Architecture and Landscape, Landscape and Architecture

Garrett Eckbo

Architecture is the design of buildings, groups of buildings, the spaces between them, and their structural extensions—the latter used to be called engineering and has now become urban design. Architecture focuses on structures for use by people. It begins with shelter.

Landscape architecture is the planning and design of open spaces and developed or developing lands not already preempted by the other spatial professions or merchants, by law or energetic promotion. Its focus is outdoor space for use by people. It begins with land.

Together these artists and professionals are concerned with projecting the optimum forms, spatial sequences and land-use patterns for humanized environments now and in the next century.

Throughout most of my fifty-year career, I have been convinced of the need for ultimate integration of architecture and landscape. It is implied in every job we do, large or small. When it is not implied, it is because the job has no open space. In an intelligent urban society, there should be no such situations.

In actual practice, this integration rarely happens through direct, one-time, equal-base collaboration. Usually architecture/construction is there first—actually, conceptually, or economically. The landscape elements must adapt to, grow from, and extend the architectural/structural concepts (whether or not they seem to lend themselves to that), and establish connections or separations between the project and the surrounding neighborhood and region. The environment is littered with impossible tangles that have resulted from the absence of foresight that such an end product would emerge from each development project. The environmental art of the future will be kept busy trying to untangle such messes. The occasional one-to-one collaboration between architect and landscape architect serves as guide and beacon.

Developed places are, of course, more than architecture and landscape. They include and come out of total environments—regions within continents, major topographic and water elements, climate and weather, ecology and economy, society and culture, community and neighborhood. Construction and landscape rearrangement create sequences of spaces for social and individual use, plus connecting circulation patterns for pedestrians, bicycles, horses and motorized vehicles. Storage for the ubiquitous and omnipresent automobile bulks large in urbanized places where people are concentrated. Furniture and graphics, artworks, and the persistent surprises of mechanical engineering all play a role. But the primary forces of life and identity are people, that choreography of variation from poor to rich, timid to aggressive, sad to happy, cynical to believing, underdressed to overcostumed, beautiful to ugly, with which we twentieth-century urbanites are so familiar.

Most indicators seem to tell us that most of the American people (and probably European and Japanese as well) would prefer to live in the “country,” either in a small town or on a farm. There, the dominance of construction would decline, and the landscape elements—earth, rock, water, vegetation, animal life; meadow, savanna, forest, river, lake, marsh—would become more prominent. Ever since World War I, the promoters and developers of suburban housing have described it as a return to country living. Some millions of units later that has become clearly a scam, except for a few isolated star performances. The dream of life in the country, with nature as either agriculture or wilderness, remains a dream for most Americans trapped in metropolitan/suburban complexes. These very large places of miscellaneous urbanization are delimited roughly by 50-mile, one-hour driving radii on more or less comprehensive freeway/highway/parkway systems. These real twentieth-century places are expanded job markets, shopping centers, recreation facilities, educational and cultural systems, in which almost all connections are made by telephone, auto, or public transit. Architects, landscape architects, artists and designers struggle heroically but vainly to bring some meaning to these gargantuan and incoherent continuities. Development planning, aimed at more of the same, and engineering are the basic environmental design processes. Expedient politics governs the whole convoluted game.

Nevertheless, within this labyrinth, there are many shining and
substantial examples of well-
tempered environmental elements
or complexes. Some of them
comprise the Inhabited Landscape
exhibition, and more can be found
in every edition of the architecture/
landscape press. Movements
for ecological and community
participation in environmental
planning and design are strong, and
the design and art professions are
alive and well. In so large, rich,
and complex a society, opportunity
and hope rise each morning with the
sun.

The search for balance between
construction and nature, or
architecture and the land, is
fundamental to the search for the
good environment. Through the
millennia of life on earth, nature
has maintained a steady and level
course, developing life and land-
scape around the world within the
limits of topography and weather.
People, as they began to improve
their environments eight to ten
thousand years ago, began the slow,
steady, accelerating pressure on
culture and landscape. Agriculture and
urbanization began at small scales
that local nature could assimilate,
but gradually, with acceleration,
grew into the expansive, destructive
and glutinous morasses we have
today.

Implicit in this picture is the need
for design conceptualizing, at every
scale from the individual project
to the urban region, that seeks a
reasonable, comfortable, healthy
and inspired balance between
construction and nature. Construction
symbolizes Man's conquest of
Nature, long seen by Western
sensory/spatial relations that are
culture as its crowning glory.
Architecture, as the cultural symbol
of construction, shares this vision,
although often with doubt, and
sometimes with sensitivity to site
and nature. In the East, the
Buddhist/Shinto urge for sensitive
and understanding cohabitation
with nature has produced building
and garden complexes that have a
sensitivity and elegance that
inspires the West. However, as
trilateralism and the free/corporate
market system expand and become
more entrenched around the world,
it remains to be seen whether
Eastern environmental culture
can resist corruption.

