

The Cultural Landscape Foundation
Pioneers of American Landscape Design

PAMELA BURTON

ORAL HISTORY

REFLECTIONS

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Reflections on Pamela Burton from Carolyn Doepke Bennett

May 2021

I am lucky enough to call Pamela Burton my friend!

We first met when I was running the Barn Studio Lecture Series for Nancy Goslee Power & Associates in Santa Monica, California. She was one of our featured speakers and I was so impressed with her talk and catalogue of work that I got this great idea...why not write a book about women in landscaping? So I took her out to lunch and three hours later we were still chatting. The book was never written but her enthusiastic support of my hidden "late in life" talents stayed with me, as did her ever-present graciousness and joy!

Years later our paths crossed again when I moved to a farm in Ojai, California. She generously offered one of her local gardens to be included in a tour I curated as part of the Ojai Music Festival. She freely shared all of her design decisions with the group at that garden and then just spent the rest of the day with us because we were having fun!

My favorite Pamela story happened just the other day. She and her husband came over for a post-Covid dinner to celebrate our freedom from masks. Pamela arrived carrying a bunch of her bright pink Gertrude Jekyll roses but admired the vase of yellow roses on my kitchen table. I confessed to her that I had "foraged" for them. I told her they came from a 100 yard stretch of David Austin roses no one seemed to be taking care of. After pinpointing the location for her, she threw her head back and, laughing, said..."I planted them!" The owner had been a client. She intentionally put them in front of the fence, so, now, many years later, even though most of the garden remains private, part of it continues to beautify the roadside. Thank you, Pamela!

Reflections on Pamela Burton by Linda Brown

May 20021

Pamela and I were immediate friends, bonding from our first months of work together telling tales of the particular magic of Ojai, the joys and work of raising children, the life invigorating power of grandchildren, busy bees and busier weddings, wabi-sabi and wondrous gardens. Over the years, that friendship has grown like a good weed. My appreciation of her breezy freedom — so reflected in the aesthetic purity of her work — is boundless. And our relationship has become like one of those great Ojai oaks, strong and impervious to the winds of time.

My garden is a deeply important part of my life, and living in the embrace of her work has afforded me all those qualities that I have found so essential in her being: warmth, life, positivity, and a touch of the ethereal.

Of course her colored drawings are a gift. I attach a more recent one.



Reflections on Pamela Burton by Frederick Fisher

May 2021

Pamela Burton and I were in the 1972-75 cohort of the UCLA School of Architecture and Urban Planning (when it was still a distinct school at UCLA). It was an effervescent time at SAUP and in the LA art world. Pamela, who grew up in Southern California had a singular focus on the subtle and not so subtle character of southern California landscape and helped open my eyes, as a Midwesterner, and others' eyes to its richness. It is not a desert! Her love of art complemented her embrace of historic spaces to give Pamela an exceptionally rich design palette. Her own drawings were artistic at time when the individual artistic hand was still celebrated in architecture and landscape design. It was always inspiring to visit her office and take in her work and the artwork of her friends.



That moment in time and place was the fertile ground that I needed to find my path in architecture with deep engagement with art and landscape. Frank Gehry was my other inspiration in how he immersed himself with the local artists, working with them in exhibition design, designing studios, and drawing on their way of seeing the world. The two fields of landscape and art are what has inspired me first and foremost in my evolution in the profession.

Pamela and her husband Richard Hertz introduced me and many others to the special character of Ojai, California. They hosted me and my family there so many times over the years that it was inevitable when we able to build a house, it would naturally be in an Ojai olive grove.

Pamela has been my most consistent collaborator in landscape. We have an effortless connection in design and joy of working together that continues to this day. Whether it's a house or a school, urban or rural, Pamela creates beauty and meaning that is both of its time and place and imbued with timeless artistic spirit.



