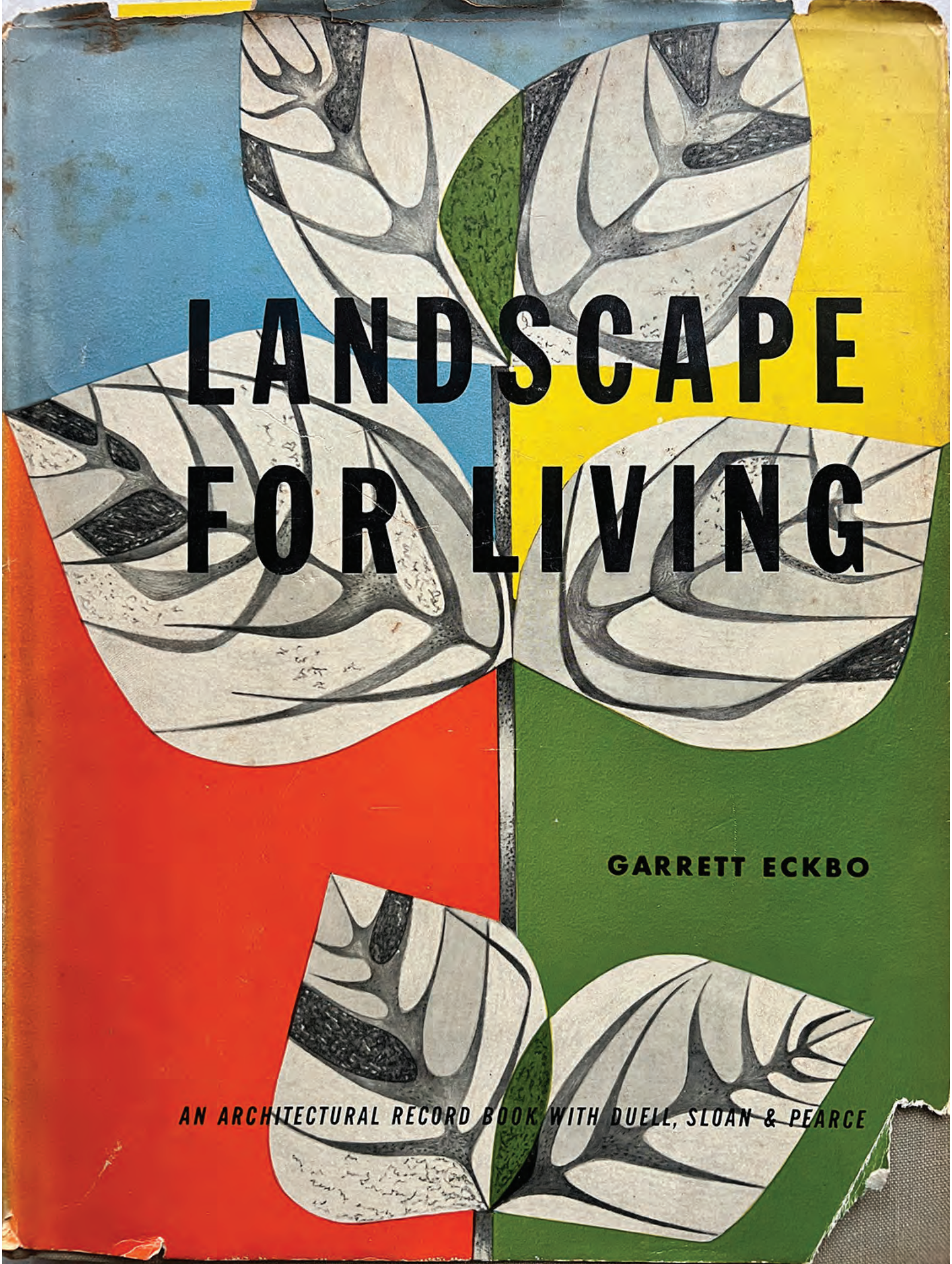
LANDSCAPE
FOR LIVING
GARRETT ECKBO
AN ARCHITECTURAL RECORD BOOK WITH DUELL, SLOAN & PEARCE

LANDSCAPE FOR LIVING

Garrett Eckbo
August 23, 1950

CHAPTER I

WHY NOW

FRANCIS BACON

". . . men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely; as if gardening were the greater perfection."