It is necessary now to begin deliber-
ate efforts to break through the
barriers that divide the environmen-
tal design professions and related
fields from the social/conceptual
fragmented thinking that has
produced and supported those
divisions. Perhaps we need to
develop and expand ideas such as
the following:

Buildings do not exist independ-
ently of the land under them or
the environmental spaces around.
They are linked inexorably with
land and environment, by technical
and functional connections that are
unavoidable. (While describing a
prefabricated housing proposal, a
well-known architect was asked
recently, “How does it relate to the
site?” His response: “As little as
possible.” This describes the
problem.)

Beyond these mandatory
connections there are visual/

I believe these visual/sensory/spatial
relations can be described as fol-
loows: Each building is a geometric
form integral within itself. This
form is not static, it is dynamic,
and it is the strongest form in any
environment. It extrudes geometric
forces into the surrounding space.
These forces need resolution in the
way that they meet similar forces
from other structures. When these
structures are similar, as in Italy,
the resolution is relatively easy,
although it requires attention.
When the structures vary as wildly
as they do in the United States,
modern Japan, and elsewhere, the
resolution of these conflicts
becomes almost impossible because
it was not considered in the
beginning. In fact, the free-market
attitude seems to be that there
should be no resolution, that
visual/economic/environmental
conflicts are essential to our health
and happiness. Post-Modern
architecture seems at times to comprise or respond to this attitude.

The resolution of visual/functional forces extruding from individual buildings has been basic throughout the history of Western architecture and urbanism, from ancient Karnak through classical Rome to Renaissance/Baroque Europe. It climaxed and was institutionalized in the Beaux Arts system.

This does not mean, however, that the Beaux Arts system is the only way to resolve the complex of visual/functional forces in modern metropolitan development. Romantic, Asiatic, and Modern prototypes exist, based on landscape components that are adequate to buffer and resolve architectural forces.

Concepts of balance, order and harmony have typified urban/environmental design thinking throughout history. They have been applied to special places for special people, with at times magnificent results. Their possible expansion to general environments may be based on two ideas, both no doubt quite controversial. Those two principles of quality for all built environments are:

1. The urban environment has three primary elements: (a) buildings, (b) vehicular spaces and rights-of-way and (c) pedestrian outdoor spaces and rights-of-way. The first two are considered mandatory and indispensable in the minds of most development and government people. The third is dispensable down to a bare minimum, and often totally displaced by vehicular surfacing.

This distortion of values is the product of over a century of high pressure urbanization, ruled largely by bottom-line mentalities. As, and if, we can return to qualitative concepts, it may become necessary to reinstate the primacy of outdoor pedestrian spaces and sequences throughout our urban areas, which could be a very big force for improving them.

2. Nature—long seen as a reservoir of raw materials, and a mechanical system subject to manipulation at will—is actually a system more complex, subtle, easily wrecked and irreplaceable than any man-made substitutes. Current conflicts will no doubt continue for a century or two, if we survive. However it may be that architects and landscape architects could come together around the development of design/planning concepts and theories that seek to integrate people and nature. These will have to be much more subtle, perceptive, understanding and imaginative than the various romantic, naturalistic, informal or oriental concepts available today.

Theoretically, a true integration of architecture and landscape, at scales from house-and-garden up to urban/metropolitan regions, is conceivable at this time as a general professional principle. It has, of course, been conceived intermittently by many outstanding individuals and groups. They have been the pioneers for an upcoming environmental sea change.

Whether this is practicable I do not know. In a recent article in Architecture, Denise Scott Brown tells us that current trends include "The decline of planning... The death of urban design..." and "The trivialization of landscape architecture..." As in various large aspects of economics and foreign relations, if we allow current trends to continue, we will deserve what will happen to us.

The limitation of the Inhabited Landscape exhibition to projects built within the last ten years, while providing focus, poses nonetheless a serious problem. For most landscape work, ten years is often barely the beginning of maturity. I think it took about thirty years for Dan Kiley's tree plantings at Dulles Airport to begin to read in scale with that landscape. Most of my best work was done from the 40's through the 60's. The development of a genuine landscape takes many years, if not generations of care. The following are a few examples of works in which I have been involved that have required a more extended time frame but have developed within the principles I have devised.

University of New Mexico at Albuquerque

The University of New Mexico at Albuquerque is a 400-acre urban campus for which I have been landscape architectural consultant...
since 1962. Throughout this time I have worked closely with Van Dorn Hooker, University Architect, and through him with a long list of local architects. (The original campus architect was John Gaw Meem.)

