

**The Cultural Landscape Foundation®**

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**STUART O. DAWSON**

**ORAL HISTORY**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

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**Interviews Conducted**

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## STUART O. DAWSON ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

*The three day interview conducted by Charles A. Birnbaum begins with a day-long seated interview at the Sasaki office in Watertown, Massachusetts. The interview continues at the sites of several Sasaki projects in downtown Boston. An additional interview with Stuart Dawson, Ellen Dawson and Byron Matthews, occurs on July 9<sup>th</sup> in Newburyport. This interview conducted by Shirley Veenema and videotaped by Jim Sheldon covers the Newburyport project.*

### Introduction

I'm Stu Dawson, Stuart Owen Dawson. Stu is what people call me most of the time. I'm a landscape architect. I've been at Sasaki for over 50 years. It's something like 52 years now. [I] grew up in Illinois. Came east to go to graduate school and basically stayed here. I continue to practice landscape architecture, a little less intensely. But I love every minute of every opportunity that I have to work with the folks here at Sasaki and with old clients. [I am] still working with clients that I've worked with for almost fifty years. And I can't find any better substitute for happiness than that.

And one more comment- you know, last but not least is family. One of the toughest things in this business, and a lot of you folks know what I'm talking about, is that the profession takes so much time. You're basically on the run. And if you're not on the run, you're getting ready to be on the run the next time. Family is very easy to overlook. And I did go through a fairly difficult divorce. Happily the three children, Mark, Emily and Julie, remain close to me and to my wife today, Ellen Washington Dawson. And all the relatives that gather around and the events that we constantly hold dear, more dear than all of my dearest clients, are family events. And I can't say enough for the need to commit to that as a balancing act with the work that we love to do.



## Biography

### Childhood and Education

#### Growing up in Urbana, Illinois

I did grow up in Urbana, Illinois, somewhere between the University of Illinois and downtown Urbana. A small scale community, small scale streets, one knew, almost everyone there.[there] was this great, town-gown relationship that was quite wonderful. Half of my classmates were children of University of Illinois faculty and/or staff, and the other were folks like my mom. My mother taught at the University of Illinois, both in music and in French.] And she wasn't a particularly popular person because men were supposed to be teaching those things at that time. [LAUGHTER] And I know that she used to come home, not quite in tears, but raging mad from time to time. But most of the time it was a wonderful, a synergistic environment. The music school was five blocks from my house. The chemistry building was seven blocks from my house. The world came by in a slow kind of way. The milkman drove a horse which pulled a carriage. And we all rode bicycles and walked. There were one-car families, sometimes zero-car families. It was essentially a kind of walkable rural community with the exception of the University of Illinois overlay of course.

What I remember about Urbana were the incredible streets and the parks, that is, the civic spaces. We had a couple of museums at the university, and the quad at the university was incredible, really a public park, too, but it felt private. But the parks in Urbana, Crystal Lake Park, the natural, biomorphic, naturalistic park, seemed like a cookie cutter, a little like Central Park. As if someone preserved a piece of the natural landscape. It had an elevation of 16 feet, which in Urbana was incredible.

[LAUGHTER]

And then Carle Park, on the other hand, [it] was in the middle of a residential zone, probably four square blocks. [It was] more formal. There is a pavilion in this park that we all used; we always hoped that it would rain so we could go play in the shelter instead of



playing outside. But the parks were quite different. And then you add to that [picture] that they were all interconnected by a square grid of elm-lined streets, the canopy effect, the cathedral effect of these streets, and all of the streets were lined with elms, at least one row on each side, sometimes more than that, thousands of elm trees and thousands of these corridors, or maybe hundreds of corridors. And many of the streets were paved with brick, almost a cobblestone-type pavement. They made a noise when you rode your bike on them. You didn't need the little flutter things in the spokes. You just rode on the brick. I remember the other thing that really, in part because I used to throw rocks at them; there were wonderful globe lights on precast concrete posts that ran throughout the city. And that's kind of the memory I have, it's really powerful; and that I think had to influence, my final commitment to the profession of landscape architecture, because that's the kind of stuff we like to do.

I think probably the thing I remember most is the beauty and the scale. And of course I can't say that I really recognized that simply, I hadn't really been around the world yet. I had been in Chicago and loved that. But I loved especially coming back to Urbana and the scale of that wonderful city.

One of the things that I think was a bonding relationship between Hideo and myself was that he had spent a lot of time in Urbana. And once I started to work with him I started traveling with Hideo a lot, especially when we started doing the master landscape plan, we talked a lot about Urbana. And by this time, I'd fallen in love with Cambridge and New York City and Boston and the Atlantic Ocean and the Museum of Fine Arts, and you name it. And I was beginning to pooh pooh Illinois, especially Urbana. I said, "you know, God, Hid, that's kind of an awful place to grow up. I mean, it's just corn fields and, you know, funny little houses. The university wasn't bad, you know, jeez, you get tired of corn fields after a while." And Urbana was kind of falling apart. And Hid said, "oh, God, Stu, you couldn't be further off". He said, "I've traveled in all of North America, and I think Urbana and the Corn Belt is one of the most beautiful parts of our country, I feel the energy coming from that land that helps keep [LAUGHTER] us alive. I love the long corridors, defined usually either by corn or wheat, and then the occasional silo,



which is like sculpture in the plain.” And he went on and on, and then said, “and besides Urbana, remember those beautiful leafy corridors, those Gothic arches that used to connect the whole of the Champaign-Urbana campus and the community together. What could be more beautiful than that?” He went on and on. I said, you know, I’ll never be the poet that Hideo is, damn it, that’s a good way to sell an idea. [LAUGHTER]

### **Memories of Chicago**

I think the best thing that ever happened probably on a monthly basis was the Saturday train trip to Chicago. When we could afford it we’d often stay in the Palmer House. When we couldn’t we’d find someplace that was [LAUGHTER] less expensive. But first of all, the train ride was something every kid, everyone should love. And I totally loved that whole feeling of leaving from downtown Champaign and getting off in the middle of Chicago and enjoying that great city with the skyscrapers. [The] incredible power of skyscrapers along Michigan Avenue, and of course there are a lot more there now than there were [then]. But the buildings that I remember were; the planetarium, the aquarium, and the Museum of Science and Industry. The Art Institute was quite a bit smaller in those days, but that was a real highlight. So those weren’t really high rise, but they were bigger buildings in a lot of ways than the high rise, because they meant a lot more.

But the beauty probably beyond the institutions, of course, was the lakefront; [with] the remnants of the Dan[iel] Burnham, the brilliance of Dan Burnham and [Frederick Law] Olmsted in the days of the civic work at the, turn of the century, in Chicago. And we were aware of that. Mother was a student of that kind of thing. And Dad and I loved to ask her questions about it, and she had most of the answers. So I think that had a lot to do with my love of urbanism and also my love of rural communities. But basically that had to be a great balancing aspect of my life in the early days.





## World War II Impacts the Dawson Family

World War II happened in 1941. None of us were prepared for it. I suppose my dad was, because Dad was called to active duty. He'd been an officer in the cavalry, but by the time World War II happened, the cavalry was pretty much phased out. And he shifted into infantry. To make a long story short, he went to Battle Creek, Michigan, for some basic training. We all moved there with him. And then he moved to Iceland for two years, and then from there to Ireland for a year, working with General Patton and his team of G officers preparing for Normandy. Dad was there the sixth day after D Day. ]He was one of four supply officers for General Patton.

I think probably the most memorable thing to me of course was making do at home with friends, a lot of friends' fathers had gone off to war; we played stuff, you know, we had traps for Germans and traps for the Japanese. And we planned all kinds of things in the play lots that surrounded or that interspersed the community. But I think the thing that really got to me was the loneliness. Because there was no real contact, he didn't call, letters came now and then, but they'd been censored, half of the text had been cut out.

And, well, during the war there were lots of things to do. I needed to shovel coal at age six. I did do a lot of snow shoveling. I did a lot of lawn mowing and basically did things that Dad used to do. I had to open the car doors for my mother and for my sister and I had to help them in and out of the house. And I had to be a perfect gentleman at risk of losing my allowance, which wasn't much. But the other thing I remember, it was with my sister and I with our little red wagons touring the neighborhood about once a month, I'm thinking, to collect newspapers, cans, bottles and any other kind of junk we could find and load it into Mother's car probably once every three months, the garage actually we used as our recycling center. And we made a little bit of money. But the main thing was that we were all helping win the war. You know, we couldn't drive faster than 35 miles an hour. And everything was rationed. You couldn't really get butter. You had to use oleo margarine and mix some yellow dye into the stuff to make it look like butter, which meant you had to put it over the radiator for 10 minutes or maybe 20 minutes to



warm it up enough to soak up the yellow dye. And it tasted like hell. But, you know, we knew that we were helping win the war. That was the main thing. Memorable times

Finally, anyway, after Normandy and the success that the Third Army under General Patton had there, he returned four years later. And wouldn't you know [it], he came into Chicago. My sister and I got all excited, because we're like, hey we're going to get on a train with Mother to go meet Dad in Chicago. And Mother said," this is one time you kids have to stay at home. I'm going [LAUGHTER] to go meet Dad by myself".

. Anyway, basically high school years came along fairly fast. I was interested in sports. Because of my mother I had to take piano and because she was a piano teacher, I fast grew irritated at being corrected every three minutes. And I talked Mother out of the piano. She said, Stu, you have to do something. So I picked up a trumpet.[40:34] And I learned to play the trumpet. And that was fine, because she didn't really know that much about trumpets and left me alone. And the piano was another story, I am sorry to this day that I didn't continue with piano. But through the years the one side of my life was the artistic side. I loved painting and drawing and playing the trumpet. I played in the high school band. I had a small jazz band that we started in high school. I actually, we moved into college with that same little group and actually made some weekend money playing for fraternities and sorority parties. That was in my blood. And I think it was very good. [41:20]

### **Developing New Talents From Sports to Scouts**

At the same time, I really wanted to be an athlete. My problem was I'd grown up with a mother, and Dad that wanted me to do everything and not be a specialist in anything. So in addition to music, I was a stamp collector. I was a Boy Scout. I had chemistry sets and all the things that all the kids do. And I wanted to be an expert at every sport. And I wanted to be a great archer. I wanted to be an equestrian. And so I finally had to make some choices basically. There was not enough time in the day. And during the high school years I played football and then tried to do swimming and basketball in the winter season and then play golf in the spring. And that seemed to blend well with my



music. And of course I had many jobs. The one I enjoyed most, the one I worked hardest at of course was life guard. [LAUGHTER] That's just got to be silliest job in one's life. It ain't very hard to do. And you got paid for it.

Growing up, even before Dad went off to war, we camped a lot. I think I enjoyed Chicago a lot more than the camping part. But I liked camping also. And Dad was about to become a Scout Master, but because of the war that was put off. Of course by the time he came back I had already started in Cub Scouts and he picked up on the Scout Master idea right away as giving back to society, Of course I really got excited about Boy Scouts. And but then when you think about it, Urbana, as beautiful as it was, there wasn't a heck of a lot to do. We didn't have any big lakes. We didn't have rivers. We didn't have hills. We didn't have rocks. There was nothing really to do. I mean, you could ride bicycles amongst the corn fields. So Boy Scouts was incredible because you started doing merit badges and traveling, [I] went to Washington and Gettysburg. I had 34 merit badges. My favorite merit badge was chemistry. That was [LAUGHTER] my favorite. And then it gave you something to do almost all of the time. I found out that I loved teaching kids. What I really liked most was Boy Scout counseling and then helping kids with merit badges. I did have a merit badge in architecture. But I never did the landscape architecture merit badge [LAUGHTER] because I just didn't know that that was a profession.

### **Attending The University of Illinois**

Yes, between the good times at Urbana High School, I had pretty much made a decision to stay in Urbana and attend the University of Illinois. They had a great department of architecture, and the College of Fine and Applied Arts were highly regarded. And it seemed to make a lot of sense to stay there.

Again, Mom, a very pivotal person, very important, along with Dad, introduced me to Stan White and a profession called landscape architecture. I was really interested in architecture, because I hadn't heard of landscape architecture, even though I'd fallen in



love with elm trees and all the stuff that they do. And Stan White didn't spend a lot of time, because he was kind of a funny guy. He was also a great pianist, and that's how my mother got to know him, said, you know, you ought to go see Chuck Harris over at the department of landscape architecture and talk to Chuck, talk to old Chuck. He'll tell you about what we do. So I couldn't understand, I think Stan tried to tell me, but I wasn't astute enough to figure out what the heck he was talking about. And it took me another two years, by the way, to figure out what he was talking about. But I introduced myself to Chuck. I'd had a semester of architecture, and all the credits of course are transferable. And he gave me a tour of Mumford Hall and some of the walls and some of the stuff the kids were doing, they did beautiful models. . . . So I signed up for landscape architecture and I was so lucky to be at the university at the time, because of Chuck Harris, who was a mentor for everything. He was the guy. The buildings would close down at six o'clock at night, maybe even earlier, [because of the] security stuff, and [they] sent all the kids home. But in a design studio you [have] got to work beyond six o'clock. And Chuck Harris was kind enough to stay with us when we were on charrette, as long as we wanted. He had a cot in his office and he would sleep all night if he needed to. And this went on for the four years that I was there. What a wonderful guy. You know he'd like to be at home, but he would stick it out with us and even give us a crit at three in the morning if we wanted.

And then you had Walt Keith and [teaching] plant material. You had Karl Lohmann in planning. You had Carl Peterson in construction. [Then you had] Chuck Harris of course and Stan White with this approach to design and [his] kind of philosophical meanderings teaching us. We had, Rich Haag came by. Hideo Sasaki came by. Dan Kiley came by. And so you had this kind of wonderful dynamic in the middle of nowhere. You know, sometimes, I get critical of Urbana because it wasn't quite as exciting as Chicago, but people kept coming through. And it was irresistible. It was the greatest four years of my life probably.

Karl Lohmann was an incredibly impressive guy. He was tall and thoughtful, had a slow delivery, but really strong. And he really, I only overlapped him, I'm guessing my



sophomore year. By then the planning focus had shifted to Wood, Jack Wood. And so I only got a touch of Lohmann. But he was, I think Wood was terrific also. But Lohmann left a real imprint, he talked about Chicago a lot. Dan Burnham was one of his key models of how a good planner should be.] And I think that that indelible. I'm sorry I didn't get to know Karl a little better. But Wood certainly filled in, filled his shoes well. The other person I should mention is Patrick Horsborough, an Englishman, a man about the Midwest. I think he's taught in several schools, Notre Dame, Texas, who knows where all. But at least we overlapped at Illinois. A perpetual sketcher, prolific, great stuff. He had a photographic memory, he could look at a barn that he'd driven by, or gone by in the parlor car, and an hour later do a beautiful pastel and/or watercolor of that barn to almost every detail. And he was also a Churchill scholar. So we spent as much time talking about Winston Churchill as we did about art, which was kind of neat.

In the meantime, I was raising a family. So for a fraternity boy to have, you know, two kids and married was very unusual in those days. The good side was that I could serve as a chaperone and I was very popular amongst my fraternity brothers, because the only requirement then for chaperones was you had to be married. [LAUGHTER] Never mind that I was a fraternity brother. [LAUGHTER]

### **Hideo Sasaki Encourages Dawson to Come to Harvard**

In one of our classes, Chuck Harris' I think, asked us to design posters. And of course this seemed odd, because we were supposed to be landscape architects. But Chuck insisted that we do posters for a then popular action program, A-C-T-I-O-N program. I had done a poster and we used Bristol board. I did this [design] in bold blue and yellow, blue and ochre, combined with black ink strokes. The [posters] were all on the wall, and apparently Hid[eo Sasaki] came through on a weekend to meet with Chuck Harris and say hello to Stan White. He missed the students unfortunately. But he'd seen the poster that I had done and liked it, and maybe talked to Pete Walker, too, I'm not sure. But I heard through Chuck Harris that Hideo was interested in talking me into coming to Harvard. And that if I did [come] I could work that summer at Sasaki, Sasaki Novak.



And I was, well, that's a real compliment. He hasn't even seen any of my landscape stuff, just a poster. But I guess Chuck Harris said something nice and maybe, I don't know, Pete Walker may have said something.

But anyway, I told my dad about this. Because I had planned to be a regular army career officer in spite of loving landscape architecture. The tension was building in my senior year and Dad, who [had] pretty much decided that the military wasn't the place for his son at that time. Anyway, I had an offer of a regular army commission, which would have been a career position. And Dad said, "Stu, this isn't the time to go into the armed forces. You have got this offer from Mr. Sasaki. You really ought to consider going to Harvard. You can still be an army guy if you want, but just do it as a reserve, a reserve officer." Anyway, I declined my regular army commission, accepted Hideo's offer and went directly to Harvard from Urbana. In those days with my Urbana background, it only took a year to pick up my master's degree at Harvard. And then I was off to the army for my six months' term and came back to work at Sasaki.

### **Harvard Class of 1957**

Another factor in this Harvard versus military decision, it had to be the dynamic, young faculty person Chuck Harris and his optimism for the profession. And his willingness to take us to places like the Bruce Goff House outside of Chicago and take us to Aspen to the design conference. And hope eternal, it's a great profession. And then the other thing that happened, it definitely got me excited, was Pete Walker's semester at Urbana. He influenced a lot of us, because he was so excited about the profession. He'd worked with Halprin and saw the future in such a sparkle, that we were really energized. And so declining the commission got to be a little bit easier. And going to Harvard got to be even easier, because when some of us went out for the urban design conference, a couple of us stayed with Pete. And Pete gave us a tour and made us even more excited about [LAUGHTER] Harvard. And sure enough, you know, I think four of us, four of our class of twelve went to Harvard just like that.



[The students at] The Graduate School of Design in 1957 were split, some of us were in Robinson Hall and some of us were in Hunt Hall. Hunt Hall is no longer there. It was really an antique auditorium, which all of us loved because it was the best place for a jury in all of Harvard College. Anyway, we were split. And there were probably eight of us landscape architects in Hunt Hall and another six landscape architects at Robinson Hall. So there were probably 14 or 15 of us in our class, a great scale, a nice size. We got to know each other and work together.

Birnbaum: *And was Bill Johnson in your class?*

No. The people, people in the class, we had Larry Walquist. Larry Walquist was also at Sasaki. We had Dick Julin. Dick Julin was also at Sasaki and myself of course. All three of us were from Illinois. And others, Marvin Adelman, who had come from, I'm not sure where Marv had come from. But he too was at Sasaki. But he was a three-year guy. And the rest of us were one-year people. In spite of that we became very good friends and we all graduated together. And then before us, the class before us because our class was so small, [they] were almost [included] within our class. We all knew each other. Peter Walker, Bill Johnson and Carol Johnson were all in the class before my class. And again, it was really collegial, intimate, fantastic experience to be with these people.

Birnbaum: *Tell us about the faculty at that time.*

The faculty at Harvard was totally different than the faculty at Illinois, as you might guess. Although Chuck Harris came to Harvard a couple of years later, he wasn't there when I went in 1957. But Pete Walker was there, kind of teaching part-time. He was teaching a little bit, but he was primarily working full-time at Sasaki. I hadn't really met Sasaki. Hideo was really the one I couldn't wait to meet and work with and work for. And I got to know Hid that summer, so even before, so before I became a student I'd worked for Hid for three months. And then you meet the faculty and go berserk. Sigfried Giedeon, incredible, great books, great person, a scholar, Serge Chermayeff, a bit of a pompous kind of a guy, but incredibly interesting. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, Reg Isaacs in planning.



Sert had a way of saying etc., etc., etc. at the end of each critique. And we all started copying that, so during our presentations. “And here we have a green bosque of plane trees, etc., etc., etc”. So we were influenced by the faculty in funny ways and very good ways. And then Norman Newton was there to be the leveling influence. He’s basically the guy that kept us honest. He’d say “speak up, Stu, I can’t hear you.” “What did you say?” “What was that word?” And “will you make that a complete sentence, please?” [LAUGHTER] And things like that. So we learned a little bit about stage management, probably not enough. It’s not possible. But the mix of faculty, the acidic relationship between them and the love between them was incredible. And to have just two semesters of that and have so much, had so much impact. And they remain friends for as long as they’ve lived. We knew each other and we talked together for years following.

Walt Chambers was the discipline beneath the glitter and stage attraction of the rest of the faculty. He really made us work, and work we did. We had to do a grading plan for a cloverleaf intersection, including super elevation. On top of that he made us calculate cut and fill. And I’ll never forget, oh, that was so tedious. I just wanted to go talk with Chermayeff and work with Sert on some urban design plan or, you know, do something with Reg Isaacs. [LAUGHTER] But, no, please, no more grading. [LAUGHTER]

I think I tolerated Norman Newton’s class. I hate to admit it, but I was so interested in modern stuff. You know, I think a lot of us, you know, Marv Adelman and a lot of us, you know, had a lot of fun with Norman Newton. But I think most of us were thinking about the project that we needed to get finished in three days and didn’t pay a lot of attention, I would say not a lot of attention. [We] didn’t develop a lot of enthusiasm. The enthusiasm came when you actually visited the places that he talked about. And what’s happened is [that] every time I’ve gone now to a garden that Norman talked about, whether it’s Villa Lante, or Villa D’Este, you name it, I can remember the stuff that Norman Newton was telling us. And it’s fascinating. I guess I’m a three-dimensional guy. I think the black and white images that he showed us were just a little too flat. It





wasn't real. It was better than reading a textbook, I think, because Norman was up there talking about it. But it wasn't till I saw the things that he talked about and loved. And his stories about Olmsted, oh, just fantastic. [What a ] great teacher. No, you know, Olmsted, I must say that Olmsted, Shurcliff and Merrill and some of the older Boston firms didn't play a real [part], it didn't seem to be a real big [deal], other than Norman Newton's passion and respect for Olmsted. We never even visited Olmsted's office. And I'm not sure it was available in those days. I think it was still being used as an office. But I think we were interested in that, I think we wanted to correct that and [we] really wanted to build great things. And I think there was a little bit of impatience with some of the great work that was going on or had gone on in this country. Sad but true.

### **Inspiration Was Everywhere**

Harvard, it was just a year really, the summer at Sasaki and then really eight months at Harvard, twelve months in all. It [was not] just Harvard, it had to be living in Cambridge and being exposed to so many different cultures, interfacing with MIT and with New York City and Maine at the other end and the exposure to classmates. I had several classmates who were from abroad. One who's become a best friend who's from Amsterdam. We're still very close. Getting to meet people that were from somewhere else other than Illinois and then of course living in Cambridge and Boston. When you've lived in a place that had no granite at all and [had] very modern houses, you know, the residential architecture being kind of the ranch-style stuff, [and then] move into Cambridge and Boston, it taints your mind about how people live and how people should live and materials. The materials in detailing in Cambridge, I couldn't take my eyes off of cobblestones and granite curbs and granite benches and beautiful boulders and gardens that had plant material. They're a gracious material. I'd never seen a rhododendron. It's just not something that grows in Illinois. So there was a lot more to that one year than just Harvard. It had a lot more to do with people and the place. And then [there is ] the Atlantic Ocean. [LAUGHTER] Not so bad. ]



It's 24 hours a day, that's what it is. You're just immersed in [it]. It helped to come from Urbana, which is a very simple, agricultural place. And in spite of the University of Illinois, it was basically a straightforward community and a straightforward campus. You know, a liberal arts college and there you have it. And Cambridge and Boston were everything else. And there were no grids. You never knew where north was in Cambridge. I still don't know where north is [LAUGHTER] in Cambridge. But it was like a whirlwind, like stepping into the middle of a tornado. And the inspiration was everywhere.

## **Practice**

### **A Summer Job With Sasaki**

Of course I was a lucky guy, the three of us were. We were working for Sasaki at the same time, so graduate school continued through the weekends and holidays, because we were basically at Hid's office helping with charrettes. So Harvard was full-time. It was 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And during that summer before I even became a student, I worked with Hideo on three projects, the Alice in Wonderland [project] in Central Park. I had to build a model in 12 days, something like that, and then drive the model to New York City and find the place to drop the model off. And this Illinois boy had a little bit of problem in that [it is] a little bit hard to find your way around New York City, and then finding a parking space. It wasn't like Urbana. You just couldn't pull over to the curb and jump out of your car.

Anyway, and then I worked with Sea Pines Plantation. Charlie Frazier had just walked in the door with a bunch of drawings and we had started our design alternatives for that resort.

And Dr. Land, a guy from MIT, had founded a corporation called Polaroid. And we were asked to help do a landscape plan for his first building in Waltham, which we did. And it was quite a funny time because we'd heard rumors that Polaroid was going to do an instant picture. And we didn't really believe it. We thought it was a big joke. And we



kind of, we weren't critical, but we kind of laugh when he'd walk into the office. He had a certain style and he carried a huge briefcase. And it turned out that he didn't have a lot of money at the time, and he offered us some stock in the Polaroid Corporation for the \$2,500 fee that we had charged. And Hideo held out for the fee, which Dr. Land paid a year later. But Hid was kicking himself ten years later [LAUGHTER] when Polaroid took off and the stock was worth [LAUGHTER] quite a lot.

*Birnbaum: Anyway, so what a wonderful exposure to people and then that summer working with those three different clients at the same time. We glossed over the Alice in Wonderland. . . . I think here you are right out of school and you're working on a project. You built the model for it and it's going to be put in Central Park. What were you thinking?*

When Alice in Wonderland came about, I was on cloud nine anyway. I was working at Sasaki's office. In some ways I just thought that's the way it would always be. You'd be doing something in Central Park one day and something in South Carolina the next day and something in Boston the next day and everything was peachy. It was an incredible thing but I wasn't serious enough. I should have slapped myself and said wait a minute. This is going in Central Park.

Now that I know what I know about all of the efforts to put things in Central Park, I might have asked that question too. Is this an appropriate in Central Park? There have been so many people who have wanted to donate stuff to Central Park in favor of the citizens of New York, of course, that the park would be filled with donations. You'd never see a single tree if you accommodated every donor that wanted to do something in Central Park. So I've even wondered about whether that was really appropriate in Central Park. Would Alice in Wonderland be better on a broad sidewalk? I don't know. It's bothered me a little bit because Huntington Hartford wanted to put his museum in Central Park, which is now on 58<sup>th</sup>. Thank God it's there and not in the middle of Central Park. I think that Ed Stone was the architect, but thank God they kicked it out of Central Park.



Anyway what am I doing? It did bother me, but I was excited to be doing something in Central Park, and then 20 years later said “what did we put this in Central Park for?” [LAUGHTER] It sets a precedent, huh? Once you allow one person. [OVERLAPPING VOICES]. . .

### **Working With Pete Walker on Foothill College**

Foothills Junior College [in] Los Altos Hills. What a great experience that was [for an] Illinois boy working on a hilltop college campus environment. Quite a shocker actually because the architect’s plan, with the landscape architect’s encouragement, suggested that the top of the hill had to be a little flatter in order for people to walk around the campus without having staircases everywhere. So we basically had to remove 30 or 40 feet from the top of the hill in order to establish a table for the new campus. As an Illinois boy I had the pleasure, thanks to Pete Walker, of doing the initial grading for that, which was shocking. It was a nightmare to tell you the truth. [LAUGHTER] I’d never seen that many contours on a single drawing in my life.

But I think the wonderful thing about that the architect, super-collaborator , was as interested in the spaces as he seemed to be interested in the building and the character of the buildings. The spaces were as important as the building. We couldn’t have been happier. I think that there was an excitement about it, a junior college, a new college. We were talking new towns at the time. But a new college, this was really an overwhelming, what do you call it? A catalyst for all, the [whole] office got involved. Sasaki was looking over Pete’s shoulder. And Sasaki was looking over my shoulder. In fact too many people were looking over my shoulder.

I think if anything, that informed my passion for working with great architects who cared as much about spaces as they cared about architecture. It’s the ideal situation for a landscape architect.



Birnbaum: *Were there discussions about the roofline of the building? Where did that come from, the idea for those low buildings with those very --*

The arcades. I was at the lowest level as an amateur civil engineer. So I'm not sure about where things came from, like the profile of the roof. I don't think, I never heard anyone say that it was inspired by hill towns in Tuscany, but it might have been. So I don't know where that came from. But it certainly works in that context. The arcades made a heck of a lot of sense.

Birnbaum: *What about the wonderful little berms that creates all of the spatial organization? Where did those come from as an idea?*

Of course the micro-grading was probably the most fun of all. The macro stuff was really a pain in the neck. We were at a time in our career, and this had to come from Pete from California, the mound thing. And of course Hid Sasaki fell in love with the idea of mounds. So we were doing mounds everywhere. Every project that we did had a mound. At least one mound, maybe three or four. Foothills has even more than that. In fact we had a sand table in the office for years where we literally worked with mound shapes and worried about things like soil coefficients and all of that stuff.

Also we found that we were trying to get away from the more formal campus walk and path alignment. [To create] a more romantic style of walk alignment. Mounding, in fact, and berms gave you a wonderful way to create an informal casual curvilinear path system. It gave you a reason, it made it feel that those curves had a reason to be curved. They didn't seem quite as arbitrary with mounds. It also helped to some extent to control the student movement. Students tend to walk from point A to point B no matter what you put in the way. But the slightly curved path and a gentle berm seemed to work very well.



## Working With Architects

Pietro Belluschi was almost a Sasaki Associates person from time to time. We saw him in the office quite a lot. And of course [we saw him when] we went to MIT, particularly during the master planning days. And I think that's how Hideo got to know him so well. The mutual respect that was shared was quite good, especially when it came to developing the massing guidelines for MIT. Pietro was right on board and helped us a lot. The relationship evolved as Sasaki became more and more interested in providing actual real architectural services. And Pietro who'd long since stopped practicing full time seemed really pleased to have a chance to work with Hideo and help us design buildings that were noteworthy and especially that fit context. Pietro was a very contextual person, very romantic. He and Hideo --were very much the same. They were quite willing to let the rest of us do all the drawings and they would tell us what we'd done right and what we'd done wrong. And that relationship lasted for as long as Pietro was alive. I remember once in Colorado we were working together at the University of Colorado. We went to Elitch's, [Elitch Gardens] which is a historic recreational park in the center of Denver. And it was very hard to get Pietro to get on to some of these rides because it wasn't his thing. But when we did, we had more fun. He turned into this little kid eating cotton candy and doing stuff that he'd probably never done since he was a young man in Italy.

