

The Cultural Landscape Foundation

Pioneers of American Landscape Design

OFFICE OF DAN KILEY: JOE KARR

ORAL HISTORY

REFLECTIONS

Bruno Ast
John Buenz
Kevin Finley
Kenny Gallt
Ed Gansz
Michael Gelick
Misa Inoue
Raymond Jungles
Kristo Karr
Taina Karr
Grace Kiley
Timothy Gus Kiley
Ron Lovinger
Dean Sheaffer
Philip Shipman
Mark Stanley
Joe Stichter
Ian Tyndall
Peter Ker Walker
Ben and Cindy Weese

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Bruno Ast

April 2018

Joe Karr and I attended the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign between 1955 and 1962. Our beginning was in the School of Architecture. I am sure we interacted in shared studios and other courses but our formal connection came when we both were invited to join the School of Architecture's Honor Society "Scarab" and from that day on we became lifelong friends.

After graduation we each went our separate ways, I stayed on at the University of Illinois to pursue a Master of Architecture degree under the direction of Professor A. Richard Williams and Joe went east to the University of Pennsylvania to study with Ian McHarg to further his aspiration for Landscape Architecture. Upon graduation, he joined the firm of Dan Kiley, that association had a profound influence on his understanding and vision of the exquisiteness of the American environment, an experience he related to me many times as we discussed issues of design.

In late 1962, at the recommendation of Professor Williams, I joined the architectural firm Helmut Obata Kassabaum in St. Louis and worked with them for 13 months until my fiancé Gunduz Dagdelen completed her graduate studies at Washington University. Following a short trip to Europe/Istanbul we settled in Chicago and I took a position with Skidmore Owens and Merrill and (by then my wife) Gunduz Dagdelen with a position at Harry Weese and Associates.

In that period Joe Karr was back in Chicago with offices within the Harry Weese organization. Our friendship rekindled and we shared many events and community within the work of architecture and landscape architecture.

I highly admired the work of Harry Weese and decided to join the firm in 1969. I was fortunate to work on several significant projects, however the major project was the master planning of the new campus for the State University of New York in Buffalo, NY on which Joe Karr was the landscape architect/planner of a large team led by Harry Weese. This association with Joe was for me one of the significant factors forming a continuing education of a unique creative process to environment and landscape architecture. All projected in softness, sensitivity, and a calm sensibility supported by the wealth of his expertise and knowledge. An expertise I had admired so much in his creative landscape works at the Ford Foundation Headquarters and the South Garden at the Art Institute of Chicago.

I did not see the University Project to completion with Joe and others as I moved on to teaching in the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In that arena our connections continued as he accepted many of my invitations to join in studio reviews and presentations to my students. He brought richness and sensitivity to means and methods in creating new forms in the environment and to perpetuate the beauty of that environment.

Joe Karr is a renowned and a much honored landscape architect. Beauty and sensitivity is in the person of Joseph Karr.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by John Buenz

April 2018

Joe Karr was the landscape architect for Solomon Cordwell Buenz from the early 1970's well into the 1990'S. Several of his most challenging landscapes beneficial to SCB architecture include:

- The Harbor Point Condominium
- Tower A Randolph Street & Lake Michigan
- Presidential Towers
- The Crate & Barrel Headquarters (MagMile)
- Bannockburn Lake Office Plaza

Although Joe and I are retired we remain good friends. We both still live a few blocks away from each other in Lincoln Park. We've had a close family relationship since the 1970's.

Thank you for honoring Joe Karr.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Kevin Finley

April 2018

I had the good fortune to first meet Joe Karr back in the late 1980's while tagging trees for the Kraft World Headquarters Project in Northfield, IL. That was the beginning of a wonderful 30 year personal and professional relationship that has changed both my nursery career and also my understanding of the art of Landscape Architecture.

While touring the nursery, Joe took the time to stop and sketch out the design concept, illustrating how the different trees fit into the project. As we drove through the fields, he asked my opinion on tree characteristics and always made a point of asking if we had the right plant for the various locations within his design for the project. I recall thinking to myself, as we toured the nursery that day, "Who is this charming, humble, interesting man with such an amazing passion for plants?" In addition to his design creativity, plant awareness, and artistic vision, I recognized that Joe had the rare ability to listen and bring cross functional teams of people together to ensure the success of the project.

Often, Joe's large-scale projects required long term (2-3 years) growing contracts to insure plant availability and of course quality! This required a high level of trust in the overall team effort. Rather than leading with a self-serving style, Joe's holistic approach always brought the owner, architect, general contractor, landscape contractor and nurseryman together in a collaborative effort – all for the benefit of the project.

Over the years, Joe's projects always felt like our projects. To name a few: Ameritech, Kraft, Lucent Technologies, Wrigley, and many others along the way. It has truly been an honor to play a small role in Joe Karr's incredible journey designing remarkable landscapes throughout the country. I am thankful to call Joe a friend and colleague.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Kenny Gallt

April 2018

The other side of Gentlemen Joe

I've been told I have a pedigree that somehow I have always been in the right place with the right people. A High School Horticulture teacher in eighth grade told me to combine horticulture with engineering and become a landscape architect.

Four years later I started my first class at Cornell University with Prof. Jot Carpenter as my advisor and Michael Van Valkenburgh as my classmate. Prof. Marv Adelman came to Cornell in 1972 and the 6 of us represented his first graduating class.

(Note: Marv Adelman went on to teach for 38 years at Cornell then retired to Illinois ten miles from my house. Marv and I reconnected and would spend 1 day a month doing something until he died. Joe Karr knew Marv as he and Marv were on an accreditation committee together seeing whether the different landscape architecture programs should still receive accreditation.)

While I did have some job offers, graduate school looked important. While Harvard was the school of choice - something happened back in 1973 and all the professors at the University of Michigan were transplants from Harvard. Chuck Cares, Ken Polikoski, Terry Brown and I wound up with William "Bill" Johnson as my Advisor..I could not be luckier.

1975-Chicago looked to be a bright city to start my career and adult life. Not knowing anybody I knocked on doors looking for a job. It was a recession period when I first met Joe Karr in the fall of 1975. Now 40 plus years later I boast that I know Joe longer than anyone else in Chicago! That we have both a personal and professional relationship that has rewarded me many times.

