

The Cultural Landscape Foundation  
Pioneers of American Landscape Design

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SHLOMO ARONSON

ORAL HISTORY

REFLECTIONS

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Daphna Greenstein

Yael Haker

Kenneth Helphand

Carl Steinitz

Peter Walker

## A Lesson in Reading Landscapes by Daphna Greenstein November 2012



Office photograph, 1977

On May 2009 I was asked to give a talk at the conference in honor of Shlomo Aronson, having worked at his office between the years 1974-1980.

I called my talk "Lessons in reading landscapes" since the most significant lesson I have learnt from Shlomo was how to observe, how correct and sensitive reading of a landscape is the key to its code.

Serendipity and coincidence brought me to Shlomo's office in 1974, and thus to acknowledge the profession of Landscape Architecture. Being a 3rd year student of Environmental Design at Betzalel in Jerusalem, I passed through the right corridor in the building just as Shlomo called the head of Department, asking for a student to work at his office. I agreed, not knowing anything about Shlomo or his office.

A whole world opened up to me as I worked with Shlomo for 6 years, before going on to acquire a B.L.A and an M.Arch at the University of Oregon.

But with all my studies, nothing compared to the experience I had joining Shlomo as he went through the planning/designing process of a new project. Peeling layer after layer, revealing the heart and essence of the place -- interpreting the site to come up with the most appropriate solution.

Landscape Urbanism, Sustainability, Cultural Landscape, etc' were invented later, but Shlomo had it all with in him in those early days, as he could see the large scale overview, as well as the very fine detail that the place, its setting, history and story evoked

He has a special sense of scale, how to "place" the design to be embraced perfectly within the sight, and how to tell, in the most appropriate way, the story of a place.

As I went on with my life, moved to Haifa, the city at which Shlomo and I both had spent our childhood, I opened my own firm where till this day; I try to apply the lessons taught to me by Shlomo Aronson.

## Remembrances of my Brother, Shlomo Aronson by Yael Haker

November 2012

When asked by you to reflect on Shlomo, my young brother, I came to remember the landscape of our childhood and thought it might shed some light on him and his work. The two of us and our parents lived on Mount Carmel with very few houses around; what we had in our neighborhood in abundance were rocks, shrubs, and pine trees. In spring time wild flowers bloomed all over, and all sorts of little creatures like grasshoppers (Shlomo enjoyed tucking them into my bed), were jumping and flying as soon as I lifted the bed cover.

A few meters from the house there was a cluster of pine trees and Haifa Bay was seen through the tree branches. On summer evenings my father took us, and two neighboring boys to the "forest"; we sat on the rocks, ate the pine tree seeds and listened to my father's stories on wild Indians (Wineto, the last Mohican was our favorite) and of course Tarzan and his chimpanzee.

Besides playing and reading for enjoyment (school was less important at that age) Shlomo was famous for playing tricks on us, telling us tall stories in a most convincing way that caused us, especially my mother to jump in alarm. There were of course tales of broken limbs from tree branches falling off, and from the roof of our one story house, accompanied by his amazing stories on how he just happened to be on the roof chasing a mysterious creature.

Times were not easy, in the forties of the last century; we had our share of wars and troubles, but somehow, the inner truth of the landscape around us prevailed. I think Shlomo tried in his lifetime to hold to this image, recreate integrity and honesty combined in his case with knowledge and research. He is lucky to have the talent, the discipline, and mainly the imagination to do so.

**Reflections on Shlomo Aronson by Kenneth Helphand, FASLA,**  
Knight Professor of Landscape Architecture Emeritus, University of Oregon  
November 2012

I first met Shlomo when I was a visiting professor at the Technion in Israel in 1980. Years later Shlomo was on the committee that I worked with when writing the book "Dreaming Gardens: Landscape Architecture and the Making of Modern Israel." I was also honored to contribute an essay to his book "Shlomo Aronson: Making Peace with the Land." In the course of the research and writing I spent days visiting Shlomo's designs, but with the privilege of him as my guide. Many things struck me. Shlomo is grounded in Israel's landscape, from a deeply felt Zionist perspective and from his exceptional knowledge and love of the land. He has a grand vision, one that can encompass and conceive the entire country in his grasp. Yet, he simultaneously pays careful attention to the specifics of place and precise location.

Shlomo visited and lectured in Oregon and we went to spent time with Robert Murase, the renowned Japanese-American landscape architect who was a classmate of Shlomo's at Berkeley. Both of them deservedly celebrated for their use of stone. "Why stone," I asked. "stone is eternity," Shlomo answered. His work has contributed to defining a landscape language for Israel in all its complexity. His designs are wonderful places for people, but they also speak to deeper connections to the land and to its inhabitants. About his great design in Jerusalem for the Haas Promenade (done with Larry Halprin) and the Sherover and Trotner Promenades, done by his office alone I wrote:

"Aronson describes the progression along the promenade as a series of chapters, but it is more than a simple narrative. The design rises to the level expected of its honored situation. Encompassing one slope of Jerusalem's Kidron valley, it is a great amphitheater space, a teatro mundi, where everyone sits facing north towards the walled Old City and east to the desert. The grading accentuates the three-dimensionality of the space with a deference to historic integrity and archaic patterns and practices. The landscape amphitheater is echoed in the constructed geometry of arcs and curves punctuated by straight axes. Culture and nature meet in a promenade at the edge of city and desert, where the vista encompasses Jerusalem from west to east, green trees and stony desert, modern construction and ancient architecture.