Birnbaum: *Is he a voice for you? Do you ever think about him when you practice?*

He is a voice for me, and also, a couple of our architects who worked with Pietro. Especially when my fellow partners and I are together, Pietro is a voice. I wouldn't say day to day, no. No. But I tell, if you asked me to name the most important architects in my career, he'd have to be right at the top.

Birnbaum: *Who else do you put in that group?*



Well, I think in the early days, people like Carl Coke. And we really worked hard [with] Gropius and tried to develop a language. But I think probably the first real click was with Sert, Dean Josep Lluís Sert. A perfect partnership was formed. I think he was a terrific architect. And one of the most fun projects that we worked on with Sert had to be the Carpenter Center at Harvard. . . . Corbu never came, he never saw the site, so it was all basically a communication between Josep Lluís Sert and Le Corbusier. He wanted the site to be planted just like [unintelligible]. He wanted it to be wavy grass, Oehme van Sweden style. And he wanted it to be rustic; he wanted the building to rise out of this natural soil. And we did specifications for it. And half of it was built the way Corbu would have liked it. [This was] before Harvard Buildings and Grounds, and who knows who[else] got in line after that and said, "it's got to look more like a golf course. It's got to be more like Harvard. You can't do a bunch of weeds next to the Fogg Museum and the Harvard Faculty Club. It's just not acceptable." To this day, and I would give anything. . . I'd love it if someone would say, "Stu, go do the Carpenter Center the way Corbu wanted you to do Carpenter Center ". [LAUGHTER] And Don Olsen would love me for that because Don and I were working on it together.

Other architects. There are so many. Paul Rudolph was an early architect that we worked with at Wellesley College, the Jewett Art Center. And I remember Hideo and I riding back and forth to New Haven in the train with Paul Rudolph. And that was a happy, nasty kind of relationship. Paul had a mercurial temper and Hideo of course did not. But we did some good work with Paul. But if I ever remember Hideo grumbling about any architect, it probably was Paul. Although I think he respected his work deeply, deeply respected Paul Rudolph's work.

Birnbaum: *Do you have a sense what the most successful collaboration might have been?*

With?

Birnbaum: With Rudolph.



Oh, I think the Jewett Art Center.

Birnbaum: Why?

Well, you know, we were involved early enough. We had done landscape design for the president's house at Wellesley. I think she told us that this young architect was designing the Arts Center and would we take a look at it? And that's how it happened. I think we were almost forced upon Paul, although it didn't feel that way. He felt as if we were the original team members and of course we weren't. And we had to do some corrective stuff, especially some of the hardscape. And but it worked pretty well because we were involved early enough that we didn't have to make any major [changes]. There was no major friction between the two of us. And the end result was pretty good. In fact what's interesting about the end result is that I don't think it looks designed at all. It pretty much fits where it is at Wellesley. And that's real important, I know it was important to Hid. And I feel good about that.

Architects, again, have almost always been a favorite client. Certain architects. You've got to add to that list the Saarinen and SOM types. People like Harry Weiss, who is a real pleasure to work with and of course Araldo Cossutta and I.M. Pei's office. [That was a] terrific, terrific office to do work with. I think of Weiss, Pei, Cossutta, and then other ones come to mind but those are the key people that really seem to appreciate landscape architecture.

Birnbaum: *How often with these folks that we're celebrating would Sasaki's office actually get to site the buildings?*

I would say, at the risk of being off, that of the architects that we worked with I'd suspect that half of the buildings had already been established and that we had very little impact on the siting of the individual buildings. The other half? I think it's a fairly accurate guess that we had a lot to do with the final siting of the buildings. I know in particular at John Deere and certainly at Foothills Junior College and I'm thinking even at Bell Labs some





adjustments were made working in the architect's office. It never worked when we tried to make adjustments to the buildings at Sasaki. If you did it in the architect's office it worked, but if you arrived in Chicago with some plans under your arm suggesting another building location you might as well go home.

I suspect we've impacted almost every architect whom we've worked with on getting the building high enough. I think this has got to go back to Midwestern roots and Sasaki and Stan White talking about walking the countryside, riding your bicycle in the countryside. Take a look at how the farm houses are sited. Take a look at how they've planted the trees. And you saw that all the farm houses were on high points and you noticed that all the trees were to the northwest, all the evergreens were in the northwest. The deciduous [trees were] to the southeast. You said, "you know, that's pretty neat". Almost to an architect, architects site their buildings too low. I can think of one example of raising the floor level of a ten-acre building ten feet. The civil engineer bemoaned the extra cost of fill, but not only did the building work better, it actually drained. There were no floods and the floor stayed dry.

Birnbaum: *Where that was done?*

That was a spare parts depot for Deere and Company, a ten acre footprint of spare parts [that] we basically raised it ten feet.

### **Rich Haag and the 3,000 Mile Friendship**

I'm reminded of Rich Haag and the incredible role he's played but also the culture that links Haag and Sasaki. They were essentially classmates. I think Hideo was maybe a year or two older, but both had studied with White and both had studied together and remained friends for many moons. In fact, we had done a couple of collaborations with the Haag office in Seattle. Projects never realized but wonderful projects.

In doing this kind of 3,000 mile friendship we got to know four of the architects that Haag converted is the wrong word, encouraged to become landscape architects.



Through Haag's office we got to know all four of them, Bob Hanna, Laurie Olin, Grant Jones, and Frank James. All four of them have worked on our office in different ways. Grant Jones for just a short time and Laurie Olin for a very short time, but his wife worked there for a while. And then Frank James worked here for years. I have to say that the four of them had to be amongst the most talented landscape architects that crossed my transom. And we all have become friends over the years and enjoy being with each other.

Birnbaum: *The other thing you also mentioned earlier, which I've heard your account of before, was the cross-country trip with Hid and Rich.*

At one point in the Sasaki/Haag friendship and this was really in the early days, they both seemed to have some time and they hopped in Rich Haag's old military Jeep and traveled cross-country all the way to the West Coast. Stopping at various places, camping, who knows, holding cups, looking for change, finding a way to get across the country and pay for their gas. We have a couple of images. Both of them always referred to that trip as the most important break that they ever took.

Birnbaum: *I'm also intrigued by the fact that all of these people really could sketch. I can't speak for Rich, but I know that Rich has told me stories also. He actually credits Laurie's drawings for Gas Works Park, when he was in the office as being very helpful in actually selling the concept. Again we're coming back to some of these themes. I'm also imagining like when people write plays imagining when people sit down together and what they talk about, were there times when you guys all got together?*

He was so passionate. When I was in Haag's office, years ago, and I don't remember if Olin was there but James was there and Hanna was there. On a Friday afternoon they decided that we ought to do a life drawing. They liked to have beer and wine Friday afternoons. One of them was designated to go down to Pioneer Square or wherever the heck it was and find someone who was willing to come up and pose in the nude. And that happened. Friday afternoon. We sat there and we sketched. [We] had wine and beer. Then the woman put her clothes back on and left. I said, "Oh my God, I've lived in



the East for too long. This West is so liberal and so crazy”. But it seemed to me that that’s the way that office ran. Not drawing nudes, but this kind of wonderful, again I keep talking about discovery and eyes wide open, the importance of drawing and communal stuff.

The Haag office took a lot of boat trips together. They were all mariners. They really enjoyed being out on Puget Sound and exploring the coast of Canada. Hid[eo] liked to do the same thing. He tried to buy a house on the coast of Maine so we’d all have a place to go. It never happened. But it’s something in both the East and West Coast blood that went way beyond what you normally think of as a professional practice.

*Birnbaum: Are there ways that this office has translated those principles?*

No. It’s much more conservative. No, but I think one good thing about the art program and I’m really proud of it, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] our 68<sup>th</sup> artist will be in place in a week. We’ve had some fairly interesting people here. One lady, all of her work had to do with recycling barnyard manure and/or barnyard parts like testicles. Our lobby was filled with stuff that was extremely, extremely well done although you always knew what it was. One of our administrative people refused to walk through that part of the building and [would] always would go outdoors and come in a door at the other end. So I guess we went a little crazy that way. But it’s really worked well in the office to loosen things up. The art’s been really great, because people will talk about stuff that they either like or don’t like and that one in particular was controversial. And there was a certain smell to it. Most art is basically visual. This one kind of impacted the whole environment which actually is like music in a way. A different kind of music.

*Veenema: Do you choose them or does a panel choose them?*

Until then I chose them. I was the selection committee but I lost my seat. Well, I still stayed involved. But one of the best of all, a group named Fieldwork, came in and did



not only the inside of the office but the outside. They did stuff across the river and stuff and stuff in front. It was a real site-inspired installation. Fantastic.

Veenema: *I was just curious. We don't have to go on and on. You were responsible for this?*

Yes. And there was one barnyard bull, kind of a linear [piece]. I think it was probably a pig trough that was filled with these wonderful hand-sized lumps. You knew what they were. It was like a basket of apples, but they were meadow muffins and not apples. That just sat in the middle of the lobby and everyone knew what it was, but to find that at the main entrance to Sasaki.[was something] Hideo was no longer alive at that time. I don't know how he would have felt. Haag would have loved it. I think. That whole group of those four guys would have loved it.

### **The Sasaki Office Grows Over Time**

The Sasaki office has a rich and varied history of names and places and it really did start in Watertown on Galen Street and it lasted in that location for about a month and then as Sasaki Novak, went to 133 Main Street. When Pete Walker joined and the two of us joined, that's where we first started working. Then we got a little too big for that and moved to Watertown Square, into the old Masonic Hall. And got a little bigger and we started moving into other buildings in Watertown and we occupied at one time 12 different buildings.

But in the middle of all that, really in the infancy of growth, Pete decided to go to California to supervise Foothills Junior College and ended up opening a Sasaki Walker Associates office in California. That was our second office. Then eventually the differences, not differences of opinion, but the partnership didn't make a lot of sense so the Sasaki Walker became a separate office and corporation and Sasaki, Watertown was a separate corporation and office.



Then growth required that we think about going beyond Watertown. We thought it might be smart to have an office in Florida. There was a lot of work in Florida. That seemed to be a good idea. Then Washington kind of caught our eye and after that Texas. Dallas, Texas. Then we did Sasaki Strong in Toronto. We had done a couple of others and [we] were thinking about opening an office in Basel, Switzerland. I think all of us were a little tired of management and all the odd things that go on when you're trying to run seven different offices out of one office. With computers and management problems and the complexity [of it all] everyone was worn out. We pretty much decided to retract and maintain the Florida office for a while, but eventually close all of the regional offices, except for a new office that we opened in San Francisco. Not to compete with Pete at all, but rather to have a Sasaki associates office in San Francisco along with SWA and along Peter Walker and Partners. There were a lot of dynamics [going on] and mostly positive feelings about all of that. I think what I remember in the beginning which I'll never forget is the Pete and Hideo relationship. As far as I know, it was always quite good, whether they were at Harvard together or in Watertown together. Sometimes there were closed door sessions, which the rest of us associates weren't privy to, but there was always a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect.

They seemed to have common goals, loved working with architects, SOM [Skidmore Owings and Merrill] and Saarinen [Eero Saarinen and Associates]. They all came along. I think that when Pete and Hideo decided to separate, it was amicable. But I always felt the relationship was very good. [There was] mutual respect. As long as both firms did good work. I think that the one thing that we knew would tear us apart would be if one firm was doing sub-standard work, or even worse, bad work. I think what I remember in the beginning, which I'll never forget, is the Pete and Hideo relationship. As far as I know, it was always quite good, whether they were at Harvard together or in Watertown together. Sometimes there were closed door sessions, which the rest of us associates weren't privy to, but there was always a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect.

### **Serving on The Boston Landmarks Commission**



While I was serving on the Boston Landmarks Commission, I was pleased that they asked a landscape architect to be on the Landmarks Commission. I thought that was a good thing. One would think it might just be historians and architects and maybe a couple of lawyers. But it was nice to be asked to be on the Commission, it was a great commission. Bob Redick was the manager of the Commission. There wasn't a formal title at the time because we were all pretty much volunteers. Walter Whitehill was on the commission, not really a commission yet either. I think it took us four years to finally put a proposal on city council's desk that was finally accepted and made into law. And the shocker of course was that Boston didn't have a Landmarks Commission a lot sooner than it did. Chicago was way ahead of Boston in establishing a commission.

While I was on the commission, even though we had no legal or political authority, we had a lot of clout with the redevelopment director, Bob Kenney, who really believed in what we were doing and helped, actually helped select the members of the commission. So he had a vested interest in making it work. Ben Thompson came to the Landmarks Commission, this would have been in the early 70s, and said, "I need your help. You know, the city council and whoever, historic district commission were insisting that we restore all of the mullions that were a part of all of the windows, 5,400 windows, in the Quincy Market project". And that means that 64 panes per window, and he multiplied this thing out and you ended up with millions of panes of glass. And did a number on, you know, it costs this much a year to keep those windows clean. Mr. Rouse would love it if we could talk the commission into supporting our idea. [Which is] that [we could] do a single double-glazed pane of glass knowing that if you ever wanted to go back to 32 panes, we could do it, but we weren't destroying the essential essence of the historic buildings. And we gave him, gave them, our support. And I think that helped. Basically they were saying the project wouldn't be feasible if they had to maintain all those windows. And I think they meant it. But we did it anyway because it made so much sense. And then as a part of that, Ben [Thompson] came to the commission again and said, he looked at me specifically, he said, "Stu, now the parks department and public works wants us to plant all of these plain trees and all of our willow trees in pots so they can be moved, just in case the project doesn't work". [LAUGHTER] And



that was kind of, oh God, that's not possible, Ben. You're going to make this project work. Anyway, we came down really hard on this thing about pots in a historic district and helped Ben and his landscape architect at the time. Oh, anyway. Presley, Bill Presley was Ben's landscape architect, supported the notion that the trees should be planted in the ground and get the pots out of there, except maybe for an occasional flower pot. And so, you know, that was fun.

## Considering Practice

### Reflections on The Sasaki Practice

Sasaki is probably not alone. That it is people have left over the years almost always due to natural attrition. There have been two or three recessions that have caused some hasty departures, but almost always it's been a natural thing. It's been good for both parties. In fact I'll bet you at least a dozen people that are here now have been here at least once before if not two times before. Dennis Pieprz, our president, has been here at least twice. Fred Merrill, our senior planner, has been at least maybe three times now been back. There's kind of a family tree effect and people feel free to come and go. They leave when they go to Rome. They leave when they decide they want to get into real estate. Most of them decide to come back and become landscape architects again or architects.

Sasaki never believed in firing. I think he didn't like to. He had a way of making people feel uncomfortable and I suspect that's true in a lot of offices, that there is a way of kind of hinting over time that somehow this isn't the place for you. I still think that's probably the culture. No one likes to fire. I don't want to talk about it right now, especially this time of year. It's kind of depressing to think about it, but if we do let some people go I hope they all come back.

Quickly. Dober, Dick Dober, an inspiring person. Planner. Ken DeMay, an incredibly talented architect. [And then] of course Perry Chapman and Dick Galehouse, a lot of the people that are still here. I can't say enough for them. Pete Pollock. A lot of the Rome



Prize people did well before they went to Rome and they did even better when they came back from Rome. There was a time when we seemed to have someone in Rome almost for 10 years in a row. We basically were the stepping stone from wherever the person went to school, typically Harvard, and Rome. There's so many. John Emerson, who teaches at LSU and practices there. Wayne Womack, his friend and partner. They're all over the country. I can't say much more than that.

Probably the ones in terms of being helpful to Stu Dawson were ones that were not landscape architects. Like Mo Freedman, the civil engineer, and Dick Dober, who bailed me out and helped me learn about planning.

*Birnbaum: What would Hid say if you brought him in here today?*

I think he'd be very pleased. I really do. I think he'd be shocked that we were still as well-balanced and the principals' group has diversified much more than I expect that he ever thought it would. The disciplines are represented both at the staff level and principal level in almost equal terms and equal lateral ways. I think he would feel that if he'd been asked to have a dream in 1960, I would hope that he would feel that this matched that dream. I think he might.

*Birnbaum: When you go to the Sasaki website you're welcomed by Hid. So my question is twofold. So when someone comes to work here what is their indoctrination to Hid's philosophy and how is that reflected in the firm's mission and approach?*

I think Melanie Simo has helped a lot with that [*Sasaki Associates*, Spacemaker Press, 1997] , although you have to take the initiative yourself, we don't require reading. I suspect there's a certain amount of knowledge in the various schools that these kids may have attended on their way to Sasaki.





At the principal level there are enough of us that can still speak Sasaki; probably eight of us that worked closely with Hideo, I being probably the oldest of that group. So we're encouraged to speak up in the partners' meetings and help people understand how Hideo might have thought about approaching this project or how Hideo might have felt about this particular award, the Firm of the Year Award [from ASLA] [that] type of thing. I think he would have been really pleased with that.

### **Mentors and Muses**

Over the last 50 years or so and as a person I've initiated and authored a lot of work. I've authored it with the help of a lot of individuals. I'll not take claim for anything as a single object, as a single piece by a Stu Dawson, other than my sketchbooks. That's Stu Dawson. But everything else is collaborative. I think the interesting thing about our discussion here has been the standpoints of my life: Hideo Sasaki, Pete Walker, Mr. current Pete Walker, and people like Dan Burnham and Walter Whitehill, *A Topographic History of Boston*, [and all the] books that keep threading their way through my work. All of my work, I have to admit, is 99% inspired by the people that I work with, the clients and the site. But there's another 1% that's inspired by these other folks. Just think about this. Sometimes when I think and I'm in a large group and I'm not speaking up well enough, Norman Newton will kick me in the head and say, Stu, speak up. Or if I see a project that has a tree in the wrong place and I can see Norman Newton kick me in the nose. And then Hid, if I'm becoming too brazen and too dictatorial,[say] I think I can win this by being a little more subtle. [And] then the inventiveness of Pete. When I'm looking at stuff that we're doing and it looks gee, we've done that before. I think what in the hell Pete would do? Then you think about Burle Marx once in a while. And people like Ricardo Brofeel, he's an architect. You think about these people. What would they do in this location? It goes on. But the Pete and Hideo have to be the number one ghosts.

I love an opportunity to reflect and discuss these things, but it's absolutely true and I didn't think about it much till now. But Hideo has always been on my shoulder, even when he was active here. Whenever I was somewhere else, Hideo was really on my



shoulder. Then Pete, too, because Pete had an aspiration for a different kind of level of excellence; Pete leaned more toward art excellence in landscape, and Hid leaned more to excellence in landscape. It's great to have those two people on your shoulder and it's still true that there isn't a thing that I do or think about that isn't shared with those two guys. That's the common thread and maybe that's what Stu Dawson is. Maybe that's what all of us are. You have people on your shoulders.

### **Three Generations of Dawsons at Sasaki**

*The interview continues Stuart Dawson and Charles Birnbaum are joined by Mark Dawson and Travis Mazerall*

*Birnbaum: We'll just have the two of you and then we'll bring [Travis?] in if that sounds OK. I really want to know when the brainwashing began?*

Mark: I think it began the day I was born. Because the story that you told at Sasaki's house when dad was here and I was born in Champagne and the cork that hit the ceiling. That's like sort of legendary. I've told that at interviews where somebody will ask me how long have I been at Sasaki and I say 50 years and they kind of go "what?" I say well, my name sort originated from the Sasaki's house in Lexington. So I think it started right then, Charles. I really do

*Birnbaum: When did this concept of understanding what a landscape architect was register with you?*

Mark: You know I think pretty young because at one point we built a Boy Scout tower out of timber.

Dawson: They were logs.



Mark: They're logs and we lashed them together with ropes and we'd go to . . . house and dig up trees and rhododendrons and bring them back. It was always around work. It started with, you have to work. And we would do that. Then it was it started with trees and plants. I remember we did that lilac hedge in Audubon. I remember planting small lilacs that were affordable. I may have been, again, around 10. That I used to try to jump over them? I'd jump over them and run to my friend's house. There was a year where they grew so much that I could no longer jump over them. Even though I was taller and I thought I was stronger. I was stronger. They just grew. So we were always doing stuff in the yard and building things. That's where I got a passion for building.

And I think landscape was an obvious connection because we were always in the office when I was a young kid. Dad would be in on a Saturday and we'd come in and on the big conference table and we would roll out paper and draw for like four hours. Just draw. Then we'd get tired and we'd play baseball. We'd take tape and play baseball in the conference room. Dad would come in occasionally. It was fun.

Dawson: You learned to stipple, too, and I think you actually helped on a couple of drawings.

Mark: I did, right.

Birnbaum: *What was it like? I know that you've been to Deere and this really being sort of a hallmark project for the firm and for your dad. What was it like to go to Deere and experience that?*

Mark: We always spent a lot of time together when we had free time and Dad always talked about Deere. I always loved the image of the Moore sculpture on the island. That was just something I was attracted to. So when I had a chance to drive out to school, Dad said you got to go see Chubb Harper if you're going to be close. He gave me his number and I called Chubb Harper and he said sure come on by. We went out in a Deere truck or something -- He took me all over the campus and explained his view of it



and how John Deere related to the land and their business in agriculture; and but how this landscape became a real iconic identity for them. He had fond memories of Dad and would tell funny stories. It was great. So I got it from a perspective of somebody who was really a user. Then Dad and I went back years later briefly, but I don't remember who we talked to then.

At dinner Dad would always talk about landscape, whether it was work or other people's work. I think that always inspired me to see these things, particularly things that he was involved with because he's my dad. I looked up to him and I still do.

Dawson: I hadn't heard that. This is wonderful.

Birnbaum: *Travis [Stuart Dawson's grandson], please join the group. How did this happen with you? Is it in the water in the house or what's going on?*

Travis: Sort of. I first started coming to the office as a young kid for office parties and Christmas parties. It's kind of a fun place to grow up and explore with all the markers and paper. So in that it became like a home, sort of. So then just learning a little bit more about what landscape architecture is, I had a passion for it. I ended up actually getting my merit badge in Boy Scouts through Stu, my grandfather.

Dawson: He designed a garden for me.

Mark: Did he?

Travis: He was my counselor.

Birnbaum: *Which badge was that?*

Travis: Landscape architecture merit badge.



Dawson: Oh, there is one?

Mark: And who helped you with your Eagle Scout project?

Travis: [LAUGHTER] [pointing to Mark] He was the master builder over here. Built a scale model with Stu and he built the real thing.

Birnbaum: *When did you graduate Syracuse?*

Travis: I graduated three years ago.

Birnbaum: *So who did you have for your history or survey course?*

Travis: George Curry.

Birnbaum: *So did you look at any landscapes in that class?*

Travis: We looked at several Sasaki projects, but the funniest thing to me was the first Intro to Landscape Architecture class I was looking through my Intro book and he [Dawson] is quoted in it. I had no idea. He's always fairly humble about what he meant to the profession and coming across your grandfather's name and wanting to tell all your friends there, but not brag, it's kind of an interesting experience for me. The more classes I took, I'd get more textbooks and see like his bollard design and detail in the landscape and some sketches and interviews. It was pretty interesting.

Birnbaum: *So in terms of the family legacy versus working somewhere else, what does this mean to you?*

Travis: I'm really happy to be here and I'm happy to be a part of the 50-plus years I guess from both of them. I guess you could say I'm -- I've been practicing for 26 years. [I've] been a landscape architect for 26 years. I'm 26 and a half years [old].



Birnbaum: *I'd like to turn it back to Stu. Here it is we've been getting your perspective. Stu, what is this like for you?*

Dawson: I couldn't be happier. I think probably the best thing is that I didn't push landscape architecture with either one.

Mark: That's true.

Dawson: In fact I didn't expect either one to become a landscape architect. So my first happy surprise is that they decided to become landscape architects. If I'd tried to force them, I'm sure they wouldn't have been. Anyway, so maybe that's the way you get your kid to do what you really want them to do.

Mark: It's interesting. I have more people ask me were you forced or encouraged to be a landscape architect? I say, "no it was always my choice". After spending time with Dad and seeing the work and being involved in the work when I was a young kid. You were paying in cash. It was a job up in Newburyport, marking stones and building models. That's probably when it was clearly in my mind that that's what I wanted to do.

It goes back to the [Sasaki] Christmas parties we used to have when I was little. We'd come to these puppet shows and there'd always be a Christmas party. We still do them, a family Christmas party. It's great. It's like one of these things that no matter how bad it gets, there'll always be a family Christmas party. I remember those puppet shows on Main Street, when we were on Main Street, and my sisters and how much fun they were. So the family was always part of the office.

Dawson: I talked about this a couple of days ago. One of the things that disturbed us about Hideo when we were young bucks was that he insisted on whatever money we had for a Christmas party would be spent on a family Christmas party. He said we were all away from home so much of the time, we owed it to our families to celebrate family



Christmas. So there never were booze adult parties at Sasaki. Children's parties were a priority. Maybe that's what got the two of you interested in Sasaki.- those little Christmas parties. But it was frustrating for some of us who, I think, wanted to have a real [party], especially after a bad year. The fruit punch was very good for some of us adults.

[LAUGHTER]

Birnbaum: *I'm curious from your perspective then as a little person; do you have any recollections of Hid during those times?*

Mark: Not really. I remember seeing him and saying hello in the office on weekends. I remember sitting in his [chair]. And you'd be working and I'd be in the office. I'd always go run around and sit in people's desk. Well, I'd sit at his desk. I remember the library before his office. I used to spend a lot of time just sitting at his desk spinning in his chair. I was a kid.

Mark: Then there was a time, boy it was a while ago, when I was at Arizona State doing a presentation to their Buildings and Grounds [people]. I came in late and the room was dark and I sort of jumped into the presentation and I was kind of mid-sentence and Hid came up to me --grabbed my elbow, which kind of startled me. He said Mark, I've been sitting in the front row listening for five minutes knowing I knew this person. But all I could think of was Stu. [LAUGHTER] And then he said, but then I realized it was you. And this was in front of a whole audience. He's very quiet. That was one of the real. . . –

Dawson: It's unusual.

Mark: It was really a warm [feeling] for me, it made me feel good. He goes, “you're doing a great job. It's great to see you. I'll sit down and be quiet.” But I never worked with him.



Mark: You just remember him in the office. But I don't remember him. I remember his daughters probably better. We used to spend time as a family and the kids would always be off.

Dawson: [To Travis] Did you meet Hideo? Overlapped with Hid?

Travis: Yes. I remember the same thing in the office. Sort of meeting him and I remember him sort of being quiet.

Dawson: OK. Good.

Mark: You always used to say he was not happy when he'd jingle the coins in his pocket. I remember seeing him do that and I thought oh [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. Dad told me he's not happy. So I got out of there. [LAUGHTER]

Birnbaum. . . *I'm curious as the next generation what Hid and Stu and DeMay and all of these people mean in terms of legacy, in terms of the practice?.*

Mark: It worries me that we're getting so many generations removed. But what's reassuring is, and I tell Dad, I told him last night at dinner at home, I said people always say, "Stu did it right". Everyone knows that we all have issues. We're not perfect. But as a model for people's career, my fellow principals and partners will say, who didn't work with Hid directly, will now say, "well, Stu really had the right model, whether it was deliberate, by luck, or a combination of all the above."

Dawson: Financial performance wasn't always, excuse me for interrupting, was not one of my strong suits.

Mark: Not, but more importantly was the design part of your performance and your innovation and your passion for detail and building. So now he's kind of on our shoulders that's how I feel, a little less [so] about Hid. The down side is the firm's gotten





big and there's a lot of us so that it feels to me [that it has] diluted itself a little bit. That worries me. So we need to have some more strong characters emerge that ultimately will be on his [Travis] shoulder.

Travis: I guess in a way you're on my shoulders sort of the same way he's [Stu Dawson] on your shoulders. Working on several projects together, I hear the same things that Mark hears about Hid, sort of Stu did it right. I can see the way he interacts with people and in the short time that I've been here, the way he interacts with clients. I remember one of the first days I started work he was in the office and I think he threw an eraser at somebody, to lighten the mood. And as silly as it was, it lightened the mood and I think it creates a better atmosphere for design and for expression. So I think the balance between business and work relationship is something that hopefully people do [step up] stronger characters step up, [and we] have those balances.

Mark: The transition is interesting. We talk about it a lot. We really do. I think we talk far less about Hid because he was a personality like all of us and that personality's been gone now longer than we care to think. You're the second [generation], you're really the one and a half generation. If Hid's one, you're one and a half. I'm like the fourth generation of ownership in the firm. You look at these decades of leaders and it worries me. It worries me that [if] we keep operating and reaching as high as Hid reached [and] as well as Dad reached to be leaders [that] we don't get bogged down in a corporation. That is what I want to avoid, is getting too corporate like. We still want to practice very strong landscape architecture and architecture. There are some good models in all these disciplines of good leaders that give me hope, which is a good thing.

Birnbaum: *Travis, have you been one of the people's that's in for a Monday crit? Have you done any of those in your time here? Where you put your work up and it gets critted by the larger office? Tell us about that experience and what that was like.*



Travis: I remember the first presentation I did was a project I was working on in Florida and it was for sustainability. There's several different projects up there. I remember being scared out of my. . . I was so nervous just standing up there in front of everyone.

Dawson: Worse than Syracuse?

Travis: [It was] way worse than Syracuse, because I had just come out of college. I'd been working, helping out on this project; and standing up there explaining my project to all of these peers, who all had more experience than me, I felt like I obviously have bigger shoes to fill. It was a little nerve-wracking, but you get through it.