While Joe didn't hire me... he says the office was slow... he showed me several of his projects that he was working on, one being "The Council for Jewish Elderly in Skokie".

I finally found a job the following spring with a Landscape maintenance contractor who asked that I build a Landscape construction department. Now all that knowledge from Prof. Jot Carpenter was in use. Pulling some of the most talented people from the University of Illinois we built a very formidable Landscape Company. I went back to Joe Karr and asked if I could build that project he had shown me when I interviewed. We continued to build many of Joe's exterior projects until Joe's retirement with some of the foreman working on the Ameritech project in Barrington.

Joe always had his recommended contractors for the different projects and his clients took Joe's recommendations. Joe kept many landscape contractors and suppliers busy throughout his career. I recently told Joe that he got a "nickname" in the industry, and that was "Gentleman Joe" because of his soft spoken demeanor and his approach to those he touched.

But Now to the Other Side of Joe:

We all know that landscape architect does the spaces between the buildings, but Joe was one of the first to really understand the importance of the interior landscape. (While I had seen the Ford Foundation in NYC many times I never tied it to Joe Karr or to my professional future.

In 1984 Joe's project "Trans Am in Oakbrook Terrace" wanted one contractor to do both inside and outside landscape. While I wanted the outside, the inside was something different.

Joe said I could “sub-contract” the inside out, but it didn’t seem right. We had more knowledge and equipment than the sub-contractors. Thus, this started our first interior landscape job that has now led to my company (now celebrating 34 years), Foliage Design Systems of Chicago, Inc.

Throughout the years I continued to build and maintain many of Joe Karr’s interior landscape. These landscapes are not usually seen by the public. Joe and I would travel to Florida to tag trees and to insure pre-grown plants for his projects. **His standards and procedures became the industry standards that I use today.**

Many of these interior projects include:

Trans Am - 1984

Presidential Towers - 1984

University of Illinois - 1995

Blue Cross Blue Shield - 2000

Lucent Technology - 2003

While Joe provided me with many high profile interior landscape projects he showed me a unique niche within the Landscape Architecture and construction area that has built a company and has continued building many of today’s interior landscapes. Joe Karr was one landscape architect that always considered the interior as part of the landscape he designed. It started I am sure from the Ford Foundation Project.

The FORD FOUNDATION:

If it wasn’t for Joe Karr I probably wouldn’t be a landscape architect specializing in the interior landscape industry. Knowing this and as we get together personally, Joe had my wife and I over for a Christmas dinner to show us the Dan Kiley slides he was putting together.

Of course it showed Joe’s early days back in 1963 when he was working on the Ford Foundation(FF). I continue to visit the FF every time back in NYC, and especially now that I know it was designed by Joe. It has Landmark status, but it doesn’t look like the original slides.

Joe has never seen the project completed or since: as he was off to his next project in 1965 the Arch in St. Louis. He has only seen the FF in photographs.

In December 2016 Joe told me that they hired a LA out of Miami to redo the Garden, “someone named Raymond Jungles”. Joe was hoping that they wouldn’t mess the garden up too much from the original design. (Considering this is the first and major interior landscape in the country it is probably the most important!)

I wrote to Raymond Jungles to let him know that the original LA (Joe Karr) was here in Chicago, with lots of drawings and slides and information and that he might want to contact him.

That was lucky for Raymond as he flew up to Chicago to meet Joe. Raymond said he was charged with putting the garden back to the way it was originally and that he found more information in Joe’s living room than in the FF or the Harvard Library where he had gone for base information.

Now the biggest interior landscape project is about to be re-created with the old master guiding the new master. (Raymond Jungles)

Joe's bucket list: Joe just turned 80....he keeps up with everyone and enjoys the industry. On his bucket list will be to visit the completed Ford Foundation Garden later this year.

What can I say?

Joe Karr has had a remarkable career as a landscape architect, contributing to both the exterior and the interior landscapes. He has done it in a quiet way, reserved and giving credit to others when he deserves the credit.

He has enriched the life of many people through his landscapes. Those of us that have been able to know him personally and professionally are even more blessed. As I look back, Joe Karr was my first contact in Chicago, that has lasted over 40 years and has been most instrumental in my successful career.

That's why he is known as "Gentleman Joe"

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Ed Gansz

April 2018

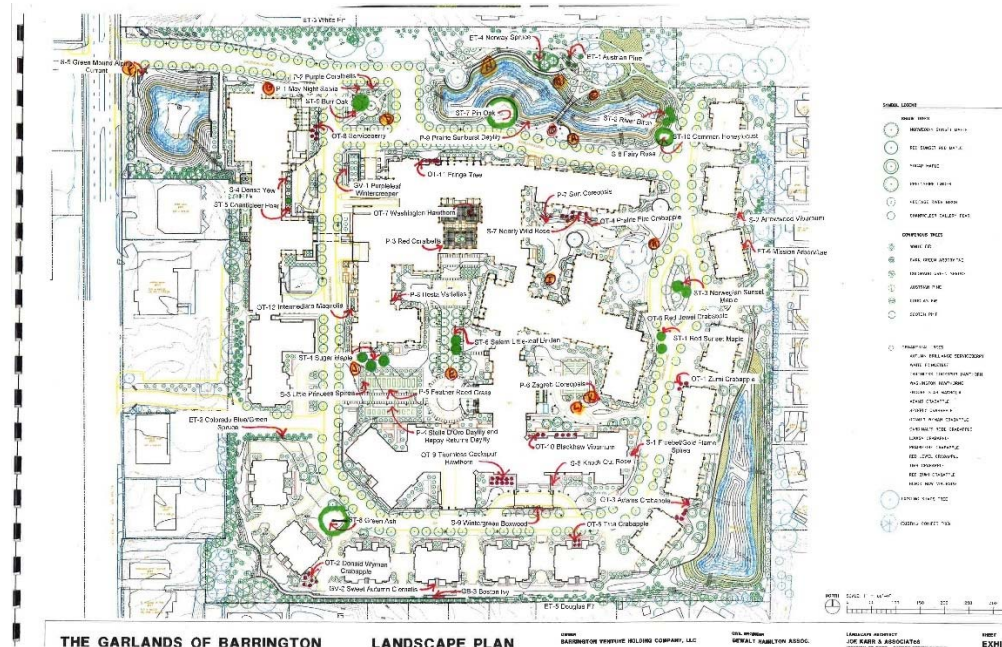
In 1980, representing a nationally recognized developer, I hired Joe as landscape architect for an office/hotel development in Schaumburg, Illinois. Joe provided design for this six-year project which was acclaimed locally for its beauty. Upon completion, Joe and I occasionally discussed other projects and trends in landscape design.

