It's unlikely that in a culture that has been through Vietnam and the Love Canal such a regime can have quite the cachet it once did. Likewise with "growth inhibitors" that you spray on hedges so they don't need to be clipped. These are landscaping strategies that deny change and the presence of life.

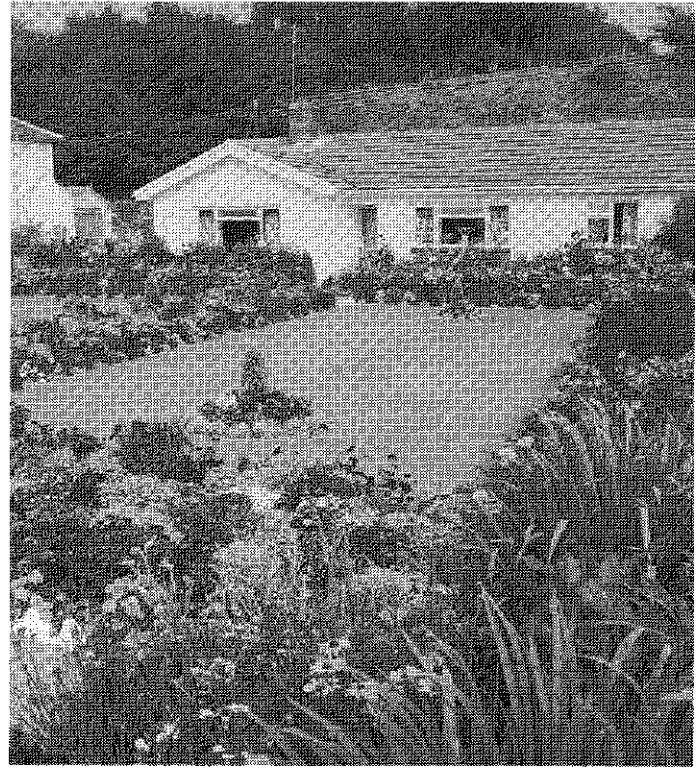
In recent years, ecological science has begun to change the way North Americans think about and work their gardens. Ideas of ecosystem and habitat have become new models for landscape work. There is new interest in native plants and wildflower gardens, in biological pest control and organic foods, as well as in planting for wildlife. These are all symptoms of a new understanding of urban land as animated, dynamic, and diverse.

These issues are now often forced into the open. Many North American cities mandate water conservation, for example. The city of Santa Barbara, California,

forbids people to water their lawns with municipal water. Marin County, California, pays residents to remove their lawns and replace them with drought-tolerant plants. In many parts of the western United States, new land development is contingent on no net increase in water

attempted to introduce natural science to the planning process.

McHarg taught in the landscape architecture program at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1970s and 1980s. His lectures ranged across ethics and aesthetics, lurching from the advent of agricul-



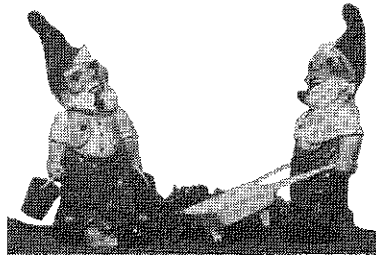
use, forcing communities to investigate composting toilets, the reuse of grey water (non-sewage waste water), and what is now called "xeriscaping," water-conserving planting schemes. Sometimes these schemes mean drawing strictly from the region: cactus and rock landscapes in Arizona, for example. But they can also mean working with composites of native plants and plants from similar bioregions elsewhere. In southern California this means rejecting the tropical and subtropical plant species that have been so long associated with Los Angeles and drawing instead from the chaparral and dry woodland plant communities of the Mediterranean regions of the world: southern France, central Chile, South Africa, Australia, and of course southern California itself. All of this work gives the places we live a sense of regional integrity.

The role of ecology in landscape aesthetics is not new. In the 1920s and 1930s the new discipline of regional planning dedicated itself to the design of *whole* landscapes. Its mission is best exemplified by the work of Lewis Mumford and, later, some of the public agencies of the New Deal years. Ian McHarg, a Scottish immigrant to the United States, made the most celebrated professional intervention in 1969, with the publication of *Design With Nature*. This ambitious book, which is everywhere cited but seldom taken seriously within the land-design professions,

culture to Christianity, science, and space technology – all with an aim to understanding better the relations between human settlement patterns and natural systems. The discussions anticipated many of the philosophical debates in ecology today.

McHarg's work, which has given rise to a small but influential school of ecological designers and consultants, is both descriptive and prescriptive. While the philosophical discussion in *Design With Nature* is broad and at times sloppy, the examples are instructive. For McHarg, those examples were close to home: the landforms of the Atlantic seaboard, and particularly the city of Philadelphia and its environs. McHarg provides detailed discussions of local geology, plant communities, hydrology, dune formation, soils, and topography. He places maps of these systems over one another to indicate the importance of detailed site analysis well before development.