Birnbaum: *How did you feel afterwards?*

Travis: Afterwards? I felt good . . . a little shaky.

Birnbaum: *Was it what you expected?*

Travis: No, I can't say it's really exactly what I expected. I didn't realize that I'd be that nervous.

Birnbaum: *But did you feel that it was a positive experience?*

Travis: Oh yes.

Birnbaum: *In what way? In what way did it influence the way that you proceeded after that?*

Travis: I think the longer you're here the smaller it gets. The more you get to know people and the more comfortable you are speaking your mind and speaking about your projects and concepts.

Birnbaum: *Mark, I put him on the spot, but –*



Mark: No, I think one of the things is we get so busy in our daily work life that we don't often stop enough and time for a pin-up. Every time I do, it may not be office-wide, but I'll ask four or five people that I respect and will tell me the truth; and every time I do it it's the most rewarding feeling because you get perspectives that I don't have. And these people are really good. They're really smart and they're accomplished professionally and it just makes the work better. That's what I like. That's where I think if Hid was about collaboration, when you do that [the crit], to me that's part of that legacy. That if you really believe it and feel it that you'll do it across your partition, [in an] easy [way] with a friend. It's not to be defensive. I think what we find is [that] sometimes people will get defensive and that's not the purpose. Sometimes the criticism can be a little too GSD-like, where it is criticism versus constructive opinions.

Dawson: I wish Hid were sitting right here. Maybe he is.

Birnbaum: *He is, of course. We've already established that. [LAUGHTER]*

Mark: But it's pretty powerful. I've gone to client meetings and said, "you know I had four of my partners in on a meeting Wednesday night and we had a bottle of wine and we sat around and had dinner and talked about the project and it's taken a different direction and here's our rationale". And they loved that.

Birnbaum: *So, Travis, after being at Syracuse in a mono-culture studio of landscape architects, what's it like to be able to work in an office where you have other disciplines under the umbrella of landscape architecture?*

Travis: It's such a great experience to have someone in different specialties to help you out. Every day I have to say I go to a different discipline for advice, whether it's civil engineering or architecture or planning. It's just nice to have it all under one roof.



Birnbaum: *You must keep in touch with people that you went to Syracuse with. Probably other folks are working in a more traditional practice of landscape architects. What do you tell them?*

Travis: I've found that a lot of my friends aren't nearly in the kind of position I am to collaborate with other professionals. A lot of it seems they've gone into engineering firms or are in an architecture firm where their job is the same thing all the time. They just don't have the ability to spread their roots and pursue what you like within the profession or also learn other things that you normally wouldn't learn.

Birnbaum: *But getting really personal for a minute, while the cameras are rolling, is there anything you want to tell Stu?*

Mark: I hope I'm as a good role model for my children. I really do believe that. I was telling somebody. "I'm on vacation next week with Dad". They said, "where are you going?" I said, "I'm going fishing". "Well, who you going with?" I said, "I'm going with my dad". They're like, "you're going with your dad?" I said, "yeah, it's great". So I really do. I hope I'm the role model, as good a role model, for my children. I'll never be as successful professionally, but I can always try. I can always try. Really. That's how I feel. When I was in college I always had a little axe to grind because I was Stu's son and that sort of followed me. At some point in my life I got over it, maybe when I was 30.

Dawson: It didn't help that one of your faculty had been fired at Sasaki. [LAUGHTER]

Mark: Yeah and I had problem grades with that particular professor.

Dawson: I'm sorry about that.

Mark: So it all kind of circles around.

Dawson: I'm not always a positive influence.



Mark: Once I shed that and had my own self-confidence, it was much easier. I do. I hope to be as good a role model and half as good a professional.

Dawson: Very nice.

Birnbaum: *Travis, is there anything you want for the record here?*

Travis: [He] pretty much takes everything that I'm going to say which I guess is his due right. Both these guys have been my role model as long as I can remember, whether it's throwing a ball around, landscape architecture, driving, [or] tons of other things, I'm kind of speechless. I don't really know what to say. Role model, I guess is the best way to describe it. Best friends.

### **Loving Living in York, Maine**

Living in York has been a great thing. Part of its greatness is that it's easy to get away from too. It's a small town. It has, you know, 17th-century roots and it's [on] the coast of Maine. And there's still an active fishing industry there. In fact working waterfronts in York have become a priority and I hope a model for the rest of our country. The privatization of wharfs and piers in York has come to an end in favor of working waterfronts. Basically it's the historic character of the place. It's not far from Portsmouth. And it's very close to Boston. Oh, again, you know, as an Illinois boy the historic houses in York are pristine and absolutely beautiful. It's a great place, great place. A nice balance. Not too big, a little bit like Newburyport, not quite as 19th century, but very much a comfortable place to live and work.



## Design

*During the interview on Long Wharf Dawson reflects about his love of water.*

### Lessons Learned

#### Stanley White and The Art of Sketching

Birnbaum: *Your love of sketching, did that come from that time?*

That had to be a Stan White. He insisted that his [one] hour class was so rambling and so kind of abstract sometimes and focused at other times, that we had to do something like scribble. You know, doodle, doodle while I'm talking. So that, that had to be the beginning of my typical sketchbook, which is loaded with notes, [and] sometimes client meetings, [and] sometimes Sasaki meetings. And then littered with doodles and sketches and sometimes more careful sketches, depending on where I happened to be sitting. So Stan White had to inspire that almost like breathing. [Sketching to Stan was a little bit like breathing. You needed to do it. And his chalkboard images are probably the most beautiful works of art one can imagine, but they're also incredible teaching tools.

#### Stanley White: Passion Was His Teacher

Stan White needs some time. He [has] got to be the most influential per-, as much as Sasaki was an influence, Stan White had to be equal. Stan was not like anybody I've ever met. It's still true today. His brother, E. B. White, of course, *Charlotte's Web*, will give you some clue about the kind of brains the White family was stuck with.

[LAUGHTER] They are an incredibly exciting and intellectual family. And Stanley's memories of the time they spent in Maine and E. B. White's memories of the time in Maine are one of the reasons that I'm in Maine. [LAUGHTER] It's marvelous.

But anyway, Stan had a way of teaching that wasn't teaching at all. I think it had to do, one day we'd heard a noise coming down the corridor in Mumford Hall. It sounded like a violin. Stan walked into the classroom playing the violin. And he stood there and played the violin for 40 minutes, anything from a more modern interpretation of current



music to classical. And [then] he simply turned around and walked back down the corridor to his office and that was the end of the class. And there were other times that were equally interesting.

One day he brought in a bag, a huge bag, like a ditty bag or a huge cotton bag of some kind. And he dumped it on the desk. And what he dumped were probably 20 or 30 hats, hats of all shapes and sizes, his hat collection. And he asked us to put on hats and start playing the part of the person who would wear a hat like that. And we did. And then he made us trade hats and then we had to play the part of the person, the new hat that you had. Now I don't know if you can call this, you know, undergraduate level education. But if you mix with that all of the other good stuff that he gave us, lessons on grading, on planting, on architecture, on design styles, it gave you a kind of a sense of freedom.

When we went on campus tours, which we did often, if the weather was really great, he'd say, "let's go look at the birch grove". But on the way we'd go into the music building and Stan would stop at a grand piano. And Stan would ask some of us to play. I could play a little bit. And some of us could play a little bit. And then Stan would sit down and play. And then we'd talk about the importance of music and how you can sketch a little better if you think musically. Because graphics and music, they're all one and the same. And then we'd get up and walk out of the classroom and go to the birch grove, and then go back home to Mumford Hall, and that was the end of that class.

[LAUGHTER]

One of the curious things about Stan, and there are many of them, was that he really didn't talk, to my knowledge, even when we'd quiz him, about really his previous experience. So he never talked, he would talk about Olmsted, but in a poetic kind of way; like Norman Newton, almost in tears but with a certain amount of passion. But he never talked about his actual experience working with the Olmsteds or anything else that he did in his background. He basically seemed to, didn't talk about Maine.



The one thing he talked about, and it was a visual overlay kind of thing, he loved Marblehead, Massachusetts. And whenever he came to Boston he would find a way to get to Marblehead. And downtown Marblehead, not far from the harbor, there was a huge boulder that a traffic engineer probably wanted to move but decided not to move because it was too big. But Stan had discovered a lichen colony on the north and west, north and east sides of this huge boulder. He basically took photographs of that little lichen colony over a 20-year period, maybe even 30 years, and loved to show us this set of the organic, organic secret in the middle of an urban area. And his message was you can find so much beauty without moving an inch, you know. And we should be more careful and not look for Dan Burnham necessarily, but you can find it in every corner if you're the least bit thoughtful.

INTERVIEWER: -- what they were and.

### **Stanley White's Chalkboard Lessons**

Stan, you know, legacy-wise I suspect his chalkboard sketches have got to be at the top of the list. He didn't write a lot. He's done some writing, but it wasn't his forte. He left that to his brother. But Stan did a series of chalkboard sketches and he'd done them more than once apparently. The ones I have copies of are ones that he did when I was at the University of Illinois. And I think good old Chuck Harris talked him into producing that chalkboard series one more time. And I think that that was the very last time. And what was neat is that it just happened to coincide with Pete Walker's arrival at the University of Illinois. Pete was determined to go Harvard from California of course. But he wanted to spend a semester at the University of Illinois and not only, well, no primarily to overlap with Stan White. He'd heard so much about Stan White from Rich Haag and Hideo Sasaki and others that he was determined to spend that semester. And what was cool was that Stan's sketches were on the board and Pete Walker was there and Dick Julin and I were there, Tony Gazarro Larry Wallquist was, oh man. And we didn't appreciate what we were looking at so much. There was a lesson aspect, but the beauty of the sketches was mind boggling.





But then you start looking at the sketches carefully. And it's a textbook on the practice of landscape architecture. All the way, how do you grade to how you come up with planting. Stan would be furious if one of us were doing a planting plan and start naming species. He would be furious. He'd say that's not acceptable. He insisted that you study planting with massing. And he had what he called low ground covers, medium ground covers, high shrubs and/or trees and then canopy. And our drawings had to show those four basic tree types. And then he said, you know, once you've selected your best alternative, and do alternatives, then you can start worrying about what species. So Stan was very, very disciplined about thinking about the art side of landscape, instead of worrying about species initially.

And then of course probably the most dramatic lesson and Hideo used it at Harvard for years; and when Hid and I taught at Michigan and Michigan State during the summers, which we did for several years, we used Stan's basic approach to landscape design. And Stan said there are only three basic approaches that really make any sense. And if you mix them up too much, it doesn't work. He said you either have, you know, rectilinear. And he said that's kind of like Mies van der Rohe. You have curvilinear. That's kind of like Burle Marx. Then you have naturalistic. That's kind of like Japanese, and if it's kind of like, you know, informal, it's English, English gardens instead of French gardens. And he went into a long dialogue about, you know, historically, which cultures were best at doing which of these three. But generally, if you wander too much and mix these up too much, you're not going to be very happy with the way it looks. He was very insistent that we be very true to one of those three styles. And Hid did the same thing. And it worked very well I think as a teaching tool.

We spoke, Hideo and I and those of us who'd studied at Illinois and there were a bunch of us that came almost at the same time. And of course Pete had had a semester. So Stan's name was used a lot in our dialogues within the office and in the classrooms. And I think Hideo admired Stan White so much, and he admired his humor, that he was kind of a buzzword. He still is amongst us that had the good fortune of studying with Stan. We asked, well, what would Stan White think of this? Or now I ask, what would



Hid think of this? And you'd hope that you'd feel good, yeah, they both would like it. [LAUGHTER] They still tend to be our major jury.

### **The Hideo Doctrine**

Another doctrine, [the] Hideo doctrine, was that we should really pay attention to the context and pay attention to our clients. And if a client would like the garden to be more formal, we should do the best formal garden that we could possibly do. If the client wants the garden to be naturalistic, we should do the most naturalistic garden we can do, and not try to impose what we think the client needs. Except, he'd say except, if the context is so powerful, then [in this case] you might need to persuade the client. But he said essentially he wanted us to be ambidextrous. He wanted us to be skillful with every site. Because he felt we were working all over the world, with all kinds of clients from public to private, and we needn't have a doctrine, we needn't impose ourselves on our clients.

### **Hideo Sasaki As Mentor and Friend**

The relationship with Hideo was fragile in a way, but it was also very powerful. He was your boss and also your professor, so you counted on him for income as well as grades. And yet he really wanted us to be equal. He was very strong in a way, of each one had a vote. We never voted, but each one of us had a voice. And it was difficult, but you felt comfortable with it. Part of the reason is, and I can't say enough for this, that at Illinois basically you were with a bunch of landscape architects doing landscape architecture; at Harvard and at Sasaki, you were with some landscape architects and some engineers and some planners and some architects doing landscape architecture and everything else, [including] urban design. And so, we weren't so focused on landscape architecture.

I think the thing was that there was so much to talk about with Hid. We had so many common goals. His of course were well formed. Mine were daily in transition. Collaboration was something that hadn't been talked about much at Illinois. It had



been, but nothing like it was at Harvard, nothing like it was at Sasaki. It was a particularly fraternal feeling. And Hideo probably did the best thing of all. He treated it as a family affair, that the office and Harvard included family. He basically wanted the mother or the wives [and] the kids to all feel a part of the collaborative process. So our office parties, for instance, included wives and children and basically they were not alcoholic frenzies. Essentially felt like family the first minute I met Sasaki. And that's the way it always was.

*Birnbaum: And I think about you coming from a family with military background. How you really reached that fork in the road. Here's a person who had connections to internment camps. What were those conversations like?*

Hideo, not once in all of the years I knew him and [I] traveled with him on countless trips, just the two of us, never talked about the internment camp or any of the World War II stuff even though he had met my father and the two of them got along famously. There was no sense of anything other than being just good American friends. [LAUGHTER] There was nothing there. Dad of course was so glad to be out of uniform. And Hideo I'm sure was glad to be out of the [LAUGHTER] internment camp. Everyone was kind of breathing a sigh of relief. It was a happy time. And we were really exuberant with where things were going.

Hideo was of course a friend and a boss, a difficult combination. What attracted me to Hideo initially of course was talent, and also his ability to make everyone feel good. In the early days at Harvard and the early days of Sasaki, he had a way of criticizing your work that made you feel good no matter how much he changed what you had drawn. You still felt good after you'd get criticized. It was objective criticism at the best. Even if it was only one little thing you'd drawn, he could kind of pull that out and say, "now if you just make this a little bigger and kind of move it that way, you've really got a great scheme here". You'd say, "oh wow". Then you realized 24 hours later it totally changed what you had done. He had a way of doing that with everything. He seemed to be able



to twist things that might ordinarily be thought to be negative. Some people, like some faculty, were very good at making you feel awful. Hideo was totally the opposite.

I think the other thing is he dressed informally, [wore] chinos and he'd jump up on a stool, scratch his head, do some sketches. He didn't really do a lot of sketches, but he'd kind of wave his arms and move the model and he would get down on his knees and we'd do things, building the models. He wasn't afraid to be one of the kids. He was very youthful, very young, in spirit. And physically he just had a way of fitting in and making you better without feeling like you've been spanked.

*Birnbaum: Again, I want to talk about why Hid stopped writing. Perhaps it was because Grady [Clay] was pushing him. And perhaps it was maybe the office was more interesting. Whatever it was, why did he stop writing?*

He thought other people were better. I think it's one reason why he didn't draw, even though I thought he drew so well. He just felt well, other people do that better. Why should I draw? Why should I write? Which is too bad because he wrote beautifully also.

### **Garrett Eckbo and Dan Kiley**

Yes. I think where the profession seemed to be headed in my mind was, and this is my own sense of it, is that we used Eckbo's [ideas] a lot as sophomores. I [remember] all of us had Eckbo books kind of hidden away. And all of our stuff looked a little bit like Garrett Eckbo, even our trees. But when Dan Kiley visited, He had this huge impact. He was doing the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs with Walter Netsch of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. I had just gotten to know Walter Netsch because I'd been at the Aspen Design Series. Anyway I met Walter Netsch in Aspen, he presented the Academy and talked about this crazy guy named Dan Kiley, who was using rubber stamps at the time, tree stamps. And lo and behold, six months later Dan Kiley came to Urbana and gave us really cool day discussion about landscape architecture, and talked about the Miller Garden. We talked about a more architectural approach. We would



call this rectilinear, in Stan White's terms. Kiley was a master of the rectilinear style of landscape architecture. He said "hey, this is cool". Eckbo was more like a curvilinear [type]. And so you had these two landscape architects that were influencing us, but I think we liked Kiley's stuff a little better because it satisfied our architectural ambitions. All of us I think wanted to be architects too, so we kept playing architect and landscape architect. But I think what really hit me was Dan's commitment; I didn't sense that, of course, we didn't meet Eckbo; Dan's commitment to working with architects.

### **William H. "Holly" Whyte**

*Birnbaum: I'd like to spend a minute talking about Holly, both personally, how the office came to work with Holly, and if there's any anecdotal stories. But just speak to Holly Whyte and how the collaboration happened.*

I got to know Holly through a Waterfront Center conference in Washington, DC, when the Waterfront Center was federally funded and was located in Washington, DC. He had given a really great presentation on transparency and public access and the importance of letting people cross busy intersections even when it wasn't very safe. I just fell in love with his message because we've all been exposed to the other side of urban design, which was essentially just blank walls. To my knowledge we never hired Holly. [We] got a lot of freebie advice from him, but he also worked with some of our clients so he indirectly became a consultant to us.

The first time that I met him that we worked indirectly together was on the Denver Skyline project. He must have been a kid at the time, just like me. He had really supported the D&F Tower as the landmark. That became the logo of the Skyline project. If you took that down you wouldn't have a logo. He was right into the importance of that.



Birnbaum: *When you were at Harvard he was writing, in the early '50's or even I think the late '40's actually, he was writing his essays in Fortune magazine. They were published as the Exploding Metropolis, as a collection of writings. Had you read any of that?*

No, but after I met him I very quickly caught up.

Birnbaum: *Is Holly's a voice that you sometimes have asked some questions?*

He is my most severe critic when I am doing urban stuff. Kevin Lynch. I mean Kevin Lynch. We worked with Kevin. He and Hideo Sasaki were very close and Kevin Lynch I think had a huge impact on Hideo and vice versa. But Holly White was right there. I think of Holly more often than Kevin. I think it's because the biggest problem we have in any of our urban design work has to do with garages and the ground floor, and transparency of the ground floor and accessibility of buildings.

The greatest example of all is the [the design of the] [Alfred P] Murrah replacement building in Oklahoma City, which we worked on with Carol Ross Barney. Carol felt just like Sasaki that the building should be transparent at the base and accessible to the people to help people feel comfortable walking on the streets. That's exactly what the people who were going to inhabit the new Murrah building didn't want. They wanted [it] opaque at the street, heavy opaque, heavy massive opaque. That's a still a problem to this day. We used Holly White a lot to convince the community that maybe there are other ways. And it wasn't just the transparency of the building. It's [was] the relation to the street. Not only did they want it to be opaque, but wanted it to be 60 feet from the street for security reasons. It's been a very difficult thing for us and many other consultants to deal with. That's a federal problem. It's a National problem.

### **Travel as a Teacher**

You know, Hideo never seemed to have a favorite set of books or favorite set of places to visit. He was basically a modernist, not so much a historian. What Hideo wanted us to see was everything new, anything new that's been built across country. He really



wanted us to be terribly informed about what was going on. He had an attachment to the Public Garden in Boston, but it was more [as] a kind of a tourist thing, it wasn't a teaching thing for us. He loved some of the earlier [landscapes], the Emerald Necklace but it was never high on his list. Essentially he wanted us to see Larry Halprin. Go look at Tommy Church.

Birnbaum: *Can you give a specific example?*

To that end, the end of wanting us to see contemporary work, when we were in any city Hid would say, "please stay an extra day, stay Saturday on Sasaki and look at some projects and then come home, don't come home Friday night." So basically no matter where we were, we would find a way. In San Francisco I would go with Pete [Walker]. We visited Halprin's office, etc. So I think almost all of us would spend that extra day if we weren't on a real charette to seek out modern works in the cities that we visited.

There was not a lot of emphasis on historic or classic [design]. I would say it was almost a friction at the GSD [Graduate School of Design] at the time. [Norman] Newton and [Hideo] Sasaki were kind of grumpy with each other. You hate to say that because they're not here to defend themselves, but there was a tension. Hid didn't want historic overlays. Hid wanted everything to be. . . . and that's one reason he was a little upset when we took on Newburyport. I think that that's another story. [

Veenema: *Was there ever a trip you came back from and went wow, that was amazing? And what did you see?*

In Denver I think for instance at Mile High Center, I got excited about that because the developer had gone the extra mile in doing quality work in an urban setting. That was a benefit of that extra day. I'm sure there were many others. I went to Boulder for the first time just because I had an extra day in Denver and discovered the University of Colorado before we even worked on the campus. And I fell in love with the Italianate architectural feeling of the campus.



Birnbaum: *Let's sort of take the first time you went abroad, for example, and that question first. And then the second is, I know that you were in Rome and we talked about it a number of times and that had a great effect on you. And so I'd also like to talk about the American Academy experience*

Yeah. Travel abroad like national travel, has almost always been inspired by the client that I'm working with. Now and then, maybe, you know, once a decade, I'll go off and do something on my own. No, it's not that bad. But basically you're so busy trying to finish projects and move on with the new project, that you have little time for exploring on your own. And again, [following] the old Hideo policy, though, if you have to work on a project in London, spend instead of a day, spend an extra two days in London. If you have a third day, you can go out to the Cotswolds. And again, Sasaki's view was very much that way, you know, if the project was in France or Italy, etc. I think he was less [inclined, which is really quite funny, to say that with the resort work. I don't ever remember him encouraging us to stay around on the resort projects. [LAUGHTER] I hadn't thought about that until just now.

Again, a lot of my experiences abroad were driven by professional practice. A couple of things that stand out as having an incredible impact on me, [it was] not just the age of almost every place one visited, but the respect for the countryside, especially in France, England, and Italy. But France especially impressed me. You know, you've got a city and there's an edge and then there's agriculture. I absolutely love that. And I think, you know, the countries are small, they don't have a lot of land to burn, and they don't have land to waste. And they've learned to balance the agricultural use with the urban use. And again, there are exceptions. But I wish you'd see more of that in the United States. I think we're a little bit weak, very weak in this area.

The other thing of course, and especially in Italy, is the importance of the open space in the city, the Piazza the Piazzetta Pompo, is so intense and so dramatic. You don't need trees. It's basically, the way you use spaces without trees, the problem solved by





the architecture, by the culture, the uses of the space. You don't need to soften things with landscape. It already works, whether it's umbrellas on weekends or parked cars during the week. I love that no tree solution to spaces, and the line that is drawn in the sand- between the city and the landscape, the natural and agricultural landscape on the edges. And then [seeing] the differences between the gardens in France and the gardens in England and the gardens in Italy. And how excited one got at each one and not really ever disliking anything you saw. It was like you walked away feeling like everything here seems to be good. What's wrong with what we're doing back at home? Birnbaum:" *And I'm wondering if that was a place that had a significant impact?*

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think Spain was one of the [places] I put it off a little too long. But by the time we'd gone to the Alhambra and so many other wonderful places . . .we finally got to Barcelona and joined the Ramblas, which reminded me a little bit of Quincy Market. But then to discover in the middle of Barcelona, the [Barcelona] pavilion; and to walk through this wonderful maze of streets and discover this incredible glass box, with very few people there which made it even better. It was almost like walking into a private house. And, you know, I felt at home, like being in Chicago, like being at IIT. I really liked this. And then I realized that what an impact that pavilion must have had on the world, the design world at large, in all countries around the world. Incredible. And to this day I am pleased that it had been so well taken care of. And I should add that we were working with Dirk Lohan at the time and I've talked about him earlier. But he is the grandson of Mies van der Rohe. And he had helped restore the Barcelona pavilion. So that had a kind of personal meaning as well, because Dirk and I had worked on three projects together and it was great to see his work there.

*Dawson discusses his experience at the Academy in Rome*

Hank Mellon was also on the Landmark Commission. Hank was a historian and architect and author. He had been selected to move to the American Academy in Rome and head up that program for the next five or six years. And as Hank was walking out of the door in 1975, he said," hey, Stu, why don't you come to Rome for a while?" And



here I'm sitting and I'm having all this fun at the Landmarks Commission, but even better, I'm asked to go to the American Academy in Rome as a resident for two, . . . for three months. That had to be a real pivotal time of my history, because I was literally away from airplanes and away from proposals and away from contractors and clients for three full months. [Previously] I don't think I'd had more than a weekend of time to contemplate anything. It was a super retooling for me and I had a lot of fun with the students that were there. Bob Hanna was there as a mid-career fellow. And musicians came in and out. I picked up the French horn and played French horn one evening with not too many laughs. I did get through a couple of numbers [LAUGHTER], but I wasn't a musician that the others there were. But they were very tolerant. They'd had a few drinks and things went very well. [LAUGHTER]

Birnbaum: *But has there been anything where it's really been sort of head and shoulders where you're just completely seduced?*

Head and shoulders, in Rome and Italy in particular [it] seemed to happen every day. You know? Villa d'Este one day, you know, Piazza Navona the next. It was all head and shoulders. In fact I know now why people like Don Olsen and Pete Pollack and others came back after a two-year fellowship in Rome, I finally realized why it was very hard for them to design anything in North America. It took those guys, five or six months to kind of learn to think about college campuses or to think about urban street in today's terms. And so we found that the one-year fellows readapted much more quickly to a culture of a competitive private practice. The two-year guys came back and it took a while. And that's the way I felt after only three months. It took me a long time to come back to the reality of what we have to work with today, which is quite different than what I was seeing abroad.

### **Always Learning**

Yeah. Well, learning is at Sasaki, certainly in the early days, was 24 hours a day, and if you weren't learning at Harvard, you were learning at the office [. And you were



learning on weekends because you went to places that had something to do with what you were doing. You didn't waste a lot of time on the beach. You basically visited gardens, you visited cities, you visited cultural and historical landmarks and you visited competition's work. The early days especially, were intensely exploratory and educational in nature, and we shared that with each other. We basically did a show and tell once a week. Sasaki love sherry parties. And one of us would get up and show a bunch of slides of Birmingham, Michigan or wherever it was that we were last and talk about it. And the office to this day is very high on a similar kind of direction. We basically have design studio presentations once a week, and vary the disciplinary focus as much as we can every week.

Birnbaum: *Do those vary, Stuart, or do they happen at different times?*

No, yes, it happens at different times, but typically we like to do it either on a Monday or a Friday. Most of us travel midweek, so the best time to get most people is Monday, Monday morning.

And one thing, in the early days, since I was working with Hideo on all the projects I had daily supervision. But as we, some of us earlier partners matured. . . Hideo let us kind of run our own show. He kind of let us take over the projects that he'd actually handed to us, and we became more and more distant. You could feel the tension once in a while, that gee, the young guys are not including me anymore. So we started a monthly pinup in our large conference room in the old Masonic Hall. We would tack things up and have Hideo come in and give us a crit. It was absolutely fabulous because he basically did these objective crits that I talked about. He didn't cut any of us down, but he helped us all a lot. At the same time, he felt better because he could see that his children were doing a good job. And he wasn't nearly as nervous as he seemed to be when he wasn't informed. So as we got bigger. We became more and more skillful at catching him up. And then when we got really busy, we started running out of time to do it, and lack of interest, because we already had our agendas. And that's when Hideo, you could tell Hideo was beginning to be a little upset with all of his children



[LAUGHTER] They were being bad children. But we still did it as often as we could. But the one thing we all grew to recognize is that Hideo started jingling the change in his pocket, he was really upset. That was the one signal, the one single signal that told you that you needed to sit down and say let's talk about this some more, Hideo; because you knew that he really was antsy about what you'd done. And that got to be more and more so, I think, as we grew further and further apart. And he had other interests, too, of course.

## Practice Guidelines

### Developing an Interdisciplinary Practice

Veenema: *Was it unusual at that time to have a firm that was so interdisciplinary in its focus and its philosophy?*

I think the summer that I worked for Hid before Harvard, and of course Harvard was into that mode big time, I had a good preparatory summer because Sasaki's office, even though it was small, was already interdisciplinary. Dick Dover was a planner and George Connelly an architect. George had worked for Hugh Stubbins and had designed the Berlin Opera House. And here he was working in Hid's basement [office]. So I had this guy that could draw and he was a great architect to boot, and then [I had] Dick Dover, he could talk the planner talk, and then there were a couple of landscape architects. It had to be really unusual because I didn't know of any other firms in that day, and this is early '57, that had a planner and architect on staff. Almost a majority of our staff were landscape architects, almost the majority, of course not much later we added a civil engineer. This continued to be that way for half a century. The disciplines to this day are fairly well balanced. Architecture may be slightly bigger, but landscape and planning, if you add planning is bigger than architecture. Civil is a little smaller. But we trade roles. Sometimes a planner will manage a project, sometimes an engineer, sometimes a landscape architect. I think it was probably the first of its kind. Maybe there's some others out there. Clark and Rapuano may have been that way. I think they work very good at engineering as well as landscape architecture. But I can't imagine



practicing any other way. I really love having people who know a lot more than I know about a lot of things that I care about.