In 1997, a joint venture purchased a 31.5-acre parcel in Barrington, Illinois for development of The Garlands of Barrington, a multiphase, high end senior housing complex which included a stand alone healthcare facility connected to independent living by a bridge. Barrington zoning, awarded in 1999, included the first of its kind Barrington "Tree Preservation sub ordinance. The development contains 358 units (i.e. 288 independent units, 70 healthcare units) totaling 1,177,000 square feet which includes 299,000 square feet of underground parking structure. The notable amount of underground parking structure resulted from a decision made to eliminate most of the surface parking to provide space for a series of intimate landscape court yards throughout the development. Staged opening for the complex occurred between 2002-2010.

The Village demands in the landscape sub ordinance included a per caliper inch replacement ratio and substitute identification for all "key, significant & other" trees removed from the site for construction. The Village oversight regarding the sub ordinance ratio/substitutions and ownership's required intimate courtyards theme presented a significant aesthetic challenge.

My past experience with Joe had demonstrated his ability to skillfully blend aesthetic/functional intent and I was confident in recommending Joe for this undertaking.

With reference to the master landscape plan and cross referenced "Plant Material Library," Joe showed impeccable vision for this singular development. More importantly, photos of the mature, completed plan "speaks volumes" about Joe....artful skill, discriminating species choice, award winning plan, and most importantly, a satisfied, frequently complementary Garlands ownership & population. Many thanks Joe.



Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Michael Gelick

April 2018

Joe is a thoughtful, talented individual who can improve any site or building complex with perceptive landscape design ideas. Light & Shade / Hard and Soft / Wet & Dry / Contextual & Contrasting / Seasonal & Timeless / Environments for the enjoyment of the participants.

In conversation Joe could make clear, what the project needed to bring it up to a high level of beauty, integrating buildings and site.

On student reviews, Joe could help the student and other reviewers “see the light.” I wonder if they got it.

Selected Projects:

Fox Valley Office Center: Joe proposed linear earth berms, with ground cover, dotted with Poplar Trees, for a fast growth impact against the horizontal ribbon windowed building.

City Front Place, Chicago: Joe formed an urban street scape with layered plantings transitioning between the walkway and building wall.



Five Town Homes, Evanston: At the corner of Church and Ridge, in a historic district, Joe developed a strong horizontal prairie aesthetic.



Ruth Shriman House a senior affordable housing project, Chicago: Joe developed a geometric pattern of repeated plantings creating friendly exterior gardens for seniors to enjoy.

RUTH SHRIMAN HOUSE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

LAKEVIEW ACTION COALITION, CHICAGO, OWNER
JOHN MCDEERMOTT

Eighty-two unit senior affordable housing development. Double-height, south facing solarium on upper two floors with enclosed balcony; "s toop" at entry to each unit provides tenants opportunity to personalize their section of the corridor.



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Private Residence, Evanston: In an original house by Jim Nagle, Joe designed two courtyard gardens, one south and one north, of the single story building. When I remodeled and refurnished the interiors to accommodate the owners' needs, a few years ago, I had to make site changes to the north garden to increase accessibility. I felt Joe's hands on the project as I slightly reconfigured bluestone pavers and plantings (some flowering seasonally), while revising the garden.

The "long few perception" of Joe's was fantastic on all projects. As time passed, the decades later, the landscape, the site and even the buildings were improved due to Joe's vision.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Misa Inoue

April 2018

It was twenty some years ago when I first met Joe Karr. I was a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign(UIUC), and the then Department Head, Professor Vince Bellafiore, strongly advised that I visit Joe's office, which was located in Chicago.

On a warm summer day, when I arrived at his office, he had just returned with his take-out lunch, but he welcomed me, put aside his lunch, and spent the next hour walking me around the office, introducing me to his staff, and explaining the various projects that they had been working on. I still vividly remember everything that I saw on that day, but what struck me the most was Joe himself, not only as the legendary landscape architect, but also as a very kind and thoughtful person, who exuded a genuine caring charisma. By the end of my visit, all the ice in the drink on his desk had melted, but he did not take much notice of it; and instead, said something that was to stay in my mind for years to come: "Remember, you want to work with not only good designers but also good people." As a student, I had no idea how significant that advice was; it took me many years of working to finally understand and appreciate the meaning of his proffered wisdom.

Years passed by, and with an interesting twist of fate, I am now with a design firm who occupies the same space where Joe's office used to be. Although parts of the original interior layout have changed, the building's signature elements, such as the timber columns and the skylight are still there, rekindling my fond memory of my very first visit to the space.

I am very grateful for the many invaluable conversations that I have had with Joe over the years as they have taught me a great deal about not only our profession, but also life in general. He is always willing to share his incredible experiences with others. Several years ago, when I had the opportunity to plan a field trip for UIUC students, Joe generously met with the class at the South Garden of the Art Institute of Chicago. It was amazing to see how captivated the students were to be able to meet him in person and listen to this legend explain the Garden, which many of them had only known about from books and lectures.

I have met numerous people who have worked with Joe, ranging from fellow designers and planners to contractors and suppliers, and whenever I hear someone say what a real joy it has been to know him, I return their smile in total agreement. We are all very pleased that The Cultural Landscape Foundation has documented the great work of Joe in its *Pioneers Oral History* series. It is a true delight that the larger audience around the world can now learn about him and his tremendous legacy.



Joe Karr at his office, circa 1996, Courtesy Joe Karr



Joe Karr with the University of Illinois students at the South Garden of the Art Institute of Chicago, April 2011



Joe Karr at the South Garden of the Art Institute of Chicago, June 2017

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Raymond Jungles

April 2018

We meet countless human beings throughout life, but we connect at a transcendental level with only a few. I was fortunate enough to meet Joe Karr through the restoration project of Dan Kiley's genius Ford Foundation Garden. I only spent the day with him but he left a memorable mark in my mind.

