Context & Space

REBOOT IN BUFFALO

THERAPEUTIC DESIGN

NATIVE-ISH ON FIRE ISLAND
In the spring I traveled to California with my mom so that I could run the Tinkerbell half-marathon in Disneyland. It was jarring, to say the least, to go from running through the pristine “Paradise Pier” at Disney’s California Adventure to riding the runaway ferris wheel at the grimy Santa Monica Pier a few days later. From Santa Monica we visited the Getty Center, where the theme for this issue was born.

It was at the Huntington Museum, Garden & Library in Pasadena, while walking through the exhibit about the ways that scientific advances opened up new frontiers, from inside humans to outer space, that the theme for this issue was cemented. Every day, you deal with new frontiers, such as those described in Chris Freimuth’s piece about landscape design on Fire Island and Eva Leonard’s essay about Andropogan Associates’ transformation of the grounds of the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane into the grounds of the Hotel Henry while communicating the history and the integrity of the site to visitors.

The contributors of this issue have found clever ways to interpret the theme of context and space. Hopefully, as you scan the pages you’ll think of new ways to look at your work and find unexplored frontiers for your business. Susan Morrison, the former editor of The Designer, generously shares an excerpt from her new book, The Less Is More Garden. She also reviews some other satisfying reads for you. Bobbie Schwartz, FAPLD takes us on a tour of the Denver Botanic Garden, and Natasha Petroff encourages you to explore therapeutic design as part of your practice. In the business article, I encourage you to draw boundaries around your landscape design practice, not just as the outcome of your practice, to help you clear some space for creativity and ingenuity.

Here’s to a productive and creative new year!
The Beauty of authenticity

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THIS SPREAD:  A water smart garden at the Denver Botanic Gardens provides inspiration for any designer. For more see page 54.

ON THE COVER:  THERAPEUTIC BLOEDEL RESERVE ON BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, WASHINGTON
Context

I went to the bank to open a new checking account. While handing off the required documents, the administrative person asked what kind of work I did. I told her I was a landscape designer and her otherwise tired face lit up! She smiled and proceeded to tell me of her new, recently purchased home, with a big yard and much to do. My mood lightened as well, as I went into full marketing mode, realizing I wasn’t just another blank individual opening an account, but I had arrived! I was “Landscape Designer Extraordinaire!” ready to solve the new yard problems and hold her hand as she told me about this new space that needed taming. She said she’d keep my card for later reference. Quickly, I realized that the context I was in had changed.

Context means being relational to another—a person, an environment, or an event. Context is about understanding the situation when you touch another person, place, or thing. Being in context allows you to respond to external challenges with an understanding and awareness to solve the problem and find meaningful solutions. It means when the bank teller starts talking shop, you are right there with her, discussing plants, spatial layouts, and functional rhythm.

The teller brought me out of my shell, giving me an opportunity to share my passion for landscape design. And later, when she said “Wow, being a landscape designer—it’s not like, a job, it’s really something you like to do.” I had to chuckle. Well, actually laugh out loud! But considering the context, I thought that response might be a little, well, inappropriate.
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Christopher Freimuth

is the founder and director of CF Gardens, a landscape design firm based in New York City. He collaborates with a dedicated team of gardeners to design, install, and maintain rooftop and backyard gardens throughout NYC and the metro region. Trained at the New York Botanical Garden’s School of Professional Horticulture, Christopher’s aesthetic brings horticultural sophistication into the urban environment. By prioritizing ecological planting design, he creates gardens that support the people, plants, and pollinators of his beloved city and its surroundings.

Eva Leonard

is a New York City–based freelancer who writes about architecture, travel, interior design, and landscaping. In addition to The Designer, her outlets include Landscape Architecture Magazine, Modern Luxury Interiors South Florida, Time Out New York, and Singapore Airlines’ silverkris.com travel guide. Her website and blog, www.retroquesting.com, is devoted to adaptive reuse, design, and travel. She loves Manhattan’s community gardens and finding willow trees in the city.

Susan Morrison

is a nationally recognized author on small-sized outdoor spaces. She gives her popular talk, “Small Gardens, Big Impact,” to garden enthusiasts all over the country and has shared small-garden strategies on the PBS series Growing a Greener World. Susan’s designs have been featured in Fine Gardening magazine, where she also contributes articles on design and plant selection.

Natasha Petroff

is a horticulturist and the owner of The Salish Seed, a Seattle-area design consultancy. Natasha has studied landscape design and restoration at Edmonds Community College and South Seattle College. Through design and writing, she hopes to spread her fascination with plants, ecosystems, and imaginative outdoor spaces. Some interesting projects have included a fern grotto alongside a native wetland, a Montessori preschool rain-garden, and a native ravine restoration on residential acreage.
Bobbie Schwartz, FAPLD a certified landscape designer in Shaker Heights, Ohio, is the owner of Bobbie’s Green Thumb.