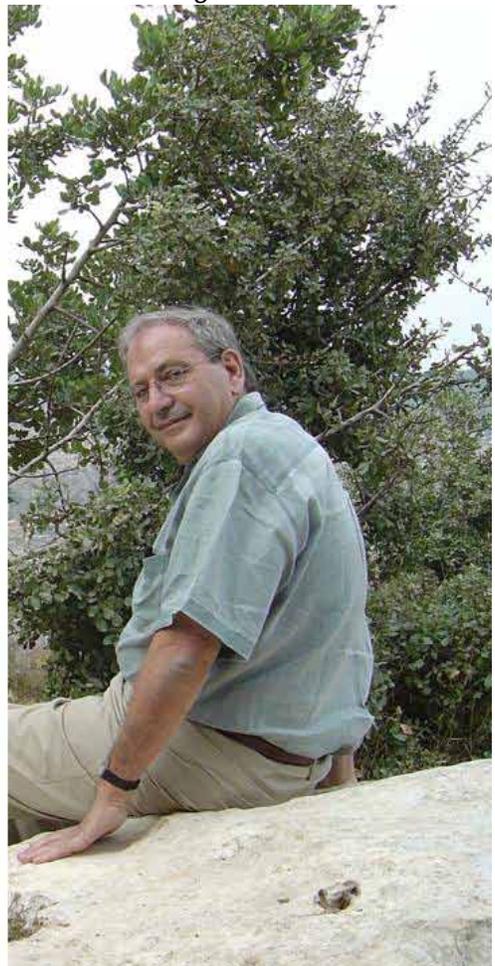
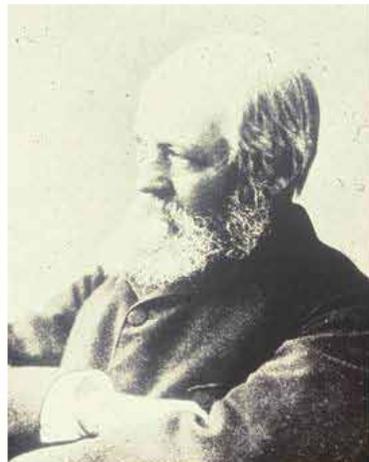
Aronson has called for calm in design, but if this is calm it is tremendously exciting. Like many great spaces there is a repose between the compelling demands of tradition and the present moment, an equilibrium between the challenge of the intellect and the pleasure of the senses. Through a combination of conscious design and serendipity, the weight of history and the fragrance of rosemary occupy equal status.

Here the intersection of the grand, historic vista laden with emotional, spiritual and political resonance meets the everyday. Adults and children play, residents and visitors stroll, people sip coffee, and everyone monitors the progress of seasons. It is ancient and modern, preserved and transformed, eternal and ephemeral, universal and precisely of its place."

**Reflections of Shlomo Aronson by Carl Steinitz, Honorary Member, ASLA,**  
Alexander and Victoria Wiley Professor of Landscape Architecture and Planning, Emeritus  
Graduate School of Design Harvard University  
October 2012

I have known Shlomo and his work for more than forty years and I hold him in great personal and professional regard. His design work is remarkable in that it encompasses the full range of scales which landscape architects consider their professional territory, and in my experience (and I have seen much of it) it has always been of the highest quality. I gave an illustrated talk in Jerusalem in January 2009 at a conference on landscape design held in honor of Shlomo Aronson. Very few landscape architects have had professional careers that encompass the highest level of design quality across the diversity of challenges implied by the full range of scales of professional interest to landscape architecture. Very few have had the opportunity. But some have, and in that talk I showed a very small set of projects made by each of five persons, all of whom I consider to be outstanding landscape architects: John Claudius Loudon, Peter Joseph Lenné, Frederick Law Olmsted, Warren Manning and Shlomo Aronson.