Reflections on Pamela Burton by Annica Howard

May 2021

When my husband James and I bought a property in the East End of Ojai, CA in 2012 we really did not know what we had gotten into. The compound feeling of the property was uniquely suited to a blended family such as ours of teenage children and close ex-spouses, but the surrounding avocado orchard in which the houses were situated was overgrown and neglected and led to a feeling of complete disorientation when trying to walk between the small dwellings. The property looked sad and dumpy, and we were beginning to wonder why we had fallen for this wreck of a 5-acre property. It was clear we needed some help, but I knew it had to be someone who would understand the particular bohemian and wild charme of the place while also creating the right amount of order and structure. I immediately thought of Pamela who, years ago, had been my neighbor and who I remembered had talked about owning a home in the middle of citrus orchards in Ojai. Her artistic eye, her sense of wabisabi and her sheer enthusiasm and optimistic spirit had left a big impression on me, and I knew I would enjoy working with her.



When now, years later, I walk our property I see Pamela's exuberance and love of nature in virtually every nook and cranny of our landscape. Where there once was a maze of dense avocado trees and a heap of discarded "Ojai potatoes" as locals call the ubiquitous local rocks, there are now orderly stacked-rock walls, an olive orchard, a native grass field and a beckoning foot path through layers of echium, matilja poppies, acacias, cacti and salvias that invites visitors to discover and marvel at nature's bounty. It feels inevitable, as if this paradise had always been here. I am forever grateful to Pamela and I miss the days of weekly "construction meetings" scheming, laughing and pouring over plans, inspiration pictures and plant materials.

During one of these site meetings, we were suddenly attacked by an angry swarm of bees. As the workers all fled the site, Pamela, ever curious and without a moment's hesitation, volunteered to find

the source of the problem. A beekeeper herself she excitedly offered to get suited up and search for the disturbed hive. Would I join her? Yes...ok...sure...

Who can say no to Pamela? She is up for anything. She says YES to life and that's what I see in her work every day.

Reflections on Pamela Burton from Mary Sager McFadden

June 2021

It was supposed to be a simple site visit to review the specified plant material in place, as described in the Planting Plans. Each plant had been meticulously drawn to scale, in particular combinations related to size, texture, seasonality and site aspect. The landscape contractor was to have it all laid out for us to review and make any last-minute adjustments before planting. But no; Pamela Burton and I arrived at the site to a truck load of plants, all in a jumble.

I was new to landscape architecture, having worked seven years as an architect. My interview with Pamela and her then partner, Katie Spitz, was informal and fun. We related to each other instantly, all sharing graduate degrees in architecture, but inevitably leaning into landscape architecture. It wasn't so much a switch in career as a shift in focus toward a practice of design with a different palette of materials.

Back at the site visit, I panicked and desperately started directing plants to be placed here and there, per plan. As an architect, I assumed a successful landscape installation would match the carefully laid out design drawing. What I learned that day was that working with living materials is a complex, organic and pliable endeavor. Pamela was in her element. She took one look at the situation and redesigned the entire project with the material at hand, joyfully.

I've heard Pamela described as a "force of nature." I think courage is her force, and joy is her nature. Confronted with any difficult issue- deadline, design conundrum, client critique, business decision- she neither backs down nor procrastinates, but goes courageously straight forward and through to the other side. Pamela loves landscape architecture and her enthusiasm is infectious. Her clients and staff alike are awed by her approach to design, which draws on an expansive knowledge of plant material, architectural history, philosophy, art, literature, biology, ecology and geology. This intellectual insight is equally matched by an intuitive artistic style, lending a mastery to her work.

Her successful career over forty-five years is testament to these attributes.

As sole proprietor of a "woman-owned firm," Pamela has demonstrated to me and many others, how to lead with gusto, determination, imagination, intuition, curiosity and generosity. She is quick to empower others and share acclaim. I am grateful to consider her a mentor and friend.

Reflections on Pamela Burton by Astrid Preston

May 2021

Pamela and I met shortly after her graduation from UCLA. It was at a party in Venice, CA at the height of the Venice art scene. Pamela has always been a great lover of art and thinks conceptually like an artist. I have always appreciated how this informs her approach to the garden, as I, a painter, approach my canvas. Pamela approaches the garden in so many painterly ways - structure, composition, color - but then has the added dimension of smell. All the senses are enlivened. I remember her commenting on one of my landscape paintings that it was so wonderful to be a painter for one could have full grown trees and perfect hedges, while she, as the landscape architect, had to wait years for the plants to grow.