She is an obsessed gardener, has won several design awards, and is a longtime member of the Perennial Plant Association, Garden Writers, and the Association of Professional Landscape Designers.

She lectures nationally, is a regular contributor to publications on perennials and landscape design, and is the author of Garden Renovation: Transform Your Yard into the Garden of Your Dreams.
GO:

The Getty Center
Los Angeles, California

BY KATIE ELZER-PETERS

I have never been so captivated by the way pedestrian activities can be manipulated entirely by design—architecture, interior, landscape—as I was during my spring visit to The Getty Center. Every building corner, every pathway, every line of shrubs and square of meticulously groomed turf, every combination of flower colors and every terrace, from the parking lot to the top floor of the highest gallery is meticulously planned to take advantage of the expansive views afforded by the Getty's position overlooking Los Angeles while, at the same time, cocooning the visitor between the bright white walls of the complex, leading them toward the gardens and artwork within. That sounds contradictory. It is not.

The bougainvillea trellises are iconic images of the Getty Center, but they are more than artistic. They pull the eye up out of the garden and to the rest of the campus.
Susan Cohan, APLD, also visited The Getty this summer, saying, “This was my second time, the first with APLD at the Pasadena Conference years ago. I wanted to go back to explore the relationships between Richard Meyer’s architecture, the surrounding land, and the smaller but not small gardens. All seem to be independent of each other yet they are tightly rooted in time and place. The stark white buildings and geometrically shaped blonde stone against the Santa Monica hills are striking, bold in color and size, and visually challenging. The use of water as a through line in the central garden echoes oasis gardens yet is completely contemporary. I could go back again and again to learn from the spatial relationships there.”

Richard Meyer’s architectural design makes visitors feel as if they are part of the city, while they are, in fact, quite removed from the bustle in the valley.
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All-America Selections Winners

BY KATIE ELZER-PETERS

Are you sleeping on AAS? This nonprofit plant evaluation organization has been picking North American continent-wide winners for 85 years, many of which are still in cultivation.

While perennials, trees, and shrubs might be the backbone of your planting plans, if you work with annuals or edibles at all you’re going to want to check out the AAS winners lists. (They’re announcing the first perennials winners in 2019, so jot that down.)

All-America Selections trials new, unreleased plant varieties in 80 different trial locations across the United States and Canada. That means a plant gets tested in the chilly summers of Prince Edward Island, searing heat of Arizona, and swampy humidity of North Carolina all at the same time. Only the high performers across the board in every location—those that grow above and beyond similar varieties on the market, are declared national winners. The trials are blind. The judges have no idea which breeder put forth the new variety for evaluation, ensuring that there is no bias in the evaluating. Winners, due to the rigorous standards of the judges, are basically guaranteed to succeed for your clients, which makes them no-brainers for you.
READ:

Winter Book Roundup

BY SUSAN MORRISON

As colder, shorter days encourage us to step away from our drawing boards and computers to soak up some much needed inspiration, consider adding these books to your winter reading list.

A NEW GARDEN ETHIC: CULTIVATING DEFIANT COMPASSION FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

by Benjamin Vogt

In his new book, Benjamin Vogt, a frequent contributor to The Designer, goes well beyond traditional philosophies of sustainable gardening, arguing that humans are hardwired to respond to wildness. The book makes the case that by living increasingly urbanized lifestyles where natural landscapes have been forced into unnatural monocultures of concrete and lawn, we are no longer connecting with other species of flora and fauna, both to their detriment and to ours. While advocating for a return to wildness with gardens rich in native plantings, Vogt connects this oft-repeated advice to much broader philosophies, including the concept of deep ecology, which sees “all life as equal, all life as contributing to our culture and our homes, and all life as essential to the health and future of our nations.” The book explores overarching themes like climate change and mass extinctions, while still maintaining a uniquely personal point of view, urging us to consider that the gardens we create cannot be just for us, but must encompass the needs of our shared communities, including the plants themselves. Passionate, thoughtful and complex, A New Garden Ethic will challenge you to rethink your assumptions on what the purpose of a garden truly is.
DESIGNING WITH SUCCULENTS: COMPLETELY REVISED SECOND EDITION TIMBER PRESS

By Debra Lee Baldwin

When Debra Lee Baldwin’s *Designing with Succulents* was first published, it quickly became the succulent bible relied on by designers just becoming acquainted with these remarkable plants. Ten years later, the release of *Designing with Succulents: Completely Revised Second Edition* (Timber Press, 2017) proves that our love affair with echeverias, aloes, and the like is not just a passing fancy, but a permanent part of how we design. Packed with over 400 photos, this new version builds on much of the information that made its predecessor an instant classic, including updated, in-depth plant profiles and recommended companion plants. The book goes far beyond revisions, however, to offer brand new content, including a wealth of site-specific advice, such as strategies for incorporating succulents into front yards and terraced hillsides. Inspiring photos of world-class gardens are scattered throughout, but designers will especially appreciate the featured gardens that are profiled at the beginning of each chapter, as well as the entire chapter devoted to specialty gardens that showcase succulents.