Books must justify their existence. This book attempts a serious analysis, in terms of theory and practice, of landscape development in our culture. This analysis must be in terms of the world we live in, the allied arts, the construction industry, and society in general—as they are, and as they are becoming. None of these are the same today as they were yesterday, and none will be tomorrow as they are today. We must examine today in relation to yesterday in order to project the potentiality for tomorrow. The book is not projected as a personal expression, although personal elements in it are unavoidable. Its intent is not frivolous, sensational, or opportunist. Nor is it thought of as conclusive, definitive, or messianic. It is meant to begin discussion, not to end it.

We are concerned, in this book, with a reciprocal and changing relation between general theory expressed in prose and specific solutions presented graphically with drawings and photographs. Sometimes the solution is a specific application or implementation of an idea; sometimes the theory results from the analysis of a completed solution. These are relations between analysis and synthesis, objectivity and subjectivity, research and intuition, which are present in all serious art work.

Words and graphic presentations are merely the best tools we can use to present concepts of rich, full, and useful experience out-of-doors. Landscapes can only be experienced specifically and directly. Here we are trying to establish a foundation of understanding, awareness, willingness, and broad perspective which is essential to preparation for such experience. The observer will assimilate what his cultural background prepares him for, and a little more.

A new discussion of theory and practice in the field of landscape design is necessary because the professional, commercial, and amateur designers, in their work, have failed to recognize the technical, social, and cultural changes that have occurred in the world in the past hundred years. We live in a world whose advances are based on the continuous expansion of the use of the scientific method, beyond those fields called exact, to such as esthetics and sociology. The scientific method is one which takes nothing for granted, accepts no precedents without examination, and recognizes a dynamic world in which nothing is permanent but change itself.

It is a process of rational analysis and creative synthesis, of continuous research, hypothesis, and experiment to prove or disprove such hypotheses.

The analogy between science and art has been recognized by many serious writers including the following:

MOHOLY-NAGY

The actual aim is socio-biological synthesis. This cannot be achieved without 'laboratory experimentation,' though this is another objection to contemporary art, voiced often by the layman. But without experimentation there can be no discoveries and without discoveries no regeneration. Although the 'research work' of the artist is rarely as 'systematic' as that of the scientist they both may deal with the whole of life, in terms of relationships, not of details.

CAUDWELL

Science and art are the frontiers of phantasy. They embody the most abstract, the most general, the most essential laws of concrete feeling and perception. They are 'pure' and for that reason they have separated out from each other. They are concerned with the new, with just those general items of social experience which negate the already existing common ego and common perceptual world, and therefore demand the extension of both ego and world (new art works, new hypotheses) to include them. This is the way practice unites with theory, because men's practical experience contradicts the already given consciousness of men and demands its modification.
Art is the science of feeling, science the art of knowing. We must know to be able to do, but we must feel to know what to do.

TEAGUE

. . . As a matter of fact, the most fruitful scientific thought . . . is borne forward by creative imagination as much as by reason, and it surprises the truth by flashes of brilliant insight long before the structure of supporting proof can be built up.

Thus there is a contrast between intuition and reason in both art and science. The popular theory that art is all intuitive and science all rational is a great over-simplification or vulgarization. It is true that today the operation of intuition in either field seems inexplicable, hence mystical or unknowable. Yet the very potential of science is that nothing is ultimately unknowable, that all our world, tangible and intangible, matter and force and energy, body and mind, can sooner or later be investigated, explained, and known. There are no boundaries to the scientific investigation of the world, to the artistic expression and projection of the potentiality of that investigation, nor to the democratic patterns of society which are implicit in their vision and insight. Sooner or later intuition will prove to be merely a phase of reason, as revolution is a phase of evolution; a more or less abrupt qualitative change or expansion, resulting from a quantitative accumulation of facts, forces, or circumstances.

ARCHITECTURAL FORUM, NOVEMBER 1948

Intuition—the faculty of knowing without reasoning—does not, however, imply the mystic ability of knowing without experiencing.

