

**The Cultural Landscape Foundation®**

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**NICHOLAS QUENNEL**

**ORAL HISTORY**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

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**Interviews Conducted**

**October 7-9, 2013**

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## **The Nicholas Quennell Oral History Interview Transcript**

*A three-day interview with Nicholas Quennell was conducted by Charles Birnbaum in the Quennell Rothschild & Partners office in New York City. Included in this transcript is an interview with Quennell Rothschild & Partners co-founder, Peter Rothschild, and partners, Mark Bunnell, Andrew Moore, and Alison Shipley. For video excerpts from this oral history visit: <http://bit.ly/1LiS8nO>*

## **PRELUDE**

QUENNEL: Hi, I'm Nicholas Quennell. I'm a landscape architect and I'm a partner in the firm of Quennell Rothschild and Partners. We're here in our offices in the Chelsea district of Manhattan, where we've been for a number of years, but are not going to be here very much longer. Unfortunately the neighborhood has improved so much that we can no longer afford the rent, so we'll be moving downtown in a few months' time. But it's been a wonderful place to be for all these many years.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

### **Childhood**

### **Growing Up in England**

### ***The War Years***

I was born in London, in England, in September 1935. At the outbreak of war in 1940, we had to move away from London. My father's business moved out to get away from the bombing and so we moved to the West Country to a village outside Cheltenham. Cheltenham was a very beautiful 19<sup>th</sup> century spa town, which was very fashionable in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and had fallen slightly on hard times but it still had certain elements to it. We lived in the country in a little village. I spent most of my childhood running around what was called Cleeve Hill.

Little villages like the one we lived in [were] a cluster of houses; a funny mixture of quite old, probably 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century stone cottages and 19<sup>th</sup> century houses that were almost certainly built [for] people who worked down in the town of Cheltenham, which was quite a busy and successful commercial city. Some people obviously even then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century liked to live outside of town, so they built a number of these houses. We lived in several of them because during the war years it was very hard to get a permanent place to live. You would move in and then six months later the owner of the house would say, "Sorry, my son's coming out of the army. He needs the house. You'll have to leave." So, we moved from one cottage to another and some pretty awful environments. It was an interesting experience. And the fear of being killed at any moment by bombs, because we used to watch the bombs dropping on the nearby cities from up where we were, up on the hills.

### ***Cleeve Hill***

The landscape consisted of probably 10 square miles of rolling grassland. It was sheep grazing land and had been for many hundreds of years. It was common land, which

meant that anybody could graze their sheep on it, interspersed with small wood lots, which probably were used for wood for burning in fireplaces. Of course the woods were scary to us as kids, but we used to play in them because they were also where you could escape and pretend; play all sorts of games.

The woods were definitely counter to the open countryside and a dramatic shift. You were either in deep woods or you were out in this countryside. There was no tree-lined promenades or anything of that kind. That was a much more urban experience. I have retained that love of that kind of landscape, [which] extended later into appreciating Capability Brown and the pastoral landscape designers who were creating self-consciously creating a landscape of their own imagining.

All during that time I commuted into the town of Cheltenham to go to school. I was very glad to come back to London when the war ended. The school that I'd been to in Cheltenham, which is in the country, was absolutely dreadful. It was one of those classic 19<sup>th</sup> century [schools]. There was lots of stupid discipline and bad teaching.

### ***Returning to London***

At the end of World War II my father's firm moved to back to where it had always been in the City of London and of course we moved along with it. [W]e all moved back to London to the house that I had actually been born in, a very beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> century house in Hampstead, which is one of the nicer parts of London high up on the hill. My parents were shocked and astounded to find that the woman who had been living in the house during the war had left a complete pig sty. She obviously had never cleaned the house, and my parents

didn't want me to even stay in the house one night because they were afraid I would catch some dreadful disease. So, I was shipped off.

### ***Devon***

I was born with a birth defect, which had to be operated on in my first few weeks of my life and saved my life. The nurse, [who] had taken care of me and then [became] friends with my parents, had opened up a home for children who had been discharged from [the] hospital, a recuperation home, in a very beautiful part of Devon, right by the sea. I went with this woman and her girlfriend, or partner, to open up this recuperation home for kids. [At nine-years-old], I was the oldest kid there, and I was also the only healthy one. So I ended up becoming a sort of nursemaid to these various kids, some of whom were very sad; kids who had polio and other dire problems. We used to take them to the beach, to the seashore, and taught them to swim and played with them in the grounds. That was fun and that was a wonderful experience for my sort of childhood, early adolescence. I spent three months, I think it was, living in that house and helping the kids; taking the kids down to the beach to swim. I was a wonderful experience and I enjoyed it. Then I came back to London because by that time my parents had cleaned up the house and made it habitable again, and started in school that fall, the school that I stayed in for the rest of my school years.

### ***Hampstead Heath***

In London we lived near Hampstead Heath, which had been, I think, traditionally a grazing land when people still had sheep or cows. It was no longer that, but it had been

maintained as public open space and fought over for a long time because there were always threats to build on it. It included a very beautiful stately home, Kenwood House, which had been turned into a museum and it was open to the public. The grounds of Kenwood, if they weren't designed by Capability Brown<sup>1</sup>, they could well have been, because the grounds were a very self-consciously pastoral landscape with a pond and woods and everything was very much picturesque and designed to be seen as a series of paintings. I think that influenced me significantly; I loved that. Even as a child I must have realized that that was a man-made environment. It wasn't nature, whereas much of the rest of Hampstead Heath could have been just a natural landscape that had been turned into open space.