The emotional content of the garden, as in all art, was critical to her approach. The play of light and shadow as one walked through the space and watched the garden change at all times of the day and night. There is a change of mood for each of her garden rooms, affected by plantings, color and fragrance, hard and soft scape. I had never heard other architects speak so eloquently about the emotional affect on the traveler through her garden as Pamela has. I am also very interested in having an emotional response to my paintings. Mystery is at the heart of that for both of us. An altered experience. When Pamela gives a lecture, she includes images of art work as well as photos of gardens to illustrate these concepts.

I love doing garden tours with Pamela, especially the Robinson Garden tour. She always taught me the names of plants and would discuss the different trees and grasses, but the most fun was learning about the snacks in the garden. She introduced me to arugula and borage flowers and the delicious petals of the pineapple guava blossoms. My backyard garden was transformed by her comments and suggestions. For my 50th birthday Pamela made a plan for a pergola and steps up to a garden on the top of my backyard hill. It is a wonderful surprise at the end of the journey up.

Reflections on Pamela Burton by Stephanie Psomas

May 2021

My first exposure to Pamela was at a 1983 UCLA Lecture featuring Pamela Burton & Emmett Wemple just prior to my entry in UCLA's Landscape Architecture Extension program. Pamela's eloquent explanation of the role that art and architecture play in Landscape Architecture got me hooked on the profession. My third year into the program I interviewed with Pamela & Katie and started working for Burton & Spitz October 1, 1987. Pamela continually mentored and encouraged me to think for myself with the challenge "What would you do?" "How would you solve this?" As an entry-level employee I thought my time with Pamela would serve as a first step to future employment opportunities, but each project I participated in was more exciting than the previous one, and before I knew it 30 years had passed.



I've accompanied Pamela in client interviews and presentations, and have always been amazed at her ability to communicate, educate and bring enthusiasm to clients. She combines a positive, creative spirit and joyous heart with the serious endeavor of finding design solutions.

Pamela Burton & Company projects have spanned the globe, but she is a California native at heart. As early as 1990 I witnessed Pamela weaving the importance of sustainability into presentations to clients. She would remind them that southern California has a limited water source that fluctuates with cycles of drought, and that native or drought resistant materials are important to our ecology. She would point out the beauty of chaparral that fills our surrounding mountainsides. This realization was also catching on with the Los Angeles City Planning Department and Pamela contributed plant material suggestions to the Xeriscape Ordinance.



I've been so fortunate to work with Pamela on a great variety of projects: On university campuses, on municipal projects, commercial campuses, healthcare centers, and many residential projects. Each project was contingent on the input and coordination of office staff. Pamela's daily observations, queries, and solutions bring new adventures to every day. In response to a design comment she has frequently led us in the chorus of a pop or musical hit song from long ago. Her positive nature does not consider failure or inability, and she continually searches for new plant materials and fresh perspectives to apply to each project.



Whether traveling to New York, Ukraine or downtown Los Angeles – it's been a blast and a half. Thank you Pamela for a great ride!

Reflections on Pamela Burton by Ron Rezek

June 2021

I met Pamela Burton in the fall of 1966 or 67 - memory fades. Pamela was a young co-ed down from the Bay Area to attend UCLA. I had a subsistence job as a dishwasher (hasher) in the sorority she chose to pledge, Pi Phi. My first memory of her was that of a slender blonde carrying a full sized surfboard through the sorority house, risking all of the China lamps, etc. in her vicinity.

I served her dinner every night as part of the job and I guess a mutual attraction developed. I had just transferred into the Art Department and I'm sorry I don't remember her initial major, but she soon joined the art studies also.

At the time we were not aware of the cultural significance of the changes going on around us. Revolution was in the air! The Vietnam War was in full swing and the UCLA campus was well involved. Bob Dylan was singing and things were indeed changing.

I lived in a very modest house a few miles from campus. Pamela had tired of the sorority life and we started life together on Beverly Glen Ave. We both had scooters to get to campus, which was not far. It was easy to park but the rain and cold made it a challenge.

