University of Virginia – Academical Village

Charlottesville, Virginia

Photographs by Alan Ward 1996, 2024

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

It is not a simple task to document in photographs both the complexity and beauty of Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village. The fifty-acre site with an integrated ensemble of buildings embodies concepts and ideals about making a place for education, that is distinctly American in its embrace of the landscape, as well as appropriately fit to the specific characteristics of the site. The photographs illustrate site planning, architectural and landscape design, along with some of the subsequent modifications and additions to the original campus, which opened in 1825.

I first photographed the Academical Village in 1996 with a 4" X 5" view camera and a 2 ¼" X 6 ½" panoramic camera, and returned almost thirty years later to complete the photography with a digital camera. While the Rotunda, Lawn and flanking buildings are very familiar landmarks, each trip elicits a different set of emotions, as one's sentiments and reactions evolve over time, just as the landscape is dynamic and changes with time. Immersion in such a significant design brings forth intense feelings; time almost stops when there is such a profound experience of a place. I tend to work quite rapidly to capture the images, which is facilitated by using a digital camera. Once the passion for the photography subsides, then it is time to pause and reflect, and look forward to the process of editing the images and seeing the product of the visualizations, and at times, amazed at what a site looks like transformed into photographs.

The Academical Village is typically illustrated with an emblematic view of the terraced Lawn and Rotunda. While many books show only one or two key images of landmark projects, I have elected to include over forty images. The goal is to give a more systematic visual overview while depicting the experience of walking through the site, illustrating the in-betweens, as well as the highlights, in this harmonious blend of buildings and landscape.

The first image illustrates the Rotunda at the top of a ridge, since the topography of the site figures so prominently in the site planning. Steps, sloping walks, and terraces are required for adaptation to the terrain of Jefferson's plan for a U-shaped group of buildings, opening and descending toward the south. These transitions in grade are recurring and appear in every few photographs. Most of the images are architectural photographs, which require controlled, precise depiction of the substantive qualities of these neoclassical buildings. Several views are centered on facades, as these render the information in a straightforward way without distorting the scale, and tend to amplify the symmetrical qualities of Jefferson's Rotunda and pavilions. Some pictures are framed through columns in the foreground, and also show deep landscape space beyond, with the intention that this balanced layering illustrates the successful integration of architecture and landscape architecture at the Academical Village.

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List of Photographs

1. View southwest of Rotunda at top of ridge, 2024
2. Rotunda steps, north side of Rotunda, 2024
3. View of north terrace, Jefferson statue, 2024
4. Statue of Washington on east side of north terrace, 2024
5. Statue of Jefferson and north side of Rotunda, 2024
6. Second level of Rotunda, 2024
7. View south of Lawn and Cabell Hall from Rotunda, 2024
8. East wing added by Stanford White, 2024
9. Colonnade along east courtyard of Rotunda, 2024
10. View west into east courtyard of Rotunda, 2024
11. East courtyard of Rotunda, 2024
12. View from east terrace to Pavilion II and east courtyard, 2024
13. Pavilion II from east terrace, 2024
14. View west from east terrace to Rotunda, 2024
15. View southwest from Rotunda portico, 2024
16. View south from Rotunda portico to Cabell Hall , 2024
17. View south from west terrace, columns of portico, 2024
18. West courtyard of Rotunda, 2024
19. View east of Rotunda and Pavilion II, 2024
20. Cryptoporticus, ground level passage south of Rotunda, 2024
21. Pavilion II on east side of Lawn, 2024
22. Pavilions IV, VI, VIII and X on east side, 1996
23. View north under portico of Pavilion IV, 1996
24. View northwest in east colonnade of Pavilions V, II, I, 1996
25. View west of Pavilion III, 2024
26. View south in west colonnade, approaching Pavilion V, 2024
27. View west from under Pavilion VIII portico to Pavilion VII, 2024
28. View northwest of terraced Lawn, 2024
29. View northeast of terraced Lawn, 2024
30. View north to Rotunda and terraced Lawn, 1996
31. Steps and passage from Poe Alley to west colonnade, 2024
32. View west of serpentine walls at Green Alley, east Range, 2024
33. View east of serpentine walls at Key Alley, 1996
34. Pavilion VIII garden, east gardens, 1996
35. Pavilion V garden lower terrace, west gardens, 2024
36. Pavilion V garden upper terrace, west gardens, 2024
37. Porch on west side of Pavilion V, 2024
38. Merton Spire in lower terrace of Hotel D garden, 2024
39. Steps from lower terrace of Hotel D garden, 2024
40. Gate and steps to Hotel E, West Range, 2024
41. Steps to Pavilion X garden at East Range, 2024
42. Hotel C and Pavilion V garden, 2024
43. View north of East Range, 1996
44. Colonnade in East Range, 2024
45. South Lawn with statue of Homer, 1996

Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Ward, Alan, *American Designed Landscapes: A Photographic Interpretation*, 1998

All Photographs © Alan Ward