### ***Family***

My father was an interesting man. He was the only boy in a large family of girls. Born in 1890, so he was already 45 when I was born. He had served in World War I, but even before the war, I think at the age of 15, he went to work for this investment banking firm because he felt he needed a steady job. So, he never went to college. He had no further education; he was self-taught. He worked for this company, became what is called the company secretary, which is one level below the board of directors, for many, many years. I think [he] probably hated it and felt that he had not fulfilled his wishes. He would have loved to be an actor. He was an amateur actor on the stage in the '20s and '30s.

Walking was his favorite occupation. He would walk for miles and miles in the country and then back in London. He'd walk home from his office, which was probably a six-mile, seven-mile walk frequently. And then walking, dragging us kicking and screaming

down these long walks on Hampstead Heath. I came to love it even though I protested probably because he was taking me away from my more anal compulsive occupations of printing and doing my Jingo comic. [Today], I like to walk. I generally ride my bike to work, but that's because it's a nice quick short [ride] and gives me a little more vigorous exercise than walking, but I do like to walk.

### ***The Influence of Acting***

My mother had to fulfill all those dreams and aspirations. She was on the stage for many years, from about 1918 until my sister was born in 1930. [S]he was on the London stage in music halls and plays. I think she would have liked to break into movies. There was one very funny story. Our neighbors, who were a very lovely couple, and their daughter, were very close friends with my parents and they were having a party one night and my mother was invited. She showed up looking like a complete tart with lots of makeup. Nobody recognized her; she was completely unrecognizable. I still have that photograph. I wouldn't have recognized her from it either. Then halfway through the evening she slipped away and came back as the char lady, and looking about 20 years older, sagging breasts and an apron and so forth. Nobody knew it was the same woman. She and our neighbors got a big laugh out of that. It was a good example of her acting skills.

One of my mother's closest friends, who became my godfather, continued to act almost until he died, in many movies over the years back in the '40s and '50s. His name [was] J. Hubert Leslie. He was just a wonderful man. He used to come and visit with us. He had a tragic tragedy. He'd had a son who had been killed in a car accident or something

quite young, so I became his almost surrogate son. He introduced [me] into the world of acting. I started out in school plays, Ariel in *The Tempest*, but moved from that into doing a lot of broadcast work. I was on broadcasting for what were called the *Schools' Programs*, which were these ridiculous re-enactments of going back in history to the pyramids with my magic uncle on a flying carpet or whatever it was. That was a lot of fun, and I did that for several years until my voice broke and I was on the trash heap.

## **Formative Education**

### **An Early Interest in Art**

#### ***Jingo, a Comic Book***

Certainly as a child and growing up as a teenager, all my interests were on two dimensional art. I liked to draw from a very early age. When I was about 11 or 12, I thought it would be fun to do a comic book, because comic books were a favorite form of enjoyment and recreation. English comic books are very different from American comic books, and they tend to be truly, some of them, truly comic. I mean they had humorous aspects to them. [S]o I decided it would be fun to create my own comic book. I came up with the name *Jingo*, not realizing that *Jingo* had a second meaning of being a war-monger. But it had a nice ring to it.

I started the *Jingo* comic and I probably produced 10 or 15 of them. They would get distributed, circulated amongst all my parents' poor fiends who had to read them and return them and pay me some outrageous amount of money like sixpence for a week. I would rent it out to friends and they would pay a nominal rental fee and then they would

return it and I would send it to somebody else. I probably had a circulation of maybe 10 people. Unfortunately, the only one I have left is the Jingo album, which is quite thick and it's still quite amusing to look at.

### ***Printing Press***

[I remember later] moving, segueing from that into letter press printing, which became somewhat of an obsessive hobby, doing really exciting things like business cards for all my parents' friend, letterhead—really exciting stuff. I was never able to really carry out my goals or my dreams of what having a printing press could mean because the technology turned out to be far more intimidating, not to mention the tedium of setting type by hand, which is something nobody should ever have to do. But I enjoyed it and I spent, it occupied many, many hours of my teenage years, really until I went to architecture school.

My memory of why I did [artistic] things was because they were fun to do. The fact that they could also make me a little money was sort of a side benefit, but that wasn't the primary reason for doing them. I did the comic books because I liked to draw comic book. I did the printing because I like to print. And if I ended up printing tedious letterheads for all parents' friends, that was fine. And if they paid me that was nice, but it wasn't the be all and end all.

### **Early Travels**

I was dragged to many, many museums in Europe. My parents took me to France when I was quite young and we ended going to the Louvre; then later, in Italy, to all the

great museums, not to mention every God damn church and cathedral that my father could find, which we would roll our eyes and say, “Oh, not another church.” I probably was a teenager, maybe 14 or 15. I think the first time I went to France with my parents I was about 13, but that was just to a little seaside town. Then we went to Paris the following year. Meanwhile I'd fallen in love with this little French girl, which was great for my French because I had to learn French in order to communicate. It was a very non-productive love affair in every other respect. She was only about 14; I think it was probably appropriate.

