Beatrix Farrand’s Campus Landscapes

Multiple Locations

Photographs by Alan Ward 1984

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

The landscapes designed by Beatrix Farrand (1872-1959) at Princeton University and Yale University represent an American campus ideal, where Gothic Revival architecture defines a series of quads, greens and courtyards, that are traversed by walkways. Farrand designed the planting and shaped the land between buildings with walls, terraces, and steps to adapt the architectural compositions to the sites and the topography. During her thirty years working at Princeton and twenty-one years at Yale, she established nurseries to supply plants, while designing the character-defining spaces of both campus landscapes.

Beatrix Farrand started working at Princeton University in 1912 on the landscape design for the new Graduate School, designed by the prominent architect Ralph Adams Cram (1-5). The University was a major patron of Gothic art, as well as architecture. Gothic Revival architecture, recalling the history of Oxford and Cambridge in England, had become the symbol for American academic institutions. Looking back to the medieval era was occurring at the same time that the United States had recently become the world's leading industrial economy. A similar retrospective approach was occurring in England at this time; the Arts and Crafts Movement was a reaction to industrialization, advocating for an honest use of materials and a return to hand-crafted work by artisans. Farrand was influenced by Gertrude Jekyll in England, designer of over four hundred gardens and author of fifteen books on gardening, and a prominent proponent of the principles espoused in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Farrand visited Jekyll in 1895, while on a trip to study the gardens of England and Italy. This movement gained support in the United States with the American Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1897.

There is a degree of unity and wholeness in Farrand's designs for the spaces on these campuses. We know from her correspondence that she was responsible for the additions of terraces and walls, that were needed to ground and harmonize these buildings to the land. The terrace she added to make a base or plinth for the Graduate School at Princeton appears to be part of the architectural composition to extend the buildings into the site (1,2). At Yale, the planted moats with stone walls along the streets and sidewalks establish mediating zones between the public domain and residential buildings, that were appropriate for the urban context of New Haven (23,24). The harmony between the buildings and landscapes can make it difficult to determine where Farrand's work is discernible from that of the architecture of Cram at Princeton and James Gamble Rogers at Yale,

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except for her layout of paths, which form cogent and dynamic lines of circulation, expressing the characteristic rhythmic patterns of academic life (4,9-12). She excelled at the craft of landscape architecture; the sites were designed to be built, and were well executed, so that the principles advocated for in the Arts and Crafts movement are carried out and expressed in these campus landscapes. Landscape architect Diana Balmori, writing in Beatrix Farrand's *American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses*, says that Farrand preferred working on residential gardens rather campuses, especially because of the long-term relationships she established with the owners of gardens, such as Dumbarton Oaks. The residential gardens may have been more personally rewarding to Farrand; however, her campus designs are important social spaces and significant places of community in the universities, that touch the lives of many people every day.

Farrand's campus landscapes demonstrate her mastery of planting design. While inspired by Jekyll and the Arts and Crafts Movement, a significant influence on her career also came from Charles Sprague Sargent, the first director of the Arnold Arboretum. The planting design comes forward and is a prominent part of the perception of these campus spaces with plants from the region, that were mostly grown in the nurseries established for the campuses, while the architectonic elements in Farrand's landscapes tend to merge with the buildings. There is a simple and calm feeling achieved in the spaces by using a simple palette of lawn and trees, along with wall plantings, and occasional evergreens along paths. She preferred deciduous trees for an expression of seasonality, while not including color borders (except in a few house gardens), to reinforce the making of a simple, broad and appropriately scaled landscape in relationship to the buildings framing the quads.

The planting in the campuses is naturally appealing because of our affinity for the presence of nature, as described in evolutionary psychologists' studies of human behavior, which identify a positive emotional response to the natural world, as an innate, but complex human trait. This human attraction to the natural world makes sense, because it connects humans to their sources of sustenance, and in turn survival, as survival is the most fundamental human value; however, is an attraction to a planted landscape, also an innate human characteristic? Is a built landscape with planting, such as a courtyard at Princeton, a subset of the natural world, eliciting similar affinities as the natural world itself? The onset of the Neolithic era with the rise of

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agriculture and plant domestication was about 12,000 years ago, so evolutionary adaptation has likely adjusted our perception to embrace a broader and more comprehensive affinity to nature, that also includes an attraction to planted landscapes. Evolutionary biologists believe that human evolution has continued, and even accelerated since the rise of agriculture. There is presumably an innate attraction to the planted landscapes of fields, pastures, and plantations of fruit trees, because it connects humankind to landscapes related to their continued survival. However, how do these affinities to planted landscapes, like the Princeton and Yale campuses, relate to how we perceive built works of landscape architecture?