His recollections were unparalleled, and his photo archive was tremendously helpful to the Ford Foundation project. We bonded over his anecdote about his frustration with wrongfully pruned Ficus trees on his Wrigley project and him having to deal with it in person until resolution. At that moment I felt I met a soulmate who was as passionate about garden design as I was.

Meeting Joe and getting to know him is one of the most beautiful gifts of serendipity.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Kristo Karr

April 2018

Some of my most vivid memories from childhood are of nature. This is in no small part due to my father's life long appreciation of trees and plants and his continuous need to return to the countryside to be around them in their natural setting. My sister and I were born in Burlington, Vermont when my father was still working for the Office of Dan Kiley at Wings Point, near the town of Charlotte. The office was surrounded by woods and it sat on beautiful Lake Champlain, with a breathtaking view of the Adirondack Mountains of New York state in the background.

In the spring of 1969, when my sister and I were still quite small, our family relocated to Chicago, where my father setup his own landscape architecture practice. Although we were now living in a completely urban environment, every couple of weeks we would visit my father's parents in a small town, 80 miles west of Chicago. During these stays, we would visit a 100-acre farm about 10 miles from town, where my grandfather was still maintaining corn and soybean crops, and a large garden. Since my father grew up on this farm, he enjoyed the opportunity to go back to his roots. Our whole family appreciated the clean country air, the fresh vegetables from the garden and the various types of fruit and berries which also grew on the farm. Here is a photo from the spring of 1977 of my grandfather's garden, with him in the middle ground and his corn crops in the background.



In the winter of 1971, some friends of the family introduced us to a small town in the state of Michigan, near the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, about 300 miles north of Chicago. We immediately became attached to the area and, for my father, it seemed to effectively fill a void that was created by having to leave the idyllic landscape surrounding the Office of Dan Kiley in Vermont. Shortly thereafter, my parents purchased a couple of acres of land in town and eventually they were able to obtain an old country house in the area, have it moved to the property and remodel it as a vacation home. Our backyard consisted of a small meadow and a wooded hillside. For several years we maintained a large

garden there. The town itself is nicely situated next to Lake Michigan, with beautiful beach views of sand dunes and South Manitou Island. Here is a photo from Christmas 1981 of my father, sister Taina and mother Kaisu on a National Park trail, looking toward town, with Lake Michigan and the Sleeping Bear Dunes in the distance.



A significant preoccupation of my father since establishing his summer residence in Michigan is the continuous enhancement and maintenance of the landscape there. Several years before the house was built, we would make trips to the area just to plant young trees on the property. I recall that we once spent a weekend there planting 100 small evergreen seedlings. After the house was ready, we planted several more trees and some spirea shrubs around its perimeter. Here is a photo from the spring of 1981 of my father and I planting spirea shrubs next to some aspen trees that we planted there the previous year.



My father still enjoys spending long hours in the meadow, clearing it of invasive plant species, while promoting the development of local plants and wild flowers. He also enjoys spending time on the wooded hillside behind the house, trimming trees, clearing the area of dead brush and aiding in the development of newly volunteering trees. Occasionally, a curious deer or two will approach him to observe such activities. These are moments when my father feels especially in tune with nature. Here is a photo from the summer of 2012 of my father clearing brush with an audience of the four-legged variety.



As with many people in his profession, my father has a natural inclination for drawing and visualizing things in three-dimensional space. Any time that he has difficulty explaining something to us verbally he will simply grab a pencil and a piece of paper and draw it for us. This is a very effective means of communication and it turned me into an early believer of the old saying "A picture is worth a thousand words". When I was growing up, I had a strong interest in drawing and painting. Anytime that I was working on an art project for school, my father would pay frequent visits to my desk to see how things were progressing. In addition to providing fatherly encouragement, he would offer constructive advice on how to achieve my original goals for the given work. Most of the time his comments would be of a technical nature, rather than an attempt to influence the subject matter or the style of expression. For instance, he might suggest how to improve the perspective or to make it clearer where the light source was located. In general, he was more interested in the process itself than in the ultimate outcome and he encouraged me to explore different techniques. I found these critiques extremely helpful and I believe they helped me progress at a faster rate than if I had only depended on academic training. Here is photo from the fall of 1981 that my father took of me while working on a school project to experiment with surrealistic painting styles.



My father has always been a very hard worker and when it comes to the profession of landscape architecture, this character trait was taken to another level. He would often arrive home after the rest of us had already finished supper. When approaching a strict deadline, he sometimes needed to work at home during the entire weekend. In addition, he frequently needed to travel to other parts of the country, to meet with clients or become familiar with a new site. Despite this impressive dedication to his profession, I cannot recall a single moment when he was not there for us when we really needed him. He somehow managed to achieve that delicate balance between professional and family life. No matter how hard he ended up working on a given project, he always managed to make it crystal clear that what was most important to him was spending his free time with us. Here is a photo from the summer of 1979 of my father, my sister and me at a beach on Lake Michigan near our vacation home, with arborvitae trees in the background.

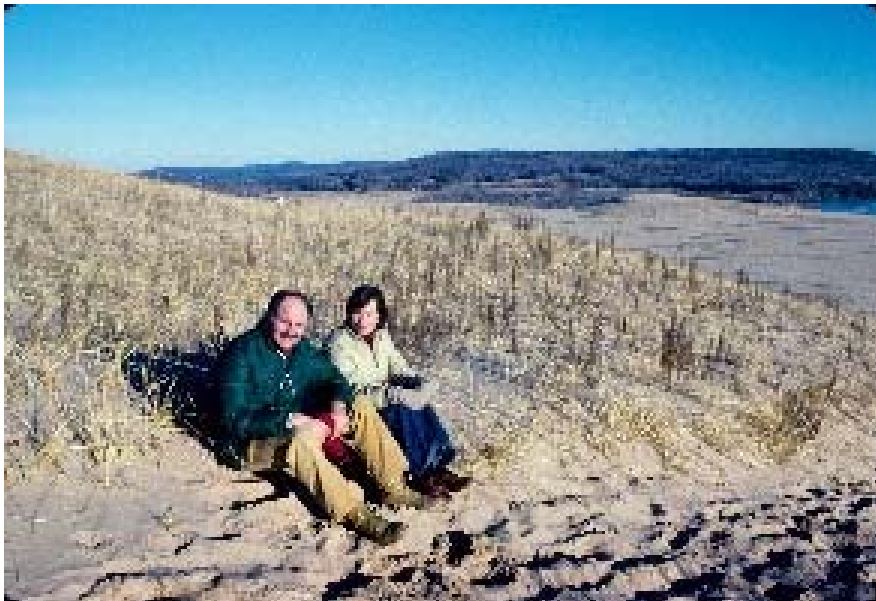


I am very grateful to have Joe Karr as my father, friend and mentor.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Taina Karr