While it is true that after all the objective decisions in creative work are made subjective ones still remain, there is too much tendency to hide behind artistic intuition and subjectivity. Creativity increases with discipline, not the reverse. Romance, too, does not flee the stage when reason enters, but rather bursts forth in new richness, like Phoenix from the ashes, from the dull blanket of academic fiddle-faddle.

The potential richness of landscape design is far greater than much of the consciously developed landscape in our country. The speed and wealth of development in every field in the first half of the twentieth century is only an introduction to the potentialities ahead. While landscape design may not be affected directly or technically by the Industrial Revolution—trees still come from little seeds—it cannot evade an auxiliary or secondary reflex to its tremendous impact on architecture, engineering, and the allied arts. When architecture moves from Vignola to Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier how can landscape design stay with Repton and Le Nôtre? What of the cultural expression, in every creative field, of a world which has developed from permanent poverty for the majority to potential security for all in 200 years?

It is high time that these currents began to be reflected in the work of landscape architects. Run through the still if not stagnant waters of our long-impounded reservoirs of design theory, they can release unsuspected artesian sources of inspiration and imagination. We need release: on the one hand from a subservience to arbitrary authoritarian "formal" axial patterns; and on the other from an "informal" subservience to nature and its naturalistic imitation and reproduction. The first betrays a muddle-headedness about history, and a refusal to concede social progress; the second betrays a muddle-headedness about man's relationship to the material world we live in, and a kind of irrational mysticism about nature.

Historical period styles have always been a product of social discipline and stabilized social patterns in which the style became a product of all the people. Before the eighteenth century the majority participated in this social production with little or no recognition or consideration from the minority who ruled them from the top. No recognizable social styles have appeared since the eighteenth century, because democratic societies have not yet resolved the contradiction between the hangover of feudal autocratic patterns and the potential for full participation in government and culture by the majority common man. In other words we have not yet stabilized a social pattern long enough to produce a lasting cultural expression.

Landscape design is important in this general expression, as the final integrating element which gives continuity to our physical environment. Nowhere can the stability of the social structure be seen more clearly than in the quality and maturity of its pattern of landscape development. The latter is a kind of social barometer; it requires a maximum in stable social organization to keep it steady long enough to mature. Isolated advanced sections of a society can produce isolated advanced expressions which have considerable endurance—a play, a book, a painting, a building, even a fine garden. When we go beyond these individual expressions to a group of buildings with their attendant web of landscape connections, a community, a metropolis, or a region, we come to as clear and accurate a social expression as can be found. The question is clear: Is full democracy expressed in acres of rich private estates, square miles of slums and semi-slums, and occasional parks for "breathing-pores"?

Beyond the richness inherent in landscape work as it is at present practiced, there is an even greater potential in the continuously developing integration of architecture, engineering, and landscape design. These three professions deal separately with fragments of the single problem of site development. Somewhere great art has been defined as putting a number of elements together in a way which produces a result greater than the mere accumulation of these elements. This has been done in painting, in sculpture, in architecture, in landscape architecture. It is now time to do it in the broader field of site space design.

Analysis in terms of both theory and practice is very important. Theory and practice are two equal components of a single consecutive operation or series of operations. Our general tendency, under economic stress, to divide these two into separate unconnected pigeon-holes ends in sterilizing both. The esthetic poverty of our general physical environment is an expression of this divorce of practice from theory. They are not antidotes or antonyms for each other; they are complements and supplements. It is not a question of either/or; it is a question of both together. Theory is the why of doing things, practice is the how; neither functions well without the other. If practice is know-how, theory is know-why. Theory must serve practice; must answer the questions raised by practice; and must be tested by the data of practice.

The broadest objectives and responsibilities of landscape design and of each landscape architect must be these:

(1) The solution of all practical and functional problems.

(2) The provision of pleasant surroundings for active work and play, and passive relaxation.

(3) The provision of more than these, in spatial experience comparable to great

architecture or great natural beauty, and allied to both.

(4) The carrying on of positive research and experiment to broaden the limits of this experience.

In relation to our clients these objectives and responsibilities can be translated as follows:

(1) The resolution of all the contradictions between needs, desires and means presented by each client or group of clients.