## **School in London**

### ***Junior School Memories***

It was called the University College School and it had had a fairly radical beginning—probably in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, I think, when it was founded; it didn't go back hundreds of years like some of the more classic English public schools. It was a boys' school; I think now its co-ed, but in those days it was certainly strictly for boys. It had a junior school, which was in a totally separate building a mile away from the main school. I started out in the junior school, and then I graduated from there and went to the senior school, which was still only maybe a mile from where we lived. It was a nice walk or a bike ride.

### ***The Hymns***

It was a wonderful school. It had been created as one of the first public schools—and you know, public school in England means private school—to admit Jews, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century [when the school was founded] was fairly radical, and it had maintained that

tradition of being very open to all who came. Every morning we would start out with hymns, Christian hymns, even though it was a multi-denominational group of students. I think the Orthodox Jews had their own services separately, but the rest of us had to sit in assembly and log in that we were there, and also sing hymns. Every morning, they'd put up a sign, which would say which hymns from the hymn book were going to be sung; the numbers. The headmaster said a few prayers and we went off to class.

The headmaster was a rather eccentric, but lovable man. I had this idea of starting a gambling pool on which hymns were going to be sung. I went to the headmaster to ask him if he would approve. He thought it was a great idea because he thought it [would make] the kids more interested in the hymns that were being sung. Him being a rather radical and eccentric gentleman, he said, "Fine."

I, by this time, had become an avid printer. Having moved from [the] Jingo comic to more money-making operations, I had a letter printing press with quite a lot of typefaces. I printed the forms for the hymn pools and the rules, which were very strict and detailed, and started hawking them around the school with great success, including the entire kitchen staff of the cafeteria who all bought in. Everything was going fine and people were winning money and getting interested in the hymns. Then somebody tipped off one of the more conservative newspapers. I think it was the Daily Telegraph. The story came out [that] the headmaster [was] creating gambling around the hymns, blah blah blah. All hell broke loose.

The headmaster was actually threatened with possibly having to resign because the scandal just grew and grew. There are small mercies: Fortunately for all of us, including him, the King died, conveniently, and no newspapers were published, I think, for a week to

recognize the death of the King. The story died and it never reappeared, so the headmaster's career was saved by the King dying.

### ***Choosing Art Sixth Form***

In English public schools, I don't know whether they're all like this, but in the school I went to, the last year in school you tended to specialize depending on where you were heading afterwards. So if you were planning on going to university and studying classics, you would go into the classics sixth [form] and study Latin and Greek for a year; if you were going into sciences, you would go into the science class and concentrate on science. I wanted to go to art school or architecture school. I was a little ambivalent about which, but my plan initially was to go to art school. That's what I really wanted to do, and I wanted to become a commercial artist and design posters and so forth. So, I went into the art sixth. We obviously had to keep up other classes because we had to take our final exam which covered everything: math and science and Latin, my goodness, which I've conveniently forgotten. But art was really my major and that's what I did. I had a very good art teacher who was a lot of fun.

### ***Early Architectural Influences***

Along the way in that last year I realized that, I think I got cold feet, for better or worse, [and thought] maybe I would be better off going into a more stable profession. Several of my parents' friends were architects and they urged me to go to architecture school, which is what I ended up doing. I grew up surrounded by architects, for better or

worse. My parents' neighbors, who [were] an older [couple]; the father was an older architect, semi-retired. He'd had a practice of mostly residential, but quite a lot of modest public housing in rural areas, and some of it very, very nice. He was a strict traditionalist, but his daughter who was one of my closest, dearest friends and even though she was a lot older than me, we felt like contemporaries to one another. She had gone to the AA [Architectural Association], where I went myself, and then ended up practicing as a planner. She never practiced as an architect. She I guess went on to planning school and ended up being a town planner for a number of communities for many, many years. She was a very, very good friend and a mentor.

## **Architectural Beginnings**

### **The Architectural Association**

The AA, the Architectural Association, was the best architect school in England at that time and had been the more radical [and] advanced back in the '30s and '40s when some of the best architects like Maxwell Fry and people who taught there really were the leading modern architects of the period. I had a great time [during my] five years of architecture school. That's what I thought I was going to be doing for the rest of my life.

### ***Modernism***

*INTERVIEWER: Were there buildings or spaces that you visited during that time that represented the birth of modernism?*

Corbusier was the hot thing. Of course we all had to make our pilgrimage to Ronchamp, the chapel, as well the Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles, which was that great apartment building with the duplex apartments which became the model for many, many apartment buildings probably all over the world. But certainly in England at that time there were many imitators. [The trip] convinced me that [Corbusier] was a great thinker and a wonderful architect. His buildings were actually beautiful and wonderful to be in. He wasn't just a theoretician who wrote books.

Peter Shephard actually was a friend of the family. The funny thing is, I can remember him as a man, but I don't remember much about his architecture except that I think it was not uninteresting, but I don't really remember much about it. I [also] met [town planner, Frederick Gibberd and knew of his work, but again he was not somebody that stands out vividly in my memory. I went to see the new towns that he'd planned, but again, it was like a pilgrimage. You had to go to the new towns even though when you got there you said, "What the hell?" I'm not sure I'd want to live here, but they were interesting. They had their place definitely.

*INTERVIEWER: Were there any people during that period that you really feel was a great connection or influence?*

There were a few. A historian called Robert Furneaux-Jordan was very inspiring and gave lectures on the history of architecture, which was interesting. Then one of my studio teachers was an architect [named] Leonard Manasseh. He was a Modernist architect, a very lovely man; charming and funny and a very good teacher. When I graduated I went to work

for him. That was a lucky break because he just happened to be hiring just at the time I graduated.