April 2018

Growing up, during long walks and hikes, my dad helped me to understand and appreciate my natural surroundings by learning to know the flora and fauna of places ranging from the streets of Chicago to the forests and meadows of Northern Michigan. I began to observe and be fascinated by how they changed through the course of the seasons. This appreciation of plants has extended to a passion for cultivating decorative and edible plants in my own garden; I love having my hands in the soil and connecting with nature. I have my dad to thank for that!



Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Grace Kiley

April 2018

Joe was one of a cluster of architects who worked for my father. My memory of Joe is from the perspective of a wild and wide-eyed girl somewhere between the ages of nine and twelve.

Wings Point was its own kingdom. My seven siblings and I ran wild in this vibrant setting. We lived in an elegant, slightly rundown white-columned, clapboard house overlooking the serene and expansive Lake Champlain. It was a kind of paradise. It was freedom, creativity, and nature in an exclusive self-contained world. This setting became my father's office. It was critical to my father to live inside the nature that inspired his work. Joe speaks to this so beautifully in his description of Wings Point.

My childhood neighbor, Sara, and I referred to my father's architects as "the office boys." They were a rascally band of men with accents from various parts of the world such as New Zealand, England, Ireland, Scotland descended into our isolated orb. The boys were our first exposure to people outside of the Vermont farming culture. We eventually moved away from the lake and into the farmland because of the growing population of motorboats. I can see my father's red face coming up the path after a brisk morning swim, naked under a coarse brown serape furious at this violation of noise.

After we moved, the office relocated from the apartment over the garage into the main house. When I'd return to Wings Point to play with Sara, our fascination with the office boys became our greatest form of pleasure and intrigue. On a warm summer night we would sneak along the wooded path from her house to my old house, the "lake house" and spy on the office boys as they worked through the night to finish one deadline after another, bent over drafting boards and cardboard models. When the office was empty, Sara and I would sneak into the house turning on desk lamps tiptoeing from table to table to draw caricatures, laughing uncontrollably as we depicted each architect, all based on our joy and attraction to this talented and unusual species of men. We would leave their portraits at each desk letting them know we had invaded their territory.

During the summer days the office boys would explode out of the house and sprint joking and laughing down the path and onto the pier in their swimming trunks. Sara and I would gaze with intrigue. Roger was the biggest man we'd ever seen, like a monster with an even bigger head for his body and this is how we would delightfully draw his portrait. Ian was small and had an extraordinary amount of thick hair for his small stature, but a twinkle in his eyes that left us smitten. Peter was wiry and had a choppy laugh, and there were others. But, Joe was the bear. When Sara and I drew his portrait we would make swirls and swirls of circles creating the abundance fur on his body, laughing hysterically. He was a bear in body, warm hearted, one of those docile lovely kinds of bears that one wants to hug and snuggle against.

Often on those late nights when the boys were pulling an all-nighter to meet a deadline at the crack of dawn, Sara and I would spy on them through the many windows, their faces lit up by drafting lights as they precisely connected dots and lines. Hiding in the shadows of the house until our need for attention and fun was too much to contain, we would bait them by throwing tiny pebbles at the windows and then run and hide. It would appear that the boys had no awareness that we were out in the dark night because they showed no disturbance as they huddled over their pressing work. Then suddenly all the

lights in the house would go out and they would come out "to get us" as we ran petrified and filled with glee into the pinewoods.

This is my memory of Joe and the office boys.



Sketch of the Office Boys, by Grace Kiley

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Timothy Gus Kiley

April 2018

I was still a child when Joe worked for my father at our place at Wings Point on Lake Champlain. He was part of a particularly wonderful and highly talented crew (which included, at that time, Peter K Walker, Ian Tyndall, and Henry Arnold, among others). The “office boys,” as we called them, all worked so hard and appeared to be so joyously engaged in their work. And it was extraordinary how the house resounded almost continuously with their laughter and raucous humor (twenty-four hours a day if there was a deadline). During lunch breaks, much of the office ran down the long hill to the lake to swim. It was there that we children would usually meet and mingle with them, and fight to throw each other off the pier into the lake. As for Joe, he was one of our favorites—sweet, kind, and gentle (much more so than we children were). We were especially impressed by the fact that Joe had a particularly hairy chest. I also clearly recall that my father had a special fondness for Joe. Again, I think it was because of Joe’s kindness and sweetness but also, and above all, because of his humility, something my father greatly admired but generally lacked himself.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Ron Lovinger

April 2018

Joe was a year ahead of me at the University of Illinois and we were both members of the Alpha Roe Chi Honorary Society. Joe was like a big brother to me. Joe went to Penn for graduate school and I followed the next year and lived around the corner from Joe and Peter Kerr Walker in Powelton Village. I sometimes stopped over for conversation, advice, help with a project or needing a word or two of encouragement as Joe was always a source of inspiration and wisdom.

Joe has distinguished himself through his meticulous attention to the context, connectedness and continuity of the urban genre. His collected works are a tribute to our profession as he has created an ensemble of absolutely exquisite landscapes.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Dean Sheaffer

April 2018

In 1973, when I graduated with a BLA and moved to Chicago to find work, Joe Karr & Associates was a young, two-person firm. What attracted me to JKA was that much of the work Joe was doing was urban, including plazas, streetscape such as the Oak Park Mall, and other civic spaces.