GARDEN RENOVATION: TRANSFORM YOUR YARD INTO THE GARDEN OF YOUR DREAMS TIMBER PRESS

by Bobbie Schwartz FAPLD

As every designer knows, working with clients to renovate an existing landscape can be much more challenging than creating a new garden from scratch. In *Garden Renovation: Transform Your Yard into the Garden of Your Dreams* (Timber Press, 2017), APLD designer Bobbie Schwartz tackles this challenge by laying out a methodical, multi-step process. Instead of jumping straight to re-design, she encourages homeowners to accurately assess not only what their current gardens may be lacking, but also to clearly define what it is that they want to achieve. From there the book moves on to landscape essentials such as infrastructure, layout basics, and plant selection, rounding out the renovation process with real-world garden success stories. Although geared towards homeowners, designers will discover plenty of solid information on design mainstays such as hardscape selection and softening blank walls, and may also find this book useful in communicating the realities of landscape renovation to homeowners.
Whether you’re a longtime designer or just getting started, you’re going to have to draw boundaries with your clients so that you can make a living, create meaningful work, and still enjoy your life. Every single self-employed contractor or freelancer deals with this dilemma.

In a world where working 24/7/365 is possible technologically, you have to be the one to just say no and stop, because going 24/7/365 is not possible, in the long-term, physiologically. There is plenty of data and research to show how self-defeating that approach can be. Working long hours puts you, statistically, at higher risk of stroke. Research shows that nonstop connectivity also isn’t good for your business. Multitasking and the constant barrage of information we’re all subjected to on a daily basis can lead to a drop in productivity, as discussed in the Harvard Business Review. And it’s well documented that time off, disconnected time, and actual vacations yield health benefits, partly because they disrupt harmful behaviors like working 16 hours a day.

The year-end holidays are coming. Make sure you get to enjoy some time to relax and recharge. Put some systems in place so that you’re ready to tackle the new year and be more productive. Here’s how.

**Turn Off the Read Receipt on Your Phone**

This is a simple yet effective way to implement boundaries with clients. If you do nothing else, try this. Turning off the read receipt allows you to respond on your time, not theirs. No one will be looking at their phones, wondering why you haven’t replied.
**Set Business Hours**

If you struggle with guilt over not being available to your clients all of the time, think about this: Is your doctor or dentist available all the time? Is your florist? Your drycleaner? No, no, no, and no. You’re a business just like they are. Draw a line in the sand by declaring your business hours. It’s your business. Those hours can be whatever you want. Does Tuesday–Saturday, 11 AM – 7 PM work better for you than Monday–Friday, 9 AM – 5 PM? Great. Put your business hours on your website. Add them to your Facebook page. Write them in your email signature. If someone asks you to work on one of your off days, tell them, “I’m not available that day, but I can meet during any of these times.”

What if some huge client can only meet during your regular time off? That’s up to you to decide if it is worth it. Chances are that those instances will be rare, and you can likely make an exception. Every client and every project is not an exception, though.

If you get lots of hits to your social media message direct message platforms, add an auto-responder that says, “Thank you so much for contacting XXX.”
We will respond to your message this day–this day, this time–this time.” Done. Same with your work voicemail. After a while, your clients will start to remember your business hours, or, at the very least, you will know that you have put some communication in place to remind them about your business hours so they don’t think you’re ignoring them.

**Create a Welcome Packet and a Goodbye Packet**

After you’ve set business hours, you need to communicate them to clients. A welcome packet is a nifty tool. In the packet you’ll outline your contact information, your business hours, expectations for both parties, the project process (what they can expect will happen when, from initial meeting to initial concepts, to installation, and so forth), how you work with subcontractors, the ways you’ll be asking for design feedback, payment terms, and final deliverables. A contract often covers much of this, but not always the communication terms. A welcome packet is a friendly, “Welcome aboard. Here’s what to expect when working with me.”

When the project is finished, give the client a goodbye packet. This marks a tidy end to a project and establishes a boundary. “Thank you so much for allowing me to help you with XXX! While this is goodbye, I hope it won’t be for long!” Then go on to detail the costs for changes and additions, give your recommendations for maintenance, inform about additional services that you offer, and ask for testimonials and referrals.

“Good fences make good neighbors,” wrote Robert Frost in his 1914 poem, *Mending Wall*. The saying is an old proverb, but the meaning of it in the context of the poem is that, by maintaining the boundary (the fence), each of the neighbors in the story can stay independent, have their own identities, live fulfilling lives. When you draw your own boundaries, you ensure that you get to give your creative best to your clients on your terms, rather than offering what’s leftover after everyone has clawed away a piece of you.
More! More! More!