### ***Working for Manasseh***

After I'd finished school I went to work first for this great architect, Leonard Manasseh. Leonard was my second year teacher, I think. He ran the studio, and he was a very dynamic figure. He and his partner both taught, Ian Baker. They were very, very different from one another. Leonard was the star and glamorous and colorful, and Ian was sort of more of a worker, but he was also a very, very sweet man and both very good architects. Leonard had made his name designing a building for the Festival of Britain in 1951. It was a big event and it made a lot of architects' names because a lot of the young architects were hired to design pavilions for that festival, fair. That really got Leonard started. By the time I came to the office he had an established practice.

### ***Highgate***

I went to the office to work there and almost immediately started work on his own house in Highgate and a house for a private client on the adjacent piece of property. I think he [had] owned both lots and sold one of them to this client. The site, which was adjacent to the Highgate Cemetery, is a quite famous 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery with some pretty famous people. I think Karl Marx is buried there, I'm pretty sure. Anyway, there's some pretty famous people in that cemetery and it's very bucolic and quite beautiful. People go for walks there. So, it was a lovely setting. Highgate village itself is an old village that's

remained; it's been swallowed up by London but it still has a distinct village character. Small streets and shops, and so forth. So, it was a very nice setting for a new house to be built.

I don't remember the specifics, but I think they received approval to build the house before I started work there. I don't think I was part of the process of getting approvals, but the houses were not that radical. They had pitched roofs. They weren't in-your-face modern to the point where they might have raised eyebrows. So, I think they probably got approved through the local planning process relatively easily. That might be wrong because I wasn't around when all of that happened. Everything was in place by the time I can on board.

I designed and worked on his own house and saw it through construction, so it was a great experience to go from the initial sketches. He designed it obviously; it was his house, but I did almost all the working drawings, and then I saw it through construction. That was a great break into the profession. It was a great experience for somebody straight out of school because I got to [see] the whole thing from beginning to end. I finished the house before I left and went on to my next job.

### ***Early Work on Public Projects***

I was offered [work] at the London County Council in their housing division. A good friend of ours', my parents', was a senior architect there, and I went to work in her division. She immediately gave me a couple of things to work on: housing projects and also a little maintenance building, which I was able to do absolutely from start to finish, which was great. It was not a wonderful building, but it was a great experience because I did all the working drawings and the specifications and I saw it through construction. The last time I

saw it, which was not that many years ago, it was still there. I couldn't believe it hadn't been torn down, but it was a decent little building. It was just a very good experience to go through from soup to nuts with designing and seeing a building built.

## **Early Experiences in America**

### **Coming to America**

About that time I met this woman. She was a friend of a friend of my sister's, who'd come over to England to work. She worked in a place where children with disabilities of one kind or another were. She worked there for several years and we became involved. Then, when she moved back to New York, I thought it would be fun to move; not with her necessarily, but [to] take that opportunity to come to the States and have a look see, because I'd always been intrigued by it. We had various friends, some of whom had lived in the States, so I'd been exposed to people who had come here over the years. It seemed like a good place to come just for a look. I came for a year and I've been here ever since with one brief three-month interlude back in England in the middle there.

### ***New York City***

So, in 1961, I decided to quit the job I was in, which had become a little bit of dead end, and try my hand at coming to the United States. This girlfriend, Barbara, encouraged me to do that. She was going back to the States, and I thought this was an opportune moment. I went to the American consulate and applied for a visa [so] that I could stay, so I wouldn't just be going on a visitor's visa. In those days the British quota, the English quota,

was never filled. So, it was a shoo-in. I didn't have to do anything to get a visa that allowed me to ultimately become a citizen.

I came to the States with that work visa which meant I could get a job. I found New York very, very exciting. I mean, to come off the boat and this girlfriend immediately took me on a tour of the West Village, and we went to various bars, some of which were quite famous at the time. Then [we] stayed in her apartment in the Village for a while. I just thought that was extraordinary. I was not really terribly interested in parks; I had worked almost exclusively on buildings and, particularly, public housing, so when I came here I was interested in the housing stock. I had no idea that New York City [had] this kind of 19<sup>th</sup> century character and still does. I wasn't aware of lofts at that time; they were something that was off in the future, but just being exposed to this rent-controlled apartment in the West Village for \$40 a month or whatever it was, was quite something. I developed [an] immediate feeling for New York even though I then moved off to Boston for a while. I sensed, I think, that I would come back; this is where I wanted to live.

### **Working in Cambridge**

I moved to Cambridge and moved in with this old school friend and his roommate. The three of us lived in this rather ramshackle apartment in Cambridge and I went to work for Josep Lluís Sert; Sert, Jackson & Gourley as I think it was called. He was the dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Design at that time and he had a very successful practice with a lot of work in Europe as well as in the States. So I went to work there and got great experience. He was quite a character. [He] was charming and he was not a hard task

master, but he had very, very firm ideas about the buildings he designed and so there was not a great deal of room for creativity. He was, “Do this, do that. Get it drawn and then we'll get it built.” [But] that ran out of steam as so many jobs in architects' offices tend to: “Oh sorry, that job's over. You're on the trash heap.” The last to come is the first to go, so I was out on the street. I was quite happy to move on to this other firm where it was a much more relaxed atmosphere.