The office was in a shared space in a converted warehouse, which also housed Harry Weese & Associates architects, in the warehouse district north of the Loop and the Chicago River. JKA occupied one corner of the upper floor with large windows admitting northern light and a view of the skyline punctuated by the John Hancock tower. For a period of months after a fire in the building disrupted the space on the floor below, dozens of architects were crammed in around us in the open floor space. Later the small staff of *Inland Architect* magazine, which Harry supported, was our neighbor. I found all of this interaction interesting and stimulating. Joe and I—and later other employees—spent a lot of time with architects, not only the HWA staff but also others from the Chicago area who were Joe's clients. During that time it seemed that most of the weekend parties I went to were in architects' homes, with the architects gathered together in one room near the bar talking shop while their spouses came and went.

I remember that Joe expressed a preference for projects that involved collaborating with architects whose work was generally considered to be significant. That usually meant contemporary buildings in a modern style, often employing innovative architectural approaches. I expect that this was a result of his recent experience in Kiley's office, where he had worked on projects with top architectural firms. However, some projects were post-modern buildings, some conversions of existing structures. Interior plantings were an area of expertise for Joe. Architects in the early 70s were featuring atriums in their designs, influenced by Roche Dinkaloo's recent Ford Foundation building in New York. At Kiley's office Joe had researched tropical plant material and put together the planting plans for the multi-level atrium at Ford Foundation. He really loved to work with interior plantings, which came along with a number of corporate and commercial office buildings. When those projects came to us Joe performed all that planting design himself.

Looking back, I am always impressed with the number of landscape projects that were completed and built by such a small office in my time there. In part it was made possible by the fact that Joe was not distracted from design and production by administrative duties. His arrangement with Weese allowed him to work as an independent division of HWA with all the bookkeeping, clerical and promotional support it offered. But more importantly, Joe was a confident designer with a broad portfolio of experience to draw on. It seemed to me that typically when he returned to the office after an initial meeting with a client and the architect, his design was roughed out on paper or at least nearly complete in his head. And Joe did not work late to meet a deadline. If he ever needed to put in long hours, I can't remember it. Nor did he expect his employees to work into the night.

When there were still only two of us in the office, I found that I worked extensively on nearly every project. During my initial employment I considered my role to be an extended internship, similar to that expected of young architects in Weese's office, but from the outset it was clear Joe expected more from me than just drafting construction documents. Joe gave me as much room as I wanted to contribute to

design development. On many projects I was on site observing construction. In my first months at JKA, for the new master plan of an existing suburban central park, I proposed the hydrological restoration of a bog and meanders in a stream that had previously been straightened. At that point I felt that I was already functioning as project manager.

In 1975 Joe hired two recent architecture graduates to help with the demands of a very large project that had come into the Weese office. It was an entire new town near Riyadh International Airport in Saudi Arabia. That was a turning point for JKA as well as for Tom and ----, both of whom went on to Harvard for MLA degrees and to new careers as landscape architects. The landscape of Saudi Arabia was a huge departure from the Midwestern landscapes I knew. It had more in common with Joe's work for sites in California and the Southwest that Joe had worked on. For me the Saudi project was day after day of working out the detailed grading plan for a community of 10,000. It was a huge puzzle to be solved, and I loved the challenge. Disappointingly, for security reasons we were never given the opportunity to visit the site either before or after construction.

Every day I looked forward to going into the office and to the projects Joe had on the boards. I also felt lucky to have him as an employer. Joe is so personable and considerate. Over time I saw a number of young landscape architects get their start at JKA, and I noticed how supportive he was—and continues to be all these years since we have moved on to other jobs or started our own offices. Although Joe had come to Chicago from Dan Kiley's office in the East, and I had worked for a time in New York and Chicago in magazine publishing, we had a background in common. Both of us had grown up in the same rural area in northwest Illinois, lived on farms, and attended the University of Illinois. We shared memories of some of the same landscape architecture teachers at U of I. I know with other employees he shared interests beyond the workplace, such as sports. Joe just made it easy to work for him. He cared about the work environment.

I was employed by Joe from 1974 to 1978, and then I returned to work there in 1986 for two more years. I was able to step right into project management. At that point the office was seven landscape architects. We continued to put out a large volume of work for a staff that size, all beautifully hand drawn. I brought our first computer, a MacPlus, and a laser printer into the office, initially just for word processing. We used our Mac to write and produce a landscape maintenance manual for IBM's Fishkill, New York campus. I don't think Joe was quite ready for computer drafting, but we knew the times were at a turning point for the technical capabilities of JKA and of the landscape architecture profession.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Philip Shipman

April 2018

I have just finished a 'phone call with Joe K, having apologized for not reaching on the preparation of a 'reflection'. My wife has been very ill for the last 5 months and daily hospital visits and other duties are leaving little time and energy. I regret this as Joe has been a long time buddy, although we have not met up in recent years. I will, however, jot down a very hasty snapshot of my professional opinion of Joe.

We studied together in U of Penn and both worked in Dan Kiley's office for 4 years (more for Joe?). In today's parlance he was what you would call a "very safe pair of hands". In memory he always seemed to be calm and was certainly meticulous in detailing both construction and planting works. I remember multi-colored acetate sheets being used to depict different, complex planting layers in such projects as Ford Foundation Building atrium and the stepped terraces of the Oakland Museum (way before computers). He was a great complement to Dan Kiley who could be brilliantly inspirational with extremely sketchy concepts, but then rapidly depart the scene and rely very much on project designers to produce workable schemes, interface with clients and contractors and be a credit to the reputation of the Dan Kiley "brand." Joe did that extremely well, often with a minimum of information, and I'm sure this experience was a great foundation to the development of Joe's successful practice in Chicago.

I wish you well with your series and I'm sorry I couldn't respond more fully.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Mark Stanley

April 2018

In December 2004, Joe Karr's peers in the Illinois chapter of ASLA gathered in Chicago to formally recognize his significant contribution to the profession of landscape architecture and the legacy of his singular career. Peter Schaudt and I spoke that evening, with each of us singing the praises of Joe in our own way.