If boundaries are difficult for you, I highly recommend listening to these fantastic podcasts from Heart, Soul & Hustle, a website by Zach Spuckler. He’s a young and gifted entrepreneur with valuable lessons for anyone self-employed. Try Episode 66: Overworked to 30 hours per week and Episode 73: Why I Took a 6 Week Break.

Two great books that will help you clear space for meaningful work are:

*Busy: How to Thrive in a World of Too Much*, by Tony Crabbe and *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, by Cal Newport.

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Native–ish  BY CHRISTOPHER FREIMUTH

“I want it to feel like a UFO flew in and dropped this modernist sculpture and decking into the middle of an otherwise undisturbed natural environment.”

Any added plants have to harmonize with the existing native flora that cradles the house.
All architectural additions take the current landscape into account.
Those are the directions given to me by my friend and client Michael, who has hired me to design and install the landscape around the Horace Gifford house he’s restoring on Fire Island. A monument of cedar cladding, the home is wrapped in walls of windows and set with an open interior. It’s a sort of unexpected lovechild between your grandma’s old beach cottage and the Lincoln Memorial; that is, remarkably cozy and intimidatingly grand all in one breath.

As a self-proclaimed “ecological landscaper,” I’m secretly plotting to fill Michael’s property with native plants and turn this high-end design project into a covert habitat restoration mission. What I would learn is that, in this happy
“The feel of the island’s ecology, not unlike its storied cultural history, is one of resilience.”
situation, the latter is in fact the only way to accomplish the former.

When Michael introduced me to the project, the property was completely overrun by poison ivy, catbriar, and deer. The first thing my team did was to tame all three—just because it’s native, after all, doesn’t mean it gets to bully us around. From there, we were able to take stock of the botanical bones of the place.

Surprisingly, the natural landscape isn’t the sort of beachgrass-meets-rugosa matrix one might expect on a property just a few hundred feet from the bay. Rather, it’s a scrubby maritime forest filled with serviceberry, river birch, cherry, American holly, inkberry, white oak, black and pitch pine, sassafras, bayberry, blueberry, and groundsel tree.

The feel of the island’s ecology, not unlike its storied cultural history, is one of resilience. Reaching to about the height of the house, the tallest hollies and birches are gnarled and scarred by consistent and relentless salt-sated winds,
and yet they are thriving. Understory serviceberries and blueberries stretch to get their share of light, living off scarce nutrients from a soil profile consisting almost entirely of sand—and yet they are thriving. The pitch pines are lonely survivors from the wreckage laid by a southern pine beetle infestation that has severely impacted the demographics of the island. And yet they are thriving.

Over the course of weeks and months, I got to know Michael’s property and its surroundings, peeking into his neighbors’ yards to see what was doing well (horticulturally and otherwise) and touring the uninhabited parts of the island to observe naturally-existing plant communities. The pelargoniums, hakonechloa, clipped hedges, and mowed lawns favored by other homeowners don’t fit into Michael’s UFO aesthetic. They’re also a little too precious for this community. Fire Island,
as its reputation predicts, is a little bit yin and a whole lot of yang. More appropriate are the swaths of *Carex pensylvanica* sweeping through groves of sassafras, monster red maples, and mean-leafed hollies that give some bite with their beauty.

Cycling through design iterations, I also became well versed in the practical necessities and restrictions for the space: we needed screening (but not too much); we needed clean lines by the decking that would fade into the wild; we needed to protect the roots of older, vulnerable trees; we couldn’t plant on top of septic tanks. And of course, we had to keep the neighbors happy, so help us God.

Eventually, I sat at my desk and looked through the merry-go-round of inputs I gathered from Michael, the land, and the community. I asked myself what made
sense in terms of accomplishing Michael’s vision, fitting into the island’s cultural vibe, appeasing and enticing the neighbors, and adhering to right plant, right place principles.

Very quickly, I found that my plans basically exploded the plant palette already found in place. I drew in hundreds of blueberries, bayberries, and groundsel trees, specimen pines and birches, an understory of sedges and rushes, and more. I laid out the plants in distributions modeled by the undeveloped sections of the island, keeping in mind angles and axes that best highlight the spring flowers, summer fruits, fall seedheads, and winter structure.

In the end, we all got what we wanted. The plants are happy, the birds and pollinators are going bananas, Michael’s got his UFO thing, and my team has the satisfaction of knowing that we just used the powers of design to do something positive—not only for Michael, but for the island as a whole.
Emphasizing views allows you to actively shape how your garden will be experienced. To better understand this, imagine your garden as a movie, and yourself as its director. During filming, the director’s goal is not just to tell a story but also to influence how the audience will react by setting mood. A director uses direction — and sometimes misdirection — to point us toward what he or she wants us to see, think, or even feel. By considering things besides just the basics of plants and hardscape, you become a director in the most literal sense. As such, one of your most effective tools for directing views is the thoughtful selection and placement of focal points. Focal points are generally defined as unique visual accents or elements, such as a fountain, bench, or standout plant, that draw the eye. But not all focal points function in the same way. Before siting any garden decor, consider what you hope to accomplish.

