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United States of America

The Landscape Architects in the United States of America 1956

By Stuart M. Mertz, Member of ASLA

Due to general prosperity and the excellent results of good design and planning, as well as exciting and colorful articles in numerous reviews, landscape architects in the U.S.A. are busier than ever. There is a serious shortage of trained persons for general landscape architectural design, for city planning work and for park and recreational work. Our bi-monthly bulletin, published by the ASLA, in 1955 contained an average of 46 positions for trained landscape architectural planners with salaries ranging from \$3,600 to \$20,000 per year.

There are close to 5,000 landscape architects in the U.S.A. in various capacities, yet our 23 colleges and universities, teaching landscape architecture, with a total enrollment of 576 are turning out an average of only 124 graduates a year. The greatest majority of them are going into city and regional planning offices. Most of these offices pay higher salaries to beginners and less experienced persons than private offices can really afford to pay. They have retirement plans and the other benefits of security offered by large organizations in America today. Their top salaries are not necessarily as good as those available to the persons who work for themselves or in small or large private firms doing many types of professional design. Thus, one of our biggest problems is to interest young men and women in our profession.

Another problem presenting itself is the trade unions. This doesn't affect the professional man personally, but affects the cost of his finished product. The nurserymen and landscape contractors, at least in St. Louis, want no part of trade unions. It costs too much to execute a design now, and to add the additional costs imposed by the inefficiency of trade union workmen would seriously jeopardize the volume of work and the net profit of the firms.

Another problem is to educate persons to beauty and the importance of good professional advice in obtaining a proper setting to all building and the proper development of open areas. Because of very high construction costs, many budgets are exhausted when it is time to plant. Often economy minded boards of directors purchase plants without a plan and half-heartedly plant the job. I have received requests for a free landscape plan for numerous buildings of a charitable nature. They are willing to pay for every hour a plumber, electrician or carpenter spends, but hate to pay for any time a landscape architect spends. We are considered a luxury and something not so

necessary for a workable unit. We must convince people that a proper landscaped setting is as important as a fancy building design or expensive materials on floors or walls in the building itself. We must tell them that our work combines ground forms, access, space and planting and thus must be included as well as the other parts of a building.

The landscape architect is enjoying greater collaboration with architects and engineers today than ever before. We still must educate them as well as clients to the fact that the most effective collaboration comes from the very beginning of a job, not after the building plans are finished or the building is partially completed. Landscape architects are efficient and practical, though many think them dreamers and only artists.

Another problem we still have is within our group—namely our name. Too many variations confuse the public and so we are trying to eliminate some of the odd such as “land planner,” “site planner,” “site engineer,” “Landscape engineer.” They are all landscape architects. Our Society, through a special committee, is trying to coordinate the definition of “landscape architecture” so that in all references to the profession, in dictionaries, encyclopedias, registration laws, etc. the same definition will be used and accepted.

Great activity continues in the field of residential design in urban areas, with much emphasis on outdoor living. Hotels and resorts are providing attractive settings for buildings, dining terraces and swimming pools.

A very noticeable trend of interest to landscape architects relative to city landscape is the landscaped shopping center in America. Perhaps motivated by a sense of theatrical publicity and showmanship, developers are requesting planting, sculpture and “atmosphere” as created by these elements along with fine commercial architectural designs. Planting to help screen noise, to relieve the bareness of acres of paved parking areas and to add colorful interest and to provide a better setting for a building or group of buildings have been required by zoning commissions where requests for classification changes have been made, particularly those adjacent to residential areas. We are hopeful that the public will learn to like planting in all shopping areas because of the aesthetic relief from the coldness or hotness of paving and buildings. We hope it will contribute something to a better America and world in which to live.