Instead of trying to extol Joe's impressive achievements, I chose to share some personal reflections on my mentor and friend. After re-reading my original comments now in 2018, I feel they may be of some interest to the broader CLF audience. So, here is what I said then (with just a wee bit of editing and updating needed). Any sentiments expressed certainly reflect my feelings about Joe now as well.

The Artful Observer. Shortly after joining JKA, Joe and I were walking the IBM campus in Rochester MN in the dead of winter. We were documenting and assessing existing site conditions for our master planning project for the 600-acre campus. After about an hour I was so cold I could hardly put pencil to paper, and I think deep down both of us were seriously questioning our sanity. But we persevered and finished the task. In and of itself that is not noteworthy, but what is, is that Joe was certainly not merely looking around. He was seeing - synthesizing everything.

When we got back to the office, Joe had already formulated a loose, preliminary design concept organized around key features of the site. Subsequent design development would only confirm the overall soundness of his initial perceptions. Time after time through the years, Joe would impress me with this talent. Whether acquired through practice or endowed naturally, Joe's keen power of observation is truly remarkable.

Drawing = Communication. Joe Karr's office had a well-established reputation for the high quality of its landscape drawings back when drawings were produced by hand, using pencils, rapidographs, markers, paper, vellum and mylar. So when Joe offered me a job in October 1984 I was eager to accept for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that I like to draw. When I came on board, the office drawing style was exemplified by the work of Charlie Gott, a gifted draftsman *par excellence*. Charlie patiently helped me learn.

In the latter half of the 1980s JKA began receiving landscape architecture commissions for corporate and institutional campuses locally and around the USA. Our diligent design team produced completely hand-drawn construction documents in support of those projects. The set for Ameritech Center was particularly memorable: forty or so drawings on 36"x48" sheets, each meticulously drawn.

Even now in the era of CAD ubiquity, what can't be dismissed about the "Joe Karr drawing style" is what the drawings were fundamentally all about. To be sure they were beautifully drawn, but what was much more important was how well they communicated complex aesthetic effects and details accurately and concisely. Over the years, contractors would often

call to say that our drawings had really helped them to understand the intent of our designs and to know what their responsibilities were going to be.

Loyal Chicago Cubs Fan. Joe, I found out quickly, is a hardcore Cubs fan. Over the years Joe would regale me with trivia and minutiae about Cubs teams of old that only a diehard fan would possibly know. On occasion, when work was caught up or could be put on hold for the rest of the day, we would catch the el train to Wrigley Field for an afternoon game. Those were great times for Joe and all of us as well.

I began working at JKA on the day after the Cubs' heartbreaking loss in the 1984 National League Championship Series. As it turned out, Joe would have to "wait 'til next year" for another 32 years before the Cubs finally won the 2016 World Series. At long last.

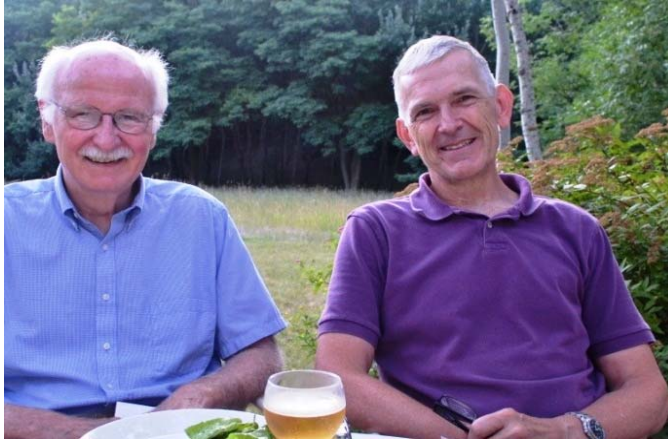
Simple, Strong Design. I have occasionally heard someone say, "Oh, yeah, Joe Karr -- isn't he the one who uses all that spirea?" My reply would be that Joe Karr designs with an intentionally limited palette of plant materials that can be effectively employed to create spaces. And isn't creating spaces the very heart of landscape architecture? Having said that, our inside joke in the office was wishing we had a nickel for every spirea shrub we specified over the years. Heck, I would have been happy with 3 cents per!

Joe continually emphasized design simplicity. Simple, in the best sense of the word — elegant, appropriate, restrained. Without a doubt, Joe Karr is a master of modern landscape architecture.

Joe's rigorous adherence to time-tested landscape design principles was the bedrock of our practice. Because his design approach was so well grounded, Joe Karr's body of work is not a catalog of short-lived trends, fashions or fads. It is a remarkably rich tapestry of consistent design excellence. I am proud to have played my very small part in the process.

Consummate Professional. Joe Karr is a credit to our profession. His legacy of solid creative work remains a benchmark for future generations of practitioners. We landscape architects are indebted to him for raising the bar and never letting it drop.

Beloved Mentor. JKA alums benefited greatly from Joe's generous mentoring. When someone left the firm, he or she invariably took away a fuller, more complete skill set. Personally, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Joe and learn from him. However, what I cherish most about knowing him all these years is being his friend.



Joe Karr and Mark Stanley, July 2011



Joe and Kaisu Karr, with Lisa Carlson (Mark's wife, center) / July 2011

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Joe Stichter

April 2018

Joe Karr always makes it a point to freely help people when they ask him questions about his landscape architectural work experiences. He does not keep this information for himself or for his office use only, Joe shares information. He is also able to easily “talk with” people. He does not “talk at” people.

His depth of knowledge in planting requirements and many other design issues learned from the many different project types he has worked on such as: interior gardens, roof gardens, corporate headquarters, housing projects, urban designs and many others.

We met in January 1963 when we were working for the National Park Service in their Philadelphia office. We had common interests in practicing sketching, traveling about seeing the new architectural work in the Philadelphia Area. Joe left for Dan Kiley’s office in the late spring, and I left in December for Europe and settled in Stockholm Sweden working for a landscape architect. We kept in touch with letters describing our experiences. Joe and Kaisu, his Finnish wife, visited me in Stockholm. I settled in Cambridge, Ma. Joe settled in the Chicago area. We would do surprise “drop in” overnight visits to each other’s homes when we flew over their respective cities. My wife, Sharon and I always enjoy his visits. A few years ago we both visited Joe and Kaisu in Chicago. Sometimes in our get togethers we would even help fill in plaster cracks with spackle in each other’s apartments when needed or just go out for a walk and dinner and catch up on what is happening.