Lead the Eye

A beautiful garden is like a painted composition, and well-placed focal points give it interest and visual balance. In a small garden, visitors rarely need help navigating the garden in a literal sense, but there is still an opportunity to influence the way they interact within the space. Strategically placed focal points attract and arrest attention, providing a space for the eye to pause before moving in to explore. Because a progression of carefully considered focal points allows a garden’s beauty to be revealed at a gradual
Tall, vertical art pieces that contrast with surrounding foliage make excellent garden focal points.
pace, anything that forces a pause is a boon to a small garden, where the tendency is for a visitor to try to digest what he or she can see all at once. Virtually any object can act as a focal point, as long as it stands out from what surrounds it. For collectors of plants, containers, or outdoor art, focal point placement is particularly crucial. When objects designed to invite contemplation are lumped too closely together, the result can be visual chaos or the risk that no single item can be appreciated for its uniqueness. Conversely, when scattered thoughtfully throughout the garden, inherently interesting objects become an invitation to stop for a moment before moving on. Each object helps define the character or mood of its own little piece of garden. If you have room for more than one focal point, avoid the urge to line them up rigidly or space them equidistant from one another — the result will be that they look like a matched set connected to each other, rather than to the space they inhabit in the garden. A placement that is slightly off center or more organic encourages the eye to move in more than one direction, once again slowing down the pace at which the garden’s features are absorbed. Consider the scale of objects and plants before you decide on a permanent placement for them in the garden. Small or intricate pieces work better close to seating areas or pathways where their detail can be appreciated. Statuary and plants that are farther away should be large enough to be understood at a distance, although conversely, if the object hints that a closer inspection will be rewarded with additional details, this invites visitors to range deeper into the garden. The choice of focal points may not be entirely under your control, however. If your backyard possesses a large or distinctive tree, for example, it will typically become a focal point by default. If this is the case, feel free to celebrate its prominence by adding a birdhouse, wind chime, or other type

“Bird Lady” at the back of the garden, helps guide the eye through the space.
of garden enhancement. This is a particularly desirable approach for trees or large shrubs with a short season of interest.

**Unify a Space**

On field trips in my student days, we often asked the instructors to point out various real-life examples of design principles. Whenever one of our teachers was asked to identify the unifying element in a garden, “the lawn” was his inevitable response. I wasn’t quite sure that was a satisfying answer at the time, and now that I see so many homeowners choosing to minimize or remove lawns altogether, I’ve begun noticing and creating other ways to make a garden feel cohesive. Focal point placement works as an excellent strategy for connecting two or more spaces visually. Placing an object that is attractive when viewed from multiple sides (such as a circular water feature, small tree, or oversized urn) between multiple activity areas simultaneously creates both a subtle connection and a division. Activity areas are defined

“Smaller pieces of art that are best admired at close range make attractive focal points on patios.”
Virtually any object can act as a focal point, as long as it stands out from what surrounds it.

while remaining integrated. This works with multiple layouts, but is particularly effective with L-shaped patios, as placing an object with mass in the right angle created by the patio’s inside corner helps relieve the flatness of the surrounding hardscape. Focal points can also be created from more than one object. This is particularly true if you are dividing a large expanse of continuous hardscape. In this instance, a lone object might appear too isolated, but a grouping of ornaments — such as containers of different heights with a similar finish or material — could work beautifully. Be sure to keep the grouping fairly cohesive and simple; for example, three containers of similar material, but no more.

**Bring the Outdoors In**

Using focal points to create and guide views can be expanded to encompass more than just vistas within the garden itself. In fact, one of the most overlooked ways to get the most impact out of a small garden is to make it function like living wallpaper for your home’s interior. Windows often become default focal points inside a home, because the movement and color of the garden beyond naturally draw the eye. Make the outside view a prominent window showcases even more effective by anchoring the view with a focal point. This does not need to be distinct from focal point trees or objects you’ve already chosen — use whatever you’ve already decided should unify the garden. But when considering the placement of any new elements outdoors, factor in which windows or glass doors in your home overlook the backyard, and adjust the locations of newly introduced objects to create pleasing vistas from inside the house.
Therapeutic Design and the Alchemy of Healing
Relaxing in the Japanese Garden at Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island, Washington; some research suggests Japanese-style gardens have greater calming effects than other garden styles.
When you enter a natural space, do you feel your shoulders lighten? You’re not imagining it. This feeling is what’s known as biophilia, or “love of other life forms.” It’s what drives us to roam in the wilderness, spoil our pets, and, yes, design lavish gardens that soothe and transport.

