

From my 11th year on I had one wish: to become a landscape architect. How did I learn about landscape architecture? My mother was a horticulturalist and had many friends who were landscape architects so I knew the word landscape architect. In the studio of an artist I saw a mural of an imaginary city at the River Rhine and I asked, “What is this? “ It showed the roads, the houses and green spaces and the artist kindly explained it to me and said the green spaces are parks! When I came home I told my mother that I wanted to do parks and become a landscape architect. Her reply was, “Then you have to drive a bulldozer”, because at that time landscape architects in Europe mostly offered design/build services. To that I replied, “ Oh, goodie”. Since then my thoughts have been on that mural and to becoming a landscape architect creating green spaces for people living in cities.

Looking over 60 years there have been milestones in my career and stumbling blocks. It has not always been clear sailing.

This evening, I have selected seven milestones—both personal and professional—to share with you. I shall then present a selection of my landscape architecture projects as illustrations of my commitment to collaboration, modernism, sustainability and ecological design.

### **Milestone 1 Charles Elliot**

In 1910, Charles Elliot, President Emeritus of Harvard, wrote: “Landscape architecture is primarily a fine art, and as such its most important function is to create and preserve beauty in the surroundings of human habitations and in the broader natural scenery of the country; but it is also concerned with promoting the comfort, convenience, and health of urban populations, which have scant access to rural scenery, and urgently need to have their hurrying,

workaday lives refreshed and calmed by the beautiful and reposeful sights and sounds which nature, aided by the landscape art, can abundantly provide.”

Today, in the 21st century I would amend Charles Elliot’s letter by saying that landscape architecture is not only a fine art, but also a science.

## **Milestone 2: Modern Design**

A letter from Dean Hudnut admitting me to the Graduate School of Design at Harvard in 1943. Walter Gropius, formerly of the Bauhaus in Germany, was then Head of Architecture at Harvard. My professors Christopher Tunnard and Lester Collins, opened my eyes to Modernism, while in the background remnants of the Ecole des Beaux Arts lingered with curlicue flower borders and washes for presentations. There I discovered the manifestos of Dan Kiley, Garrett Eckbo and James Rosen in Pencil Points in 1938. From these teachers, I learned not only collaboration,

but basic design principles in the Bauhaus tradition, as well as aesthetics, which are still expressed in my designs today.

After graduation I had the good fortune to work in the architects offices of Louis Kahn and Oscar Stonorov in Philadelphia on Public Housing Projects, and with landscape architect Dan Kiley in his office in Charlotte, VT. One day after a walk in the woods, Dan said, “Cornelia, walk lightly in the woods.” I replied, “but Dan, I always wear sneakers.” He looked at me quizzically and commented no further. Later on, it dawned on me that he meant “study the woodland and preserve it.” Thus I learned about the ecology of New England and could later transfer this knowledge to the Pacific Northwest and other ecologies.

### **Milestone 3: Rachel Carson**

Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* published in 1963 allowed me

to understand how all living creatures and land are interconnected.

#### **Milestone 4: Earth Day**

Earth Day is an annual event, celebrated on April 22. It was founded by Gaylord Nelson and first celebrated on March 21, 1970, the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere.

Today we celebrate Earth Week, an entire week of activities focused on environmental issues.

#### **Milestone 5: Brundtland Report**

In 1987 the Brundtland report “Our Common Future” was published. It recognized that environmental problems were global in nature and urged the UN General Assembly to establish policies for sustainable urban development.

Pressing this book into my hands, my late husband Peter

Oberlander said “This will change your landscapes” and so it did, as shown in projects over the last 30 years.

## **Milestone 6: Climate Change and Sustainable**

### **Development Goals**

Climate change is upon us as we all know. The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) may have been our last chance for a meaningful agreement to shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy before ongoing damage to the world's climate becomes irreversible and devastating.

Lately, the United Nations issued a new list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals Goal. Concerning the design professions the goals are:

Good Health and Well-Being (3)

Quality Education (4)

Industry, Innovation Infrastructure (9)

Sustainable Cities and Communities (11)

Life below Water (14)

Life on Land (15)

Partnerships for the Goals (17)

Today, more than ever, the design professions can play an important role in ameliorating conflict between the built and natural environments. Landscape architecture should be a leading-edge profession in collaboration with other professionals. The scale of our environmental challenges demands a new group of multi-disciplinary professionals. We are concerned with the bigger picture of our built and natural environments. E.O.Wilson's *Biophilia Hypothesis* suggests a biologically based, instinctive bond between humans and their environment. In short, longing for nature is built into our genes.

We cannot undo the past but we must go forward. He further

urges us: “We must keep every scrap of nature in and around our cities. Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction.”

### **Milestone 7: Densification of Cities**

Population pressure on cities has resulted in increased densification with more high rises and less accessibility to nature. It is essential that we replace the footprint of the many high rises with green roofs and solar collectors to alleviate energy consumption and to reduce stormwater runoff.

In order to accomplish our goals, we must practice what I call the three R’s on every project: Research, shouldering Responsibility, and Risk-taking to meet the challenges faced by our finite planet. We also need what I call ‘VIM’ – namely VISION, IMAGINATION AND MOTIVATION by all those involved in building resilient and sustainable cities and communities. Today we need to design landscapes that can



withstand drought, rising water levels, floods and storms, in addition to being accessible to the citizens. This means as landscape architects we must design with newly acquired knowledge to develop bold concepts of bringing nature into the city. Right now we are all groping for new solutions in landscape architecture and city living. We need to look at new models of sustainability here and abroad. We need to engage our citizens once again to help us define what our city could be.

Only good, thoughtful planning and design can create a city for future generations especially with the demands on all of us to combat climate change as discussed in Paris.

We have reached the end of the Holocene period, namely the end of the last ice age, and we are entering a new phase called the “Anthropocene” which translates roughly as the “human age” for which we have to find design solutions.

We have learned from the eminent scientist E.O. Wilson, author of *Biophilia Hypothesis* who suggested that there is a biologically based, instinctive bond between humans and their environment. In short we all long to be surrounded by Nature, which is built into our genes. He further urges us, “We must keep every scrap of nature in and around our cities. Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction.”

Furthermore E. O. Wilson’s latest book *Half-Earth* describes our planet’s fight for life which can be helped by preserving half of the surface of the earth to nature.