Now we are both retired, and we still keep in frequent touch. Joe is one of my oldest and best friends.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Ian Tyndall

April 2018

Joe was the first American I met when I arrived in Philadelphia during the early '60s. Peter Ker Walker had invited me to stay for a few weeks in an apartment he shared with Michael Laurie and an American friend, Joe Karr. All three were students in Ian McHarg's program at Penn. The apartment was on a leafy street in West Philadelphia within walking distance of the School of Fine Arts and big enough that we didn't get in one another's way too much.

Joe was working at the N.P.S. for the summer break and while we were just getting to know one another he took me out for dinner one evening. We went to Tad's Steak House, downtown on Market Street. It has gone by now, but it was then a well known chain where a steak dinner with a baked potato and salad came to \$1.09. This was truly the land of plenty. As we ate, Joe told me how the midwest is the breadbasket of the entire country and what it was like growing up as the son of a farmer. It was interesting and as he explained the regional differences it was clear that he was a Midwesterner first, then an American. He was living with three Scotsmen who weren't shy about celebrating their homeland and I figured that the steak dinner was Joe's quiet way of ensuring I knew that the midwest too had its own strengths and virtues.

Some years later, I recalled that evening, when Joe announced his planned return to Illinois. He seemed instinctively to know he was part of the midwest's proud design regionalism. It was where he was destined to make a durable impression on its sometimes daunting environment. And he has, splendidly.

Given Joe's modesty, we have never talked about his work since our days at Dan Kiley's Vermont office. My knowledge of his design work has been gleaned entirely from the late Peter Schaudt's TCLF essay and his archive at the Art Institute of Chicago. Both are excellent and have made writing this recollection a fun assignment. Congratulations Joe, you are a great friend.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Peter Ker Walker

April 2018

My Friend Joe Karr:

From our first days at Penn. Joe Karr and I were roommates and close friends ever since – keeping in touch every two weeks.

For Joe it must've been a bit of a culture shock while at Penn, to find himself surrounded by so many European students, mainly British. We joke that he became an "honorary Scotsman" having been taken immediately under the wing of Michael Laurie, Ian Tyndall and myself. I recall that at my first Thanksgiving Dinner 1960, Joe was the only American present. Our class at Penn was a small one, we did things as a group socializing, partying, camping and working together on class projects.

During the summer break at Penn in 1961, Joe invited me to spend a couple of weeks on the family farm in Rockford, Illinois. The mid-west was a new experience for me - a flat landscape, a farm consisting of lots of pigs and one cat. Days were spent in the fields, cutting thistles – which I reminded Joe was the Scottish National flower. Evening treats were a drive to the local A&P Root Beer stand. For Joe to come to Vermont must have been a tremendous landscape experience.

After Penn., Philip Shipman and I, already at the Office of Dan Kiley, invited Joe to join us in Vermont. It has been said that we, a group of Penn. graduates, were at a "holiday camp in Vermont." Work was fitted in between mornings skiing, volley ball at lunchtime and in summer, after a late night of work, sleeping overnight on the rocks adjacent to the office, on the shore of Lake Champlain. Socializing often consisted of office parties with dancing to Scottish Country music and Barbecues on the beach by the office. We worked hard and played hard.

As a team we helped each other on the various office projects. Joe was lead designer responsible for Oakland Museum, the Ford Foundation and the Chicago Art Institute. For each of these significant projects Joe demonstrated thorough research of plant materials for California and indoor planting. Upon installation of the plants Joe struck up an excellent rapport with the Landscape Contractors.

I was sad to see Joe leave Vermont but, for him, the return to the Mid-west was a unique opportunity offered by Harry Weese, a well-known Chicago Architect. Joe established a highly respected practice, which is testimony to Joe's characteristic thoroughness, precision and workman-like ability in design and plant knowledge. Further, he established a good relationship with his clients, consultants and nursery suppliers.

Joe is a great guy – a dedicated longtime friend and a credit to the Landscape Architectural Profession.

Reflections on Office of Dan Kiley: Joe Karr by Ben and Cindy Weese

April 2018

We have benefited from Joe's professional expertise and his friendship for just over 50 years. His work first came to Ben and Harry's attention when they were collaborating with Dan Kiley on a number of projects in the 1960's. Joe's abilities were evident in design & execution of the Oakland Museum gardens and the Ford Foundation atrium. Our lives, personal and professional, have been intertwined ever since.

In 1967 on our way to see Expo 67 we stopped in Burlington and spent time with Dan & Ann. We also had lunch with Joe and Kaisu and a very young Kristo – at the end of which Ben offered Joe a place at Harry Weese & Associates. He would do projects for the firm and also be able to work with others. He accepted, they moved and the rest is our joint history! Both Ben & I have worked with Joe in Chicago, our children have grown up together and we have summer houses in the same historic village on Lake Michigan.

We admire his design skills and work ethic and prodigious knowledge of plant material – many will comment on his professional work I know. We have particular appreciation for his work in a non urban environment specifically in the aforementioned Michigan village.

In the 1970s Joe & Kaisu bought a lot on the edge of town and moved an old farmhouse onto it; they've spent time there in the summer ever since.

The land is a flat piece facing east (perhaps a former farm field?) along a local road. It backs up to a steep dune perhaps 50 feet high covered with poplar trees. When ruffled by a breeze, the leaves turn their underside and the hillside turns from green to silver. The dune ultimately leads one to the shore of Lake Michigan to the west.

When Joe began there was nothing but grass on the flat piece. He began along the road by planting bare root a row of fir trees obtained from a local farmer. They have since grown to majestic specimens.

Around the house is an irregular glade of aspen underplanted with deer-resistant (until recently!) spirea – it provides dappled shade on the outdoor deck – and perhaps reminds Kaisu of her native Finland. The rest leading back to the dune is a grassy meadow which Joe maintains meticulously. The entire composition has been carefully thought out but looks natural & effortless. It is a fine example of how to add to a landscape in a symbiotic way - keeping important parts and enhancing them with additions.

There are lessons to be learned here!