From there his discussion moves out into the interior river valleys of east-central North America. McHarg argues for changes in settlement patterns, for design work that begins with nature – indeed, he advocates a kind of ecological determinism. Steep slopes, he notes, are unsuitable for row crops but good for secondary agriculture such as orchards, or for recreation. Cities should be kept well away from the aquifer and are best encouraged on the nodes of ridges, which have low agricultural value but high scenic value. Agricul-



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ture is best directed towards alluvial valleys, where the soils permit extensive row cropping. Using these principles McHarg fashions an aesthetic that promotes development compatible with the bioregion. This is not an anti-urban polemic. Rather it is about bringing nature into the city.

McHarg's lessons have been all but ignored within the land-design professions. A great deal of development has taken place in North America since 1969, and little of it shows an understanding of ecological principles. For its part, landscape architecture is in disrepute, having for the most part degenerated into a service industry that provides "amenities" and adornment for real estate development projects. Many land designs are undertaken by people who have never been to the site.

If the landscaping professions are in disarray, it is because they are awash in the flood of environmentalism. For better or worse, an entire generation of people now understands landscape design as applied ecology. As the idea of bioregion gains currency as an organizing strategy, Ian McHarg's work is once again relevant, this time to people working in the social movements. It offers a methodology of place, a way communities or watersheds can map their identities according to climate and landforms. "Place," McHarg writes, "is a sum of natural processes and ... these processes constitute social values."

Questions of place and values resonate differently across generations, classes, and political cultures. But some landscape work is able to galvanize both communities and professions. A promising example is ecological restoration, an emerging discipline – and movement – dedicated to restoring the Earth to health. Restoration is the literal reconstruction of natural and historic landscapes. It can mean fixing degraded river banks, replanting urban forests, creating bogs and marshes, or taking streams out of culverts. Since the early 1980s, this work – a great deal of it carried out by people working for free in their spare time – has been going on in forest, savannah, wetland, and prairie ecosystems all over North America. The Society for Ecological Restoration was founded in 1987 to coordinate the endeavours of its disparate practitioners: farmers, engineers, gardeners, public land managers, landscape architects, and wildlife biologists, among many others.

Restoration ecology is multidisciplinary work, drawing on technical and scientific knowledge for a generalist pursuit. It

is more than tree planting or ecosystem preservation: it is an attempt to reproduce, or at least mimic, natural systems. It is also a way of learning about those systems, a model for a sound relationship between humans and the rest of nature. Restoration projects actively investigate the history of human intervention in the world. Thus they are at once agriculture, medicine, and art. William R. Jordan of the University of Wisconsin Arboretum writes:

Watching a group of volunteers collecting seed on Curtis Prairie one fall day, I realized that they were repeating the experience of hunter-gatherers who inhabited this area centuries ago, and who actually, through their hunting, gathering and burning, had helped create the prairie communities we tended to think of as "native," "original," or "natural." At this point I realized that restoration represents a reenactment – not only of the forces that created the communities being restored in the first place, but of the entire passage of cultural evolution, from hunting and gathering through agriculture, to the analysis and synthesis of modern science. I now see restoration as providing the framework for a system of rituals by which a person in any phase of cultural evolution can achieve a harmonious relationship with a particular landscape.

These are not new ideas, but they are ideas newly current in the culture. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jens Jensen, Stan Abbott, Aldo Leopold, and others have all been part of efforts to replant and restore this continent. The recirculation of these

ideas has led to some fascinating philosophical and political debates. What is an authentic landscape? What is native, or original, or natural? These are cultural questions, and it's refreshing to see them raised within a technical – even scientific – profession.

Restoration actively seeks out places to repair the biosphere, to recreate habitat, to breach the ruptures and disconnections that agriculture and urbanization have brought to the landscape. But unlike preservationism, it is not an elegiac exercise. Rather than eulogize what industrial civilization has destroyed, restoration proposes a new environmental ethic. Its projects demonstrate that humans must intervene in nature, must garden it, participate in it. Restoration thus nurtures a new appreciation of working landscape, those places that actively figure a harmonious dwelling-in-the-world.

What we see in the landscaping work of the late 20th century are residues of many traditions: romantic, modernist, environmentalist, pastoral, countercultural, regionalist, agrarian, and, now, restorationist. The suburban aesthetic was able to accommodate some of those traditions, but today suburbia is clearly a landscape that can no longer negotiate the tensions between city and country – much less those posed by the many people and movements already busy making new relationships with the non-human world.

Changing environmental and cultural circumstances have brought changing aesthetics. If these changes have left the landscape profession (and the landscape) in disarray, they have also allowed large numbers of people to become involved in shaping the physical world as never before. As landscaping ideas have been reinterpreted and reversed, the boundaries of the garden have become less distinct. Much recent work attempts to reintegrate country and city, suggesting that what was once nature at home may soon become nature as home. ♦

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