

# LALH Nature and Design Fund







The landscape architect Lawrence Halprin found inspiration for San Francisco's Levi Strauss Plaza in the natural landforms and waterfalls of the Sierra Nevada. Photograph by Tara C. Robinson, from *Lawrence Halprin* (LALH, 2017).

## LALH Nature and Design Fund

*The need for landscape design that provides a connection to the dynamic, restorative power of nature has never been greater than it is today. In response, LALH is creating the Nature and Design Fund, with a goal of one million dollars. The new fund will support books and documentary films that illuminate the transformative principles of nature and the landscape designs they can inspire.*

American landscape designers have long exulted in the richness and variety of the nation's wild beauty, from the Adirondack Mountains to Yosemite Falls. Frederick Law Olmsted and other conservation-minded designers were inspired by evidence that time in nature can calm frayed nerves, heal broken hearts, and rejuvenate failing bodies. They believed that the soundness of the republic depended on the health of its citizenry, and the native landscape had a large role to play in achieving it.

As Olmsted and other American landscape architects advocated for the protection of scenic lands, they also grappled with how to provide an experience of “wild” nature to the inhabitants of increasingly dense cities. In their work creating parks and park systems and other landscapes, they forged a nature-inspired approach to design.

Since 1992, LALH books have explored this body of work. The Nature and Design Fund will ensure that we continue and expand this critical focus. Research will not only reflect on the importance of these places to diverse populations but delve deeply into differences, setting the record straight about the realities of the forces of paternalism, geographical determinism, sexism, and racism in landscape design.

*Landscapes of Exclusion* (LALH, 2016), for example, explores segregation and the creation of state parks in the South during the Jim Crow era. *Marjorie Sewell Cautley, Landscape Architect for the Motor Age* (LALH, 2021) delves into the life and career of the first woman landscape architect to design a state park.

As we expand our awareness of the diversity of experience in landscape history, future walks in the park will perhaps evoke not only thoughts of nature's healing influence but also expressions of deeper cultural insight and understanding.







## Health and Well-Being

A growing body of research corroborates long-held beliefs that spending time in nature can produce significant health benefits. A walk in the forest can lower blood pressure and reduce stress hormones. It can enhance immune systems, improve mood, and counteract feelings of anxiety. In children, it can stimulate creativity and help build self-confidence.

Frederick Olmsted and his colleagues understood that urban parks of all sizes could provide some of these same benefits, making America's burgeoning cities more livable and citizens of all walks of life happier and healthier. The parks they designed for cities throughout the nation—the first was Central Park in Manhattan—bear witness to their sound thinking. In recent years, institutional landscapes, such as hospital gardens, have been created specifically to promote health and well-being, their designs reflecting thoughtful attention to the needs of individuals with special requirements.

During the pandemic, parks and other green spaces have provided invaluable public health benefits. By offering opportunities to regain psychological balance, recreate, and socialize safely with others, parks have proved critical to the well-being of city and suburban residents throughout the world. The sights and sounds of the changing seasons stimulate the senses, offering a connection to the larger forces of nature, mitigating feelings of isolation and hopelessness.



Comfort, accessibility, and beauty are equally important in the designs of David Kamp, founder of Dirtworks Landscape Architecture. Opposite: Evans Restorative Garden, Cleveland Botanical Garden; above: Camphill Village, Copake, NY. Photographs courtesy Dirtworks, PC, from a forthcoming LALH book.





## Environmental Balance

The goal of designing landscapes attuned to the spirit of place was very much on the minds of American practitioners even in the early years of the profession. Inspired by the scenic richness and diversity across the continent, they were also galvanized by a sense of the divine residing in nature. Along with American writers and painters, they developed a strong cultural identification with the native landscape and aspired to create designs in harmony with it.

