

Dulles Airport

Dulles, Virginia

Photographs by Alan Ward 1978, 2024

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

These black and white images from 1978 of the Dulles Airport landscape, now seem like artifacts from a time capsule, illustrating Dan Kiley's design fifteen years after its installation in northern Virginia. This significant work of landscape architecture was lost in the late 1990s for airport expansion. I returned to the site in 2024 for the last two color-photographs to illustrate the changes twenty-five years after the removal of the short-lived, but masterful design for an airport landscape.

Kiley's design for the Dulles site was an artful expression in the landscape of approaching an airport along drives, arriving at a large entry court with parking, and then transitioning into the terminal designed by architect Eero Saarinen. The 1982 *Process Architecture* monograph on Dan Kiley's landscape projects includes Dulles Airport with text and data summarizing the project and his design intentions. What stands out are the use of the terms: "scale" or "large scale," which are mentioned four times in the text describing his strategy for laying out the site.¹ Understanding scale is paramount in any landscape design, and it was fundamental to Kiley's approach to the planning and design of the Dulles Airport site. It began with the existing property and its geometry of large agricultural fields with hedgerows as clearly defined boundaries. It was an orthogonal order within linear frames of vegetation. How do you then respond to the scale and speed of the approach to an airport in an automobile, as well as take command spatially of the large areas required for circulation, parking and arrival?

Kiley laid out a geometrically organized plan as an extension of the architecture of the terminal, however, it is at a grand scale, appropriate for a site comprising over 6,000 acres. The approach road to the terminal is flanked on each side by large groves of red cedar trees, spaced in a 20' grid, around 900' long on each side (1). The road then loops around an elliptical-shaped parking area (3,9). Three blocks of trees frame this parking court, which is set at a lower elevation on the flat site. The trees are like allées in a French garden with multiple rows of red oaks over a juniper ground cover, each row around 600' long (4,5). In the final approach around the ellipse before arriving at the elevated terminal, Kiley opens up the view to Saarinen's building, by planting masses of low-growing holly and roses (6). "The geometry and scale are comprehensible from the ground and from the air." ²

I photographed Dulles Airport for the exhibition *Dan Kiley: Classicist in the Modern Landscape*, organized by Peter Walker, which opened at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1982. Works of landscape architecture like the Dulles Airport site are dynamic living compositions; these views from 1978 show the essential character and intent of the original design. It is Kiley's vision for the site, at or near the optimum time after its installation. Photography is an indispensable tool in documenting the history of landscape architecture, especially with designs lost or modified beyond recognition, the significance of Kiley's work remains visible through photographs.

1. *Landscape Design: Works of Dan Kiley, Process Architecture*, 1982, pp. 135, 147

2. Possibly Kiley's own description in *Landscape Design: Works of Dan Kiley*, p. 147

List of Photographs

1. Approach with red cedar groves and flowering trees, 1978
2. Median with flowering trees, 1978
3. Approach to parking court, 1978
4. Multiple rows of red oaks along drive, 1978
5. Juniper ground cover and red oaks, 1978
6. Approach to terminal with massed planting of ilex and roses, 1978
7. Drive with roses around parking court, 1978
8. Massed planting of roses around parking court, 1978
9. Parking court set at a lower elevation, 1978
10. Service drive to terminal, 1978
11. View from perimeter parking area, 1978
12. View of terminal expansion and site modifications, 2024
13. Overall view of terminal expansion and site, 2024



























Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Landscape Designs: Works of Dan Kiley, Process Architecture, 1982
Kiley, Dan and Jane Amidon, *Dan Kiley: The Complete Works of America's Master Landscape Architect*, 1999
Rainey, Reuben and Marc Treib, *Dan Kiley Landscapes: The Poetry of Space*, 2009

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

"Dan Kiley: Classicist in the Modern Landscape" Harvard Graduate School of Design, 1982
"Dan Kiley, Landscape Architect – the First Two Decades" Harvard Graduate School of Design, 1997

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