(2) The development for them of concepts of space formation, use and experience beyond those they are able to develop for themselves.

Thus the professional planner-designer must always be both a follower and a leader in relation to his clients. If he concentrates too much on leadership he isolates himself; if he concentrates on following he becomes merely a draftsman.

This book would be calmer if it had been written in calmer times. We are living in times of major growth, of climactic developments in world history. Serenity, the avoidance of controversy, the air of intellectual aloofness, are elements of irrelevant ivory-tower dilettantism in these obstetric forties and fifties of the twentieth century of Christianity on this earth.

CHAPTER II

WHAT IS LANDSCAPE DESIGN?

As a conscious rearrangement of the elements of the landscape for use and pleasure, landscape design is an existing fact in our culture, and it has been an existing fact in all human cultures since people first began to stabilize in one place, build shelters, and grow crops.

It may well be asked why we use the term "landscape design." There are a good many names commonly accepted and used to refer to work in the landscape field:

landscaping
landscape gardening
landscape design
landscape planning
landscape engineering
landscape architecture

Choice among these is somewhat arbitrary, since there is as yet no legal sanction of any one term. The first two tend to refer to the more practical and limited aspects of the field. Design implies a three-dimensional relation between materials and people. Planning implies two-dimensional abstraction, and Engineering that purely practical approach which is helpless in the sea of esthetics. Landscape Architecture is used by the organized profession, which is the most established and reputable authority we have. However, this term implies an integration with architecture which does not in truth exist now, although it has existed in the past.

In order to define and evaluate a human activity we must establish its relationship to the general cultural pattern of the society in which it occurs. That is, what is landscape design for? With what problems does it deal? Where does it fit in that pattern of production relations between people, and between people and nature, which produces the things we need?

Landscape design covers that portion of the landscape which is (1) developed or shaped by man, (2) beyond buildings, roads, or utilities and up to wild nature, (3) designed primarily as space for human living—not agriculture, forestry, etc. (Note how Colvin expands this definition to include the total landscape as the total living environment for all people.) It is the establishment of relations between buildings, surfacing and other outdoor construction, earth, rock forms, bodies of water, plants, open space, and the general form and character of the landscape; but with special primary emphasis on the human content, the relation between people and landscape, between human beings and three-dimensional outdoor space quantitatively and qualitatively.

Landscape design in our culture deals with the problems of the outdoor physical envi-

ronment of the American people; that is, how best to use the land once its ownership status has been determined by deeds and property lines. This means the specific kind of development, in terms of grading and paving and construction and planting, of each piece of property insofar as it is not covered by buildings or engineering structures. These are problems which have to be solved somewhere along the line in the development and use of any piece of property. If they are not solved during the planning and construction stages, they are merely left over for solution by the occupants as best they can.

The problems of landscape design are among the general problems of our physical environment. All our communities, without exception, need more properly located and organized open space (public and private), and/or proper organization of existing open space (public and private). These needs are conceded or stressed by all individuals working on our physical planning problems.

The function of landscape design is more than the direct design of outdoor space arrangements. In the larger sense it is the continuous establishment of *relations between* man and the land, tying in those hills and valleys and broad panoramas which are beyond design, through designed elements which establish a scale relation between each individual human and the large landscape, placing them so that that individual gets a maximum experience from the relationship. For this process trees and special structures are of pre-eminent importance, to the extent that they are intermediate in scale between man and the landscape and partake of the qualities of both. Thus the view garden relates man to the landscape literally; the enclosed self-sufficient garden must supply a space-and-material experience comparable to that relationship in quality. The landscape is everything seen from a given station point or series of such points, whether in the crowded city or the open desert or mountains. Therefore, landscape design must embody the effort to organize this total outlook rather than merely the design of isolated pictures, objects, groupings, or structural elements. The contradiction between this need for wholeness of view control (spatial continuity) and the actual breaking up of the formation of the view by property lines is one of the major problems in landscape design.

If the broadest definition of art covers all the best artifacts of the man-made world, as distinguished from the wilderness of nature, then landscape design is potentially the bridge between these two worlds. It has this potential because it gives human scale and organization to considerable sections of the landscape, using largely materials which retain those qualities of growth and irregularity we associate with nature. But landscape design cannot achieve this potential if it persistently segregates man as "formal" and nature as "informal"; if it persistently apologizes for man's presence in the world with the dictum that "art" must not appear in the landscape.