Among the most fervent proponents of environmental design was Jens Jensen, a Danish-born landscape architect whose Chicago-based practice transformed the city's great Victorian parks into lush evocations of the native prairie that once covered much of the Midwest. Jensen was also among the first landscape architects to incorporate ecological concepts of plant communities into his design methods.

Today we know the value of using plants that grow without elaborate care and that associate happily with other species as they might be found in the wild. Biologically diverse landscapes are not only more stable than those filled with temperamental exotics, they also attract a rich array of animals and help support entire species, especially during migration. Designs that use plants suited to their settings also require less water, an increasingly important consideration as the climate warms.



Darrel Morrison bases his designs on Jensen's concept of plant communities. Opposite: view to Curtis Prairie, Native Plant Garden, University of Wisconsin Arboretum; above: Native Flora Garden Extension, Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Photographs by Robert Jaeger (opposite) and Wikimedia (CC BY-SA 4.0) (above), from *Beauty of the Wild* (LALH, 2021).







## Education

There is a long history in America of creating public gardens and arboreta to educate citizens; many of these places showcased native plants. O. C. Simonds, for example, relied primarily on native plants to achieve a sense of wild nature in his 1906 design for the Nichols Arboretum of the University of Michigan. Two decades later, the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, the first botanic garden in the country devoted exclusively to native species, was laid out by the landscape architect Lockwood de Forest.

“Wild” landscapes, in particular, can influence children who spend time in them, and landscape architects, trained to observe nature closely, have led the charge in the creation of gardens for schoolchildren. Without realizing it, young people are deeply affected by natural beauty and carry with them an appreciation of nature as they become adults with stewardship responsibilities. As adults, these individuals may well serve on conservation commissions or become park patrons, perhaps learning to grow their own food and to vote with their conscience when it comes to protecting the environment at every scale.



The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden's wildflower-filled meadow was designed by Lockwood de Forest to educate local gardeners. Opposite: California poppies in bloom; above: visitors in meadow, 1940.

Photographs by Saxon Holt (opposite) and courtesy SBBG (above), from a forthcoming LALH book.







## Conservation

The cause of land conservation has been embraced by American landscape architects since the mid-nineteenth century, when Congress set aside Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove as a public reservation. Olmsted wrote a report to guide use of this site, praising the splendor and beauty of the falls and arguing for their protection so that they could be enjoyed in perpetuity. His report spoke to the vital need for such places in the new republic, effectively laying out the intellectual framework for a national park service.

As land for other national parks was conserved, sites of exceptional scenic beauty came to be protected at the state level, too. Olmsted's former assistant Warren H. Manning, for example, advocated for the protection of gorges and waterfalls near Ithaca, NY, and these became the Finger Lakes State Parks. Manning's environmental approach to regional planning influenced later twentieth-century geographers and landscape architects, among them Ian McHarg, author of the landmark book *Design with Nature*. Insight into the workings of nature remains a cornerstone of the profession.



Manning worked with Robert and Laura Treman of Ithaca, NY, to preserve surrounding lands of gorges and waterfalls. Opposite: Lucifer Falls, Enfield Glen State Park; above: overlook from trail. Photographs by Carol Betsch, from *Warren H. Manning, Landscape Architect and Environmental Planner* (LALH, 2017).



## Donate

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Library of American Landscape History is the leading publisher of books that advance the study and practice of American landscape architecture—from gardens and parks to city plans. LALH books educate the public, motivating stewardship of significant places and the environment, and they inspire new designs that connect people with nature.

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RIGHT: Sensory Arts Garden, Els Center of Excellence, Jupiter, FL, design by Dirtworks Landscape Architecture. Photograph courtesy Dirtworks, PC.

COVER: An 1864 act of Congress established Yosemite Falls as the first scenic site in America to be set aside by the government for public use. Olmsted's Yosemite Report, written a year later, provided the intellectual framework for a national park service, and for American park making generally. Photograph by Carol Highsmith, from *Olmsted and Yosemite: Civil War, Abolition, and the National Park Idea* (LALH, forthcoming).