I luckily landed a job with an architect who [worked] as a sort of developer as well as architect for a new office building going up in downtown Boston. I worked on that doing the usual exciting things that junior staff do like door schedules and toilet schedules and all the other boring stuff that has to do into a high-rise building. But it was a good experience and it was a very nice firm, very amiable.

[Boston] certainly was [modernist], which is pretty extraordinary when you think how deeply entrenched in the past Bostonian culture is, but Cambridge, and particularly, probably even more MIT than Harvard. Harvard still had its classical trappings, but MIT was the sort of hot, new-thinking kind of place. I did have friends who went to school there so there was some exposure to the MIT culture.

### ***Sandy Daley***

While I was [in Boston] I met the woman, [Sandy Daley], who later became my girlfriend. She was working for a design store called Design Research which was quite famous at its time. It was one of the first places to sell modern Marimekko dresses and modern furniture and modern kitchenware and that sort of thing. It was a really wonderful

store. It was a sort of funkier old, but nice, old building. It had been modernized and had been brought into the contemporary feel because of the people who ran it, the architects who created that store. [It was] started to show off contemporary design and contemporary culture in a dramatic way. It [was] very trendy for that time and I think, even now, if you could go back in time and see it, you'd say, "This place is pretty hot." The woman I became involved with worked there. She wore these Marimekko dresses and looked great. All the women who worked there were very stylish and young and sexy. It was a pretty hot place. A lot of us hung out there I think, not just to buy the furniture or buy the plates, but because it was sort of a place to see and be seen.

Sandy Daley; Renée is her middle name, but she never really used it. She had studied art at Cranbrook, I believe it was; [she] was quite a good sculptor working in metal, welded metal. Then [she] married a fellow student and had moved to Boston and was working at Design Research. I think [she] realized fairly rapidly that the marriage was a big mistake and wanted out. We met through my going to the store to buy Christmas gifts for my family and almost immediately fell in love. I shouldn't brag about this but she did leave her husband and moved in with me, and I think it was the right move for her because it didn't sound like it was a very happy marriage. So she and I moved in together. We had to go out and buy all the welding equipment so she could pursue this career, but she never did any more welding, which was so sad; we got interested in art and then she decided she really needed to go back to school.

### **San Francisco in the 1960s**

[Sandy] got accepted at the California College of Arts and Crafts. We ended up in San Francisco just because [that is] where you had to go when you went West; you couldn't stop. Even though we stopped briefly in Reno [Nevada], that was just a layover. She needed to get a divorce, so we had to stop in Reno. We [stayed] for six weeks and I got a job in this dreadful firm that designed casinos, but it kept us out of the poor house for a few weeks. She got her divorce and then we moved on to California and that's where I started working for Lawrence Halprin.

### **Working for Lawrence Halprin**

Coming to the Bay Area, it was a little scary because I didn't have any connections or very few connections there. [I] had a few English friends of friends, and I did contact them. It was they who said I should stop in and see Lawrence Halprin because he did have a way of hiring architects, and particularly English architects. I did try other places to work in an architect's office first and just drew a blank. There was absolutely nothing, nothing happening. So, I said, "All right, well, I guess I'll go and check out this Lawrence Halprin guy." So, I made an appointment to meet him. It was extraordinary; I remember walking into the space and thinking, "Wow, this is what architects' office should look like." Not these nasty little pokey holes that I've been in in every other [job], including Sert's office, which was all right but it was just a modest little office space with a bunch of desks. But you walked into Halprin's office and you saw views out to the water. You had that wonderful deck where everybody used to sit at lunch time. And then you had the martinis on Friday evenings.

[On that first day] I walked in his office and showed [him] my portfolio, which had absolutely nothing to do with landscape architecture, except I think I'd worked on one little park when I worked for the [London County Council], but it was nothing worth talking about. It mostly had probably working drawings for toilet cubicles or whatever was done in the last job I had. He just handed me a pencil and said, "Here's a pencil. Start tomorrow." That was his style, so I literally started work there immediately. My first project was sort of the aftermath of the Seattle World's Fair, which had closed that fall. That didn't last very long, and I think I made [a couple] of trips up to Seattle. It was not uninteresting. There was some things to be done there with the site to turn it into a park, keeping a lot of the residual bits and pieces of the fair, including the Space Needle.

### ***Ghirardelli Square***

Then Ghirardelli Square landed in Halprin's lap. It was through the architects Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, whose office was on the floor below ours on Montgomery Street. Halprin said, "Well, this looks like a job for you, and it has a bit of architecture in it."

I started on [Ghirardelli Square] from scratch and came up with this idea of stepping terraces down the hill on top of the underground garage and using water as a major feature. Don Carter, who was one of Halprin's partners, was terrific and we worked together developing that. The thing that I had the most fun with was the lighting because there was this wonderful sign on the roof of the factory building; it had been the Ghirardelli Chocolate Factory. It's where they made chocolate until fairly recently before; I guess it had closed a few months before we started work there. Up on the roof was this huge sign that

said, "Ghirardelli." Everybody said, "Yeah, we're going to tear that down." I said, "Why would you want to tear that down? It's the most wonderful thing. You should restore it." I finally convinced them that we should restore the Ghirardelli sign, which included putting all the little light bulbs back in and rewiring them, and that became the sort of symbol of Ghirardelli Square and, still, I think is an important symbol for that part of town.