Today there are in general four kinds of problems which fall to the landscape field:

Private gardens—outdoor space around private homes, sufficiently enclosed or isolated for the private use of the individual families.

Public grounds—"landscaping" of all types of buildings, singly or in groups.

Parks—considerable areas of open space, organized primarily by landscape means, for the recreation, both active and passive, of the general public.

Collaboration with architects and engineers in site planning for land development—that is, the work which is primary to the detailed work of all three.

Landscape design usually deals with only a portion or fragment of the total problem of site or property development. Outdoors and indoors are inseparable; they are complementary and supplementary, two sides of the same door. The land at the beginning is programmed as one complete unit—a home, a school, a hospital, a park; thereafter it becomes separated into two or more fragments—architecture, landscape, engineering, etc. Although lip service and some actual follow-through are given to the idea of

complete teamwork and co-ordinated development, the fragmentation remains. The professional division of labor, now a set of vested interests, produces and maintains a popular division of thought, and this becomes so well-established that it is difficult to work back toward the primary unity of the site. We think of "house" and "garden" but seldom of "home" as a unit greater than mere house and garden. We are caught in our own system of pigeonholes: analysis has become an obstacle, rather than a prerequisite, to the final synthesis of problem solution.

The jagged line of this fragmentation between the indoor and outdoor portions of site development stands out very clearly in the actual work of landscape design. The core of most problems in practice is the establishment of good relations, both functional and esthetic, between a building and its site. Does the form of the building fit the form of the site, and are they so merged as to make it difficult to separate them, or does the building look as though someone dropped it there by accident, and then hurried back to pretty it up a bit?

Perhaps the first step in most landscaping—foundation planting, that great technique for moving miscellaneous nursery stock—purports to "tie the building to the ground," "soften it," "conceal the scars," etc. Landscaping is very apt to be sold as beautification which may cover up damage to nature or mistakes of architect or builder.

These colloquialisms and commercialisms express a basic fact. The integration of building and site, of the rational geometry of man with the blind irregularity of nature, is the primary problem of physical development usually left over for the landscaping process. Whether it be in terms of the crude practicality of front walk and driveway, or the refined esthetics of subtle architectural space concepts on a subtly irregular site, this is the problem which is continuous throughout man's development of the raw land.

That considerable portion of landscape design which is concerned with the development of sites and areas not directly related to buildings, in public parks and large private estates, has a good deal of freedom in its arrangement of open space and natural materials. Its primary functional problems come with the introduction of active recreation facilities. However it is only separated, not divorced, from architecture. Few estates these days are large enough to lose sight of central architectural elements. Every in-town park has a simple physical relation to the architectural elements of its community; this relation is expressed by the transportation lines which connect it to all the homes and work places which do not have adequate open space closer to them. All the slums, all the blighted old neighborhoods, all the shiny new substandard dingbat subdivisions, all the apartment houses of whatever economic level—these are the indoor space for which our systems of public parks endeavor to provide adequate complementary outdoor space.

We have nearly pure landscape design in the large out-of-town park, in rural or primeval surroundings, even as we have pure architecture wherever we have 100 per cent site coverage in congested urban centers. But, even between these extremes, there is a direct and balancing connection; each complements and palliates the other. Twentieth century transportation becomes a substitute for direct physical relationship; time takes precedence over space. The theory of park design has proceeded from the actuality of urban congestion as directly as egg from hen.

WHO DOES IT

Anyone who makes specific decisions about landscape form must be considered a designer of some sort. The people who do landscape design and planning fall roughly into three groups: amateurs, commercials, and professionals. Of these the first two are probably each responsible for at least a third of our developed landscape and the last may perhaps be responsible for as much as the final third.

Amateur landscapers are people without for-

mal training, who usually don't get paid for the work they are doing. They include unconscious landscapers, such as farmers, horticulturists, and foresters, who in the course of working with plant propagation, production and protection may work out quite large-scale modifications of, or arrangements in, the landscape. Rural landscape patterns, as developed generation after generation by farming operations, are perhaps our most direct and continuous expression of the joint operations of man and nature.