Making a landscape with planting is an opportunity for the art of landscape architecture, however not all built landscapes with planting are works of landscape architecture, nor is a work of landscape architecture required to have planting. Landscapes can be constructed with planting that would fulfill practical needs, and also appeal to our innate attraction to the natural world, but landscape architecture, as an art, offers more; it has an expressive dimension. Expression in landscape architecture is the presentation of ideas through articulate symbols, like all the arts.

In addition to planting, what are the opportunities for symbolic expression in landscape architecture? Through most of human evolution we were more connected to the natural world, including plants with their growth and seasonality, the flow of water, along with other facets and rhythms of nature (such as the patterns of the sun and moon), which because of their relationship to survival, became meaningful life-symbols. These life-symbols were the sources of many of the foundational myths and beliefs of prehistoric people. Landscape architecture taps into these deeply held values and communicates with expressive forms articulating a knowledge of the rhythms, feelings and emotions, associated with the natural world, that still resonate within us, because of the continued potency of these life-symbols.

The symbolic expressions of values in landscape architecture go beyond sound, functional planning and the good arrangement of buildings and sites, to communicate in a tangible way the value of building in response to the patterns and rhythms of nature. Works of landscape architecture express the value of our being on the land, a basic condition of existence, that is brought forward and expressed in a symbolic way in this art.