I think [re-envisioning the space] certainly was a radical idea, but the radical idea I think stemmed from the developer, from [William] Roth himself, who had this idea of taking a 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial building and turning it into something contemporary, but definitely recognizing its past and its importance architecturally. Then the plaza itself, we created these stepped plazas that went down the hill on top of the underground parking garage that was below grade. It included various water features and fountains and so forth. [We planted] trees in tree boxes, but buried the boxes so that the top of them was flush with the paving, which I really thought was very important. I didn't want the trees to look as if they were sitting in pots. I wanted them to look like they were growing out of the ground.

[I]t was a logical amalgam of modern thinking with the underground garage and stepping down the hill [to] the new building they built at the bottom of the hill that faced the bay; then restoring the factory building itself and turning it into a commercial operation. The sign was just a little extra that we threw in for good measure. But I think ultimately they were very glad they hadn't torn the sign down because it became an important sort of symbol both of the place, but also a symbol of what it means to restore a building and maintain its historic character. That's how Ghirardelli Square ended up. The last time I was there it looked pretty good still.

I think there is a real link between what happened at Ghirardelli Square and what happened later at Times Square in that they were places that had symbolic importance. Ghirardelli had been an important commercial center for the making of chocolate. It wasn't ever thought of when it was built, obviously to be a shopping center, but the fact that where it was located right on the water and the original building that still [has] this wonderful architectural quality just lent itself to be turned into something that became a festive place and a place that people would want to go to and gather and celebrate. That thinking probably inspired me or encouraged me to rethink Times Square in a similar way when I was on the Municipal Art Society board and we had got wind that Times Square was going to vanish and was going to become a corporate headquarters. [We] were all in agreement that Times Square was a special place; that you didn't have to completely lose everything to clean it up. I mean you could clean it up, you could get rid of the prostitution and the drugs, or at least minimize those while at the same time maintaining the wonderful sort of liveliness and pizzazz that Times Square had. "What are we going to do on New Year's Eve without Times Square?" That was the kind of appeal. I think the result has been pretty good. It's a little bit too clean for my standards today, but it's still better than it would have been if they had just gotten rid of all of the honky-tonk and the neon signs and so forth. It's still better than it would have been if it had been totally gentrified.

[At Halprin's office] we worked very closely with Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, who were the architects and whose offices were I think the floor below Halprin's but in the same building, so it was very easy to have a constant sort of day-by-day relationship and communications were very easy. And they were very open to ideas, which was great. Some

architects are not as open to landscape architects. Fortunately, of course, it helped that Halprin himself, his ego was big enough to compete with anybody, so I think that they recognized that and paid homage to it. So, I benefitted from that.

### ***Halprin's Partners***

Most of the work that I did there was really [working] much more closely with Don Carter, a partner, than with Larry himself, although Larry was an important figure and he clearly made his feelings known. Jean [Walton] did almost all the planting. None of the other partners ever seemed to specify plants, which was a very peculiar sort of set up and I don't quite know how that had happened. I'm sure they did influence; I mean, they must have had their opinions. I certainly did too even though I knew very little about plants because I had no training in that, but I did have certain feelings about what should go where and whether there should be palm trees here or deciduous trees there. Jean was open to ideas; she wasn't totally rigid, so it was a pretty collaborative environment.

[Halprin's partners] were very lovely people. I mean Don Carter was just a lovely, lovely man, and Vignolo. They were all very sweet, but they all depended upon Halprin's bravura and his theatrical presence. His red handkerchief hanging out of his back pocket—that was his trademark. And the fact that he was married to this remarkable woman, [Anna Halprin], who was a great creative dancer. I don't think he ever danced, but it sort of affected and influenced, I think, his way of presenting himself. He would infuriate me mainly because his ego was so out of control. But he had many, many good qualities and he knew how to use and work with the talent around him, and he knew that his partners were really

good designers and they all cared for the same things. He could be a pain in the butt, but at the same time, there was this wonderful sort of generosity about him and color and humor. All in all, I definitely appreciated him.

I think that the work process was relatively traditional. The jobs would come in; they would be allocated to different partners, other than the women, who did all the planting. But whether it was Vignolo or Don Carter or whoever it was, they would sort of take the lead and they were very generous in giving the staff the opportunity to design as well. So, it wasn't, "We're going to do all the design, and you're just going to do the working drawings." It was a very collaborative and convivial kind of atmosphere. I think a lot of that must have come from Halprin himself.

### ***Richard Reynolds***

One of the most interesting and, for me, influential aspects of working for Lawrence Halprin was the arrival of a geographer called Richard Reynolds. Halprin, I think, hired him because Halprin had this extraordinary eye and he could see off in the horizon, [the term] "ecology." That was going to be the next buzz word, you know? Nobody even knew what the word meant or ever even heard that word. But somehow Halprin had that sense I think of what was the coming thing. I can't remember how he brought Richard, Dick, we used to call him, but Richard Reynolds into the office. But he arrived and immediately started influencing the way we all thought about how we should be designing.

Sea Ranch, which was the great Halprin project, which I only had very peripheral dealings with, was the one that Richard affected and influenced more than anything. The

idea of creating these wind rows, which then became sort of shelter for the housing, and the clustering of housing tightly so that you didn't just spread the individual houses across the landscape—That was pretty radical thinking at that time. Dick became a very close friend of ours and spent a lot of time hanging out.