We had a little apartment surrounded with greenery and nice windows. Pamela invented (I thought) the hobby/art of growing lovely, healthy plants indoors! I had never seen this before but soon our little home was covered with prodigious greenery, inside! She was very careful about maintenance and as I remember she verbally coaxed them all along.

We both were very involved in our Art education, taking lots of history and lower division classes. As I pursued a higher degree, I remember Pamela helping me with projects and full-scale models and always being present for my presentations. We were quite blessed at that time with the caliber of the faculty and visitors; Henry Dreyfuss, Charles Eames, Buckminster Fuller and others.

We lived in West Los Angeles, adjacent to the Pacific Ocean, Beverly Hills, Venice Beach, Sunset Strip, the downtown art community and many other hot spots of cultural and artistic evolution, and we took advantage of it all.

Pamela worked with tapestry. We had a loom and a sewing machine in our tiny place. With this equipment and skills she would make her own dramatic clothing. We had fun dressing up for the Renaissance Fairs at the time. She had the proficiency, energy and creativity to excel at whatever she tried. The indoor gardening however survived her other whims.

We both graduated from The Art department and migrated down to Architecture, a few buildings away. I had an MFA in Design so I was offered a job as the shop foreman in the Architecture School which evolved into junior instructorship. Pamela jumped right into the academic curriculum but generally

steered her program towards exterior architecture. She was quite the star of the Architecture student body. Once again her energy and drive put her at the head of the class.

About this time our relationship changed, a sad time.

I went on to teach at most of the Art/Design schools in the Los Angeles area (part time). Along with developing products and my own entrepreneurship. Pamela was in school a few more years but upon graduation got right into her own successful landscape architecture consultancy.

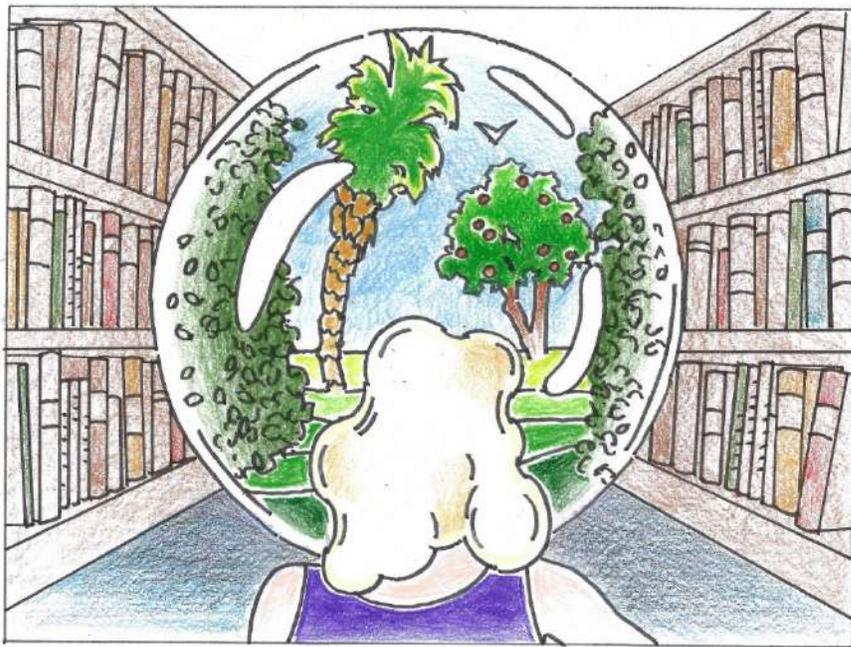


Reflections on Pamela Burton by John Ruble

May 2021

Pamela lives in a beautiful, generous world and invites us all to be part of it. It's a wonderful place to go when you are designing, and out of that you come forward to color more of the 'rest' of the world with her maternal glow of light and life, a kind of essence of California that she sees, and brings, everywhere she goes. This is an excellent state of mind for a landscape architect. In that field of design there are a lot of problems that have to be solved. But the most important thing is that whatever challenges you have overcome, the completed work speaks not of necessity but of *desire*: everything here is the way it is because we wanted it just like that.