The growing field of therapeutic design—also known as healing design or restorative design—isn’t new. It dates back centuries in the UK, Japan, the Middle East, and elsewhere, to the earliest cultivated spaces growing medicinal and edible plants. What is new is a broadening awareness of the health, humanitarian, and even economic benefits of restorative landscapes. Designers are in the lucky spot of spreading this awareness—of spreading biophilia.

Who Benefits from Restorative Design?

Exposure to nature benefits everyone, but studies show that the most remarkable, even transformative, effects are on those who are especially fragile. In 1984 Roger Ulrich showed that surgery patients recovered more quickly and required less pain medication with a view of nature from their window. He later argued that green plants, open natural spaces, and wildlife played significantly into mood elevation. These days, this
point of view (in many variations) is pretty much universally accepted.

This explains why restorative landscapes are proliferating in hospitals, mental health facilities, retirement homes, hospices, rehab centers, schools, and prisons. Here, landscape elements can be targeted to the needs of specific populations. In a veterans’ garden, you might see a railing to support users with physical disabilities or a quiet sitting area ensconced in greenery, meant for contemplation.

At the same time, healing elements are being incorporated in public spaces, including parks and transit stations for both the public and for specific populations, in some cases deliberately as a tool for mainstreaming marginalized groups, like the blind.

Visitors with disabilities can easily move from one restful spot to another at the Puget Sound VA Healing Garden in Seattle.
More and more, therapeutic design is also being integrated into residential and commercial landscapes. This makes sense, because good therapeutic design is, in many ways, just good landscape design; the principles overlap. And the many designers proposing to help property owners connect with nature? That’s biophilia talking.

**Key Components of Therapeutic Design**

“The rule of thumb is 70 percent green,” says Daniel Winterbottom of Winterbottom Design, which specializes in therapeutic gardens. It turns out that green emits just the right wavelengths for visual rest (no kidding), and it’s considered by many to be a symbol of life and hope.

Other important components include water features and options for privacy and contemplation. “People need different things at different times,” Winterbottom
Winterbottom, a professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington, stresses the need for designers to balance complexity and simplicity, and to pay attention to what gives the users peace, whether that be through contemplation, gathering, or other activities.

“You’re trying to increase their focus. Traumatic illness makes you confused,” Winterbottom says. “A therapeutic landscape needs to be complex and engaging enough to engage your fascination, to make you one with nature so it’s not taxing your concentration but restoring it.”

Importantly, to understand what engages users’ fascination, you have to involve them in the design process.

**Planting for Year-Round, Multi-Sensory Interest—and Manageability**

In therapeutic design, plants are chosen to convey a sense of peace. They tend to be aromatic, colorful (muted or vibrant, depending on the needs of those who will use the space), perhaps symbolic, edible, or medicinal, and they tickle multiple senses, including touch and sound.

Vegetative “softscaping” is used to define spaces in a way that’s uniquely com-
forting, and naturalistic plantings are often favored over formalized plantings (think biophilia). Plant-to-site appropriateness is especially critical for minimizing management expenses in clinical and nonprofit situations where funding can fluctuate.

**Adding Therapeutic Design to Your Practice**

Winterbottom offers these tips for including restorative design in your practice:

- For large commercial or public projects, make a case for integrating and destigmatizing users with special needs.

- On smaller projects, make a case for the necessity—and intrinsic presence—of restorative attributes in all gardens.

- Make it one of several focus areas, maybe 30–40 percent of your practice.

“Institutionalized settings are the bread and butter,” he explains, “because they have the money.”

But, Winterbottom adds, “Absolutely fall back on attributes of therapeutic gardens in all gardens. You can do this artfully. Integrate all of this into a place of beauty. Beauty is cathartic and interventional.”

**Resources**

**ORGANIZATIONS**

Therapeutic Landscapes Network
American Horticultural Therapy Association

**ARTICLES**


**BOOKS**

*Therapeutic Gardens: Design for Healing Spaces* by Daniel Winterbottom and Amy Wagenfeld (Timber Press, 2015)

*Healing Spaces: The Science of Place and Well-Being* by Esther Sternberg (Belknap Press, 2012)

Lengthy booklist from ASLA
### Checklist for Restorative Design

Key considerations that designers can be tailored for each project:

| Perceptions of safety and comfort lent by navigability, private areas, quiet, and human help if needed |
| Solid design and construction and appropriate plantings |
| Options of sun and shade, including covered seating near entrances |
| Visibility into the garden from indoors |
| Opportunities for sensory engagement with plants, water, wildlife, fresh air, sun, and stars |
| Invitations to move and play, such as pathways and play structures |
| Weather-proof, relevant art |
| Design collaboration with the intended users |
When Andropogon Associates took on the re-greening of a 130-year-old Frederick Law Olmsted landscape in Buffalo, the Philadelphia-based landscape architecture firm balanced the revival with the need to reshape the grounds for new uses.

