

A GUIDE TO CAREERS IN DESIGN



BECOMING A

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

KELLEANN FOSTER, RLA, ASLA

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LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECT

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➤ Becoming a LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

A Guide to Careers in Design

Kelleann Foster, RLA, ASLA



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*To my family,
for their steadfast and encouraging support;
in particular, to my parents, for trotting us kids
all around North America to numerous cities,
and state and national parks and forests,
where the seeds for my love of the land
and its diversity were sown*

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FOREWORD

Perry Howard, FASLA, RLA, 2008 ASLA President

MOST LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS find out about landscape architecture by accident. It is not a profession that is the subject of much media attention; nor does it have a deep or long history. The term “landscape architect” was first used in the mid-1800s by Fredrick Law Olmsted, the designer of Central Park in New York City. Our professional association, the American Society of Landscape Architects, was founded in 1899, and the first School of Landscape Architecture was started in 1900 at Harvard University. Landscape architects do not often make it into the limelight, as do doctors, lawyers, engineers, firemen, teachers, the clergy, or even architects. The hope is that this book and other efforts like it will help illuminate the profession of landscape architecture, because we need more landscape architects today. Why is this so critical now?



Simply, we need more landscape architects to help restore the damage we humans have been causing to our planet, in particular over the last 50 years. To cite just one statistic, the human population has more than doubled in those 50 years, adding untold stresses to an already overburdened and highly complex ecosystem, further weakening the life-support systems of planet Earth. It is said that we cannot solve even the poverty problem for the world without first repairing our damaged ecosystems.

We in the profession of landscape architecture are equipped with the tools to help repair our shared home. Through research, planning, design, and management of our landscapes, we have been turning out cutting-edge works that both promote environmental awareness and encourage ethical design practices. With the help of a multitude of scientific and allied disciplines, we are making headway in finding solutions to the air, water, and soil problems, and putting those solutions into action. We are at the forefront in demanding green and blue infrastructure, at all costs, in our old and new urban areas. We are beginning to find ways to provide food and housing for everyone on our planet, and to grasp and appreciate diversity and, thereby, become an integral part of the restoration of our ecosystem. We are raising our voices as advocates for all people and creatures everywhere, and in doing so becoming stewards of land, humanity, and culture. We are focused on

designing and building walkable and livable communities, demonstrating that all our human needs can be met “in the neighborhood,” in order to conserve energy. We are focused, too, on ensuring privacy, even in the face of great population density in our urban centers.

Through these works we are healing the earth and the human spirit. We are addressing global issues through issues on the home front. We are “walking the talk,” and “thinking globally and acting locally.” Our works are celebrating the spirit of individual places, adding to—rather than taking away from—the continuous landscape mosaic, and doing so in an artful manner. Expressive forms are being generated from user and ecosystem needs. More responsive and creative site details are installed at all levels of design. There is a rich blending and contrasting of the natural with highly refined man-made machined objects and materials.

All of this is apparent in *Becoming a Landscape Architect*. Included in this book is a very wide-ranging group of people, who represent the best of the profession. Through their voices and experiences, readers will gain a comprehensive snapshot of the practice.

I grew up in New Orleans but spent my summers near my birthplace of Morganza, Louisiana, a rural wonderland of levees, lakes, wetland areas, seafood harvesting areas, and farmland. New Orleans, in contrast, is probably the first true urban community of the so-called New World. When I grew up there, all the neighborhoods had corner stores; barber shops, bakeries, and hardware stores were close at hand. But there were open spaces, too, room enough for a football game in the middle of the streets between parked cars.

It was the combination of those two environments from my childhood that stoked my inner fire to study landscape architecture, which I discovered my first day on the campus of Louisiana State University, where I had gone to study architecture. After reviewing the landscape architecture curriculum, which just so happened to be on the page opposite the one describing the architecture curriculum, I decided to change my major. It was the best decision I ever made.