### ***Reclaiming Cities***

*INTERVIEWER: [Coming from a background] doing buildings and now suddenly, with Halprin, you're working for someone whose quest is to reclaim the streets, [who views streets as] the kaleidoscope of life and is looking at [broader] social and cultural dynamics. Can you address this larger dynamic of the streets?*

I certainly did buy [Halprin's] book [*Cities* (1964)]. I didn't read every word of it. I think I did appreciate Halprin's view of what cities could become and what they'd lost in many ways. [T]he fact that we were in San Francisco, which had maintained and retained some of the qualities that other cities had lost. The fact that people still walked more in San Francisco than they did elsewhere; they didn't just get in their cars and drive. And of course Ghirardelli Square was symbol of that. Bringing people back to life. Bringing them together in an urban environment and sort of stirring them up. And the relationship of commerce to active social life: You went shopping or you went out to eat or you went to drink. All of those things worked together to create interesting places.

### ***1960s Social Atmosphere***

This was definitely a period when society was being radicalized, whether it was through politics or through drugs; I mean, there were connections, I think, between both of those things. I was never much into drugs. I never dared try any of the hard stuff, and I think we used to smoke a fair amount of dope, I guess, but I never really enjoyed that either. I'm afraid I'm a martini man and probably always will be. But clearly, that drug culture had its influence and in some ways [was] very good. I think it [opened] up people's thinking. People who had done LSD, which I never did, I think did see things differently and for better or worse, it must have influenced the way they worked in later life.

The assassinations obviously were traumatic but we didn't see them at that time as symptomatic of a broader social sickness. I think we just saw them as isolated incidents: "Some crazy guy's just shot somebody." And it was shocking, but at the same time, you didn't feel that this was a slippery slope that we were moving down. I mean, I think they were, whether there were things going on in society that provoked those incidents it's hard for me to say at this point; perhaps the sort of radicalization of society, which was generally going on, the hippie movement and the similar incidents that were occurring throughout society. I never really saw the connection between that and the disastrous events that occurred, but I may be wrong. I'm not a social scientist.

### ***Living in the Bay Area***

The woman I was living with then, Sandy [Daley], and I had found this wonderful home in Oakland after living briefly in San Francisco. It had been a windmill built in probably [the] late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Typically the windmill structures were a sort of tripod of large

wooden members supported a platform on which sat a tank, a water tank. They pumped the water up into the tank and then it flowed back by gravity to water, first of all, the farms, and then later, to provide water to the homes as the area became developed and built up. We found what had been this windmill structure which had been sheathed and turned into a little house. We found it just by chance and just moved right in. It was three stories. The top story had a ceiling height of about five foot eleven, I think, and the lower two stories were normal ceiling height. It had a very beautiful living room on the ground floor and a kitchen. Then the second floor was a bedroom and the top floor was the attic bedroom, which is where we slept because it had the nice view and that was romantic. We lived there and Sandy went to school at the California College of Arts and Crafts, which was about a mile up the road from where we were living, so it was very convenient for her. I used to admittedly drive into Halprin's office every day, driving across the Bay Bridge, one of those dreadful commuters. The Bay Area Rapid Transit didn't exist at that time. So, it was either that or the bus, so most of the time I would drive into work.

### ***The Pop Art Movement***

Sandy, as I said, went and enrolled at the College of Arts and Crafts and through the teaching that was going on there, became interested in the Pop Art Movement. I think what really triggered it was that we went back to England to visit my family one summer and stopped in New York on the way, and I think we must have gone to see an Andy Warhol show. It just blew us [away], or maybe it was Lichtenstein; or maybe it was both. Anyway, they both blew us away. So we came back to California and I said, "Well, we've got to do

something like what they're doing in New York.” I had the idea of creating photosensitive emulsions which we could paint on canvas so we could control where the image was and where it wasn't. We went to the Berkeley library and found this book from about 1870, 1890, or something thereabouts, on photo emulsions. Nobody had opened it for almost a hundred years. So we brought it back, went into San Francisco to the chemical supply houses and found all these ingredients. We mixed them up and painted them on the canvas and bingo. They worked. It was very exciting.

The first painting we did was a re-enactment of a wonderful painting from the Renaissance of one woman tweaking the nipple of another woman.<sup>ii</sup> The two naked just from the waist up and one of them is tweaking the nipple of the other. We recreated that with Sandy and a friend of hers, and we created a diptych of the original painting above and then a re-enactment below. Maybe it was the other way around. A friend of this friend, Richard Reynolds, was very close friends with John Weber who ran the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles. He suggested that we go down to L.A. and take these paintings with us and show them, which we did. And they loved them and they put them in the show called...It had some slightly erotic title, but it mostly showed nudes and showed paintings to do with sex.<sup>iii</sup> And this painting sold; Philip Johnson bought it, I think.

Then John Weber came back and said, “We'd like to give you a two-man one-man show,” so we were on our way. Then we decided to do a series of Adam and Eves, which we were models for.<sup>iv</sup> They were life-size on canvas. I still have one in my loft on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. That was a good show. We didn't sell everything obviously because I still have a couple of them, but we sold several of them and we thought, “This is it. Now we're on our way, baby. We're

going to move to New York and hit the big time.” Of course we came to New York and fell flat on our faces and that was the end of my career as a pop artist.

### **New York in the 1960s**

We came back to New York in order to try and break into the New York art scene and had a very hard time. [We] moved into the Chelsea Hotel and came up with various ideas for the next series of paintings. I, meanwhile, had to go out and get a job because we had to actually earn money so we could live. I landed a job because of my experience with Halprin's office.