### **Collaboration Is The Rule**

*Birnbaum: Describe what the environment was like to be in the office at that time and to practice and the kinds of projects the architects, the clients. Give us a sense of the spirit of the place that was the Sasaki Walker and Sasaki Dawson DeMay.*

I first joined Sasaki we were working on some really interesting things. I've mentioned some of those, and we were beginning to land other things that seemed even more interesting. I think part of the excitement was not only the resort type with Charlie Frazier at Sea Pines, but the corporate work. SOM brought several projects across our transom, Saarinen the same, and later other architects. We were all over the place in different parts of the country, different kinds of architects and personalities, different kinds of clients. So we were very heavily focused upon high design. Planning wasn't really essential for most of this work. It really was landscape architecture in the purest sense of the word. And working with great architects really made it even more fun. At the same time we had really taken hold of campus planning, institutional planning, which really required planning, it was primarily planning. But [the] planning [practice] in those days at Sasaki and still to this day involves architects and landscape architects very heavily in the planning process. Planners don't do planning at Sasaki, all of us do planning at Sasaki.

I think maybe the excitement had a lot to do with [the fact that] first of all we didn't have to market. People would call us up. And every project seemed to be different. Even if it was a corporate headquarters, it was totally different than anything we had ever done before. So it was just a bunch of discovery. No repetition [of projects] that I can think of. Maybe there are a few things, but by and large, being young, not having to market, not having even to go to interviews, and all of a sudden [to] be on a plane to Birmingham, Michigan, to visit Cranbrook to meet Eero Saarinen in his father's masterpiece. And to



see how real architecture and real sculpture can be combined along with the landscape to be in perfect harmony. It was all the way from really contemporary work to stuff that I would call much more natural and organic. We were doing a couple of parks, a couple of parkways, [a] soft, but a nice counterpoint to all of the high design stuff. [We were] doing some urban work in New Haven, we were busy in downtown New Haven and Newport, Rhode Island, Rockport, Maine, Portland, Maine, and eventually Newburyport, Massachusetts.

Birnbaum: *Now during this time you were also loaned out, if you will, to work in Saarinen's office, weren't you?*

Yeah, it was one thing that Hideo really insisted upon, is collaboration. And collaboration didn't mean having Saarinen hire Sasaki to do the landscape and then Sasaki does the landscape in Watertown. But Sasaki goes to Saarinen to work with the architect to design the landscape. So a lot of us spent a lot of time in the architect's offices. I spent probably a whole year, I'm guessing, in Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's office in Chicago and probably half that amount of time in the [SOM] New York office working with Gordon Bunshaft. So we really did collaborate. I don't remember us ever doing a bunch of alternatives and in private. It was always done face to face. In fact a great lesson I've learned and I've tried to share it with every young landscape architect at Sasaki and wherever I teach is the notion that there's no such thing as one alternative.

I was working on Bell Labs, as it was, in Saarinen's office when he was still in Birmingham, Michigan, and Eero came into the room late in the afternoon, around five o'clock, and he walked around and looked at one or two things that I had on the wall and said, "gee, these look nice". Then he turned away and said, with his hands behind his back, walked out of the room and said, "when is a landscape architect going to come and work with the architect?" He walked out of the room and I was ready to go home with my tail between my legs. [LAUGHTER]



Thank heavens for young Kevin Roche. At about six o'clock Kevin said, "Let's go have supper". I said, "Kevin, I got to talk to you. I said your boss, or your partner, just told me that I really need to come and work with the architect. I could tell he didn't like what I'd done." I was just devastated. "Tell me what to do." Kevin said, "OK, let's have lunch and I'll tell you during lunch". It was a brief lunch because what he told me was what Eero likes to see are a lot of alternatives. He likes to see sections, he wants to see spot elevations, he wants to see different ideas. I stayed up I think until five in the morning. I filled the walls with alternatives. Around ten o'clock the next day I was almost afraid to see Saarinen because I was afraid he'd say the same damn thing. I'd poured my heart into these studies.

Anyway he walked around the room, hands behind his back, walked back and forth and he said, "You know. I think we should do this. I think we should do this one". And he walked out of the room with his hands behind his back. What was even better, an hour later he came back in and said, "Let's go have lunch." [LAUGHTER] So he took me to lunch and after lunch he offered me a cigar. My God, in 24 hours I've died and gone to heaven but I'm still alive. That's even better. So anyway that's the story of alternatives.

*Birnbaum: What is it that the players bring to the table in terms of collaboration? And if you want to point to an example as part of that answer, that would be fine.*

A perfect example of collaboration has got to be a corporate headquarters, TRW in Lyndhurst, Ohio. FCL, [Fujikawa, Conterato, Lohan], were the selected architects. There was a competition. There were five different firms. We were selected, which is always the best thing. FCL is now Lohan Associates. Dirk Lohan is a grandson of Mies van der Rohe. So we had this wonderful kind of Illinois root thing and he knew very quickly how much I admired his father. Dirk, of course, told me stories about carrying the bag for his dad, or his grandfather, and traveling the world with him. Anyway, Dirk was not as Miesian as his grandfather. [He is ] much more of a contextual kind of a thinker. We seemed to be the right team to do TRW's project.



The fellow that managed the whole team in probably the best way I can imagine insisted that all of us come to Lyndhurst once a month, the security guy, the plumbing guy, the utility guy, the lighting guy, every consultant. And it was a highly secure program that basically you had to have some kind of a top secret clearance before we could even work on the project. But this fellow, he said to us laughingly, he said “you know I never studied architecture, I’m not a planner, I’m not an engineer, I’m not the kind of engineer you guys are thinking about.” He went on to tell us that he basically was a scientist who was able to put 25 boxcars of data onto a single microchip. That’s why TRW decided that he should manage the project.

We said to ourselves at dinner afterwards “oh my God, what’s this going to be like?” [LAUGHTER] He’s not sensitive to some of the things we do. Anyway [it was] the best thing that ever happened. Apparently that is what he did when he was doing the microchip stuff. We met once a month even though some of us had no role, no place on the agenda. We sat for a full day and listened to the problems that each one of us had, some with greater ones and some, of course, with none. This went on for almost two years. We literally met once a month and let our hair down and settled differences right there on the spot. That kind of sounds too much like the military, but sometimes it’s not a bad thing to kind of marry the arts with a more aggressive form of management. They seemed to work very well. And we all worked together because we were together once a month.

### **The Managing Principal - Is The Go To Guy**

Hideo never liked for us to use first-person singular. It was always a we, we this, we that. He would go storming out of the room if you used too many I this and I that. [LAUGHTER] Even though it might have been me that did it, it comes off as we to the client. That’s his style. That’s a serious style. And that goes all the way back to Sasaki’s foundation of the firm. Also I think we try, for the client’s sake we have to identify who’s in charge. I think that’s critical. The client must know who’s running the show. So we have a managing principal on every project. And we have a design





principal on every project. And there may be, there's always a project manager. And then there may be managers for disciplines, depending on how big the project is. But as far as the client's concerned, there's one person, and that's the managing principal. Often times the managing principal and the design principal are one and the same. But that would tend to be for a smaller, less complex project.

*Veenema: If I was doing a project, what would I go to you for as a go-to guy?*

I think, well, my style with my managing principal is fairly simple. We introduce ourselves, and we did this in Charleston. Mo Freedman introduced himself and said, “if you select Sasaki I'll be the managing principal. I'm the ballpoint pen guy. I am really going to make sure this project is run with precision and within the budget, on time, technically correct. Now Stu over here, he's the soft pencil guy. He's going to be responsible for the design. The two of us are going to work together and it's going to be better for that collaboration. So if you want to know about soft pencil stuff, you go to Stu. You want to know about ballpoint pen stuff, go to me.” [LAUGHTER] By the way, the ideal model for me as a guy who doesn't like to worry about footings, foundations and geotechnical stuff, I love having the project manager or the managing principal who wears civil engineer boots. I mean, it's perfect teamwork stuff. I don't need another landscape architect managing Stu Dawson. [LAUGHTER] I need a guy who'd get me out of trouble. Or keep me out of trouble. Yeah.

### **Good Clients Deserve Recognition**

*Birnbaum: Let's take a moment and talk about clients.*

There are so many of them that tend to be loyal and compassionate and respectful of your original effort and keep coming back, which is wonderful.

We have found, and you can't say that it's a rule of thumb, that political clients, i.e. cities, especially when the mayor changes, the consultants change. It's a political network and there's not much you can do about that. Although you know I have to admit with Newburyport there have been three or four mayors and we're still doing work in



Newburyport. But that's a small town and it's a little different than the larger bustling large scale city.

What I was saying I think earlier is that the consultant is only just a little piece of the finished product and finished project. I think we don't give clients enough credit. I think we tend to give ourselves awards. In fact one of the complaints I've had about ASLA is not including the clients in the awards ceremony. I've always felt that the client needs to be standing up there with you. I think not only is it correct. Without them you wouldn't have done anything.]But also it's really good marketing. I think the client likes to be recognized. They love to be given attaboys. So I think there are some areas where we could really build ourselves a stronger link to clients if we would include them more often, particularly the awards ceremony.

### **Creating Indoor and Outdoor Relationships**

Anyway,[if we are talking about] corporate headquarters. ... Coincidentally, we talked about the Urban Design conference at Harvard in '56 when shopping centers were the thing that everyone talked about. It was the beginning of corporate headquarters, expansionism, and the spread of the corporate headquarters from the city to the suburbs. It almost parallels the shopping center movement, which is not surprising. Essentially everyone was getting out of the city, a sad story, but it was a lot of fun. And then for some reason, with the corporate headquarters market, we were in the right place at the right time. Bruce Graham of SOM [Skidmore Owings and Merrill] Chicago, hired us to work with him on Upjohn corporate headquarters in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and also with Parke-Davis. In fact, we worked on eight different corporate headquarters with SOM, seven with Bruce Graham, and one with Gordon Bunshaft. And later, at that same time, in fact, worked with Eero Saarinen on four different corporate headquarters. And [then we worked] with Dirk Lohan, Fujikawa, Conterato, Lohan, Mies's [Mies van der Rohe] grandson, on three corporate headquarters. ]



The one thing that seems common to all of the suburban or rural corporate headquarters is the commitment of the Board, the CEO, to make sure that people are able to use the outdoors, and that the building and the employees within the building are able to see the outdoors. It's essentially the primary marketing piece for that particular building. Every effort has been made in every corporate headquarters I've worked on to assure this connectivity. One of the advantages of these more rural sites is that security isn't so much an issue. Basically people are able to go and come from many points of access and egress. With the new emphasis on physical health, we've added several trails at John Deere; several trails have been added at Frito-Lay and TRW. Miles of trails have been added to get people out of doors taking care of themselves. I think the thing that probably makes access [so important] for the out of doors, visual as well physical, is the high stakes and the pressure on those people inside to perform.

Ideally the kind of contacts which allows access visual and physical allows those people to perform better because it gives them a chance to get away, get away from what's on their desk. To get away from the phone call, the email that they've got to write. I think one of the problems, if there is one, we've talked to the people about at John Deere and the others is that people are sometimes afraid to look like their relaxing out of doors because someone's bound to be looking over their shoulder and wondering what you're doing sitting out there enjoying yourself. So there's another side to this. It's almost like you need to provide camouflage for people so they can get out and not be seen. [LAUGHTER]

### **Maintenance and Materials**

Birnbaum: *Let's talk about this issue of maintenance.*

I think when you're younger you don't worry about maintenance as much as you should. Although you tend to talk about it because, you know, someone else has told you to. But we're pretty much now insistent that you've got to use granite in fountains. You can't use concrete. It doesn't last forever. The Indianapolis Art Museum's fountain is a great example. We were forced to transition to concrete blocks instead of granite



blocks. The money couldn't be raised to do [a] granite [fountain]; and at the time we said maybe we should not build it until we can afford to do [it in granite]. Anyway, we went ahead and built it. But those blocks had to be replaced because they fell apart. But the good news is the fountain is still there. Yeah, not enough attention is probably placed on maintenance. And I think the weakness rests on the consultant's shoulder. I don't think we inform the clients enough about how much it costs to manage a fountain. I think we were really weak on that. I don't know of many landscape architects that give a client an estimate of what it's going to cost you to maintain this landscape I've designed for you. And on a square foot basis, you know, lawns are probably the least expensive. And then fountains on the other end of the scale are probably the most expensive per square foot. I think we handed clients a lot of stuff that the client really loved, but two years later didn't like anymore because they didn't know how much it would cost to take care of it. Fountains have got to be the number one culprit, especially now with all the requirements of potable water and the "little Johnny" problems of the fountains. Now [we have] participatory [fountains] that weren't participatory. And even if they aren't [designed as] participatory, they are, because kids are going to use them. Christian Science is a great example of that [situation]. Neither the fountain nor the reflecting pool were [designed as] potable water features, and now they have to be. It's [building] code and it's just the way the US is these days. [

### **Design Guidelines**

Design guidelines have been a part of the practice, I suspect from the very first day that we worked on a campus plan, which would have been with MIT. And again we had the good fortune of working with Pietro Belluschi. And so the master plan [there] had as much to do with three dimension as it did with the actual land use and circulation. And the guidelines were developed for MIT. . . , people [at MIT] have been true to those guidelines that were established in the early 60s. And you know, I would say we used the guidelines certainly first in our campus planning work, but [also] as we moved into resorts and other kinds of project types. Guidelines have always been a part of the practice. I'm thinking, even in Boulder, Colorado, with the Mall, guidelines were



developed for the buildings very, very tight guidelines for height, awnings, intrusion into the public realm, materials, transparency and signage. But you know, it's almost like everything we do, especially for public work and private work or you might say vulnerable project types, guidelines don't always work. People break zoning laws all the time. Guidelines are easier to break. But it's such a part of designing open space.

## Tools of the Trade

### One Good Sketch is Worth a Thousand Slides

*Birnbaum: What is the role of sketching in the process that happens here? First let's start with the personal. When did you start sketching? Do you continue to sketch? Why do you sketch?*

I grew up sketching. I've joked earlier about in Urbana there wasn't a heck of a lot to do and no one had television in those days and there was only one movie theatre in town so you -- [spent] a lot of time drawing.

Then in college, of course, if you go into the arts you're required to draw. But basically everyone should doodle. It's a way of being better on the telephone. The ultimate teacher, [is] Stan White? We've talked about Stan a lot. Our notebooks had to have sketches in them and he would grade you severely if you hadn't done a lot of doodles. They didn't have to be really good sketches. He just wanted to see the exploration of form and exploration of color. He has us use Prismacolor and anything else we could think of. Some of my earlier books are pretty grisly. I would be afraid to show you some of those. They're so '50's, bad, bad, bad.

Drawing is just a way of life and Hid[eo]. When you're sitting with an architect and sometimes need to do a little axonometric of what you're talking about. How do you do that detail? Here's the way it should look and draw it. Then the other thing is [that] finally after you enter into private practice, you live by the camera. I don't know how many thousands of images I've taken, 35 millimeter images, but I know that I've thrown away



at least 20,000 slides. I used to weigh them so I kind of kept track of my pruning. You ended up not seeing anything. You ended up with a great slide collection but you never had a chance to study stuff, especially if you loved details.

So the more and more time we had, we, I mean people like Alan Ward and Dennis Piper and Frank James and I think Laurie Olin's the same way. The more time you have, the more time you have to sketch. One good sketch is worth a thousand good slides. You never forget what it was you sketched, whether it's a 30 minute sketch or a two hour sketch. You can remember almost every detail. There's something . . . especially if you choose good things to sketch and not bad things to sketch. It becomes a very important of your knowledge base . . . I think maybe what drawing really does as much as anything, it puts you in the shoes of the contractor, they guy who's got to build what you're doing, what you're sketching. It makes you incredibly more real. A photograph is just a photograph. But when you're drawing this thing it's almost like you're trying to build it. It becomes three dimensional instead of two dimensional and hence a greater appreciation for what it is you're trying to achieve

### **Using the Sand Table**

Birnbaum: *Did you use the sand table?*

Oh a lot.

Birnbaum: *How did you use the sand table? Can you think of some specific examples on projects?*

MIT was a great example. We were doing a grading, well, a planting study really for DuPont building. I can't remember the architect's name but it was an eight-story building, which in some ways was a disaster and we kind of sensed it at that time. MIT is basically a five-story campus. And it was curtain wall. It was in fashion in the '50's. So we had a little tiny space. MIT being MIT buildings prevailed so we had some leftover spaces and we thought the way to make those spaces really important was to make a



lot of little berms and stick yucca on top of the berms and create this little cactus atmosphere in the middle of the MIT campus. It was beautiful and I'm not sure if there are any photographs around any longer.

Of course physical plant really hated it and they used to call us here comes the yucca Sasaki office. Those berms were actually designed on a light table and we actually brought in little pin cushions to replicate yucca. And there you are. It was a temporary landscape, probably one of the first and last temporary landscapes that Sasaki ever designed and built.

*Birnbaum: Were there other devices you used in house like the sand table for problem solving that you think is somewhat specific to the Sasaki process?*

The sand table I would say had a short life expectancy because we found that the berm we built at the sand table looked good in sand but it was too steep if you actually built it in the land. So we found that profiles were better. In fact one of the great examples of why the sand table didn't work was that when we designed Constitution Plaza in Hartford the berms in the willow garden were all designed on the light table. When we had the general contractor build the berms at Constitution Plaza to the specified height, Sasaki happened to see them on a Friday and told three or four of us that on a Saturday we're going to take rakes and shovels and drive to Hartford and re-grade those mounds. So five or six of us got in cars and drove to Hartford and re-graded the mounds. We probably scraped a foot or two off of each one onto the paving, which the contractor on Monday removed. So we said you know we learned the hard way. We've got to go to some other technique for studying mounds and cross-sections are the best.

It was part of the experimentation that was, [UNINTELLIGIBLE back ground noise] And [with] all the new stuff that was coming through the door, the sand table was just one of those things that you went home [and talked ] about. You brought your kids to the office and they said, "look what Daddy gets to play with". "He gets paid to play with the sand table." [LAUGHTER] [It is ]too bad that we don't have it anymore.



Birnbaum: *Would you also insert sculpture on these berms? Would you plant materials after you built this? Was using other materials as part of that or was it just strictly to look at topography?*

With the MIT berms we did do little miniature yucca miniature plant forms. With the Constitution Plaza berms we did little model willow trees. I don't remember every incorporating sculpture either into the sand table studies or into our berms. As a matter of fact, maybe we should be doing that. I can't think of a single example of sculpture on a berm. I think in a way because the berm itself is sculpture. Of course. We could argue that our Henry Moore at [John] Deere is on a berm. We actually designed the berm with strings. That's the only one I can think of. Anyway. No, in fact, Hideo was dead set against planting any tree on a ridge or on the top of a berm. He basically felt planting should be just off to the side. I don't know where that came from but he essentially discouraged us from ever, I don't ever remember him being happy about a tree on a berm or on the top of a hilltop.

### **Models Help us Try Ideas**

Birnbaum: *The fountains that were designed during the '60's in the office on projects like that or in Copley Square were they designed in house?*

We basically built, designed the forms, here at Sasaki. I think one reason we've always needed mill space and we're happy to be in a mill now is we need lots of space. We built models all the time.

Our office was essentially a model studio. Everyone in the office had to build models. We played with models and did alternatives and clock tower stuff and fountain stuff ,you could put one in and take one out. Actually it was as great way to work by committee because if you didn't like what you saw you could go build an alternative and put it in. Try to prove that it was better than the one you saw there before.





Birnbaum: *It's interesting because Halprin's office during that time was working the same way especially with details. I'm wondering if that's something that came out of Harvard. Were you model building at Harvard as students? Or at the University of Illinois?*

[Yes at] Illinois, model building, all the way from some of the fine arts programs that were required of landscape architects, and [we built models] at Harvard too. The models were a little more sophisticated at Harvard and you had tougher critics. But we grew up with models. [We did] drawings too, of course there was no computer so you really had to work with your hands. Models were king. Most projects were presented in model form.

Birnbaum: *Do you still use models today?*

We use models today but not nearly as much as we did in the old days. The computer does help an awful lot with modeling and in fact we have a computer that builds models. So if you're doing a complicated fenestration or a complicated paving pattern, the model does it all for you. The machine does it all for you. So we do them, but it's not nearly with the intensity that we did in the old days. In the old days [UNINTELLIGIBLE] you had to build everything. And you didn't have a computer to help you out.

### **Keeping Design Diaries**

Birnbaum: *Can you think of examples where going to a fresh site for a project and there were these kind of doodles that happened with your work?*

Sketching is certainly more important to me and to many others, I think, maybe than writing, which is unfortunate. It would really be nice if you could do both. I'm not so sure that it's axiomatic, but are sketchers writers? Maybe they are. [LAUGHTER] Is there a person that's really a great writer and also a [sketcher]? Yeah, I think so. But I basically



have always kept diaries. Not personal diaries, but professional diaries. There are a few behind me here and there are many in [my house in ] York Harbor. But most of these diaries are written notes, client notes, and ideas; stuff like that, checklists, questions to ask the engineer or questions to ask the architect. If you go through them all chronologically there's maybe a little sketch of an Indianapolis corner where the canal meets the river. You've had time on the airplane to think about that and you find this wow, geez, that's pretty nice amongst all this ugly note-taking. It's a good little idea. Then a couple of pages further you'll find a seat wall kind of little detail and that might be for [the] Charleston [project] or something. These little chronological diaries are loaded with sketches and almost all of them have to do with current projects and problem solving.

Birnbaum: When did you start doing these diaries/sketchbooks?

[ I began] At the University of Illinois. Stan White insisted that we keep a diary of his lectures. That's where it started. It was a requirement at the time, and it's probably the most fun that I had taking notes in my whole memory of four years at the University of Illinois.

Veenema: So when you were in the lecture did you actually write in the diary or was it a reflective activity afterwards?

Sometimes on the plane, but those would tend to be to do lists. But the note taking happened when it was happening. Otherwise I'd forget. I'm not that good about that stuff. If I didn't write it down then, forget it.

Birnbaum: *Open one of the sketchbooks. Talk about what we were just talking about now and that there are some solutions in some of those. Maybe we can just give an example.*

This [notebook is from] 2001. One of my engineers, the one I work with quite a lot, is quite a craftsman and he built this beautiful little ink stamp block out of three different woods. There it is. [Dawson points to a sketch] Here's a cross-section at Rice University



thinking about formal/informal architecture, columnar architecture. Who knows?  
[Dawson points to another sketch] That was on the way to Rice University. [Here are] notes taken at Rice and some thoughts about how you might do an entrance at one of the new buildings. [Looking at another sketch- Dawson comments] Moving] on to Cincinnati,[ this is] kind of a summary of where our design plan. Thinking about how I was going to present the project. Then [here are] some notes that I took, and past notes that I must have had on a piece of scrap paper, probably yellow paper, and put in here.

I always write down names. Hid made me a partner, I think, because I really remembered names in the old days. I say in the old days because I'm not so good anymore. But Hid was always so impressed that I knew all the young kids at Saarinen's office and knew all the young people at SOM's [Skidmore Owings and Merrill] office. I think that's why I became the principal. Here are notes taken during the meeting, a lot of notes, it must have been a long meeting. [Looking at another drawing] Whoops. Off to Spain. [I am spending] a little time in Spain. [Here is] the Alhambra and a garden that I liked in Ronda. Some details that I thought were cool. I thought we could use this in Cincinnati. Here's a wonderful detail of how you handle a retaining wall with steps coming down to the lower level. There's a wonderful little crafted piece of granite at the end, instead of just a blunt rectangle. And you spin the stairs around that and come down the last stair, the last riser being flush with the wall. [A] beautiful detail. [another drawing] And here is the entrance to one residence and you walked up and there were entrances to other buildings above.

Here's a note. I'm a nut about things, but during the Indianapolis charrette and in Cincinnati and even [at the] Boston Waterfront Park we had people that were worried about their little children falling into the water of our waterfront parks. We always called [them] the mothers, and they were always the mothers. I don't like to be that way but I don't ever remember a father complaining about the danger of our parks. It was always a mother. We always called him Little Johnny. So note here, Little Johnny's mother would hate Spain. [LAUGHTER] It's loaded with things that have no rails.. . .



Oh. Michael Graves has always been a great influence. During our principals' meetings I like to do little Michael Graves sketches. My little dream city at the base of the foothills. [Looking at another sketch] Where are we here? Cincinnati again and we were looking at trying to figure out how to . . . Zion and Breen stuff without looking like we were using Zion and Breen.

[. . . [Another drawing] Then other little one, oh, here's a GSA peer review. I was asked to look at a coast guard station outside Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Anyway these are the alternatives to [what] the architect had proposed and [it] sort of helped me decide which one he really should do. [Another drawing] [I was] thinking about lights for National Harbor. What should they look like? See this one [sketchbook] goes on until 2006. But I could go on forever with these. I'm not sure you want to -- Sometimes it's fun to show the client. You sometimes make decisions with a sketchbook. You say, what do you think? Is this the right approach? Is that the right cross-section?

### **Critiques Help Shape the Design**

Birnbaum: *[Lets talk about] the role of critiques in the office and what role they play.*

I think from the first day that Sasaki opened his doors as a practice, it was an extension of either the University of Illinois initially or of Harvard later. I didn't notice any difference at all between what was going on at Harvard and what was going on at Sasaki Associates. Basically it was a crit, take your crit seriously. Accept it. Try something else, keep going. Be ready for another crit. You're going to get it whether you like it or not. And you end up liking it because it actually ends up making you work better. Now there are some personalities that can't survive that and those are the ones that tend to leave Sasaki. Because we still like to work on a crit basis. ] And that's that. Yeah, I think, oh, and I made it sound a little too simple. I alluded to the notion that people that don't like to be criticized leave Sasaki. That's not the only reason people leave.  
[LAUGHTER]



But in Frank Gehry's case, which is quite funny, he wanted to work for a landscape architect and he did. But Frank found it very hard to be criticized for anything, because Frank wanted to be the critic. And you're not supposed to criticize the critic. The good news about Hideo is that he could play it both ways, and I think most people that people that worked at Sasaki have always been really good that way. Don Olsen is a teacher, but he never minded being taught. Hideo's the same way. Hideo's a little more, a little less resilient than you thought. Because again, if he giggled his change, it meant that you better not criticize him anymore. [LAUGHTER] And Pete was a little bit the same way. But on the other hand, both of them I think really grew and relished the critique of others. And that's the way the office is.

But by and large, there are people here that we had brought in over the years that we really thought would add to the juice and energy and design\_level of the office who couldn't handle it and are no\_longer here. We actually have a room on the second floor that's called the crit room. It's not to be used for conferences at all. No teleconferences, no lunches, no suppers, no cocktail parties. Well, maybe a sherry party, because those are good excuses to be critical. It really is the crit room, period, no exceptions.

Veenema: *So is a critique always critical or do the people say that they like, I mean, what happens in a critique?*

I think crits, the best crit of all is when everyone sitting there says, "God, that's terrific" [LAUGHTER] and "atta boy". We include our civil engineers, because those are the ones that start asking questions about practicality. And we think you\_need to include that level of criticism in the very beginning. And [we include] especially our traffic engineer. If we're looking at some planning alternatives, it's good to have a traffic guy sitting there and tell you that you can't do that silly stuff. But yeah, I think, in fact Hideo stopped a couple critiques when people were just being so negative. I think he said, "well, you need to suggest about how it can be better". I think it's not good to be so negative, because this person's worked for two weeks on these sketches. You know,



there's got to be some good stuff here. And so we tried to keep a silent, a kind of silent discipline. The critique should be as objective as possible.

Birnbaum: *Do you think Sasaki is different than a lot of other offices?*

Sasaki I think really is different than all other offices. You know, certainly of any one that I've ever been exposed to. Probably the balance of disciplines is what makes a difference. There's no real single discipline that wags the dog. Essentially we're balanced. Sometimes the civil [engineer] will bring a project to the table, quite often a planner, quite often a landscape architect and quite often the architects. I think normally the interior people and signage people tend to be more supplementary, complementary. On the other hand, they open the doors to their projects as well. But that's got to be the difference. I don't know of any other practice that has as a balance of representation. And so that a critique which might seem simple, can be very complex because it can be multidimensional, including the interiors [people] and all of the environmental signage [people] not just the architecture and the space planning [people]. Sometimes the crit room can be busy for three or four hours at a time on a single project.

## **Elements of Design**

### **Designing With Water**

Birnbaum: *I think the only other thing, you talked a lot about water, but again, thinking about so many of the early projects where it's really water as a reflective mass as opposed to just animating water, if you wanted to talk about the water also is as reflective surface.*

Fountains have become a real part of our vocabulary and they almost happen on every project. And every one is different than the one before. But I think, you know, we've done so many different ones. But the reflecting pool aspect of fountains has a kind of multidimensional application that I think Buffalo, New York, Fountain Plaza in Buffalo, New York, is a good example. We could probably dwell on that a little bit. There's a reflecting pool and then a massive fountain of cascading water 35 feet above, stone



collected from South Dakota and Minnesota. But that reflecting pool, it's different than Christian Science, which has a permanent reflecting pool. And then it's dry in the winter. The Buffalo reflecting pool can be converted to a plaza in about four hours. And then it can become a reflecting pool in eight hours. Or in the winter become an ice skating rink. So it's a multi-purpose, the function, I think in our urban centers it's probably a darn good idea. But we haven't done that many of them, but the Buffalo one's quite good.

Animated water is still the predominant challenge and I think it has a lot to do with the sound and drama of a forced contemplative atmospheric stuff that goes with it. Reflections are, you know, you've got to sit down and think about it a while. So we are still, you know, producing mostly active water features. And with that comes the responsibility of making sure that the water is potable and that it's safe. You can't build things that people are going to drown in. You can't build things that people are going to drown in. In fact in Prince George's County, outside of Washington, DC, the fountains that we were originally designing by county code would require a lifeguard for each fountain, even though the water was only three or four inches deep. So, you know, we had to kind of change our approach in Prince George's County. But some of our legislation has gone a little too far in protecting the public.