BY EVA LEONARD

The Olmsted Landscape

To describe the vast grounds and massive Romanesque buildings that are home to Buffalo’s new Hotel Henry Urban Resort and Conference Center as sprawling is a bit of an understatement. The Richardson Olmsted Complex comprises 42 acres and 13 buildings, and the hotel occupies roughly one-third of that space, including three buildings that were formerly the Buffalo State Asylum for the Insane. In the late 19th century, Frederick

Back to LIFE
Construction of the original buildings, including the Towers Building, took 26 years to complete.
Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux worked closely with architect H.H. Richardson and physician Thomas Story Kirkbride to create a therapeutic, humanitarian landscape for the asylum’s patients.

However, says Chris Mendel, associate principal at Andropogon, “Olmsted, in his own letters to the client at the time was bemoaning the fact that a lot of the trees and shrubs he had planned for this area had never been paid for. So the landscape had been kind of naked from the very beginning.”

After the asylum closed in 1974, the landscape was largely ignored. Parking lots covered once pastoral land, and senescence and die-off decimated the original plantings.

When Andropogon took on the project in 2007, says Mendel, “What we did, as landscape architects, was think, ‘What would Olmsted do now?’ Everyone recognizes Olmsted for his curvaceousness and the pastoral that he emulates at Central Park, but he was also very concerned about water and the
appropriateness of water next to human circulation.”

The South Lawn

In adapting the Olmsted landscape on the South Lawn, Andropogon changed the configuration of roadways and regraded them to pitch into rain gardens. The rain gardens act as a vegetative buffer between the roadways and the more open, programmed landscape space.

The aim was to create a park that would dovetail with the future development of the hotel and conference center and was warm and welcoming for the public. The result is a nine-acre landscape in the spirit of Olmsted, with rain gardens, canopy trees, and meandering pathways created with pavement from the old parking lots. Locals and hotel guests use the space for events and as a place to walk, run, relax, and play.

“The South Lawn is dedicated to the public and making sure that the collaboration between Richardson and Olmsted is preserved, so we really pay attention to the pastoral landscape there,” Mendel says. “It’s programmed for large events; there’s a big great lawn in front of the building, so there are sweeping views of this architectural masterpiece. There are little private spaces and spaces for smaller groups, but really, it’s a great lawn that celebrates the building.”

Frederick Law Olmsted (above) is popularly considered to be the father of American landscape architecture. Henry Hobson Richardson was a prominent American architect who designed buildings in Albany, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Hartford, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and other cities. The style he popularized is named for him: Richardsonian Romanesque.
Olmsted originally designed the grounds to be therapeutic for the patients at the facility. Today they provide a relaxing place for guests to stroll.

The North Side

Olmsted designed the former farmland on the asylum’s north side to sustain the complex and so that patients could experience nature and the responsibilities of animal husbandry. Andropogon carried through that original pragmatism in the redesign.

“We relied very heavily on orchard trees to show that this landscape is about production and food more so than the pastoral,” says Mendel. Andropogon planted orchard rows that were abstracted rather than regimented, taking into consideration Buffalo’s harsh climate.

“We focused on bringing back that story of productivity, of agriculture, because it’s
a rare example of Olmsted engaging those things and his linkage to agriculture as a therapeutic process. Every time he established green space, it was for the health and welfare of the folks who were working in factories, for the middle class. In this case, he was trying to create therapeutic options for the asylum patients.”

Building wings now occupied by the hotel spin off, creating large enclosures. Orchard rows tie the outdoor spaces for people and parking together. Mendel notes, “We have plans for gas fire pits, as well as raised beds within the ruined foundations of the greenhouse, to bring that farm-to-table aesthetic close to the building.”

“The main feature that has really blossomed is the cruciform foundation from the original greenhouse, which has been transformed into a chef’s garden with all sorts of edible plants and flowers,” says Christine Krolewicz, Richardson
Olmsted’s project manager, noting that visitors are especially fond of the sunflowers that have been planted.

Plantings

“We’re using a lot of cultivars that emphasize flower show, rather than fruit, because fruit is a maintenance hassle on hotel grounds,” says Mendel. “We’re looking for the aesthetic of low, very colorful trees. We’re not trying to throw shade, because the buildings themselves do and are very imposing. That low-to-the-ground landscape is very important, because we don’t want to diminish the power of those buildings.”

Crop rows of orchard trees are also interspersed with rain gardens to manage storm water sustainably and to avoid shading out the plants. The rain gardens are primarily planted with Heavy Metal and Shenandoah switchgrass, and the grounds’ more than 125 new trees include apple, cherry, and hawthorn.

Says Mendel, “These landscapes take an awful lot of abuse by the climate, so we tried to be very simple about how we were planting this out. These large expanses can get windswept very quickly. We’ve set up grapevines and willows to help stop the wind at key moments and keep it from picking up velocity and snow. It’s a nice merge of agricultural aesthetic with environmental function.”

What’s Next?