Albuquerque is high desert, hot and dry in the summer, clear and cold in the winter. The original campus layout followed the streets and blocks of the urban gridiron. Much of our work has dealt with the replacement of streets with interior pedestrian systems and peripheral parking areas. Pedestrian spaces range from small courtyards through larger terraces around buildings to still larger plazas and malls that complete a continuous open space system that is the primary structure of the campus, integrating relatively consistent architecture. The whole complex has the distinct flavor of New Mexico and the Southwest, a region unlike any other on the continent. The central campus includes a four-acre park with pond and seating complexes. This provides relief from the intensive academic surroundings.

**SRI International at Menlo Park, California**

The SRI International research institute occupies a substantial campus about 40 miles south of San Francisco, near Stanford University. In the early 40s I developed the spaces around their primary engineering building. A few years ago I did the park-like spaces around and through their new science building, and a large central
parking area that provides well-planted facilities for 400 cars. The science building was done by Pereira Associates, Architects, of Los Angeles. It consists of 2 four-story (one below grade) cubes connected by an elaborate glass breezeway at two corners. The principal pedestrian access follows fancifully curved paths through this breezeway, tying surrounding garden spaces into the building. To the northeast, one enters through a shade garden under a large existing oak that was preserved. To the southwest, a cluster of large orange vent pipes accents a special entry place. South of this substantial park-like space is a central eating facility. I think of this as a modern version of the Crystal Palace in a park.

Stanford University, near Palo Alto, California

Stanford University occupies a large old campus, originally planned by Olmsted. I have recently replaced three streets with pedestrian malls, and designed the foreground spaces for a new music center that also functions as an entrance to the central campus.

Galvez Mall replaces an existing street, beginning at the main north-south campus drive and running west. It is bounded by four major campus complexes—the Hoover Center, Encina Hall, a dormitory group, and two of the main libraries. The eastern block, between Hoover and Encina, benefits from their mature plantings and some large existing live and cork oaks in the right-of-way. The path pattern

1 University of New Mexico at Albuquerque
   Photograph by Garrett Eckbo

2 Stanford Research Institute, Menlo Park
   Photograph by Garrett Eckbo

3 Galvez Mall, Stanford University
   Photograph by Garrett Eckbo
4 Eckbo garden, walk leading to the house  
Photograph by Kyle Thayer

5 Eckbo garden, entry patio  
Photograph by Kyle Thayer

6 Eckbo garden, entry patio from front porch  
Photograph by Kyle Thayer

7 Eckbo garden, small patio off the studio  
Photograph by Kyle Thayer
worked naturally into four squares, which gives it a touch of formality. This is accented by the introduction of Mediterranean fan palm (Chamaerops humilis) clumps at the corners. Seats are introduced under the oaks along the paths.

**Berkeley Home and Garden**

My home and working studio in Berkeley has been extensively remodeled since we bought it in 1968 and is subject to more or less continuous rearrangement. The lot is 50 by 200 feet and is fairly level for the Berkeley hills. The house, probably built in the 30s, is set back 135 feet from the street. A 25-foot rear yard, sloping steeply down from the house, presents a magnificent view of San Francisco Bay and the city, the Golden Gate Bridge, and Marin County with Mount Tamalpais. One enters from the street through a redwood carport and descends a few broad brick steps to a small brick promenade edged by triangular planters. Japanese maples (Acer palmatum) grow in these planters, which were built from broken concrete from the original driveway. Behind the carport is a rectangular lawn with a mixed border on the north and west. On the south side, the brick path leads to the house along a border of camellias and other shade plants, sheltered by purple plums and the neighbor's giant Monterey pines. At the west end of the lawn, brick steps drop about four feet, around the end of a privet hedge, onto a brick patio about 35 feet square. My studio looks down into this patio from the
south, and one enters the house from it to the west, through a porch with a tile roof. The patio is bounded to the north by a six-foot wooden wall on which I have made a continuous sculptural panel with scrap lumber. This is a long-term hobby; there are also sculptural figures on the patio and along the front promenade. The patio is dominated by a large jacaranda tree, furnished with metal furniture painted blue and displays three exotic panels originally painted in bright acrylic by Charles White. One enters the house through the original vaulted entry hall and arched interior openings. The living space is large and flexible, culminating to the west in a sunken sun and view room, which we added to the house. Thus there is a progression from the street through fairly small garden and patio spaces and even smaller house entry spaces to the grand panorama of the bay.

These four projects, among many developed during the fifty years of my practice, may be seen as an early response to the need for transition from Built-Inhabited Landscape to Integrated Landscape. They are also part of the mid-century need for response to the impacts of modern art and architecture on cultural and natural landscapes. There was no intention to establish a Style as a period in history, but rather to develop a way of working with environmental design problems that would express contemporary attitudes and feelings. Current post-modern confusion seems to reflect both a continuation of that effort,
seeking to escape from the sterile institutionalization of a modern steel-and-glass Style, and an effort to invent a new style or styles, as fashion is invented or cycled. The acceleration of period changes since the Renaissance creates a clear need for continuity of sound, sensitive design processes regardless of vocabulary.

Notes


See also Conference on Shaping the City, p. 32.