Conscious amateurs include home owners who can't afford, or don't feel they need, professional help; dilettantes with excess time and energy; and "practical" men appointed to executive status, such as park superintendents. All of these people consciously accept the responsibility for making specific decisions about the form of sections of the landscape, and a fair portion of them carry it out quite satisfactorily. (No professional arrogance is intended here. Free participation by amateurs in all the creative processes of our society is one of the cornerstones of full democracy.)

Commercial landscape designers usually, though not always, lack formal training. They perform design services incidental to, and often as promotion for, profit from the materials and labor of their installation. They include nurserymen, who grow, sell, and install plants; landscape contractors, who do various kinds of earthwork or outdoor contruction in wood or masonry, with or without planting service; and gardeners who, in the course of maintaining installed planting, often have considerable freedom to influence, change, or expand its development.

Professional landscape architects include those who have received training at an accredited school, or have had long professional experience. They provide design and supervision services on a straight fee, time or percentage-of-cost basis, taking no direct profit on materials or labor. They are a small group, perhaps 1500 in the entire country, concentrated almost entirely in urban centers. In the San Francisco Bay region there are perhaps fifty; in Los Angeles not over one hundred. By contrast there are seven hundred qualified architects in Los Angeles; probably five hundred around San Francisco.

What are the relations between these three groups, in determining the form of our outdoor environment? We have guessed that in terms of quantity they divide it roughly into thirds. In terms of quality the professionals have a consciously developed and maintained theory of landscape design. This is taught in the schools and carried out quite consistently in most professional work. They also have a conscious concern with the quality of the design and installation of their work. The work done by conscious amateurs and commercials is nearly always derived from professional theories of form in a diluted or distorted fashion.

There is a further reciprocal relationship between professional and commercial practitioners. While the former exert pressure in the direction of quality of planning and installation, the latter exert pressure in the direction of the most production for the least cost and therefore the most profit. This pressure, subtly reinforced by the whole general climate of opinion of our society, as expressed in newspapers, radio, movies, etc., tends to reduce emphasis on design and on theory. The result is apt to be design work done in the simplest, most academic and hackneyed terms, which also reduces the time spent in supervision, because there is little if any difference between jobs. Thus, the tendency toward hack work, mechanical in form and sterile in content, tends to be a direct product of commercial pressure. The successful professional must combine (1) promotional imagination, (2) business acumen, (3) technical competence, (4) design ability. Those four together are a rare combination, and reputable practices have been built on not more than two or three of them.

Along with the tendency toward hack work done according to formulae (a theoretical justification for the capitulation of the professional to economic pressure) goes a parallel tendency toward superficiality, sensationalism, and trickery. Design, instead of being serious research and creation based on a sense of social responsibility, tends to become shallow, cynical, a tech-

nique for extracting from the world the living it "owes" the designers. Constant vigilance is required to avoid these two tendencies toward mechanical formulae and irresponsible tricks.

There is also a contradiction between the ideal of private practice (each professional in his own office) and the demands for more advanced and expanded technical organization implicit in the problems which society proposes for solution. In the physical planning fields, as the scale and importance of problems expand, the private office tends to become inadequate in terms of resources for research, design, and execution. Hence the growth of park departments and planning staffs as part of the government structure at every level, "competing with private enterprise."

The wasteful duplication in private office organization, in which each professional is apt to find himself secretary, bookkeeper, telephone girl, draftsman, file clerk, business manager, promotion man, contact man, publicity agent, and field superintendent, all distracting and detracting from his primary role as planner-designer-supervisor, will likewise sooner or later be recognized as more than individual problems. It is the physical separation of architects, engineers, and landscape architects, each in his own private office, which makes difficult the most complete, thorough, and productive collaboration around the general problem of site-space formation. On the other hand, the problem of preventing public design and planning agencies, with their tremendous potential for social production, from becoming sterile bureaucracies in which imagination, invention, experiment, and research are all frustrated and reduced to the lowest common denominator of dull mediocrity, will also have to be solved before either the public or the professional will consent to merging private offices in broader, more social organizations.