We traveled to Asia together to design a campus on the eastern side of Taiwan- an immense field of sugar cane that we shaped using a big grid overlaid with a meandering water park. It was built from scratch, like Hadrian might have done, using water from a nearby river to create the *image* of a river running through the site. It gave us a reason to build bridges, so that students could experience a stronger sense of transition from residential villages to the more auspicious center of academic life. But my strongest memory is simply our day-one tour of the area. Pamela's unquestioning openness to experiencing a new place included chewing betelnuts used by locals when they wanted to kick back, but she needn't have bothered. Her natural confidence that the world will provide gives her a state of grace that you can't get from mere substances.



The other favorite work we made together is the Main Library in Santa Monica. Its central courtyard has a garden in which the shapes and textures of the plant palette somehow remind you of a reef, and that relates to an art installation by Carl Cheng that commemorates the underwater world of the Santa Monica Bay. The Library celebrates its 15th anniversary this year, and to assist, at the request of one of

the librarians, I created a coloring book. Now that I look at it, one of the pages makes me think of Pamela, and so I include it with these thoughts.

Here is someone that looks at an ordinary room and sees a garden.



Photo Credit John Linden

Reflections on Pamela Burton by Susan van Atta

May 2021

Pamela Burton is a cheerleader for our profession. Have you been to the Council of Fellows Investiture Ceremony and heard a two finger whistle celebrating a newly elected Fellow? That was Pamela.

We make a commitment to enjoy the Ceremony together every year. Pamela insists on this mandatory participation, which she envisions as 'tribal'. Because of Pamela, I belong to this tribe, as she generously suggested to the SoCal chapter of the ASLA that they should consider me as a potential Fellow nominee.

Pamela seems to love hearing about the accomplishments of landscape architects during the Ceremony, while also making it an opportunity to keep up with old friends and make new ones. This photo with James Corner, taken by Pamela's husband Richard, documents the time Pamela asked me if I'd ever met James Corner, after his 2018 Investiture in Philadelphia. Since neither of us had, she suggested we rush over to introduce ourselves and congratulate him.



We always have a great time at the conferences, whether riding bikes in New Orleans or having a luxurious lunch in San Diego. Since she now spends more time in Ojai, getting together is easier, even during the pandemic.

Pamela and I met in the mid 80's when I asked her to be one of our guest speakers for a 'Women in Architecture' lecture series, sponsored by the Architectural Foundation of Santa Barbara. A group of women, seeking role models, established these events to take place at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Pamela is a wonderful role model, not just because she is a talented and successful Landscape Architect, yet mostly because she is generous, kind and lots of fun.

Reflections on Pamela Burton by Elyn Zimmerman

May 2021

The name Pamela is widely taken to mean "all sweetness".

Formed on the Greek words πᾶν pan ("all") and μέλι meli ("honey").

A very appropriate name for Pamela Burton, especially when you see her at Rancho Dulce, her home with Richard Hertz in Ojai, CA, tending their bees, the citrus groves and her beloved agaves!

Pamela and I started UCLA undergrad around the same time and became friends when we lived next to one another in Beverly Glen Canyon. Pamela had a station wagon that she used to visit the plant suppliers in Inglewood, buy wholesale and then bring the plants back to Westwood and sell them to friends and friends of friends....an early indication of her entrepreneurial drive – a slight beginning for what developed over the years into her unique and spectacularly successful career.

Aside from her natural beauty (we called her the Grace Kelly of landscape architects), she was a plant geek incapable of calling any shrub, ground cover or flowering plant by its common name... always addressing them in Latin...thereby intimidating those of us not in the know. Always generous and enthusiastic, Pamela galvanized many of her friends and students to pay more and closer attention to the living world around us.

What distinguishes a Pamela Burton landscape, from the early small gardens to the later, large-scale complex projects, is not just her great sense of design, or her vast knowledge of flora (she is a Landscape Architect who genuinely loves plant materials). What really elevates her work is her approach to each project as a developing story or journey. One that she orchestrates through the choice of plantings, the grading of the site, the introduction or not of water and stone and other building elements. Nothing is stated in a literal way, we move through Pamela's gardens and parks and *feel* the journey and *intuit* the relationships she has created and shared with us.