The fountains as a subject, one could go on for hours about. But certainly the techniques, the way of doing it has changed dramatically. And one of the worst things that all of us did was wastewater. Many of our fountains essentially used potable water right out of the water main and let it go back into the storm sewer. You know, it's so wasteful in so many different ways. The good news, though, was that at least it was potable. So that if "little Johnny" decided to jump in the pool, "little Johnny" probably would survive his exposure to the water. [LAUGHTER] And so the technical side of fountains has changed tremendously, and that's fine. Except that, you know, the thing that goes with that is a humongous cost. Now they require huge underground vaults to act as reservoirs. You need filtration systems and pulverizing systems to help grind up cigarette butts and pieces of gravel. And you've got to clean it and double clean it and



filter it and then recycle it and hope it all keeps working. And then of course electricity is being used at a tremendous rate and the water is evaporating, so you're losing potable water as well, even though you're recirculating [the water]. But it's worth it. We all love fountains and I don't think that'll ever change.

But in Indianapolis we did do it right. We learned about boxes, culverts and reservoirs and filtration. On the other hand, we were using chlorine at the time. We'd done that at Purdue also. And that was an easy way to get around the potable water problem, just like swimming pools. The problem is, again, [this is] another reason not to squirt water in the air, because chlorinated water does a number on the landscape. So in Purdue we'd done this incredible rosette of arborvitae, [it is ] not quite as beautiful as Italian Cyprus, but if you put on your thinking hat you could think Italian Cyprus, surrounding this incredible fountain, that put lots of water in the air and lots of chlorine in the air. In about 18 months, all of our beautiful little arborvitae were brown and had to be removed. So, what we did, I hope they've done, is get rid of the chlorinated system.

So in Charleston the technology had been developed and so both fountains were participatory in nature. But again, you know, the time we had to design and build the park worked so much in our favor. I can't say enough for that. So in fact the Pineapple Fountain works beautifully for little kids and their mothers and fathers because there's a bench and it's a smaller space and the users are very closely supervised. And a bigger kid would look silly playing at the base of a pineapple, an abstract pineapple. So it's kind of perfect. It [works] without any signs. And every time you go there it's just the way it works. Now and then a bold little kid will go into the big, big jet, the multiple jet fountains in Vendue Plaza. But by and large that's where the big kids play and the little kids tend to stay at the Pineapple. And both seem to work really well.

Fountains in Charleston are relatively easy because you can run them year round, and although it's a little cold now and then, a fountain still seems appropriate. But in certain climates, and there a lot of them, as you know, in North America, Indianapolis is a great example of that. You know, running water in the winter in Indianapolis probably, like in





Boston, it doesn't really work very well. So, when I did a fountain at the entrance to the new Indianapolis Art Museum [which] was a requirement of one of the donors to the museum, several alternatives were developed. He said, "what if you designed the bottom of the pool so that it looked good year round, even when the water was turned off?" . . . And so we said well, why don't we do something that reflects the downtown? You've left the downtown, but we're going to put something right at their front door that might remind you of the downtown. That's essentially what was done. The radial [paving] pattern, and the degree [of the angle] on the four quarters, the eight quarters is an exact referenced to the city of Indianapolis. And just for the record, my great-great uncle was a structural engineer for a monument in downtown Indianapolis. And when I told the people that they thought OK, you're a good guy. You've got some Indiana roots. [LAUGHTER]

When the art museum was dedicated, the Indianapolis Ballet worked for months on a performance, the choreography was incredible. They performed on the fountain dressed all in white. And was the most remarkable thing I've ever seen. And as they finally moved from the center, the fountain came on slowly. It was at dusk so that it [the fountain] was brightly lit. It was kind of like the ballet, the people that performed ballet had turned into water. [LAUGHTER] It was just "wow". [LAUGHTER]

### **Planting Design**

Birnbaum: *Let's use that as a transition to talk about planting philosophy in the office.*

Planting design at Sasaki is a great subject because all of us had a really good planting background I would say, especially from the land grant colleges. We had really developed a good knowledge of plant material. I think what you learned at Harvard was you that you had a whole different palette of plants in New England. One of the first things that Hid would preach to us in the office is that we're going to be doing work all over the country; we're doing a project in Foothills; we're doing a project in Atlanta; we're doing a project in South Carolina. None of us are smart enough to really know



what species are going to do well. We're going to have to collaborate with either local landscape architects or local horticulturalists; people who know these places where we're working. He said, "you know it's even more important that you understand the Stan White model as we do projects all around the world."

"Think about the effect you want, low plant material, medium plant material, higher plant material, canopy plant material. Think about the aesthetic. Think about the art of the landscape. Do you want to hide this service area? Do you want to open up this courtyard? Do you want shade on the south terrace? But don't worry about species. Once you've got the concept of massing, then you start thinking about species. But you do that with someone who knows a lot more about it than you do. That was a prevalent theme within the office.

I think the art of landscape boils down basically to land form and planting, and plants being the most interesting because they live and die and each one has quite a lot different character. I would say [at] Sasaki, the theme here basically was a natural local material. Hideo didn't like hybridized stuff very much. He really liked native. And if you use something that was hybridized or highly cultivated it really ought to be the specimen tree in the courtyard or the specimen tree at the entrance. And he also believed strongly that one of this, and one of that, was a terrible way to landscape anything. Three or more was always better. I had to admit we did have favorites. We loved birch. We loved willow. We love ginkgo. We love plane trees. [A] good maple sugar maple. We had a lot of favorites [like] rhododendron. But I think every project was different. We had projects that required formal landscapes, a single species. We had projects like the herb garden at the National Arboretum, [where] we probably had 1,000 species. You can only do so much when you're teaching with species. So you had this great range of project types, each one being different.

But plants were probably the most important thing to Hideo. I think he respected and loved plants and he hated it when we made mistakes and he was the first to tell us you didn't listen to the horticulturalist, did you? Birch really don't grow in Arizona, so don't



specify them. Hid was never a plants man like Tommy Church. I think it was more the Stan White model and then you get a pro to tell you which ones will do well.

*Birnbaum: Were there go to people in the office in the early days? You mentioned Peter Roland doing the herbaceous planting plants earlier [at] Christian Science. Were there certain people when you got to the planting plan that one or two people were the go to people?*

Yes. At Sasaki we always seemed to have people that fall out naturally. I don't think there's ever been a designated plant pro or a designated grading pro. But you know who they are. There've always been two or three people that are really good and you always check with them before you sign off. We did have a botanist who worked in the office for a while when we were doing the herb garden in the National Arboretum, but that was probably 18 months and didn't make sense to make that a full time thing. But yeah, we've always had a few people that come from Cornell and colleges that go a little further in plant material than maybe some of the other colleges.

In planting design of course you've got to think color year around. You can't think about the middle of summer. You've got to think about that plus at least four other seasons, if not more than that. I think we did a good job of that. I've always considered that partly [it was] because, it was inspired by our studies for the Christian Science church in Boston. Araldo Cossutta, the architect, wanted us to do a series of overlays to illustrate to the church the colors of the landscape palette throughout the year and especially what it would look like in the winter. So we ended up doing 18 different drawings because we were doing seasonal changes of the flower parterre, to show to the church, and really to ourselves, what it would look like [in] early spring, middle spring, late spring, early summer and middle summer.

*Birnbaum: I know that Dan Kiley for his entire practice was very influenced by Stephen Hamblin when he was at Harvard. He gave every new employee the Hamblin handbook*



*on plant identification. During your Harvard year or your time here did you come to use Hamblin?*

We were never exposed to Hamblin to my knowledge, as a student or after. We were basically students of Arnold Arboretum and previously Morton Arboretum and people like Chuck Harris who really kicked us around a little bit if we weren't good at plant material. There were others of course, but no, Hamblin unfortunately we hadn't been exposed to him.

### **Public Art is an Integral Part of Landscape**

At Illinois, you know, I remember sculpture primarily through art appreciation. We had two great semesters and that particular faculty person was crazy about sculpture, and especially large-scale sculpture. At the University of Illinois, you know, except for the Krannert Museum, and even there weren't really big pieces [sculptures], but we did have Lorado Taft at the University of Illinois. The *Alma Mater* that Lorado Taft did is incredible and the *Abe Lincoln* that he did at Carle Park in Urbana is also incredible. And all of us knew about those pieces. The scale of the pieces was absolutely fabulous. So all of us, all of us being amateur artists, loved talking about sculpture and incorporating works of art into our landscapes.

At Harvard art became even more intense. [Joseph Lluís] Sert was incredibly interested in public sculpture, Hideo too. So all of a sudden we were in the middle of people that were talking about [Contantino] Nivola and you name it, Henry Moore of course, [Joan] Miro hadn't really done much sculpture at that point. And of course [Alexander] Calder was doing stuff that was very popular at Harvard. The stabiles more than the mobile stuff. But art was almost, copying art was almost as important as knowing all the architects that were doing good stuff and knowing all the landscape architects that were doing good work. We also needed to know who the great artists were, who the great sculptors were



Birnbaum: *Do you want to talk a little bit about public art, art in the landscape and then your favorite artists?*

Over the years I've become more and more inspired. [When you think] a piece like the Picasso on Chicago's civic piazzatta [look at] what that did for the city of Chicago. There wasn't one taxi driver that wasn't trying to take you by the Chicago Picasso to show you and tell you all about public art and all about Pablo Picasso. I just said, "wow." What an impact that had on North America.

In the early days because of our work at MIT we got to know Beverly Pepper, who was doing a show. I helped her do the lighting for her show and eventually got her to do a show at Sasaki. I eventually bought a piece of Beverly Pepper's work, which I have at home. Then along comes Dimitri Hadzi. Dimitri had done a lot of work at MIT and we got to know Dimitri Hadzi and I did three or four projects with Dimitri. He was teaching at Carpenter Center at the same time, which is almost next door to Gund Hall at Harvard. So he had a huge influence on my life and of course a lot of students who studied at the Carpenter Center. And we had a show of Dimitri's here at the office.

We've done sixty two shows, Sasaki art shows. Probably a third of those have been sculpture. Most have been two dimensional, either photography or paintings. I wanted to expose Sasaki people to public art. A lot of us live in the suburbs. Happily some of us live in the city, but we thought it was important, and my partners agreed, to commit to the celebration of public art. So we've had numerous shows. Walter Dusenbery has shown here and many, many others. I think with Pete's, Pete's basically a sculptor. Pete Walker. Martha Schwartz is another sculptor.

At Sasaki I think we tend to be a little more, maybe background isn't quite the word. A little more quiet, a little less assertive. We need public art and Sasaki's work. Sometimes Pete and Martha don't need that stuff because theirs is public art. Tanner



Fountain at Harvard by Pete is one of the greatest minimalist sculptures and/or fountains that I've ever seen. Pete had a lot to do with who I am. I think he helped translate Stan White in ways that I hadn't thought of Stan White. He helped interpret of some of Hid's earlier musings, which I wasn't smart enough to pick it up. Five years later I knew exactly what was going on, but initially Pete helped me an awful lot and with Gideon and others. Pete was a real inspiration. Of course --I think almost everything I do I try to think like Pete. One of the alternatives, I basically like to do what Pete might do or I'd like to think what Pete might do. I usually decide to do what Stu might do because it's hard to do what Pete might do. He's constantly on my shoulder urging me to think of landscape more as an art form. Not landscape itself but [to] try to build some essence into it beyond what I might ordinarily do.

Birnbaum: *What about land art, [Robert] Smithson and [Michael] Heiser. What are your thoughts about that?*

I really don't have anything [to say]. Nothing instantly, nothing jumps out.

Birnbaum: *Noguchi is a name that comes up quite a lot.*

Noguchi was a friend of Hideo's. We all knew each other. We never actually did a project together. We worked with him a little bit at Yale, but never really took credit for that courtyard piece, but we helped him get the project. One of our earlier employees, Isamu, was also a friend of Noguchi's. Anyway, Noguchi came to the office a couple of times. We almost did projects together but it never worked out. We almost worked together at Connecticut General. But also he was a favorite of Dean Sert and I think [Serge] Chermayeff liked him a lot. He was an accepted sculptor at Harvard. So we all had to know all about Isamu Noguchi.

And [Constantino] Nivola was another of Sert's, one of Sert's favorite sculptors.

So we all needed to know about Nivola when we were at Harvard.



Birnbaum: *Anything else on sculptors*

There's so many good artists that I would give anything to work with any of them or all of them. Basically I love what they do, subjective abstract stuff. . . . There are favorite pieces but I don't like all of Donald Judd's stuff. There are two that are really fantastic.

I understand them. They're not such simple cubes. I don't like it when I can look at art that I think I could do. I say come wait a minute. It needs to stretch me a little bit. A couple of Donald's, I think, are really stunning. And that's true even of Hadzi and all of them even Beverly Pepper too. Beverly's done some stuff that I think, North Park in Dallas, for instance, was a tremendous piece. It's like Sasaki. We do some good stuff and some stuff isn't so good. The artists are the same way. But I can't think of one I wouldn't want to work with.

Even the landscape artists like Fleischner and Maya Lin. I think Maya Lin really is a landscape architect, architect, and sculptor. I'd love to work with Maya Lin some day. . . . Yeah, anything, I'd work with anybody. I think Pete's Ray Nasher Sculpture Garden in Dallas is really quite well done. It's within our Dallas arts district and a neighbor of our little Betty Marcus Park at the Meyerson Symphony Hall. [It] is a great well done spatial arrangement for largely different types of art. I love that. That's what I'd like to do more of. We're doing one in St. Louis I hope that we can see published in four or five years. But we'll see. We'll see.

### **Japanese Inspiration in the Sasaki Work**

Birnbaum: *But I'm kind of curious. Did anyone ever go to someone like Hid[eo] or Mas[ao] and say design a Japanese garden for me?*

You know, Sasaki with a Japanese-American, a Japanese name, people assumed that Sasaki could speak Japanese and design Japanese. But in fact Sasaki didn't know any Japanese at all. So there you are. [LAUGHTER] He was American as all of us. But Mas Kinoshita, on the other hand, who became a really influential partner, really had



studied Japanese gardens and spent hundreds of hours in these gardens sketching and [doing] photography. He knew all of the Zen stuff that goes with the design of the gardens. So when we had a project that seemed to need the Japanese feeling, it didn't really go to Sasaki, it went to Mas. But Mas liked to work with Hid and it was a perfect team. Mas was the Japanese arm of Sasaki. And if Greenacre Park feels a little Japanese and the Waterfall Garden feels a little more Japanese, that's exactly right. They probably are. In fact I talked about it earlier with John Deere. When Bill Hewitt, the CEO [of John Deere] brought home from Japan, five stones from Kyoto, the first thing we did is say this is not a job for Stu Dawson, even though my love affair with John Deere was pretty clear at the time. I said to Bill Hewitt, I said, "we've got to bring in someone else from Sasaki". And that's when I knocked on Mas's door, with Hid's blessing and Mas went to Moline, Illinois and helped design that. And that's probably the most Japanese thing we've ever done in this country.

Birnbaum: *Fantastic.*

But, you know, this is, I think the Japanese influence, and it could have had to do with Sasaki, it probably did. Because he'd done a couple of things with decks, very architectural decks on little reflecting pools with goldfish and rushes and reeds. And it felt very wow, this is great. But also Carver had written this great book, black and white, on the form and space of Japanese architecture. And we didn't study the architecture so much, the book was loaded with beautiful images. But what was really beautiful were all the details of the Japanese buildings, and incredible. A lot of it had to do with how the building meets the ground and how you transition from stone of the earth to wood of the trees. Oh, man, beautiful. So I think a lot of our works have been inspired by the Japanese, not necessarily Hideo Sasaki.

## **Thoughts on Design**

### **On Urban Renewal**

The '50's, when I had the pleasure of being at GSD, was a curious period where we were happily vacating our cities and urban renewal was tearing down the North End [of





Boston]. There were a few spokesmen out there trying to do it nicely but essentially we were tearing down Norfolk, we were tearing down New Haven and we did a number on Boston. We were all excited about shopping centers and corporate headquarters. It was a tumultuous period, but thank goodness you had some of these urban scholars, [Gordon] Cullen and Patrick Horsbrugh and others that I've run across over the years who really cared about cities. They constantly sketched the cities and sketched ideas for cities. And the new town stuff was fantastic, but it was still new towns not old towns. There was a lack of interest in our cities and thank God for Ed Logue and people like that who really did a lot to turn that around.

### **On Preservation and Landscape**

*Birnbaum: And also you and I have talked over the years about the role that you played on the competition jury with Denver's] [Skyline Park and saving the building, the D&F Tower. So what I'd like to know is do you see that tension between the two, between modern design and historic preservation? Are they mutually exclusive? And what does preservation mean to you as a practitioner with over 50 years of experience?*

I think the tension amongst historical precedent and modern precedent had to be greatest when I entered the Graduate School of Design. And that tension you could see amongst the faculty. Hideo was impatient with too much historical overview. Hideo wanted to explore all kinds of other things. There was this tension you felt when Norman Newton would speak up a little too much about [how] you really ought to go visit Villa d'Este if you want to see how to do waterfalls. Hid would [say], "no we're exploring waterfalls." [It was] different. [I think] that was true when I landed Newburyport. I think Hid was still thinking that that wasn't modern enough, that this is not a good thing. The good news is that you began Hideo mellow and I think the profession begins to mellow and [to] realize the great value of both. And even better the blend of both [ideas]. Newburyport is exactly that.



But again, the kinds of things that we had an easy time with, the two great examples that I can think of, [and] that might not have been so easy in the '50's, are when we were able to save the D&F Tower in Denver in the middle of a modern urban movement to make downtown Denver special and then the Indianapolis project, the new art museum.

I think [it is] my favorite example probably. The museum moved from downtown Indianapolis. Like everyone else they were leaving the city and going to the suburbs. [They moved], all the way to 38<sup>th</sup> Street on the White River, because they were given the old Lilly estate. The Lilly Estate is a lovely fifty acres in the middle of which is the Lilly mansion [designed by] McKim Mead and White with a beautiful Olmsted landscape, a combination of a formal spine, a fountain at the end, and then the views of the White River on one side and intimate spaces on the other; a little French parterre on either end of the beautiful mansion. The trustees and the director of the museum wanted to put the new museum on either side of the McKim Mead and White mansion, destroying not the major portion of the Olmsted landscape, but some more minute portions of the Olmsted landscape. In those days we had to talk more about poetic stuff instead of historical preservation. We had to say that since the McKim Mead and White mansion is on the high point on one side of this ravine, there's another high point on the other side of the ravine. The new museum should actually go on a high point just like the McKim Mead and White mansion did instead of flanking that old building with new buildings. We had to use a kind of skillful poetry stuff to get the trustees and the chairman of the board and the director of the museum to even consider such a move. And they did. I can't tell you how happy we were. Now the new museum is there and the old McKim Mead and White pavilion is here and the Olmsted landscape has been preserved. I really felt like a hero. Of course it wasn't me, it was the board. They finally agreed to do it.

*Birnbaum: Let's talk a little bit more about the IMA [Indianapolis Museum of Art]. I don't know if you know this but the IMA landscape is now one of only about 60 National Historic Landmarks.*



It has to do with feeling good about something.

Birnbaum: *Back in the '70's and we haven't talked about him at all, but I'm sure the connection here is Peter Hornbeck. He did one of the early plans for the restoration of the Olmsted Gallagher landscape at IMA.*

But Peter did that after we had done our work. Peter probably five years later had restored some of the trellises and parterres on the southwest side of the building. The north side stayed what was once a maintenance and greenhouse area. We actually preserved a clipped hedge and added to the clipped hedge and created a little parking garden, which basically he needed for support for the museum. That was probably 10 years after Sasaki.

Birnbaum: *So where did this come from Stu? This fire for this. . . Was there something in the Olmsted landscape that spoke to you?*

[Where did] the passion to save the McKim Mead and White? Maybe in the '50's I might have wanted to tear the building down. [LAUGHTER] and put the new museum there. You change. First of all it was a beautiful building and it wouldn't have been so beautiful if it hadn't been for Olmsted's landscape. The two of them spoke beautifully to each other.

Talk about the balance of landscape and architecture. It's probably one of the most powerful spaces in the Midwest. I felt it I guess and Hideo agreed with me we felt it was worth falling on our swords if necessary to not let that new museum be built in that location. It's just one of those good feelings you have. The passion was there. We were really almost angry. Yeah, we were angry, but they didn't know it.



Birnbaum: *So let's take this one step further because I think there's a message here also for a younger generation of practitioners. So what is it when you approach a site like that?*

Approaching a site with wide open eyes is something Hideo, all of us, I'm saying almost automatically [do]. Or at least most of us [do]. I think a lot of it had to do with Urbana. On one side of me I can be romantic about the Midwest as Hideo Sasaki was [with its] silos, corn fields, vistas, and alleés. But the other side of me, I remember the dust storms and the tornadoes and the gas stations and the parking lots. It's almost like every site I've been confronted with since then has seemed more interesting and fuller of opportunity, including conservation in some cases and restoration in other cases and total demolition in other cases. There's something about growing up not feeling so good about where you grew up and then being able to discover all these things. That's one reason the Indianapolis Art Museum is one of those things. “

### **On Compromise**

Birnbaum: *You've told us other fall on your sword stories like IMA. Think of a time when there was an in-house discourse about a building location and everyone was in agreement it was the wrong location and you and Sasaki then turned it around and convinced the architects that the building should be somewhere else and it was. Can you think of an example of when that happened?*

Well I know one great example and it didn't work. We may not have talked about it. At the University of Virginia we were doing a master plan and of course you can't help but be absorbed by Jefferson's beautiful quadrangle and some of the incredible thinking that went into that. Including buildings that were sited high enough that drained. Then you saw that the building at the end [of the quadrangle] that no matter how good that building is, by a good architect, [it] blocked that wonderful open access that Thomas Jefferson had wanted to keep open. You couldn't help but feel disappointed that something like that ever happened. You wondered why.



The year later we were working for the University of Rochester on the Genesee River and that beautiful Eastman quadrangle resembles a lot the UVA Jefferson quadrangle. Lo and behold a donor had come along who wanted to put a chapel on that axis on the edge of the Genesee River, on the center line of that beautiful colonnade, at the base of Old Main. Well we fought and fought and fought and found another site that we thought was even better. Perry Chapman was working with me on this. We fought and fought and we were ready to fall on the sword. The president basically said you're going to have to fall on your sword. You either have to go along with this and try to make it as good as you can or we'll have to fire you.

So we took the first alternative and we stuck with it and helped the architect. Burwell, the architect, didn't really want it there either, but the donor was wagging the dog and the chapel was built there. There's one case where instead of raising the building that I've just been bragging about, Sasaki always likes to make buildings higher, we actually pushed the building more into the bank of the floodplain, or the river bank. You hate defeats like that because the axis is so, so beautiful. You didn't need a building. There's no building good enough. There's no sculpture good enough to be in that location. That's kind of what it was. That's an example of buildings happening where you're hell bent not to let them happen. But we didn't affect Rochester, which is too bad. I wish we had.

### **On Waterfronts**

Birnbaum: *The way that you've talked these transitions on projects that dealt with history and preservation, let's also talk about how the office began to move into urban waterfront work and your own personal interest in the topic.*

Waterfronts have tremendous meaning to me, especially, and to the office over the years. Certainly growing up in a city that really didn't have a waterfront, you had to go 200 miles north to Chicago to really see a waterfront and even that was limited because



it was essentially a fresh water waterfront with no tides. And Chicago being Chicago the waterfront was tidy and quite beautiful.

At Sasaki we really weren't doing urban waterfronts. There really wasn't a market for that kind of work. But we were working at Sea Pines surrounded by Calibogue Sound and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. We were working at Dorado Beach in Puerto Rico. We were doing this and that resort-wise especially. Those were sort of artificial waterfronts. You fell in love with that. Something about the healing [aspect] the healing of the ocean is like healing with plant material. The two are tremendous powers to work on your brain. The combination of beautiful landscape and water is probably the best combination I can think of. And we use fountains sometimes the same way.

The first waterfront that we were involved was in Newport, Rhode Island. In Philadelphia we got involved with a wonderful quick study of the Schuylkill and got excited about how beautiful the Schuylkill was. Although it really wasn't, we knew that it could be. So we were beginning to look at waterfronts and Newburyport [project] had to be the first one. Although we'd done Harbor Town by this time at Sea Pines Plantation, so that we were doing real water's edge stuff. But Newburyport had to be the first urban waterfront that we really opened up to the Atlantic Ocean on the Merrimack River.

A lot of excitement [about these projects] and we found out one thing, though. We never seemed to make any money doing waterfronts. An axiom with the waterfront or a truism with waterfronts is that there are so many problems with ownership, structure, soil conditions, and politics that it just takes a lot more time to do a waterfront. It's not simple, but that's what makes it even more fun.

### **On Boundaries**

*Birnbaum: I'm wondering what your thoughts are on this issue of boundaries?*



Boundaries I don't think have been a problem for Sasaki. I think we've always tried to live within the boundaries we're given. But I have memories and it probably goes back to the urban design studio at Harvard of always going way beyond the boundaries that you were supposed to be working within. When we were doing Central Square, we ended up looking at all of Cambridge. Maybe we should have looked at all of Boston. . . . In looking at the practice in general, I think planning has always gone a little beyond its boundary at Sasaki. But I've got to think that that's the way that the urban design folks think, and urban design has become much more a bigger driving force [at Sasaki], especially since we're doing so much urban work. They, I guess we're all a little bit like that, go way, way beyond the constraints that they were originally hired to think about. I've never really felt restrained because Hid always wanted to go beyond the box. Boundaries are OK in the end when you finally have to do working drawings, but when you come up with a final design we really want it to be informed by a lot more than what the boundary is.

There's a boundary time and then there's a project time. I think in the very beginning you don't want to place many constraints on the people that are working on the project. Maybe it boils down to project management. It seems to me that you need to try to open all doors within the first period of any project, then gradually work closer and closer to what it is you think you're going to be doing.

Charleston is a great example. When we started with the peninsula, little would you know that we went way beyond the peninsula and looked at the whole Cooper River corridor and the Ashley River corridor and finally came back to the peninsula itself. Then once we were doing that we gradually worked our way towards this little six acre waterfront park. That to me is the ideal way of doing things. You always think of the Charleston peninsula model, whether or not you know where your park site is or not. You [first ] need to approach in these big, big, big strokes.



Birnbaum: *What [Norman] Newton bemoaned was he says that the planners were the Adam's rib of the landscape architecture profession. And he bemoaned the disconnect that had happened by the '50's at Harvard.*

You're right about that. : I'm thinking because Reg Isaacs was doing some good stuff in the middle '50's, so many the complaining really worked. It's possible. Huh?

The planners were always there at the GSD. They were a part of our studios and the faculty was part of our jury so planning, and at Illinois too, was very much a part of my academic background and it remains so through all of these years. That's interesting, Charles. Norman Newton complained about a number of other things. I think a lot of us one year wonders that were able to get through the GSD in one year; he complained about any time any of us put something in the middle of a space. He would do something like this and [he] didn't say a word and you knew that you had done something wrong with your vector. [If] someone put a tree in the wrong place, he was a Beaux Arts guy; you got to leave the axis open. If you ever put a tree or [in the wrong place] *Dawson makes a gesture with his hand.*

Birnbaum: *I love that. That photograph has all this new meaning for me now. That's just beautiful.*

### **On Modernism**

The modernist movement couldn't have been closer than it was to Urbana. We had the Chicago School, led by Mies van der Rohe. And IIT [Illinois Institute of Technology] is an incredible campus. I think that probably was more heavily criticized than Max Abramovitz's Krannert Center ever was. You know, [it is] brutalism and minimalism and it isn't touchy feely. [LAUGHTER] We've all heard them [criticism]. It had a huge impact on our thinking at the University of Illinois. I love Mies van der Rohe. I love the towers that he did on the Near North Side [of Chicago], and of course his IIT [Illinois Institute of Technology] campus. And then I'd fallen in love with the Robie House by





Frank Lloyd Wright, which, I would call it a modernist building, even though it was 1908 or something like that. Basically there was a tremendous amount of resources in Chicago and the entire Urbana faculty, architectural faculty were enamored with this stuff. And it was on our boards, you know, in 1956 and 1955. And we were trying to do the same thing with landscape. And of course Eckbo was a big deal then, and we thought that was modern. But in fact that's another story. But what was the wrong side of the excitement about modernism was that so much bad stuff was being done at the University of Illinois- curtain wall, probably the most dreaded word, to me, in the whole architectural world, has got to be the curtain wall. So many bad buildings were going up in Chicago and so many bad buildings were going up at the University of Illinois, dormitories, just God awful. Curtain wall, flat roofs, totally lost the whole feeling of the original campus. [There was a] lack of contextual sensitivity, completely [was] missing

So within the landscape department, we had a lot of discussion about contextual architecture . Otherwise, if you don't, you end up using landscape as cosmetic to hide buildings so that the nicer buildings are more visible.

### **Landscapes That I love**

I love Cranbrook and the Cascades and the formal rows of horse chestnut. I love the integration of sculpture and architecture. But I can't say that that's a stand alone. That's close. If you said which ones are the very best? I love the Robie House in Chicago. Talk about loving certain projects, the Robie House in Chicago to me is the essence of an architect understanding the landscape and making the landscape a part of the architecture. That [was built in] 1908. Then we've just talked about the Barcelona Pavilion. ] It just goes on. Comm[wealth] Avenue, Boston Common, Boston Garden, waterfronts that I've seen that are natural and ones that are made. It's hard to say that I've got favorites, but once you force me to come up with them, I think I could. [Chateau] Villandry I love. But I've got to say well the architecture doesn't really quite fit the gardens, so I'm a little picky about things. But I love it. I love pieces. I love parts. Comm[wealth] Ave has got to be great. That's one of the great ones.



Birnbaum: *Why?*

Probably for an Illinois boy growing up in Chicago and trying to find my way around in Boston, all of a sudden I knew where north was. I knew where the Charles River was. I felt connected from the suburbs to the city. It made you feel comfortable. And besides, that median is just the right dimension, eighty eight feet from curb to curb. It seems just right. You can get in the middle of that and sort of hear the cars but they don't dominate. There's so many nice things about it, it just feels right.