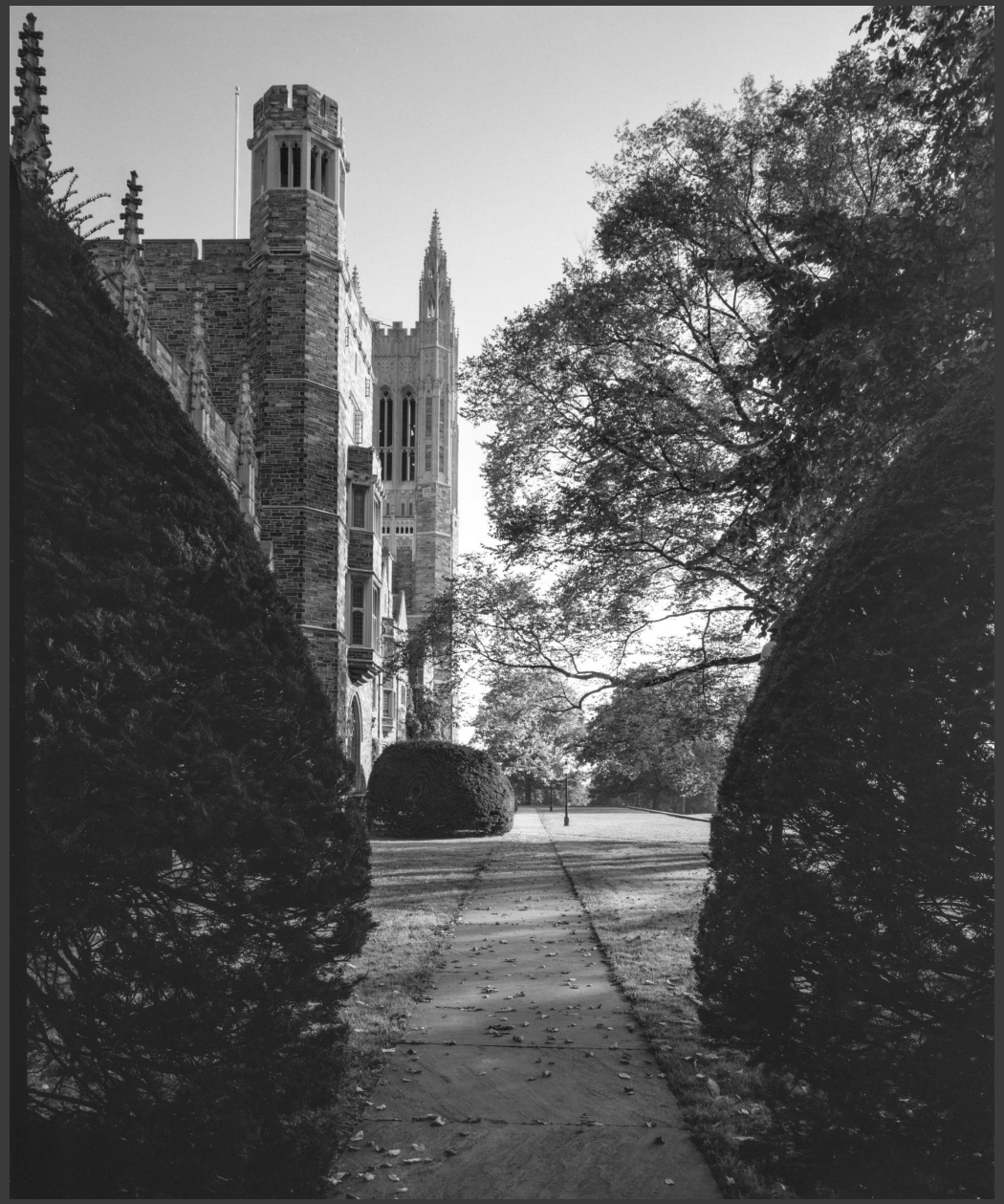
List of Photographs

1-22 Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey

1. Path along Pyne Tower and Cleveland Tower, Graduate School
2. Terrace on south side of Graduate School
3. Cedars in Old Quad, Graduate School
4. Paths at New Quad, Graduate School
5. Wyman House garden, Graduate School
6. Gate and walk from railroad station to University campus
7. View north along yew-bordered walk, Pyne Hall
8. View south along path between Laughlin and Folke Halls
9. View south to gate and 1901 Hall
10. 1901 Hall and Laughlin Hall
11. View north toward Buyers Hall, Folke and Laughlin Halls
12. View north of Buyers Hall
13. Steps to Blair Arch
14. Residential quad showing palette of lawn and trees
15. Steps and terrace to fit buildings to the topography
16. Wall and steps for grading of the site
17. Wall plantings of wisteria
18. Planting at residential building
19. Wall plantings at residential building
20. Garden with herbaceous borders
21. Garden wall and bench between planting
22. Arbor at Maclean house

23-28 Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

23. Planted moat at the corner of College and Elm Streets
24. Planted moat along sidewalk of Elm Street
25. Entrance to Branford Court, Branford College
26. Stone paths in Branford Court
27. Branford Court and Harkness Tower, Branford College
28. Yew hedges in Calliope Court, Branford College
29. Brothers in Unity Court, Branford College
30. Linonia Court, Branford College



Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Balmori, Diana, et al., *Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses*, 1985

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

"Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses," Wave Hill and Harvard University, 1985
"Luminous Landscapes: Photographs by Alan Ward" The National Building Museum, 2016
"American Designed Landscapes: Space and Light" Sarasota Center for Architecture, 2018

See *Beatrix Farrand's American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses* by Diana Balmori, Diane Kostal McGuire, and Eleanor McPeck for more biographical information. McGuire discusses Farrand's use of plants and planting design, as well as the influence of Gertrude Jekyll, Thomas Mawson, et al., on her work in the chapter "Plants and Planting Design." The chapter on planting is about one-third of the book, which is indicative of its relative significance in Farrand's work.

These speculations about of the art of landscape architecture are strongly influenced by Susanne Langer's ideas, particularly in her book, *Feeling and Form: a Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key.* Langer presents a comprehensive theory of art based on symbolic forms articulating *knowledge* of feelings and emotions, not the actual feelings, but the projection of feelings. Her term "feelings" covers more than a specific state, but a process, which may have successive phases, to form a sort of virtual, or imagined set of emotions. A symbolic expression is achieved by an artist creating a "significant form" that communicates in art, something that cannot be communicated in language, or discursive form. She covers painting, sculpture, architecture, and the performing arts; her theory of music is perhaps the clearest example.

The idea of landscape architecture, as an expression of the value of being on the land and building in response to natural processes, is influenced by William C. Widdowson's theory of architecture, as an expression of the value of shelter, in *Architecture as Art: A Phenomenological Theory of Architectural Esthetics.*