Krolewicz says that the focus is now on the redevelopment of the complex’s remaining ten buildings and 25 acres. Over the short term, Hotel Henry plans to add outdoor seating for its restaurant in the chef’s garden in 2018.

Although the pre-revival complex was sometimes described as “a hole” in the middle of the surrounding neighborhoods, there is now talk of creating a cultural corridor to connect it with local communities and institutions. A proposed art walk would create a rolling gallery or merge the landscape with the sculptural showcase of the world-renowned Albright-Knox Gallery, a Modernist art museum that’s just a ten-minute stroll away.

Pleased with the project’s focus on the landscape and its relationship to architecture, Mendel adds, “Out of this partnership to reinvent the use of this psychiatric hospital, Buffalo gets a new park. We’ve also made sure that the psychiatric institution that is adjacent can enjoy these landscapes, so there’s still that connection between therapy and nature.”
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The looseness of this fountain grass is the perfect counterpoint to the linearity of the pool and the wall.
ACRES OF INSPIRATION FOR EVERYONE DESIGNING IN A DRY CLIMATE
What thoughts and images does the word “Denver” evoke? Blue skies? Temperature swings? Snow that melts the next day? Drought? High altitude? (It’s not called the Mile-High City for nothing!) It’s all of this and more.

The Denver Botanic Gardens are a fount of gardening and design knowledge and examples for those living in the Denver area. Visitors can enjoy seventeen gardens of the West featuring plants that thrive in Colorado’s climate and provide long seasons of color and texture. Additional gardens are inspired by plants from Japan, China, South Africa, and the tropics and feature plants from other steppe regions that have similar climates and soils.

This cave provides an opportunity for adventure, even for very young children.
The plant palette of this corner of the Promenade Garden is lantana, nasella, and agastache but the design says that it is an English border.
Where Form Doesn’t Trump Function

I was quite impressed with the Water Smart Garden. There are two ways to experience this long garden that sits between the main sidewalk and the Orange-ry. One is to view it from the sidewalk but the other is to take the winding path through it. I recommend doing both. This garden demonstrates that xeriscapes needn’t lack texture or color but can be just as beautiful as traditional gardens.

“Xeriscapes needn’t lack texture or color and can be just as beautiful as traditional gardens.”
I do admit to *Stipa (Nasella) tenuissima* envy. This grass is so graceful and I love the white inflorescence.

For those who visit seeking beauty and serenity, there are ornamental gardens that please the senses, particularly those of smell and sight, at different times of year. The sun is so strong in Denver that one often seeks shade, and there are shady gardens offering pleasing plant combinations for a variety of mois-
ture conditions while also furnishing habitats for birds and insects.

**Colorado Interpretation of Classic Design**

Not far from the entrance of the main garden, on the left is the Promenade Garden, a long, beautifully designed “English” border. What makes it a Colorado garden is the plant palette. Perpendicular to the Promenade Garden is a long pool that runs the length of a golden yellow wall. Bordering the pool is a mass of *Pennisetum orientale* ‘Karley Rose’ that echoes the color of the rose-colored pavers.

Colorado may be relatively dry in most areas but its residents are just as excited about growing food as the rest of the country. Surrounding a lily pond,

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The Steppe Garden is not huge but it provides a plethora of plants from other countries that are just as useful in Colorado gardens as they are in their native lands.
Children love to play in water, especially on a hot day.
the extensive Potager offers many examples of designed beds and interesting edibles that could be incorporated into a home garden. We know that many herbs are drought tolerant and this Herb Garden demonstrates that characteristic with excellent vignettes of color, texture, and form.

**Learning in the Context of Play**

The primary objective of the Children’s Garden at the DBG, a rooftop garden across the street from the main garden, is acquainting children with the six different ecosystems of Colorado. This garden invites children into varying spaces
with subtly integrated play features. Kids can dig in the dirt, splash in a stream, explore a “cave,” swing in cloth swings that are unlike any of the swing sets we usually find in a homeowner’s backyard or on a playground, or have a picnic at child-sized tables and chairs. Children are encouraged to touch plants to experience their different textures.

If you are visiting Denver, be sure to stop by the Denver Botanic Garden and plan on spending the day. In fact, perhaps you should just plan a visit to Denver!

One of the Potager borders consists of artichoke, calendula, nasturtium, ‘Lacinato’ kale, and zinnias, a feast for the eyes and the mouth.
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All submissions from APLD members are considered, but The Designer is particularly interested in articles that fit the issue’s editorial theme or are appropriate for one of the magazine’s regular columns spotlighting technology or business strategies.

Seeking pitches for the Summer 2018 issue. We’re always looking for writers for regular features including Wander.Lust., Travel Inspiration, Plant App(lication)s, Design 101, and Design Masterclass articles.

Not sure if your story is a good fit? 2017 Editor in Chief Katie Elzer-Peters is happy to discuss your idea with you. Reach her at editor@apld.org.
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