Birnbaum: *We talked about a lot of places that are iconic, but have you had those moments where something you had zero expectations suddenly comes out of nowhere like a curve ball? And it's something that then becomes part of the places that you think about lovingly?*

In a way of contrast I think I was probably a sophomore or junior in college when I visited Niagara Falls. I was on the American side first and I was feeling disgruntled about it. I had no idea what was going on in some of those honeymoon hotels, but the whole place just seemed so inappropriate to these beautiful waterfalls. Then I went across to the Canadian side and all of a sudden felt really comfortable. That had a lasting impact on me. I think of that quite a lot. I can't say the Canadian [side] is great by any stroke of the imagination, but I thought that the different cultures had indicated a different kind of respect for that great natural resource. It bothered me a lot that our side wasn't as good as their side.

### **What is Landscape Architecture?**

Landscape architecture is perhaps, the most important profession out there. In addition to softening scars and hiding mistakes, we also create cultural opportunities that go way beyond, I think, the ability of civil engineering and even architecture to set the stage or set the environment for people who live and work in cities and in suburbs. It's a thing



that rejuvenates you. It's a thing that is yours. Landscape tends to always be public, even [in] a private landscape [garden]. In a highly private garden, the minute you're in there you feel like it's yours, [like] you're a part of it. It's hard to feel that same way in a building. . . . I can't imagine landscape architecture without support features, support disciplines. So you mold the spaces that you actually animate . . . . And that you work your tail off to make sure the design fits the purpose to which you were hired to make it fit.

### **Projects for the future**

Birnbaum: *Is there any type of project that you haven't gotten to do that you'd like to do?*

Yeah. A lot. I'd love to do a new town. National Harbor comes close to that. But it really isn't a new town. It's close. I'd also love to do a cemetery. We worked on Arlington [National Cemetery] for years right after Kennedy was assassinated. We were hired by the Pentagon, basically, to come up with a master plan for Arlington National Cemetery. Fascinating the research that we did, the French cemeteries in particular helped us be smarter about how you master plan Arlington Cemetery.

Another would have to be a National Park or a National Forest, something that's huge and something I'd never done before. I'd love to do something like a World's Fair. Ellen and I wanted to move to Beijing to help manage and supervise the design of the Beijing Olympics, but that fell through. Another [project] would be - I'd like to do a MOMA; I'd like to do a Museum of Modern Art sculpture garden. I'm so jealous of Pete [Walker], who was able to do the Ray Nasher [Museum] in Dallas. At least we did the [Dallas] Arts District, so we feel like we're participants.

### **Projects**

#### **The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, IL**

The spine of the campus was a broad sidewalk, 18 feet in width, called the broad walk, it was edged by an arcade of elm trees. And that got me excited. was that the mason



had used the most incredible scoring in this concrete, on this simple concrete surface, a kind of mundane concrete surface, and turned it into a tapestry of skillful etched lines, almost like a quilt, you know, for 2,000 feet. And I loved that while you could play hopscotch on it, you could also walk backwards and try not to step on cracks and so that you wouldn't break your mother's back and things like that. And as I became older, I just loved it as a "wow, you can do that with concrete," That was inspiring, still is. And I think it's still in one piece. So the concrete's been there for at least 65 years, maybe 70 [years]. [LAUGHTER]

But the campus, it was a great place to grow up. And then I went away of course, to Harvard, which would have been 1957, working with Sasaki. The elm trees were almost all gone. In about eight years, the city and the University of Illinois lost 80,000 elm trees. It was devastating. What was a beautiful city had become, I don't want to use, ugly is not the right word, it had become inhuman almost. It essentially [had] lost its spine. It lost its face and it lost its form. It still functioned, but it didn't have much else. And the city then began to reforest the streets, what was cool is by 1959, when I was working for Sasaki full-time, our office was hired to do a master plan for the University of Illinois. [LAUGHTER] Sasaki said, Stu, would you like to work on this? And I said, "oh, my God, I'd love that I really would." I still owed the university money and to think that they'd be paying us to help me pay them back really was a wonderful [LAUGHTER] thing. And it wasn't so much the money. It was just getting back to the culture and being with Mom and Dad again and [would be] working with this brilliant Sasaki, and our local client contact.

So that over a five-year period we had done a master plan for the entire campus and integrated with the Urbana-Champaign ideas on both sides. We were under pressure by the horticultural lobby to alternate species on every street to never put two species together. And this is when I think Sasaki turned white and I felt the same way. We finally talked them into using a single culture on each street, so that if you lose the red maples, you only lose Illinois Street. You don't lose the whole town. But the worst thing, we thought, was to intersperse species in a formal way. And to this day, we still



work with the University of Illinois from time to time. But anyway, the thrill was helping reforest the campus and reforest about, 30,000 trees in probably a ten-year period. And [when] you go back now its not an elm tree city, it's not an elm tree campus anymore, but it's awfully nice. It really feels good. It doesn't feel great. It feels good.

### **Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, IL**

Mr. Krannert was from Indianapolis and an incredible supporter of the University of Illinois. He'd given a museum, which was designed by Ambrose Richardson, and felt that Illinois really needed a performing arts complex. It became a reality and Max Abramovitz or Harrison and Abramovitz in New York, also an Illinois alum, designed the building and asked if Sasaki would be a landscape architect

We worked with Max from the very beginning, which is exactly the way you like to work with the architect, because we did influence his decisions and I think he was happy for that influence, it was a good collaboration, a great collaboration. I think it's been criticized over the years, probably with good reason. It takes up a block. It's basically opaque. The edges are essentially under deck parking. But there is a wonderful entrance towards the campus which really seems public. The other three sides are kind of, almost got their back to the community. But we planted three rows of Honey locust trees around those sides, and it doesn't look so bad. I mean, it's not that negative. But it is basically a large brick compound dedicated to the performing arts. And I think it works a lot more than it doesn't work.

### **John Deere Headquarter, Moline, IL**

While we've done Upjohn and Parke-Davis and a couple of others, John Deere stands out probably for many reasons. First of all, it was in Illinois, called a home state, second, Eero Saarinen was the architect and you could add a third, John Deere was a great company. And the thing that one realized about Saarinen not far beyond the second meeting, was that he was as much a landscape architect as he was an architect. Intensely focused on models, not just mullions, spandrels, glazing, porte



cocheres and bridges, but on typography and the way the architecture meshed with the landscape architecture. And again, that with all of his skill, he still felt the landscape architect should be involved from the very first day. So it was a pleasure to almost work with a partner. It was almost like working with another landscape architect who was really good.

He happened to be the architect. So you know, with every meeting, the stuff seemed to get better. The grading, we would help a little bit here and he would do something there, and he changed the model and changed the model again. And at one point, he became worried about the mass of the building in this really beautiful ravine [which was] draining the uplands into the Rock River, and which eventually joined the Mississippi River south of the Quad Cities. And he decided that we really ought to raise some balloons to test the height of the building corners, because he was intent that the buildings not dominate the oak and elm trees which dominated the site, . . . And it was a windy day. The balloons didn't last for long. But the next day everything was fine.

I was there with Hideo, and Eero was there and Kevin Roche were there, and another really great guy, John Dinkeloo. You can't mention Saarinen without knowing John Dinkeloo. He was the guy that did all the research. He's the one that said, "box cars are made with Corten steel. Yeah, you can use Corten steel to build buildings, even though it's rusty". And how that was sold to John Deere, I'll never know. [LAUGHTER] Anyway, Saarinen and Dinkeloo were geniuses.

I have a feeling that because the river had to run through the building, which is a problem for most buildings, I have feeling Sasaki would have been more conservative and not put a building over a ravine. Maybe not. But Eero had an engineer who said, "oh, no problem, we can put a 108 inch, a 12 foot diameter culvert in here and divert the stream around the building and everything will be OK."

Eero wanted, and his primary passion was we had to surface parking. In those days, you couldn't afford to do a garage, or even more crazy, would have been [the idea of] an



underground [garage]. So he knew that he had to park cars on the surface. His idea was that if you could get the building low enough and put the parking at the higher plateaus adjacent, that you'd never really be looking down on parking. You'd always be looking into the landscape.

So basically, the ground floor of the building was four stories below the bridges that connected the corporate headquarters to the flanking buildings to the east and west. And those flanking buildings connected to the parking beyond. But because they were only one story on those east and west sides, very few people looked at parking. But everyone in the building looking out, always looked at landscape. There was kind of one of those simple partis, when you see it, you say “my God, wouldn't everyone do exactly the same thing.” And it really works. I think the best part [of the design is that] this is green design before its time. Saarinen wanted the grounds to be native Illinois grasses. He only wanted maybe 20 acres to be cultivated around the upper pond. And this was, this is the way we started. This is what we did. And so essentially, we hadn't really changed the watershed that much. And we maintained the habitat for the critters that lived in the landscape. And it was fabulous.

It was like Le Corbusier's Ronchamp. Ronchamp wouldn't look the same if it weren't in a grassy setting. Saarinen wanted the Corten building to rise out of a grassy setting and seem the opposite of agriculture, even though their business was agriculture. He really didn't want it to look like a golf course, or like cultivated [land], cultivated for decoration's sake. He thought it should feel natural. And we recommended that there be no evergreens. It was a totally deciduous landscape; because he [Eero] didn't want it to feel out of place. And I must say, it was the most beautiful [design] that has ever been when it was just like that. It isn't bad now, but there's a lot more [grass now], and one reason there's a lot of grass is about 10 years after the headquarters was finished, John Deere came out with a domestic lawnmower. I think it's the biggest disaster of John Deere's corporate history. Because once they came out with the domestic lawnmower, the chairman of the board wanted to have domestic lawnmowers mowing all the grasses around the building. So eventually there were 50 acres of new grass, and then



200 acres and then 400 acres. And that's how fast some of these corporate headquarters can do things if they really want to. The good news is a new chairman of the board came along and it's been reduced to 100 [acres] I hope. And we'd like to see it reduced all the way back to 20. I'm not sure we'll ever see that happen. But those are the kinds of things . . . We really fought on Eero's behalf to make it the way he wanted it. Maybe it'll be that way again someday.

Birnbaum: *But Saarinen had experience [OVERLAPPING VOICES].*

IBM was before. IBM was slightly before John Deere.

Birnbaum: *OK. Saarinen had experience working with Church on GM [OVERLAPPING VOICES] on the arch competition. So I mean in terms of --*

And Dulles, Dulles

Birnbaum: *Dulles, yes. So he had experience with working with other landscape architects before this collaboration.*

[OVERLAPPING VOICES] Yeah, and he was smart. We think he was smart, because Dulles was the kind of thing [that Daniel Urban] Kiley would really do well. It needed a more formal [plan], it needed street trees in a more formal setting. He envisioned the John Deere Corten as being more Japanese architecture, more of a Japanese feeling. Therefore, the landscape should be a little bit more like that. So Sasaki was selected,. Kiley could have done the same thing, I'm sure, but it was fun because Kiley and I talked over the phone quite a lot. We both had the bad fortune of having had the same landscape contractor as a low bidder for both projects. And both projects were being built at the same time. Kiley and I were both having trouble with quality of trees. We discovered that 200 of 400 trees the contractor planted were infested with who knows what all. And the guy had hidden them with the wrapping tape. A local contractor said, "Stu, take off some of that wrapping tape, let's see what's underneath". Anyway, we





rejected almost 200 trees. Dan Kiley said, “Stu, guess what, we're doing the same thing at Dulles”. And we actually encouraged each other. Because both of us, I wasn't working with Varoujan [Hagopian], I didn't have a civil engineer working with me at that time because it was a landscape project and we weren't doing any of the hardscape. And Dan Kiley was feeling kind of weak kneed also about rejecting over half of the trees at Dulles, but we did. And this bad contractor, who purposely bid low on both projects, Dan and I are both happy to admit, or were happy to admit that we forced this guy out of business. So that's rough justice.

Birnbaum: *So let's talk about the public art component at Deere.*

There are so many sidebars at John Deere and certainly you've got to look at the chairman of the board, Bill Hewitt, a real scholar and from all we know, a tremendous corporate leader. He was also an avid art collector. And Saarinen's office provided him an incredible interior environment for all of the [art] work which was displayed quite simply on all of the walls within the building. There was some sculpture, but mostly, [it was] small in scale, indoor scale.

But one day in London, he ran into Henry Moore. Maybe it was deliberate, but decided to visit Moore's studio and selected what was called Hill Piece, and bought Hill Piece. And asked Kevin and I to come and take a look at it and take some measurements and find out a way to use it. He had no idea about where the Hill Piece should go, and neither did we. It was a little bit scary because the site was so natural. The only piece of sculpture that John Deere had was an old bronze deer, which was the original trademark for Deere and Company. And you can't imagine, you couldn't imagine Henry Moore being near that. So anyway, what Kevin and I did was agree that we should build a Styrofoam mockup of the Henry Moore, something we could carry around. We carried it all over the site and stuck it here and stuck it there, and nothing worked. And then we were sitting in the cafeteria, the executive cafeteria, which was a lower level, where all the tables were at the same level as the lower lake, with a view which looks at the little island with the larger lake beyond. And this little flat table of the island looked awfully tempting. I said, “God, what if we put it there, Kevin?” And he said “oh my God,



let's do that after lunch". And we did. We got Bill Hewitt to come down at 3:00 for tea, instead of 4:00. And he sat down. He said "oh my God, that's really great." [LAUGHTER]

You have to know the Hill Piece to appreciate it, there's an egg shape on the left third quadrant that basically looked like an egg on one side but it had a wonderful cavity on the opposite side. And we had faced the egg toward the cafeteria, but we decided to turn it around, and we asked Mr. Hewitt to just sit there, because we thought the other side was much more interesting because it had a little hole in the egg. We turned it around and we could see him in the window going like this. [LAUGHTER] It was a wonderful experience. And then he invited us for cocktails. We hadn't left the room. And we were saying it's called Hill Piece, but that island is a flat little table. Why don't we put some fill on the island and make a little hill for it? And everyone's oh, OK, let's try it. So the next day, we raised the Styrofoam model and bought 1,000 feet of string and laid little cords from the base of the piece to the edges of the island so you in fact, you built a top of strings. And we got Bill Hewitt down the next day at 4:00. And he was ecstatic, to see this piece on an artificial hill. And it was decided to do it. When it was done, within about three months, the Henry Moore piece was flown in by helicopter, which caused a lot of angst in the Moline community. Can you imagine flying across the countryside with a large Henry Moore dangling from a helicopter? [LAUGHTER] But in addition, Bill Hewitt was so excited about the Henry Moore piece that ] a couple years later when he was traveling in Japan and visited Kyoto he ended up finding five magnificent stones. And they were originally from a family in an old historic Japanese garden, but the Japanese garden was removed because of a highway or some other awful thing that happened. But Bill Hewitt bought those stones and brought them back to Moline, Illinois. I knew I wasn't the right guy to arrange these Japanese stones. And he asked if Hideo could do that. I think, I don't know, but I don't think this is Hideo's cup of tea. But Masao Kinoshita happened to be a partner in our office at the time and had once worked for Saarinen. So actually this was a perfect marriage. Anyway, we talked Bill Hewitt into bringing Mas Kinoshita on. Mas had studied Japanese gardens and lived in Kyoto for two years and he probably even knew the stones. But Mas flew to Moline



and spent, I think, two months living at John Deere, working with a local guy operating the crane, arranging the stones just so. And Bill Hewitt again was ecstatic. [It was] quite an interesting contrast to the Henry Moore on the opposite side of the building.

Birnbaum: *Can we talk about planting?*

Planting at Deere was in some ways [was] saving trees initially. There were so many beautiful specimens [but also] a lot of nasty stuff like buckthorn. But mostly the trees were quite nice, a combination of red oak, some red maple at lower elevations, and a lot of elm trees. And we all know what happened in Urbana [Illinois]. The same thing happened in Moline. By the time the building was built we'd lost probably 300 elm trees, which meant the landscape was a lot less of a landscape than it had been when we started construction.

So one of us did a plan where we picked all the natives we could and sprinkled them all over the site, especially the areas where the elms had disappeared. And Hideo came by for one of his timely crits and said, "you forgotten all of Stan White's stuff. You know Stan would really like you to think about where the canopy should be. And since you're replacing canopy what should that canopy be? And since you're replacing these lower old hawthorns that have matured, what do you want to put there? Something low. Something high."

So we did a Stan White overlay and forgot about species for the moment. And essentially what that did was collect similar species in drifts, huge drifts, sometimes maybe 30 or 40 hawthorns in a single drift, or a grove of white oak, or a grove of red maple and a bosk of sugar maples.

And essentially one of our naturalists said, "gee, you know, this isn't really the way nature is" .And Hid, "said yes, it is. You tend to have a mother and a father and pretty soon the family gets bigger." We had this kind of great philosophical discussion about sometimes our forests are mixed pickles, because that happens over time. But originally



you basically have a colony of single species. So John Deere was planted with Stan White's overview and with Hideo's intelligence in grouping similar species together. And in fact it looks perfectly natural. As it is today one would think that it was just what Hideo said it would be. And I think Stan White would love it too.

I think that John Deere has so many good stories but I think the one that means the most overall has been the client's commitment to work with the original consultants. They still check in with Kevin Roche. They still check in with Sasaki. And both of us over the years have done other projects outside of Moline for some of their other facilities. Especially for the landscape architect, when you're a little younger and even when you're a little older, you're impatient by nature. I think we overplanted John Deere in our enthusiasm and exuberance. We planted things a little too close together. But by coming back once a year. We would visit the site every spring and make adjustments. And oftentimes it meant taking out a lot of the stuff that we'd planted five years before. Embarrassing, but the client got to laugh at us a little bit and they didn't seem to mind.

But John Deere has been through a number of CEOs and a number of buildings and grounds people, and Kevin and I still play a little bit of a historical reference role. With each new CEO we give them a little bit of background about some of the stories and some of the hardships and some of the fun that we all had in developing the project.

And I think because each CEO has been informed in the beginning, they tend to be a lot more religious about a commitment to the consultants. It's been a wonderful experience that way.

Birnbaum: *Can you speak more to the personal side [UNINTELLIGIBLE PHRASE] and to going back and what it means to you Stu Dawson as the person who has had this ongoing relationship.*



What it means to me is I can't really quantify it. I think Illinois has been good. We've been blessed with other [good client] Charleston, South Carolina has been a continuing client and there are many others.

But John Deere in a way has been probably the most rewarding. It probably is emblematic. It's something you'd say if you had one project to define your career that [this one] might be it. It's something to do with client/consultant trust and commitment to the original ideals even though another CEO had dreamed it up. And Eero Saarinen is no longer alive and neither is Hideo. And somehow they keep sticking with us. It's a great feeling. And I think also we learned so much from other.

### **Sea Pines Plantation, Hilton Head Island, SC**

One of our favorite clients, and these things happen when you're really young especially, Charles Frazier walked into Sasaki the summer of '57 with a roll of drawings under his arm. He said he'd heard about Sasaki from someone. He was from South Carolina. He sat down. Hid was there, which wasn't the usual thing because Hid was usually at Harvard, but he happened to be in the office. I wasn't invited to sit at that table. I was sort of to the side. Basically I had only been there for about three weeks. He unrolled the drawings. It was a USGS map and a coastal navigation chart of some kind. And he said, "my dad has given me these 4,000 acres and maybe we'll have 6,000 acres, on an island called Hilton Head. Could you all help me do a master plan? I'd like for someone to really help me make this the best possible project that can be made. It's a sensitive island. It's beautiful. There are people living there now that have lived there for a couple centuries and I don't want to bother them and I don't want to bother the landscape. I want to build a project that fits socially, physically." So here was this young law student. I think [it was] Yale Law School. He was speaking like a planner. He was speaking like Reg Isaacs and it sounded like Radburn too. You kind of got the dream about a new town, but a resort rather than a new town.



So we negotiated a fee and did a master plan. I think again it's kind of like the Polaroid story. Charlie didn't have a lot of money and he offered us some stock in this silly thing called Sea Pines Plantation instead of money. So we declined to take the stock and held out for the \$3,500 or whatever the heck it was. Again Hideo was kicking himself five years later for not taking the stock. [LAUGHTER]

Anyway it was a great relationship and I can't say enough. And this is a great example of all examples. We could have done the same plan that we did for any other owner and/or developer and it might not be nearly as good as it was. Charlie Frazier took our ideas and carried them just always one step further. He had a passion for detail and he had a passion for the natural environment. And he had a passion to make money. Clients are so important. We don't about that enough. I think if you say anything it's Sasaki's genius master plan. But that could have been a flop if it had gone to the wrong guy. So we ended up working for Charlie for years and eventually designed Harbor Town, including the lighthouse and the first buildings at Harbor Town and then did all of the associated landscape for that.

And by the way, what's really interesting I think for the connections between people like [Rich] Hagg and Sasaki. Frank James, who had been one of Haag's bright students along with [Laurie] Olin and [Bob] Hanna and Grant Jones, was working in our office at the time. And [Hideo] said, "hey Frank, how'd you like to move to an island in South Carolina for six months and help us design Harbor Town?" So Frank said "hell, yeah". He packed up and moved to Hilton Head Island. There wasn't much on Hilton Head Island at the time. It was basically a wilderness of armadillos and wild deer and lots of other nasty things. So Frank moved there and helped us craft a plan for Harbor Town and the shape of the harbor and the location of the lighthouse and all of that stuff came a lot from Frank's brilliant hand but also from Charlie Frazier's brilliant coaching.



## Constitution Plaza, Hartford, CT

Birnbaum: *Were you involved with the Constitution Plaza project?*

Yes. My role was more I would say a critic. We always used to crit each other's work. The real Constitution Plaza people at Sasaki were Don Olson, who's a partner to this day, Masao Kinoshita, who is no longer alive unfortunately and of course, Hideo. Dick Rogers in later years worked on some of that as well.

Birnbaum: *Can you tell us a little bit more about the project? It seems to me that probably more than any other . . . It was just tremendous in terms of reclaiming the urban environment, dealing with parking, of course, which is a signature issue for the firm. Just talk about that a bit.*

Constitution Plaza, I don't talk about it much because it went through a sweet bitter phase. Holly Whyte can tell you some of the discussions we've had about that. When we did it, of course, everyone was creating walls against the streetscape in the city, basically parking garages, opaque building facades. You know, the banks especially, that close at five and stuff like that. So this Hartford project, creating a pedestrian realm on the fifth level, was really exciting, but basically what it was doing is taking people off the street. So we did the best we could do and at the time it seemed like wow, let's do this in all of our cities. Minneapolis was doing that with sky bridges and a couple of other cities [were doing it] too.

The good news is that probably five years later we were more critical of Constitution Plaza because we were getting the message that gee, we're taking the people off the street. The good news is yeah, we were right, but Constitution Plaza still seems to work. It's still in great shape. It's well maintained. People use it and happily they use the streets as well.



Birnbaum: *What role did the view from above play in the form giving of projects like that at that time? Again you were working in cities where you had skyscrapers. Was there [a relationship] in terms of the berms and biomorphic forms? Can you talk a little bit about that kind of interplay?*

The view from above for Constitution Plaza specifically, and other projects, I can't think of one where the view from above wasn't terribly important, [but] not as important as eye level. First of all we designed them from above; even [with] our models you tended to look down on them, so they've got to look good from above.

At Constitution Plaza, because there were three blocks, which we loved; we had the continuity of paving patterns, detailing of paving, lighting, signage, and benches; but we had the luxury of creating three different experiences, [no] four different experiences within three blocks. Part of that [experience] came from the different architects that happened to abut the space that we were working on. Harrison Abramovitz in one block kind of wagged that tail a bit, so that became different than the next. The centerpiece was highly Sasaki, a concrete block fountain with an inlay of honey locusts in pots on both sides. [It was] a little more formal, a little more French. The next plaza with the clock tower [was] more of a little piazzetta. The clock tower [was] reminiscent of some of the great Italian campos, an Italian piazza. It was meant to be the really multipurpose performing space and exhibit space. And then the final space, which was at the end of the concourse, could be greener; with the mound gardens, much more curvilinear feeling and much more soft, more gardenesque. Even though there's a lot of paving, when you looked at it, it was all green.

That's a great example of something that looked quite different from the ground than it looked from the air. From above you saw the shape of the mounds and you saw the pattern of the paving. From the ground you basically saw this wonderful. . . , a little bit like Foothills [Junior College], nothing but green.





## Copley Square, Boston, MA

Oh, we're in Copley Square looking at the Boston Public Library. [I have] fond memories here, [and also] not so fond memories because what we did here ain't here any longer. [LAUGHTER] But that's OK because I don't think we were crazy, that crazy about the end result of the competition, which we won when Mayor Collins was mayor here.

We had great expectations for a piazza in Boston, a non-landscaped space, a paved space for people. And that's what we did, three years after we won the competition. The downside is that the budget was the same as it had been when we won the competition, so we had to live with that budget. So basically we had raw concrete retaining walls, raw concrete steps, lots of asphalt paving. Pavers, at least, it wasn't asphalt, but asphalt pavers. And a fountain that was probably half the budget that we really needed to do a great fountain. But the bones were great.

The big move of course was to remove Huntington Avenue. If we were standing here 40 years ago, we'd be cut in half [LAUGHTER] by who knows what all coming from both directions. So getting rid of Huntington Avenue was great.

I'm a little sorry, I'm a little disappointed with the space. I don't mind having a place taken away that we've done, especially if we see some fault in it in the first place. You just want it to be replaced with something better. And I think this is a great opportunity for the future generation to do something really, really great here. An example, and we were just at Christian Science Church, when things were going bad, we suggested to Boston Parks and Recreation that we open a café on the side toward the hotel. The hotel was willing to manage and run the café to get some commercial life in the center of this piazza. But the city wouldn't hear of serving wine on city property. So basically that idea was shot [down] and went away. It might not have solved the problem. .But when you build a piazza, you've got to have cafés. So maybe if you can't do cafés in American plazas, then we shouldn't do American plazas. We do American gardens. We're agrarian. We're uncomfortable with paved spaces I think. I hate to say it, but



City Hall Plaza in Boston's always been a thorn in everyone's side. I think it's great. But I'm probably the only one. [LAUGHTER] I love multipurpose paved spaces. And in the US we haven't learned to use them very well.

### **Greenacre Park, New York, NY**

We hadn't really worked with water to the same degree as [Lawrence] Halprin and the West Coast landscape architects. I think probably because you know [because of] colder weather fountain work wasn't quite as much a part of our culture. There was a fountain here and there. There was one on the [Boston] Common and one in the [Public] Garden. But basically it was kind of a non-fountain culture. We had the Atlantic Ocean and the Charles River. The West Coast was doing stuff [i.e. fountains].

The first fountain that I remember our office working on would have been Constitution Plaza using granite blocks and the waterfall effect. We learned probably from [Lawrence] Halprin or maybe [it is] just common sense, that squirting water in the air is a bad idea in this city because it tends to end up somewhere else. Waterfalls are much better. The water tends to be more contained and tends to drift a lot less. And besides, the sound effects are much more powerful with falling water, which tend to dampen the nasty noises of our cities. . . . But probably Greenacre [Park] is the first one where we really became convinced that we could be good fountain designers. We'd done Copley Square, but by then, you know, it didn't last for long. It was concrete. We didn't really have the budget to do a fountain right. At least Constitution Plaza was granite. Greenacre was granite as well.

And I should mention that in spite of the work that had been done on the West Coast, there wasn't a lot of knowledge about fountain design. You couldn't just guess at it, because you had to know something about the volume of water over the weirs and whether you needed to articulate a scup work to keep the water from too much surface tension. If you wanted it to fall, you had to make sure it separated itself from the vertical. We were able to work with the hydrology lab at MIT and did several mockups.



I'm guessing [we did] twenty five mockups using a plywood replica of granite blocks in order to try to get the best effect with waterworks. [M. Paul] Friedberg of course was working with water and that was good. And Paul was a friend of Hideo, so I got to know Paul as well.

But I think we should dwell on Greenacre a little bit, because Mrs. [Jean] Mauze, [of the] Rockefeller family, was determined to build a park, a vest pocket park, because she had loved, she loved Paley Park by Zion and Breen. We were working with the family on a resort or two. She asked Hideo, I think, at the end of one meeting if we would like to do a little vest pocket park east of Paley Park but inspired by Paley Park. And Hideo said, "of course", why not. But Hid called, you know, knocked on Mas [Masao] Kinoshita's door, who sat right next to me. And Mas being as much a sculptor, he was an architect as well as a landscape architect, was just the right kind of guy.

Of course we knew we had to have a waterfall because our client wanted a waterfall. And we really liked the simple minimalist waterfall that Zion and Breen had done; but we knew we couldn't copy that. You just don't do those things. So we were determined to do an abstract version of a natural waterfall by breaking up the flat plane and creating multiple cubes and verticals and horizontals to give folks a feeling of a more natural water feature, a more natural water element. And it [the fountain] did the same thing as Paley [Park], maybe a little better. It made a little more noise than Paley, which dampened all the traffic on the street to the south. It was the same size as Paley Park, but a lot more complex. It had an upper-level terrace with a Corten trellis, with internal light structures, or internal light fixtures. And then [it had] an entry trellis with internal light fixtures, a little café tucked away under one wing wall, and a small obelisk monumental stone arrangement at the very entrance with a very small source of water. [This water feature] went along the east wall paralleling the steps that descended into the lower level and went all the way into the lower fountain. So [it is] a lot more intricate. Also [the park has] Bertoia chairs just like Paley Park. And I think has been just as successful as Paley Park.