*Shlomo Aronson is the fifth of these landscape architects and I will be very brief –and visual—in describing the broad range and quality of his work in design.*



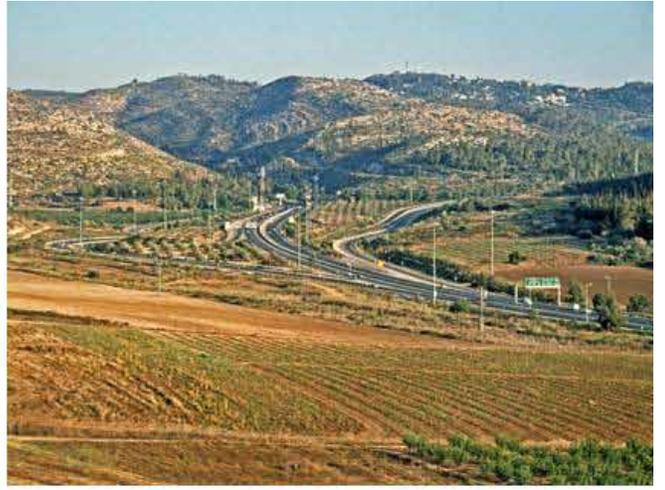
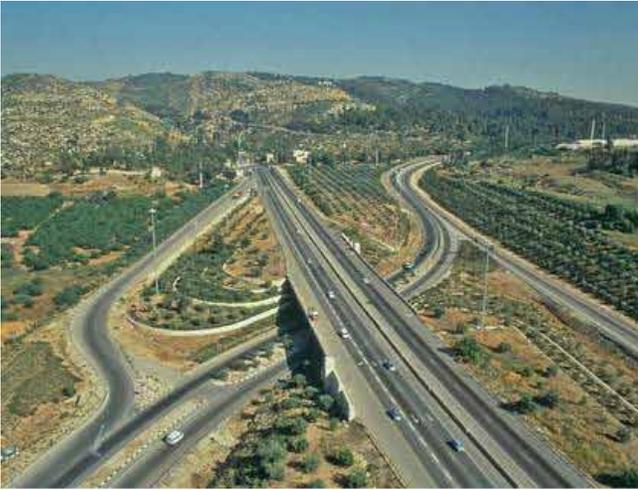
*There are many public places, and many parks.*



*There are many special places, of entry and focus.*



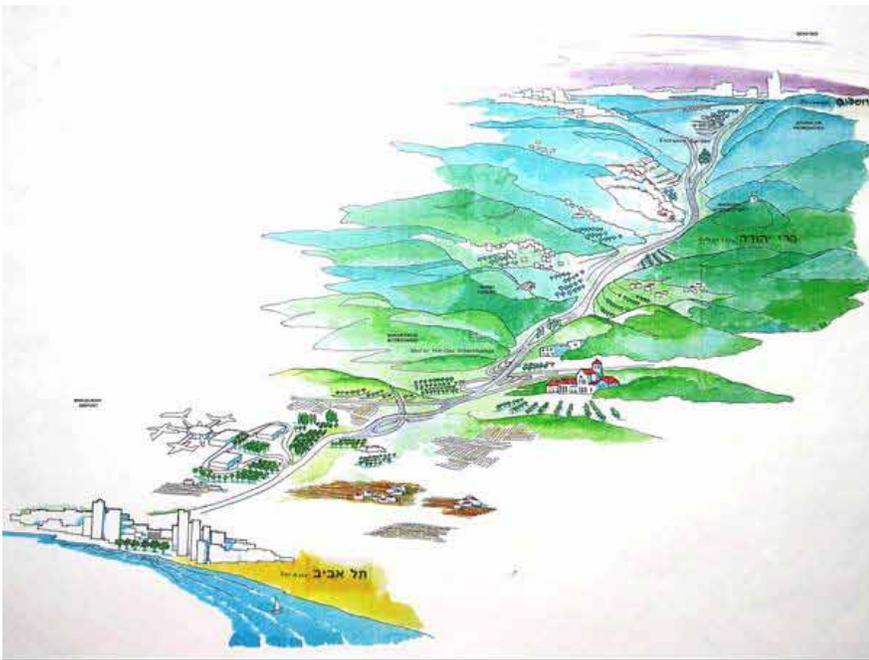
*There are many infrastructure designs.*



*There are many forests.*



*And there are very important contributions to planning the national landscape.*



Loudon, Lenné, Olmsted, Manning, and Aronson: What do they have in common?

They are all well known, and justifiably so. A long and full professional career unites these five, a career which includes many private and public projects, but they are better known for their public landscapes.

They have worked across the full range of the scales of professional practice in landscape architecture. They were not afraid of the challenges of very large projects and they were decisive in the planning and design of these landscapes, as designers must be. And they varied

their methods of design to fit the scale of the problem and changed those methods as the scale changed. They all wrote about their work, less about what they did and how they did it, and more about the more important question of WHY they did it.

Consider applying a proportional index, recognizing that Israel is a relatively small country when compared with England, Germany and America. One can fairly say that proportionally more Israelis and tourists have directly experienced a design of Shlomo Aronson's than the English have experienced Loudon's, the Germans have experienced Lenné's, or the Americans have experienced the designs of Olmsted and Manning.

Everyone has benefited from the work of these five landscape architects: their countries and their peoples, and their professional colleagues and collaborators. In Shlomo's case his colleagues and friends consider him with immense respect, both as a person and as a symbol of what landscape architects can accomplish through their professional practice. I am honored and happy to be among them.