PREFACE

I HAVE BEEN TEACHING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE for nearly 20 years and enjoy helping students explore the many career paths open to them in this exciting and expanding profession. I wrote this book in large part as a reflection of my passion for this profession coupled with the need to increase the number of individuals going into landscape architecture. One of my roles as assistant department head at Penn State has been student recruitment, and I have given a great deal of thought about how to raise awareness about landscape architecture as a rewarding career choice for creative individuals who care about humanity and our planet. I also wrote this book because I am concerned, as are many in the profession, about the need for greater diversity within our ranks. Therefore, another of my goals in writing this book is to present a broad cross section of career opportunities. To achieve that objective, I interviewed more than 50 noted landscape architects from a broad range of backgrounds and ethnicities and representing all sectors of landscape architectural practice; in addition, I included the “voices” of a number of landscape architecture students, both undergraduates and graduates, from schools across the United States. All these men and women share their thoughts: why they went into landscape architecture, what they feel the future holds for the profession, and what their work means to them. They also offer tips on the job search process, among other issues.

Chapters 2 and 3, which form the core of the book, are structured to emphasize the variety inherent in the profession. Chapter 2 focuses on the myriad types of design (broadly defined) in which landscape architects practice; Chapter 3 describes the broad scope of professional practice settings available to landscape architects—public, private, nonprofit, and academic. Reading these two chapters will make it abundantly clear that this profession truly can offer something for just about anyone interested in design.

Becoming a Landscape Architect also features 15 Project Profiles, containing the details of specific designs, most of them built. One of my express purposes with these profiles was to dispel the all-too-common narrow perception of landscape architecture; therefore, the profiles I selected for inclusion are intentionally diverse and broad, and located throughout the world. You’ll read, for example, about a zoo, an urban waterfront park, and a major land plan in China. Many of these projects are award winners, including one completed by university undergraduate students.

Several of the topics covered in this book I derived from a course I have taught for many years, “Professional Practice.” As such, the book will be of great interest not only to those curious to learn what landscape architecture has to offer as a career, such as junior high and high school students

and anyone seeking a career change, but also to those currently studying landscape architecture in college. This book can serve triple duty: one, as a solid overview for a first-year introductory course; two, in a professional practice course, providing essential information on marketing and professional ethics and licensure issues; and three, as a valuable resource for students reaching the end of their studies and seeking more information about career options and advice about interviews, portfolios, and the job search process (these topics are covered in Chapter 3 under “Marketing Yourself: Finding a Job”). The book concludes with additional references and resources, to further aid your understanding of the profession of landscape architecture.

It is my sincere desire that this book be of great value in helping to clarify and illuminate the unique and inspiring world of the landscape architect. This is a very exciting time for the profession, and I encourage you to explore it thoroughly, as there are many ways in which your interests and future goals can find a very satisfying home in this multidisciplinary, creative profession.

A portion of the proceeds from this book will be donated to the Landscape Architecture Foundation to assist in their mission of attaining sustainable landscape solutions through research and scholarship.

— KELLEANN FOSTER, RLA, ASLA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE without the insights offered by the wonderful professionals and students I interviewed. I thank you all for your generosity and encouragement. With each interview my enthusiasm for this profession grew; you inspired me, and I am sure readers will feel the same. I am also grateful for the unending support of my colleagues at Penn State's Department of Landscape Architecture. In particular: Tim Baird, your suggestions regarding professionals to interview were helpful in getting me started; Brian Orland, your encouragement, insights, and support were essential; my dear friend and colleague Bonj Szczygiel, your feedback and critique at key times during my writing were invaluable.

I was also extremely fortunate to have a fantastic student assistant, Mary Nunn: Mary, your perspective on which projects to feature, followed by your detailed research and writing of the initial drafts of all the profiles, was terrific. You were an integral part of this book and I am grateful for your involvement.

At John Wiley & Sons, I truly appreciate the patience, kindness, and timely assistance provided by Lauren Poplawski, senior editorial assistant. And thank you Margaret Cummins, my editor, for your interest in this book and belief in me. Your perspective was always valuable.

1

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.

Mikyoung 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 Champion, 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 Champion, 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.

Mikyoung Kim
mikyoung 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