## **IP Plaza, New York, NY**

Birnbaum: *The other thing I found myself thinking about was, I remember being there for the opening, was Paper Mill Plaza. And [was the sculpture] was it a Tony Smith? And it was on an island in a similar way {to John Deere?} –*

Yes. Yes. IP Plaza, we called it. International Paper Company Plaza, which is no longer there. Sad but true. Again, Mas[ao] Kinoshita was involved. Tom Worth, who is no longer with us, was heavily involved in that. And I played a more active role than I did with either Greenacre or Waterfall because of some of the brick detailing and some [other] things that I had had experience with. I was just a natural fit. Tony Smith was selected midway through. I think the chairman of the board liked this particular piece, and we were asked to work with that particular piece. And the program was fairly well established, so we did pretty much what we were asked to do. And there you are. I'm sorry that it's gone. I think it probably needed some modification, because the area dedicated to performing arts didn't seem to make that much sense anymore. But that could have been modified. I think that it's too bad that it's gone. But that's the way things happen.

*The interview continues at Christopher Columbus Park.*

## **Christopher Columbus Park-Boston Waterfront Park, Boston, MA**

Christopher Columbus Park, Boston Waterfront Park to some, was completed in 1976 to help celebrate our nation's bicentennial. The selection process was the kind of selection process every landscape architect dreams of. I had been serving on the Boston Landmarks Commission and had gotten to know Bob Kenney, who was the Boston Redevelopment Authority [BRA] Director. We had dinner one night because it was a late meeting and Bob had to come and testify about something that we were arguing about. And during dinner he said, "Hey, Stu, you know, this [was] 1974, would you like to design a park on the waterfront to commemorate the bicentennial?" I said, "sure". And we shook hands. [LAUGHTER] And that's kind of everyone's dream, I suppose.



But two years later, the park was built and dedicated. And by all reports [it] has been a real success. I think some constraints in the old days certainly were budgets and also land use. The back side of the parcel against Atlantic Avenue was reserved, the banana-shaped parcel, reserved for public housing or private housing. Housing with retail on the ground floor and restaurants, would have been pretty darn nice. So the forms and grades of the park had to respect that parcel. In later years those restrictions were removed and the park redesigned has changed. And I think, it's changed in part because of that extra acreage.

I think the thing that pleases me still is that it is a window to the sea. It was the first 400 feet of public access in Boston Harbor. Its renovation is preserved. Perhaps the key elements to me are the lawn, the lamella truss the shade structure, and the bollard and chain on granite blocks, which define the old bulkhead. And happily, even in those days, people complained that we were going to cause a lot of problems for mothers with little children and mothers with big children [that they] would all be falling into Boston Harbor, [LAUGHTER] because it [did not have] a four-foot high chain link fence. In fact the original contract documents did have, in addition to the bollard and chain, we had to show the chain link fence in front of the bollard and chain. [LAUGHTER] But happily [there was] a change order during construction with the mayor's blessing. Kevin White was great. "Take it out. Take it out." [LAUGHTER] And we got a credit.

Anyway [LAUGHTER] it's nice to be here. I think, you know, there are some sad things that go on. This old bulkhead wall does have an irregular grade. It had to do with differential settlement. It was level probably a hundred years ago. It settled. The original design had taken advantage of that settlement. The new design just sort of wallows the paving against the change in grade. I find these kinds of things bothersome, but I shouldn't pick on that stuff. Christopher Columbus Park continues.

Basically it feels good to be here. I have to say, it's the first time that I've been back to the park since it's been redesigned and rebuilt. [LAUGHTER] I had a tendency to shy away from it. I love to see the bollard and chain. Of course, we used it again on Long



Wharf and other people have used it. And it makes you feel good when you come up with a detail that doesn't meet code and people accept it anyway and build it anyway. Because it really looks like a waterfront and not some kind of a penitentiary, which is what a lot of waterfront people, a lot of waterfront lawyers would like for us to do.

[LAUGHTER]

I think the kind of stuff that bothers me is the loss of the articulation of the bulkhead grade change, the sag in the bulkhead, is not reflected in the paving pattern at all. And that sag in the bulkhead was important because at spring tides, the tide would come in to that triangular zone that we established in the original plan as an interpretive experience. Once a month when you have the best sun-moon configuration you have higher tides and that was always a wash. But the good news is the big stuff is there and I'm still happy about that. [LAUGHTER] And there's lots of grass and there are a lot of people. So that's not so bad.

It had been called Waterfront Park for at least four years, maybe even longer. And we knew there was a movement in the North End and within the mayor's office to rename it. Christopher Columbus Park was the name that was floating around. But [the thought was] oh, that'll never happen. Then overnight, the statue of Christopher Columbus that I'm standing next to appeared in the middle of Waterfront Park. And the mayor and city council and no one else had the courage to suggest that we remove Christopher Columbus. [LAUGHTER] But to this day we don't know who did it, where the money came from. We know why, but [LAUGHTER] here it is. [LAUGHTER] Maybe someone knows the story, but it's been secret for a long time.

Standing here, you know again, the big idea still is here. The connection to the North End, which is behind me, really works quite well. By raising the grade in the middle, which we did back in the middle 70s not only did it provide a better soil structure for any trees and grass but also so [allowed] people to be a little higher and have a little better view of Boston Harbor. So we're standing about four feet above existing grade. And the soil conditions, if you can imagine, were worse than worse. And so anything we could



do to get build up Mother Earth was really important. You could argue it's a Copley Square problem, because we're cutting off Atlantic Avenue from Boston Harbor. But no one seemed to complain about it much. It seems to work fairly well.

But, I'm happy about a lot of stuff, but I hate to be standing on asphalt paving and looking at precast concrete paving along Boston's waterfront. I mean, this is a brick and granite city. We're not in Cleveland, you know. We're not in Paducah, Kentucky. It really worries me. And the devil's in the details after all. The big ideas are important. But if you don't follow through with all the good detailing, what's the good of the big idea?

And I think in general you can't say that this was the first waterfront park around. But cities hadn't really hadn't started to reclaim their [waterfront] edges for public consumption. Most cities still had industrial waterfronts. And even more cities had industrial waterfronts that were just abandoned completely. No one wanted to touch them. Basically people turned their backs on the waterfronts. Opening this window up really changed things in Boston, it set a whole new guideline for the fan piers off to our left and [set] the amount of public space that was going to be dedicated in that master plan. And then again, look what it does for the real estate values that are behind it. So it's a win-win for everyone. Taxes go up. We did a quick evaluation of the amount of money that it cost to build this park compared to the amount of new private investment on land adjacent. And it was like a 20 to 1 ratio. I mean, that's good business to spend one part on public space and then have a 20 part return in private investment and related taxes, plus people activities, which is what it's all about.

I think one fond memory had to be the dedication of the park and the celebration of the bicentennial here in Boston Harbor. While its fun watching these power boats come and go behind us, what was so incredible about the bicentennial celebration were all the square riggers. The USS Constitution was going back and forth. Square riggers from all over the world showed up. And Boston Harbor looked 200 years older all of a sudden. We stepped back in history a couple hundred years here. It was incredible. It



was wonderful. And I'll never forget that day and to this day, anything we've done on waterfronts seems to inspire and bring out the best in people.

### **Christian Science Center, Boston, MA**

Here we are at Christian Science Center in Boston. It is basically, a 28-acre parcel of land that the church acquired over time. Working with [I.M.] Pei's office we [Sasaki] developed a master plan for the 28 acres. When I think about Christian Science what really makes me feel good is that the church wanted to contribute a civic realm [and] that [it] would have an impact on the people of the city of Boston. I think we really find that that attitude was intense all throughout the planning process. So development, private development tended to be moved to the outside, across Mass. Avenue and across Huntington Avenue. And the center of the 28 acres really has become a totally public place. And I think in this country you don't want to blame the churches so much, but I can't really think of any other examples where a public civic institution like a church has really, really contributed significant civic space. And I think that is terribly important. And it's been meaningful to me over the years, as we've spent time walking the grounds. [LAUGHTER] Even though we're not working for the church at the moment, I always think of it as our project.

I can't resist giving Araldo Cossutta, of [I.M.] Pei's office, credit for this masterpiece. He is as much a landscape architect as he is an architect. And even though he brought us in from the very first day, in some ways I have the feeling that Araldo could have done the whole thing himself. Although I'd like to think that it's as good as it is because we work well together. But anyway, the symbolic entrance now on Mass. Avenue was made possible by the removal of a tremendous number of square footage of real estate. I think five stories, empty spaces, basically tenement-type buildings. And the road in front of the church was then removed so the portico could be built. Once again, let's give more applause to Araldo Cossutta, who did such a great job of detailing that portico.





I think the idea was so simple. By the closing of the four internal streets, creating buildings across Huntington Avenue and Mass. Avenue, the envelope is essentially a tremendous space with the Mother Church as the feature centerpiece from either street. And the landscape basically was done in such a simple way so as to, again, amplify the church and simplify its foreground. In fact the simplicity has sometimes been overwhelming; in the winter especially, when people wish it weren't quite so simple. It's windy out here. But then that's the way it should be. It is a civic space. But to soften it, red oaks were planted clear around both streets and against Huntington, which was originally the front door to the church, [there] a triple row of Littleleaf Linden were planted. And that's pretty much what it is today.

I think from a landscape point of view, the reflecting pool was perhaps the biggest and probably most noteworthy idea. In a sense it forced you to move around the site instead of crisscrossing the site. And it allowed buildings and trees on the opposite side to double their value because of the reflection of those items, of those objects in the pool. And of course people walking around the reflecting pool are fabulous because the reflections lead you to believe that those people are walking on water. [LAUGHTER] And of course they're not, at least as far as I know. The fountain at the far end was meant to be a placeholder in a way, an icon that collected the spaces from Mass. Avenue and Huntington Avenue toward the Prudential Center, which at the time was an eyesore. But the good news is that the fountain holds its own at the east end of the reflecting pool, since we really weren't able to locate buildings in that particular zone

The underground parking again was one of those [things] that seemed like a simple move but wasn't a simple move because the plans studied many alternatives with surface parking. The trapezoidal lawn in front of the church for a long while was a surface parking lot. But all of us, I think, hated the idea, and were loathe to think about underground parking, because there wasn't very much of it in those days. People didn't want to pay for garage structures, let alone underground structures, and especially in Back Bay where the water table is very high. But anyway, when the decision was made to park underground, all of us breathed a sigh of relief and thought that would be very



simple. Just hide it underground like we learned in school. You know, you park underground. But then you have the realities of the engineering that this is the boat section, the dry dock section, and the load support of the loads above. The more weight we put above it, the more expensive it got. And so in some ways the reflecting pool wasn't a bad idea, because it was lighter than heavy earth loads. So the paving and reflecting pool basically reflect the notion that there's a fairly expensive piece of architecture under there. And the less load on that roof structure the better.

I think the importance of detail and bones are critical. And the good news is the bones of the site have held up over time, even though the planting concepts have changed, particularly for the perennial gardens that you see to either side. The detail of the perennial garden was represented in 18 different drawings because these beds were changed every three weeks in an alternating way. You basically had a gardener out here [working] almost full-time, changing the flowers and changing the flowers and changing the flowers some more. But the theme was that we started in the spring with the whites and pinks, and then in the summer, during the summer months moved more toward the blues and the purples and the cooler colors. And then in the fall, as you might guess the reds and the oranges. So the perennial gardens reflected the seasons. And of course to the extent that you can control the color of the Littleleaf linden and the American linden and the red oak, combined with the little rosette of Honey locust were to give us as much deciduous color and variety as you could have in good old New England weather.

But anyway, it worked really well over the years. I think as the church began to feel an economy pinch, they've gone to a much simpler herbaceous collection, and it probably makes a lot more sense. But the good news is the bones are there, and if folks wanted to go back to the flower gardens again, they could certainly do that.



I think probably the big idea for the grove was essentially a green building, defining the Huntington Avenue edge and providing a buffer from that, an architectural buffer from that, to the gardens into the reflecting pool and then of course to the church.

The whole idea of being against Huntington Avenue, walking through the trees, the decompression, the feeling of leaving behind another world and entering a new world I think has worked remarkably well here for many moons. And one of the reasons it's held up so well is that the church was willing to develop, pay for the development of a continuous trench of loam, of backfill, a perfect, beautiful earth backfill, so that the soil is essentially a separate element and not compressed by paving and by people walking on the soil. And one good argument for doing a trench and an impressive soil environment for trees, are the red oak right next to the grove on the street. The city insisted on planting the red oak in city standard holes. Even though the church was willing to do a continuous trench for the red oak along Huntington Avenue, the city planted the red oak just the way cities plant red oak, in little tiny square holes. And if you look at the red oaks now you can't believe that they're still alive. And I'm not sure they are. But this is a great lesson in urban forestry. This is a better way to do it. But again, the church was so good, and we did try to talk the city into doing it right.

The church allowed us to pre-select the trees four years before the trees were planted. We found them in a nursery outside of Chicago and were able to tag 200 trees and visit our beloved trees twice a year for the next three years prior to digging and planting. So I kind of feel like I've grown up with these guys and I'm glad they're all alive. They seem to be alive and well. But basically we ended up using 188. We had 12 left over and we kind of tucked them anywhere we could find a place to tuck them, around the back side of the church and the front side [of the church]. Anyway, there we are. But the idea of the trench we've used many times. And I don't know that it's ever been done more successfully than this. Just simple. The spacing [of the trees] originally we wanted them to be three abreast, but because we only had so many feet before we ran out of space, we literally had to stagger the middle row so we could keep the spacing as distant as possible. We wanted it to be thick and solid like the arcade of a building, the further apart you place them, the less like an arcade. The horticulturalists would have loved to



have had these [trees] at 50 or 60 feet. These are something like 18 feet diagonally, and they're all equidistant. So it's a triangle, a triangular spacing pattern. Of course I love the linden grove and the reflecting pool and the fountain and the lawn on Mass. Avenue. But it's got to be the memory of what it was like and what it feels like today that really is powerful. And I guess that's one thing I like best about landscape architecture, especially urban work, is how you can transform things. You almost need to have a before picture that you hand out so that people are reminded about oh wow, landscape architects can make a difference.[LAUGHTER]

I'm basically a traditionalist, I suppose. When a project has been as well accepted in general by the public and by the professions, professions plural, it seems to me it has a certain landmark quality, not unlike a building. That [it] should trigger some kind of landmark status. And I think we don't do enough of that. I would love to see it stay the same. Whether the flowers are changed every three weeks or not, that doesn't matter so much, as long as the bones are here and we don't lose the reflecting pool and we don't make little bridges across the reflecting pool. [LAUGHTER] But basically I would love to see it stay pretty much as it is. I think that that's the bottom line. I can think of a lot of things we've done I'd love to change, but not this.

### **Chase Mill on the Charles River, Watertown, MA**

Chase Mill, on the Charles [River, is home to the Sasaki office]. It really was a mill. [Hideo] Sasaki, after numerous attempts to find office space in Boston and Cambridge, pretty much decided to stick it out in Watertown. And to that end we had something like six addresses in Watertown for many moons, many moons, and then discovered this mill, which was empty. In fact it was a little bit depressing at first because it had been used for probably twenty years in the manufacture of antique furniture. Essentially [it was] modern furniture, probably Grand Rapids furniture, that was brought into this building, sandblasted, hit with shotgun pellets, painted, scalded with boiling water, soaked in the Charles River for a year, pulled back out, refinished, resurfaced and sold as antiques. [LAUGHTER] And the place actually looked like a Jackson Pollack



[painting]. [LAUGHTER], I said, “we can never occupy this place.” And it smelled like, you know, turpentine. [LAUGHTER] But it had had the space and this fantastic location on the Charles River. We now own this old mill and we love it. And I think the kinds of things that have happened in Watertown are marvelous.

First of all we were disappointed that the MBC didn’t hire us to provide public access to the Upper Charles River, which of course this is. And we were a little upset that Carol Johnson [Carol R. Johnson Associates] got the job because, you know, we were competing. [LAUGHTER] On the other hand, Carol’s a friend and we were pleased that she was doing the work, because if anyone would do it well, Carol would do it well. Anyway, when they got to our old mill building, there was no public access on the river side of Chase Mill, as you might guess because that was all turbine, turbine outfall and never intended for pedestrians. [When] Carol first approached us with some alternatives, we said “God, Carol, that’s nice of you to come to us and ask our opinion.” And sure enough, we worked together with Carol’s office so that the wall I’m sitting on and especially the deck and the rail and the boardwalk that connects the deck, the upper fall to the lower side of the fall, was collaboration between Carol’s office and our office. I was just thinking that one would like all landscape architects to have that kind of relationship with their fellow professionals. [It is a] very, very happy memory. And we think it’s better for our involvement. And of course, I think it’s better for hers too, so that’s even better. [LAUGHTER]

### **Newburyport Downtown and Waterfront, Newburyport, MA**

*This interview took place on July 9<sup>th</sup> in Newburyport, Massachusetts. The interview with Stuart Dawson, Ellen Dawson and Byron Matthews is conducted by Shirley Veenema*

Veenema: *So you’re a landscape architect too?*

Ellen Dawson: No, no. Actually how we met [Stu Dawson] I was in graduate school doing a project in urban design as an English major. I went to a lecture that Sasaki



gave. I was like a kid with a new idol. I went up to him afterwards and said, “what can an English major do to help this cause?” And he said, “Come work for my office. We can all draw, but none of us know how to write.” And so I came and interviewed and got a job. I ended up as a planner actually and a research assistant. And I met him{Dawson} at the water cooler... Then when we were courting, we came up here [Newburyport], we were looking for a sailboat. And Stu found one at charliepowers.com. We came and worked on it here and that’s how we got to know Newburyport.

Dawson: But from a Newburyport perspective, when we were here working on our new, our Crocker ketch, the town was just a ghost town, East coast style. The buildings were empty. Those that were substandard were being torn down to make room for parking. But parking wasn’t required because no one was coming here because none of the stores were open. And do you remember the model we saw?

Ellen Dawson: Oh, it was awful.

Dawson: Some visionary probably from Harvard [LAUGHTER] or MIT had put together a model of their image for Newburyport. Basically they saved the streets and tore down most of the buildings and [had] this kind of a modern shopping center in the center of Newburyport. And we were aghast. Of course we loved the 19th-century buildings that we saw, even though they were empty. And then six months later, we were hired to [LAUGHTER] help do a master plan for downtown Newburyport. It was fantastic.

Ellen Dawson: Yeah, and it was in one of those storefronts, one of those empty storefronts. And it just, it was just frightening to see what was being thought of for this town. They were going to take it all down, all of it. And we were just thinking oh, no, this poor beautiful place. Somebody save it. [LAUGHTER] And somebody was. Byron was in there working behind the scenes to get the funding to do the project.



Dawson: Speaking of it, I think that, we ought to stop on that for a second and talk about the TOPICS Program. It was very popular, but people hadn't learned to work with it very well, i.e., administrators, communities especially. Its [purpose] was essentially to improve state highways in urban areas. And happily, Route 1 runs through Newburyport. Byron Matthews and Jack Bradshaw were able to tap into the TOPICS Program to help improve Route 1 and its connecting roadways to get the downtown looking good again. And when you really think about it, it was a stretch in a way, because you've got all this federal money and you're going to use a little bit of it on Route 1 directly, but you're going to use most of it away from Route 1. Most of it would go into the improvement of pedestrian areas, rather than the improvement of roadways. Although those happened as well, so you can't say that it was just a pedestrian project. But I think that what was so cool about the whole thing is that the buildings were empty, they were up for grabs. They were being torn down, you know, at the rate of one building a year. And all of a sudden with the federal money flowing into roadway and pedestrian improvements and all of the amenities that you see here that were constructed some 35 years ago, [they] inspired the private sector and the banks to loan money and jumpstart the commercial and retail interests that you see here today. There were probably only two or three people downtown when we came on board, the Fowles, the Grog, a little bar called Starky's and a couple of other places. But within three years, I'd say, after the, all the federal improvements were complete, every shop, every one of these vacant buildings was filled in. And that was a thrill for us...

Ellen Dawson: And it's been fun to watch the shops change, because the first ones that moved in were almost like souvenir shops. And I was thinking oh, gee, I'm a little disappointed because this beautiful building stock is being used for sort of ordinary touristy shops. And Stu said be patient, because as the city gets its feet under again, the shops will evolve. And I see that they have. They're sort of much more, I'd say quality-based . . . appealing to residents with good taste as well as visitors. So it's been wonderful to see that.



*The interview moves to Market Square*

Dawson: So this is sort of, I guess you'd call it the heart of Newburyport. This is where everything happened. In the historic photos, this place was loaded with markets and people buying things, horse and buggy style. And I think what's cool is that today the same things happens without horse and buggy, but this becomes a market a number of times during the year. And behind me of course is Inn Street, which again was a car haven and has now been turned into a pedestrian mall. Most importantly [it] connects the Market Square and everything behind me to the waterfront to the left, all the way to the Merrimack River. It's truly a story of connecting this large urban land space with a large waterfront space, the Merrimack River, which is this kind of nice

Someone did ask me if there was an aha point or an aha element in the downtown Newburyport plan, and I think it's really got to be Market Square. And one has to go back and give credit to our traffic consultant, who along with Jim Anderson and ourselves comprised the team of three. [Alan] Voorhees, the consultant, came up with a one-way street pattern that allowed us to recapture this space for the pedestrian. And it really is the heart; it's the San Marco of Newburyport. And I think the reason [that] it is that way like San Marco,[is that] it connects the waterfront and it connects the downtown; and unlike San Marco, it also connects all of the traffic. It's essentially, it's a symbol. It's emblematic of the restoration of the downtown and waterfront. It serves as a landmark for pedestrians especially, but also cars as well. I think cars really like to drive through Market Square. It's a part of the experience for the person in the car as well as a person on foot. I guess that's got to be an aha.

Dawson: We're standing in front of the fountain in the center of Inn Street mall. The [design] inspiration for the fountain [came from] a couple of things. This is a seaport city, it was incredibly important historically, [and what is still important], is its relationship to the Atlantic [Ocean]. The fountain basically attempts to remember [those things]. The granite blocks are from the old bulkhead that once edged the historic harbor on the Merrimack. The cobblestones at the base of the fountain are also





salvaged from the waterfront. And the bronze pipes are a metaphor for the metals that were used on all of our ships in the early days.

When we first were commissioned to work with the city and the redesign and/or restoration of Newburyport Sasaki was really skeptical of our being involved in what he considered to be a historic kind of a renovation, a preservation movement rather than a design. And in a way he kind of contradicted himself because he always said that we shouldn't be so egotistical and if a client wanted a French garden, we should design a French garden. If a client wanted an English garden we should do something that was more inspired by the English. And so to have him be a little upset about a restoration project of this 19th-century community downtown, it was surprising. And I felt uncomfortable for two or three years as we worked on the downtown and the waterfront. But in the end I know that Hideo really thought we did a good job and thought that it wasn't an affront to our effort to be a modern office, because in fact if you really look around, a lot of the moves here are modern. It's just the materials are a more, what do you say, indigenous, more antique, more historic.

Veenema: *What kinds of things are modernist moves here?*

Dawson: I think modern because it was designed in the early 70s. Of course today that's a long time ago. [LAUGHTER] So maybe modern then is antique now. Anyway, I think modern had a lot to do with the sophistication of the lighting; the quality of brick paving that's been used; the signage has historic references, but it was done in a very skilled, contemporary way; and the plumbing of the fountain, there are lots of things underground that are modern. And I think even the steps that we're standing on here have essentially the idea, the terrace steps are something that really would not have been done in the Colonial Period. And of course, you know, we've used trees that are hybrids of natives. The Moraine locusts that surround us along Inn Street Mall I guess you might say are modern trees. But the bollards that you see around this fountain are essentially a copy of the bollards that we found here that were built in the 19th century. So we decided to just replicate the historic bollards, because they look good and we



couldn't design anything better. It was like that. And even the light fixtures, even though the electronics are modern, were modeled after the historic fixtures that existed here in the 19th century.

*The interview moves to a new location.*

I think it's pretty obvious that we're standing in front of a playground. People have often asked, what things have you learned in Newburyport that you might use and repeat in other cities? And most often you say well, each city is different and therefore you just can't sort of repeat things that easily. But I must say when this playground was proposed in the original master plan, I'd say half of the community was against the idea, half of the redevelopment authority was against the idea. But somehow I think the mayor prevailed probably and said, "you know, let's try the playground downtown." There were no people here, let alone kids. The downtown was really empty. So we said well, let's just try a playground. And said oh boy, this is not going to be a good idea. Anyway, it really has worked. It's been a marvelous part of the urban plan and the urban experience. And by the way, we've done this more often than not. Boulder, Colorado, has a great playground on its downtown mall thanks to Newburyport. But I think the other thing is, and this is probably the sad side of the landscape architect's experience.

The original playground was basically timber, Timberform. With huge climbing towers with very, very challenging sleds, ladders and rope swings. Paul Friedberg would know exactly what I'm talking about. Between the lawyers and the people that worry about such things we ended up replacing that wonderful old timber form playground with the plastic and metal thing you see behind me. And of course it makes me cringe. I can't stand them. But when you look at the kids enjoying the thing, how can you argue? It works well. It was a good idea. It just doesn't look that good, but who cares? The kids love it.



But this is darned good time to talk about how important the client is. Without a good client, it is awfully hard for a landscape architect to produce a great product. And I have to admit that the client in this case, the mayor, the council, the redevelopment authority, and the community at large were behind everything. And it helped tremendously. Basically we became kind of the drafting board for the community. And I think that's the bottom line. There's nothing better than a great client. And Newburyport was one of those.

*The interview continues and Byron Matthews, the former mayor of Newburyport joins the conversation.*

*Veenema: When you look at this project is there a part of this project that you're particularly pleased with?*

Matthews; I know what I'm not pleased with. I am pleased with everything that's happened down in here, these twenty acres. The thing I'm not pleased with is what we see behind us this parking lot and the conditions that have existed for 30-plus years since I left. I always say I'm sorry I didn't stay two more years. Things would have been different.

Dawson: We would have done what needed to be done.

Matthews: Things would have been done in accordance with what the redevelopment or urban renewal program's was all about, economic development. We haven't got it and we haven't done it yet. There isn't one thing producing money down here in this land. And that's really what urban renewal is all about. Because the majority sits back and don't speak up and the minority controls everything. And that's what's happened in Newburyport as well as a lot of other communities. I visited every city and town in four years in state government, and the same thing. It's just like déjà vu all over again. You don't get enough of the people who really complain about things not happening to come



to a meeting and say hey, :listen. We're taxpayers. Let's do something". Why leave this land sitting here? How much money have we lost in 35, 40 years with this land vacant?

Dawson: Yeah. It's a national problem.

Matthews: It is a national problem. That's what I'm saying.

Veenema: *Here's another question. Why did you hire this guy and his firm to do this job?*

Matthews: We were interviewing several companies. If you'll recall you guys [Sasaki Associates] were working in Baltimore. We went down and met with the mayor of Baltimore, [Mayor William Donald Schaefer] who then became the governor; and he couldn't say enough about the great work this company was doing. Well, I think what we did in traveling down there was to get convinced that this was the company. This boardwalk is very similar to the one in Baltimore, down at the harbor. . . . But in a smaller sense we could picture and visualize exactly what we were looking for and this is why we hired this company. And thank God we did. It's the truth. It was a good marriage and there hasn't been a divorce yet either, how's that? [LAUGHTER] That's a true story. We went down there and we spent a couple days there and we learned what these guys were all about. We liked what they had done.

Dawson: I think the other that we can't underestimate is the role of Tim Anderson on our team.

Matthews: Tim was our lawyer. Tim was part of the team.

Dawson: He had just restored the Prince Spaghetti building in Boston. [OVERLAPPING VOICES]

Matthews: That sold us.



Dawson: This guy loves old buildings.

Matthews: He was the first guy that we met that really did hands on work in Boston on restoration and rehab.

Dawson: Yeah, no one was doing it. Tim was one of the few really doing it at the time. You got to mention Mo Freedman, too, because Mo was a civil engineer and he had [OVERLAPPING VOICES] to keep you and I out of trouble. You got to do something underground before you put a boardwalk there. You've got to invest some dollars that you're never going to see. So he kept reminding us of that. We wanted to do it in a faster and less expensive way.

Matthews: I remember we were talking about the tie-backs and how we were going to tie this pier, the caissons in the front, tie them back to almost Merrimack Street to hold them in place. And that's important to get it done that way.

Dawson: But we all said why? That's a lot of money. You're never going to see it.

Matthews: He said well, either that or you're not going to have anything to hold up this place. We got a terrific run of tide here. It's a nine foot tide that comes in here. I can tell you that in 1969 or '70, before anything was really done down here, we were just in the motions of getting things done, we had water right up the Market Square in a flooding situation.

At that time we had what we used to call the Greek Navy here. We had the Flying Cloud. We had the General Greenwood, the Coast Guard cutter that they gave us for show. And we had a tugboat and a steamboat. So we had four ships. . And being of Greek origin, they used to call it the Greek Navy. Well all the boats got off the moorings and they floated right behind the fire station and you don't think I got a surprise when I walked down here in the morning. Because [then] I used to walk downtown every



morning, seven or seven fifteen to make sure it was cleaned up. We almost had a ship in Market Square.

Veenema: *Observing the wharf- Was it a planned kind of thing?*

Matthew: The intention [of the project] was what happened down here. There's fishing. There are plenty of boats down here. [pointing to a boat] That one didn't go out today. . . . The first thing we did before we even brought the fishing boats in here was we built an icehouse. A ice manufacturing house that's now gone. I don't know why, because it was producing ice.-there wasn't any ice between Boston and Newburyport. I'm sorry. Gloucester. . . . Then the next place you could buy it was in Portsmouth. Well these guys said we've got to have a place to buy ice if we're going to be living here.

Dawson: Otherwise they can't fish here.

Matthews: So we built the icehouse. That was the biggest controversial thing you'll ever see in your life. It was down behind the Starboard Gallery.

Dawson: Shouldn't be a problem, but it was.

Matthews: I mean, give me a break. So we got it built and it produced ice for several years and when I left office, the boats finally came in and we built this pier over here for them. It's right down on the right here. So it was successful. These guys do pretty well. They come in and out. My sister-in-law lives on the beach so she watches these guys go in and out every day and they've done pretty well. But of course, I don't know, the fishing industry, quote unquote. . . I don't know today how bad things are in Gloucester for these people.

Dawson: [In] York [Maine it] is difficult now.

Matthews: Every place. They won't let them go out that often.



*The interview continues.*

Dawson: I think when you stand on the waterfront here and think about the history of the Newburyport work, which really was our introduction into the whole realm of urban waterfront planning and design, you can't help but think of Charleston, South Carolina. Historic Newburyport is of course, quite a bit smaller. But soon after we finished Newburyport, we were selected to master plan and eventually design a new waterfront park in Charleston. There are some similarities . . . . And one of the most interesting points, again I can't understate the importance of having a great client. We've talked about Byron Matthews here and the Redevelopment Authority in Newburyport, but the one thing in common between Newburyport and Charleston in particular was the commitment of this mayor and the commitment of that mayor, Joseph Riley.

. . . I think the two cities share a lot of similarities . . . . Byron Matthews was a leader. He made sure things happened. We became a great team. And the mayor of Charleston, Mayor Joe Riley, was the same way. Again, I think a designer would have an awfully hard time doing a decent master plan and even harder to do a really great design if you don't have a great client to help you get it built. Both Byron and Joe Riley were just that way. They both cared about their people, their community, and they respected their consultants. It's a perfect combination.

I think another important point and you've got to include Boston Waterfront Park too when comparing Newburyport and Charleston, is that the parks primarily were intended for the people of the communities. I think the thing we lose sight of and don't really think enough about, is that these public improvements are primarily for people but they secondarily need to provide an economic stimulus. In Newburyport we've seen a whole downtown restored by the private sector. In Charleston the same thing happened once the park was under construction. Not only buildings restored but new buildings built. A lot of private sector investment followed and paralleled the development of the parks.



So basically isn't it nice that with a park you get a place for people and you help raise money for the city, basically.

### **Long Wharf, Boston, MA**

I can't help it, standing here on the tip of Long Wharf surrounded by Boston Harbor and a great city behind me, I really love waterfronts. And it has to do with growing up in the Midwest in Urbana, Illinois. We didn't really have any water except our hoses. And there was a little ditch that was more of a sewage ditch, and that was that. And as a kid I was attracted to Chicago. I went there by train once a month. We stayed as near the waterfront as you could stay. We played on the waterfront. I learned to sail in Lake Michigan. But still I lived in Urbana. I even went to college in Urbana. I knew that I would find water, especially if I moved east and especially if I traveled a little bit. So no matter where I've gone, and I love working on universities and colleges, and I love corporate headquarters. And I love urban stuff, urban problems. But if everything happened on the waterfront, I'd be the happiest guy in North America. I mean, I lived in Marblehead. I spent my life sailing on the Charles, sailing in Boston Harbor. And now we live on the water in York, Maine. And I love, well, resorts that have waterfronts. You name it. Anything that has a waterfront I love.[LAUGHTER]

But I think part of it is you find that corporate headquarters, a lot of project types are relatively simple. They're kind of more logical, have to do with ownership. You have a single CEO. You have a relatively peaceful community meeting with some urban projects, not always. [LAUGHTER] But with waterfronts, you've got problems, problems of ownership, problems of jurisdiction, technical problems; you name it, polluted sites, contaminated sites, contaminated politicians, polluted people and the homeless people that have been living on the waterfront for the last 50 years. What do you do with that? So anyway, I love waterfronts because it's probably the greatest challenge of all and when you're done, you get what you get right here on Long Wharf. You get a lot of people out here having a lot of fun. There's something about being on the water's edge in public space, in a public park, a plaza that really makes you happy.





It's fresh air, I don't know [maybe] infinity. You can think about Europe if you want. I love waterfronts. [LAUGHTER]

Long Wharf . . . our nation's gateway to North America basically. We were selected to design Long Wharf following the design of Boston Waterfront Park, which was designed for the Bicentennial. This would have been finished three years later. But even better it was based upon a master plan for reclaiming private land for public access around the entire harbor. When Waterfront Park was completed, we only had opened up 400 feet of waterfront for the people of Boston. The rest of the waterfront was locked down basically with chain link fence.

Kevin White asked us to do a master plan for all of Boston Harbor. And we came up with, I don't know, probably 23 or 24 miles of potential public access that was unavailable. This was chained off simply because it had been condemned. The master plan worked for people, they loved the idea. And they all decided that they needed Long Wharf wharf.

Long Wharf had to be the greatest project of all time. Of course I probably say that about all [LAUGHTER] the projects that I work on. But this is really waterfront. It's waterfront America. It's the door to Boston.

And you can imagine that this pier went all the back to the old, the Customs House tower, which is directly behind me, maybe you can even see it. And the land on both sides was essentially all Boston Harbor. Landfill had reduced the length of Long Wharf by 60%, something like that, a tremendous amount, so it is not as long as it used to be. But what's also interesting is that the first wharf was really a rather tiny pier that was built in 1680 and in 1720 another addition was made to that pier. I think then it became Long Wharf. And then [in] 1850 a couple of adjustments [were made] to the outer 1780 alignment, primarily they built a wooden deck over the whole thing.



Anyway, that deck was collapsing- it was built for United Fruit [Company]. If you can imagine, all of our waterfronts were industrial, you know, particularly through the 1850s and beyond. This was all shipping and boat building. United Fruit had taken over all of Long Wharf. This is where all of all the bananas and everything you can imagine that United Fruit imported came right here to Long Wharf. But anyway, those wooden decks rotted and by 1950 no one was allowed on Long Wharf.

*[Looking at the design- Dawson comments]* And this is all paving. There's no landscape at all. But there was a group that thought we should have trees [here]. And here's where we got help from Walter Whitehill, who wrote that great book, *Topographic History of Boston*. He said, "there never were trees on Long Wharf, there never should be trees on Long Wharf, and please don't plant trees on Long Wharf and if you do, as long as I'm alive, I'll cut them down". [LAUGHTER] So it is a paved plaza. The compromise with the mayor's office are the little flower pots that you'll see here and there. And in some ways that's the appropriate way to plant something like this. I think trees would look silly here. Even if they'd live and were healthy, they'd look silly so that's a good [thing]. So I hope Long Wharf doesn't become forested. [LAUGHTER]

That's one of those things for the future. But I see [in the future] a lot more, maybe water taxis. I'd love to see high-speed access to the North Shore. We already have access to the South Shore. I'd love to see the waterfront become more working. With all the privatization, which resulted in no access and industry which allowed no access to the waterfront, now we're opening it up. And what we'd love to do is make sure that the boating is equal, as important to the transportation infrastructure as the highways behind us. There's one exception to public access to the water's edge – [let's do] anything that we can do to support the fishing industry. And if the end of Long Wharf had to become a fishery, I'd probably say that's OK because I care about the working waterfront so much. They've lost their way on most of our coastal areas, especially in urban areas. And anything we can do to keep those guys alive and on our waterfronts, even if it means no pedestrian access now and then, so be it.



I think one important feature, this is definitely a less is more design. We talked about no landscape and minimum furniture. Everything you see is based upon historical precedent. The one thing well, except for the shade structure, but was a utilitarian necessity, is the flagpole. People really felt that there ought to be some way of celebrating the front door to the city of Boston. And so that 100-foot flag came out of nowhere. Someone in a community meeting said “gee, I love that flagpole over near the USS Constitution”, where the National Park Service installed a flagpole years ago. We measured that and its a hundred feet. And everyone said make it a couple of feet taller. So [this one] it’s 102 feet instead of 100 feet. [LAUGHTER] But what’s wonderful is you can see that from the Old State House. You can see it from the Customs House. It really says waterfront. It’s basically because of the marine flags, which we hope they fly more often than they do, is really symbolic of the rediscovery of Boston’s waterfront.

One of the fondest dreams for Long Wharf is, at the very end of this building that you see, this was the Old Custom House block, even though the new Customs House is, of course, back in the city, is working with Ben Thompson, a dear friend who had designed Quincy Market. He suggested that we do something like he’d done at Quincy Market at the very end of this Old Customs House block, a glass café. And the footprint is rendered quite clearly in the paving pattern, so that we’re hoping someone someday [someone] will say “oh my gosh, we ought to put a café here”. Because [to have] a café on the tip of Long Wharf would be fabulous.

### **The Boulder Mall, Boulder, CO**

In the early days, and later days, all of us were active in reclaiming urban spaces for the pedestrian. Holly Whyte was one of the great spokesmen for this of course. And so cities started closing streets. I call it almost a fad at first because there were so many failures. There was one in I think Kalamazoo, there was another in Memphis, and others. Minneapolis tried to modify it their streets. Halprin worked on a modified closing in Minneapolis. And all of them [had problems], either they were too big or they were in the wrong place at the wrong time, or there wasn't enough retail. Once you closed it



[the street], they were dead [spaces] before you closed it. That's kind of the worst thing [LAUGHTER] to do. The second worst thing is that they were alive before you close it, and then they failed. That was happening too.

I think when we were hired to [do this job] . . . this is a good story too, because we'd been busy at the University of Colorado in Boulder for the whole decade, from 1960 to 1970. . . . The bottom dropped out of the institutional market thanks to Vietnam and the student unrest on all of our campuses. The regents had shut down all work at the University of Colorado. But we loved Boulder and kind of said oh, my gosh, this is the last time we're going to be in Colorado. And then a couple of years later we were hired by the city to design the Boulder Mall. And we said, "aha, we get to go back to Boulder, Colorado". [LAUGHTER] And it was great.

At the time, and I've forgotten [the name of] the local planner, he was a good guy. He'd come up with, his idea was that you should put parking under Flora Street, which was the street to be closed, not allow any cross traffic, and make it a little bit like Constitution Plaza on the ground level. We were very skeptical, thank heavens. We were selected because we were skeptical of this. We thought we wouldn't be considered because [LAUGHTER] he was on the jury. But apparently he was the only one on the jury that liked his scheme. [LAUGHTER] Which, I can understand.

So essentially, you know, we came up with a much more cautious approach, less expensive. We basically said let's close four blocks but leave all the cross streets open, And, you know, if we want to close more blocks, we can close them. But let's start with four. And then we worked out a one-way loop system because traffic had to be diverted from Flora Street somewhere. And so a loop system was devised which worked quite well.

And of course the garage was built; and the shops that were there stayed. In fact they had a ribbon tying celebration instead of a ribbon cutting celebration. And I've got to admit that if it weren't for two local firms, and I love them to this day, Everett Zeigel, the architects, who had a nice office on Flora Street with an old MGTD in the window and



Communication Arts, the two partners, Rich Foy and Henry Beer, were great industrial designers and they really knew signage and graphics. But it was just I guess a perfect kind of a team. And essentially, we used good materials, good detailing, and as many trees as we could fit. The fire chief was tough because he didn't want to lose any access to the buildings. Other than that we had pretty much an open door. .Again, having the Communication Arts people [come up ideas,] the idea of the ribbon tying and the banners that were used during construction and the boardwalks [that] were brought in to give people fun, fun access to that same store, so you never felt like you were walking on crunched asphalt. In fact, what was happening is that probably about half the shops were either vacant or about to be vacant. They had all moved to 28th Street to a new shopping center. And within two or three years they were all moving back into downtown Boulder and the shopping center was having trouble finding tenants. I think, to me, that's the greatest dream of a landscape architect, to be on the right kind of a team for an urban project like that and have it become magnetic as well as aesthetic. I think it looked pretty good too. And that's the good thing, kind of a win-win.

Oh, and one more thing. I don't know that it would work in any other city. You know [but here] you were next to the University of Colorado. Those kids are a lot of fun. The faculty is a lot of fun. And they didn't really have a place to go in downtown Boulder. And [then] all of a sudden they had a place to go. And so I don't know if the university hadn't been there, it might still look the way it looked. You know, the dynamics have a lot to do with being in the right place at the right time and being lucky with what you got[ It's been modified three times since and each time the city has called back the same team. We'll tend to have a two or three-day symposium and catch the local people up on the history of it and then at the end come up with a couple of yellow sketches and makes suggestions about what we what might do to bring it into the 21st century



## Charleston Waterfront, Charleston, SC

Waterfronts again have got to be my favorite [projects] and certainly [at] Sasaki, the whole office is in the same camp. We love them, especially urban waterfronts. I think the resort ones are fine. They're relatively simple, but the audience is limited to those people that can afford to go to the resorts. I think we like the urban ones because everyone can go and that's the bottom line. The more people that go to your work the better you feel about it. It's worth the effort.

I think we had just finished Waterfront Park in Boston and the Bicentennial was a smash hit and an RFP came out for a master plan for the historic peninsula at Charleston. It was not for a specific waterfront park but it was a master plan for the peninsula. It sounded just like a great thing to us. We put together a team, myself. Ken Kreutziger, a planner and Mo Freedman, a civil engineer and marine engineer. The three of us prepared did a lot of preparation. We studied Charleston as best we could in Boston. [We] talked to Walter Whitehill about it, actually, because Walter was one of the members of the Landmarks Commission, which I was a member of at the time.

So we were reasonably well prepared and knew a lot about the Cooper River and the Ashley River and Fort Sumter.

The interview was exciting. You know why? Because Mayor Riley was there and what a guy [he is]. With Mayor Riley, it sounded just like a Sasaki office [meeting]. He had his public works guy, he had a parks guy, he had his traffic person, and the police chief and the fire chief and all these people sat there at the interview and helped select a consultant. What was fun, of course, is that we were selected. I think Mayor Riley liked the interdisciplinary team. But what he did, because he had been impressed with Jack Robertson, who also interviewed, and Ed Pinckney of Charleston, who also had interviewed, [was] that he decided to marry the two of them to us. So we were asked to include Jack Robertson as a sub[contractor] and Ed Pinckney as a sub[contractor]. We were not insulted, but it turned out to be a terrific. We found out later when we were



having supper with Joe Riley that he liked us Yankees but he didn't think we quite knew Low Country well enough. That's why he said you needed to have Ed Pinckney. He had liked Jack Robertson because he was really an urbanist. He wasn't quite sure Sasaki, he said "Watertown? Where's that?" He wasn't sure we were really urbanist enough. Anyway it turned out to be a terrific team. We did a master plan for the peninsula.

*Birnbaum: So by this point when does Robert Marvin build the Beaufort waterfront? That's already constructed isn't it?*

That was constructed? Yes. We knew Robert Marvin, Robert Marvin in a bid for Charleston. Robert Marvin cornered me at the next ASLA conference, and congratulated me on the Charleston victory. I said, "thank you very much" and he said, "gee, come and visit my new park in Beaufort., which I did the next time I was in Charleston. He said, "you really have to look at the swings that we put in". He said, "they're the most popular thing in the whole of the state of South Carolina." The swings? I said those are for kids, you know? I didn't believe this guy.

Anyway, later as you'll see in Charleston Waterfront Park images, that we did indeed use swings under the shade structure. And it's probably one of the best things we've ever done in South Carolina. [I] thank you Robert Marvin. People stand in line to use those swings.

It's one of the things I love about landscape. Most landscape architects, I think successful ones, is they don't mind sharing ideas. The dynamics are a continuing education program. That's one of the cool things about the [ASLA] conventions is we're able to rub elbows with people that aren't hiding stuff, that are really excited about what they've come up with.

Continuing with Charleston again I think Mayor Riley was a little skeptical of this Yankee team. He never called us Yankees. He's about as open a person as I have ever known.



He would have no prejudice against anything other than bad work. He took the three of us, Ed Pinckney was there and he dragged along Jack Robertson, probably three weeks after we were selected, [on what] we've always called it a forced march. Mayor Riley always said we [would] just strolled around the city, but by the time we were done we all felt like it was a forced march because Mayor Riley was a runner. He walked us I'm guessing at least five miles, maybe more, around the peninsula pointing out bollards, basket weave, women weaving baskets, palmettos, live oak, Spanish moss, and cobblestones. And then [showed us] the old curbs and the carriage stoops and the drinking fountain and the place for the horses to drink water and places for people to drink water. .Everyone should go on a five or six hour tour with Joe Riley. We walked away almost in tears but with a tremendous sensitivity to what the landscape would be within whatever it is we [would] do in Charleston. Anyway from then on we proceeded to work on the master plan for the peninsula.

But essentially the master plan placed a high priority on turning this little piece of land, this beautiful piece of land on the Cooper River into a green space. Because it had been used for years as a parking lot and a road built in the '50's was called Concord Street. So that site was selected and we began to do studies for the site. At this time Ed Pinckney, a great friend and collaborator, came up with a number of alternatives for the park. I would call [them] almost a non-Charleston [solutions]. Non-Charleston meaning what would you say? More of a Franklin Park kind of [design] it was all paved, with kind of piazza kind of stuff, with more real estate in some of the park area, residential and commercial. The thing we did discover through this process was that in order to take the parking off the site, the parking was essential to the survival of the downtown, we had to build a couple parking garages to accommodate that surface parking. You had to get those cars into the garages and then you could start working on the site. . . .

The good news, the two years that it took to design the parking garages and get them built was two more years to think about the design of the park. We had a chance to reflect, consider, reconsider, the form and the emerging importance of the streets that connect the downtown to the waterfront, which were actually the foundation or the origin





of the piers that used to penetrate the Cooper River. Those became more and more important so the east-west vectors emerged during the garage period as the most important things in giving form to the design of the park.

The garage design was especially interesting because there was serious pressure in Charleston in the historic district in one garage in particular, the one on East Bay Street adjacent to Broad, which is pretty much the east-west corridor of the old city. We did commercial on the ground level and used small bay configurations so that it didn't look a garage and [we] even used louvers in those openings that were remaining. The garage openings were vertical instead of horizontal. Horizontal bays are a dead giveaway. It usually means parking. This garage does not look like a parking garage. The down side that you discover later, the trouble with the louvers is you need to have the lights on 24 hours a day. So the second garage that we designed we flipped the louvers so at least the light would come in through the louvers instead of, anyway, it was a learning experience at the expense of the city of Charleston. This is too bad but they've been good about that.

During the garage period the design of the park had begun to come together. The emblematic fountain in the middle of the park was decided [on] during the model phase. [And] that that would become the logo of the park and be used on all the fundraising material that was being produced by the city and by their consultant. At that time, by the time we were looking at the fountain and the emblematic form of the fountain we were also looking at all of the other components. We knew that shade was important.

We've already talked about the importance of the east-west vectors and the historic [city] we haven't talked about Queen Street and Adgers Wharf, but the importance of that wharf was [that it was] one of the original piers of the city. And the overlay of all this and an important overlay was that shade is really important in the city of Charleston. The summer is when all the tourists come and it's a very hot climate. So a shade structure on one of the piers and then a grove of four oaks away from the waterfront



toward the city were the two ways that we could provide shade for almost everyone within the park.

Again, it was a very simple decision in a way. Things were done formally against the city and more informally against the waterfront. Transition. A little bit like Waterfront Park in Boston. You come through a vale of trees to the water's edge. Before the water's edge the park opens up because of views, actually in this case, [the] Cooper [River is] extremely dramatic with pleasure boats, of course, fishing boats, shrimp boats especially but also submarines. You have this wonderful kind of clash of cultures and clash of centuries going back and forth because there are many historic boats in Charleston as well.

Again the time that we had to put this together was extremely beneficial because the specific design of the fountain evolved over time and we think became better. But other things [happened] too. We finally had a geotechnical [person] come take a look at things. He discovered that since this had all been old wharf and pier structure and most of it was backfill between the old wharves and piers, that the soil conditions were worse than worse. The bad news hit us all like a ton of bricks. That [to build here] we could use piles under all of our park if we'd like to support even trees, because it was that bad, or we could surcharge the site with nine feet of soil for two years more in order to compress the soils and provide more stable footing for the park. That decision was made. Mayor Riley, being a politician, was running again that year and people who were skeptical called this Riley's Mountain. And [they] gave Riley a lot of grief for spending all the money for the garages and taking away the parking lot, which was now filled with two big mounds of earth.

As a landscape architect I go crazy. I love it because our engineers came up with these little wicks that had to go below low water with a drill. We push these little wicks down through this nine foot soil mass in order to get the water to the top of the surcharge faster. It would have been five years instead of two years if we hadn't used these little wicks.



Again the manager of our project, Mo Freedman and later Varoujan Hagopian, were the architects for the garages as well as the shade structures. This collaborative team with Jack Robertson and Ed Pinckney continued to work together. And the donors were starting to knock on the door, which was great. Probably the best guy of all, his name was Woodson, from Philadelphia, who liked to winter in Charleston, gave us a substantial gift, which allowed us to say, “I think we can start getting this thing out to bid in another year or two”. In the meantime we got a model and all these studies and things were getting better all the time. But he wanted to build a couple of ricescapes because he was enamored with the rice plantation culture of the Low Country, especially the ones he’d seen around Middleton Place. He’d studied Middleton Place and considered himself to be a Low Country expert.

He hated the palmetto. He thought palmettos were an awful thing. We had in our bold New England way, with Ed Pinckney’s blessing, proposed an arcade. And this goes back to Stan White’s teaching. Once you come through the grove of trees you almost need to have an arcade to look through to the Cooper River because it makes the Cooper River even better. It was just the right way of moving from one thing to the other.<sup>9</sup> But this guy, the donor, really hated palmettos. I was at a loss for words. Mo Freedman was at a loss for words. Happily Ed Pinckney was sitting there. He is such a wonderful gentleman and he said, you know, Mr. Woodson, I really hate to disagree with you but you know, I remember as a little boy growing up in Low Country and my first visit to Kiawah Island, my first visit to Hilton Head and then walking along the battery here in Charleston the sound of the wind in the palmetto and the romantic aesthetic light that happened at the same time was like three-dimensional music. He said, “You know I can’t even imagine Low Country without palmettos.” By the time Ed was done I think the donor was almost in tears and he said, “Ok go ahead and plant the palmettos.” He was right – we were right.

The park was not completed until 1980. So in about 1990, when was Hurricane Hugo? It course destroyed quite a lot of the park which had to be rebuilt. Happily the fountain and the four oak grove and everything above the flood wall [were OK] the palmettos were



gone or had suffered salt water damage but by and large the park survived Hugo and was dedicated later that year.

The parks department was very clever in their attempt to be ready for the dedication. The palmetto fronds had all turned brown because of salt damage. They got the fire department on site to spray paint the palmetto fronds so that it would look all fresh and green for the dedication, which it did and it was a wonderful day. To this day I think the park is just as successful as it was the day the doors opened.

By the way, I think the important message in all of this, and this is Jack Robertson at his best and Holly Whyte and the other great urbanists that we've had the privilege of knowing and working with, is that the park wasn't seen as just a park. It really was thought of as a catalyst for private investment and that really, really did work with the construction of this park. It really triggered a massive amount of sensitive adjacent development, buildings that really fit the mood of Charleston and fit the mood of the waterfront. It was really a kind of a nice business deal as much as it was a great social and cultural success.

You saw Varoujan [Hagopian] while we were having lunch. This is such a good story. He helped me with Charleston Waterfront Park. He basically became the principal in charge once we finished the working drawings. He managed the construction of the project. And he was half the size of the general contractor, and half the size of all the other people that worked for the contractor. And I had noticed that herringbone brick had been laid 90 degrees to what we had specified, and a [it was a] lot of brick, maybe an acre of brick. And Varoujan said, "do you want to have the contractor change it?" I said yeah, "I'm afraid so." Anyway, I walk into the meeting with Varoujan, and here they are, waiting for the Sasaki people to come in and give them good news. Varoujan said, "I got good news and bad news. I'll give you the bad news first." [LAUGHTER] He said basically, "you've got almost an acre of brick. It's the most beautiful brickwork I've ever seen, but you've got to pick it all up, turn it 90 degrees, and re-lay it. According to our drawings and according to the mock-up that you guys helped us build, which is right



over here.” And anyway, from then on, Varoujan and the contractor had a great relationship because they knew, that if they didn't do what Sasaki wanted, it was going to be very costly for them. And I can tell you, that's the kind of thing a landscape architect has a hard time doing. I don't think I could have stood up there and said what Varoujan did. But he loved it. Engineers love that stuff. [LAUGHTER] Not me. Anyway, that's just a good engineering story. He's superb.

### **Frito-Lay Corporate Headquarters, Plano, TX**

I'd love to chat about Frito-Lay corporate headquarters in Plano, Texas, just north of Dallas. We had the good fortune of being selected to design their headquarters with Dirk Lohan of Fujikawa, Conterato, Lohan, and we were also selected to do the master plan for EDS, the property within which the Frito-Lay site rests. The funny part of it is that we designed Frito-Lay before we had completed the master plan for the EDS property. It's one of our cart before the horse projects. Happily it worked out very well. It just happened to fit even though the master plan was done six months later.

The wonderful thing about Frito-Lay is that the client had liked John Deere a lot. In fact, a lot of our clients had liked John Deere a lot. The problem is the site wasn't quite like John Deere but it was similar. It had a stream running through the middle of it, it had a swale. There were no flood plains and there was very little vegetation. But we essentially used the same parti. The core of the central headquarters straddled the stream and edged the lake, which was to the south. Parking was located on the high plateaus to the east and west sides of the building and access to the building was at the third floor from bridges connecting the parking lots to the headquarters building, allowing cars circumventing the building on the loop road to pass underneath. The pedestrians, i.e., employees, crossed above the moving cars below. And [here] there's a courtyard. John Deere doesn't have a courtyard, but Frito-Lay has a courtyard and the stream that runs right through it with a really a crafted waterfall that is more natural than natural.



Being Texas, wildflowers were what was more important than forests, and materials were more important than probably plant material. Plant material tended to be native. There were several other species, mesquite being a primary one along with an elm species that I can't quite remember. Essentially it was again this strong collaboration between the architect and the client. The good news is that it doesn't look like John Deere at all. It was inspired by John Deere and it works, I think, just as well. Essentially 95% of the employees don't look at parking and it's essentially a surface parking corporate headquarters.

*Birnbaum: I'm wondering about the philosophy towards indoor/outdoor relationships in whether it's the corporate headquarters or it's in campuses or waterfronts, because it is something that is very much a modern principle.*

### **National Harbor, MD**

I've worked on this plan for almost two years and Hid and Pete have been sitting on my shoulders all the way along and through this process. Milt Peterson the developer, knew Hideo Sasaki and Milt has used us on other projects. [His project] Fair Lakes in Fairfax, Virginia, is very much a Sasaki project with a little bit of Olmsted thrown in. This [National Harbor project] is a much higher density. It is still real estate based, just as it was at Fair Lakes, but Milt hired Sasaki because he wanted a Sasaki product. I can't think of any Sasaki project that I've been involved with that I don't have the ghost of Hideo and young Pete Walker sitting on both shoulders. There are a lot of things in this that I think Pete would do

The collaboration with artists is incredible. I think that Pete would love the integration of fine art and again inspired by Pete's thinking about art and Hideo's love of art and also my experience at Cranbrook that we have maybe thirty three pieces [of art] that are highly integrated into the fabric of this project.



Birnbaum: *Why don't you get up and show me what you're talking about?*

*Dawson studies the plan of National Harbor on the office wall.*

An art overlay is a good question that's been raised about the integration of art at National Harbor. We just happened to have a good exhibit on the wall and this is the art overlay exhibit. Every one of these [points] is art that's either in place or art that will be in place within the next year. I'll just go through them, metal, found stone, sculpted stone, water features, and then [some spots are] art opportunities. So there's some [places] where we're saying we really don't have an idea yet but that's where we really think art should be integrated. Not plopped. We're really trying to avoid plop. Then [we have] interpretive and figurative features. That has a lot to do with the Potomac River and the relationship of this project to Washington, DC, and the history at the Potomac River

Stepping back a bit [for this project] we've been involved with the whole master plan. The urban design is a bit of a tour de force but we felt our neighbor, Washington, DC, deserved something that was not the same but at least had some of the grand scale of the District [of Columbia]. So in the very heart of this mixed-use development is a 2,000 foot boulevard that connects the heart of the new town to the hillside where the residential [component] would tend to be most dominant. What's cool about it is this is about 250 feet above the Potomac [River] so that the views of the opposite shore are of Alexandria and even the views north of the Washington Monument are really quite remarkable.

The [plan] dimension is a couple thousand feet. It has a grand scale. It's essentially more formal, as it should be, adjacent to the boulevard. [Here] the design begins to break down and become a lot more informal. Again I think the banding and the paving, the formal row of plane trees, the plane trees are huge, sixteen inch caliber plane trees,[creating an] instant landscape. The promenade is absolutely beautiful. The promenade was modeled after the [La] Ramblas in Barcelona, [Spain] but it has modern



elements. I hate to say it's modern. [It has] banded paving, banded paving basically extends all the way into National Plaza, all the way to the waterfront. The whole notion of the materials and the detail of the materials is to reflect the ripples of water on the Potomac [River]. To develop the feeling of that those ripples of water extend all the way up to the top of National Harbor.

This idea was very supported by the developer who wanted National Harbor to seem timeless from the first day that it was opened and he felt that the art, especially the found stone art, gave it a sense of age and also a sense of permanence. He felt this would be not only a beautiful thing but also a very marketable thing. And of course developers are worried about that.

One of the greatest relationships that we've developed [was with] Albert Paley who is a sculptor from Rochester, New York, he teaches at RIT.[Rochester Institute of Technology] [*Dawson points to a model*] And is one of his macquettes for *The Beckoning*. This is not the final [design].But this is the way we work. Albert worked in the office for a couple weeks and we came up with [the design] that has been finally installed.

Actually the idea, instead of an art park [came about because], we talked about doing what Pete [Walker] had done in Dallas [Texas- the Nasher Sculpture Center]. Milt [Peterson] has quite a substantial art collection and thought about having a single art park or an art garden. But it was decided that really it would be better if the whole of National Harbor became an art park, especially to help people find their way, a way-finding system.

The End