### ***Vollmer Associates***

I started looking around for a job and ended up almost by chance, it might have been through an employment agency, initially, who suggested I go try Vollmer. I went to the Vollmer office and realized when I saw what they did that this was probably a good fit for me because they were architects, engineers, and landscape architects. Even though, at that time, I was not a qualified landscape architect, I'd been doing it for several years in Halprin's office. I walked in, was interviewed by Bob Rotner, who was the architect partner in charge, [and] he hired me on the spot. That was great.

Vollmer Associates, who were a sort of classic old-time engineering, architecture, and landscape firm, they did everything. Vollmer himself I think had a background both as a landscape architect and an engineer, although he was mostly known as an engineer, and he had been a Robert Moses protégé and that really was what got him started. It was a very

interesting; I won't get into any of the lurid details, but it was a very interesting and a complicated office. A mixture of real old-time engineers and much more florid designers. Bob [Rotner], who was the architect who ran the architecture section, was a very interesting and good architect. I basically worked for him, even though I was hired both because of my background in landscape architecture and architecture. I initially did really stupid things like bath houses and the sorts of things Vollmer did by the dozen, but eventually did actually do some park design.

I started out working on various typical sort of what had been Robert Moses' parks back when Vollmer first started his firm. He maintained that relationship with the state parks in various states, but New York in particular. I worked on a number different parks and a skating rink somewhere. Then, I think it was through Bob Rotner, I designed a sort of mural for the side of a factory building in Boston, which was basically a sort of recreating the façade in paint with shadows. I'm pretty sure that was a building that belonged to Peter [Rothschild]'s family because they had a factory up there in Boston. His family had a furniture manufacturing company. Peter at that point was also working in the office as a summer intern while he was at Harvard. We became friendly and remained friends ever since and ultimately became partners.

### ***Chelsea Hotel***

When I came back to New York and lived in the Chelsea Hotel, there was a lot of drug use, not to mention martini drinking. But there was a lot of drug use in the people who were living there at that time. It was already a hip place. It had a core long-term resident

population. George Kleinsinger was our neighbor down the hallway. He was a musician and had written a number of quite famous songs. “Tubby the Tuba”; that was the one he was most famous for. “Tubby the Tuba” was the big hit that probably kept him going for many, many years. Then there was Shirley Clarke, the filmmaker, and a number of painters who all lived there at that time. I don't know whether Shirley Clarke did drugs, but it wouldn't surprise me. But, you know, there were people like that who had a different view of the world from the general world outside. It was like belonging to a club. You'd hang out in the El Quijote lounge downstairs, the restaurant, with these people and drink, mostly of whom were alcoholics.

Or up in our rooms smoking dope, which was the other thing that everybody did then. Fortunately I haven't done that in many, many years because it never agreed with me. It was a way of breaking down barriers between people, which the best thing about marijuana I think. Because it was a club. We knew it was illegal, but at the same time, it softened things. Everybody got a little bit high. It was an interesting period, that late '60s.

## **Becoming a Landscape Architect**

### **Harvard Graduate School of Design**

Through working at Vollmer and working on these parks I realized that if I was going to really start my own firm, it should be as a landscape architect, not as an architect. I went to Harvard to get a degree because I knew without a degree I couldn't practice as a landscape architect. I could practice as an architect and I had my architect's license, but that's not what I wanted to be doing. I wanted to practice as a landscape architect. I knew I

had to get a master's degree in landscape architecture in order to qualify to take the licensing exam, which was in itself an ordeal.

First I went down to and met with [Ian] McHarg, whose career I'd followed and I was a great admirer of his books. He gave me the "old Scottish you-know-what." I think I could have gotten in there if I'd pushed it, but then I went up to Harvard and I met with Hideo Sasaki and he looked at my portfolio and he said I could get a degree, a master's degree, in a year. So I said, "Why would I not accept that?" Get in and out quickly, which probably was a mistake. I probably would have been much better off going to McHarg and learning all of that ecological design stuff because it was very interesting to me, but I took the easy way out and went to Harvard and got a degree in a year.

### ***Remembering Academic Influencers and Critics***

I did get some very important gaps filled. I took planting with Joe Hudak, who's a great planting lecturer and would drag us on these exhausting hikes through the [Arnold] Arboretum every Saturday morning. That was well worth doing. The great thing about Joe Hudak for me was that I virtually knew nothing about trees. I'd worked at Halprin's office, but as I said, we were not allowed to do planting plans. Those were done by Jean. I could have a say in it and sometimes I'd make a pitch for a particular species, but that [was] barely tolerated. So I knew that I didn't know very much. There were a lot of trees I couldn't identify and I really wanted to learn as much as I could during the time I was at Harvard. Joe Hudak was great. He would drag [us] out every week, every Saturday morning, through the Arboretum. We had to learn, and then he'd quiz us on, twig identification. My god, I don't

think I could [do] that any longer! I used to be able to identify trees by their twigs. Of course, most of that time was in the winter. We'd start in September and by the time we had a few field trips in September and October, most of them the trees were leafless and the snow was on the ground, so it was a rigorous experience but it was good. Joe was very, very good.

The people who I found stimulating and who I got the most out of, other than Peter Hornbeck, who I was taught planting, but was somebody like Carl Steinitz, who's an intellectual and had a very interesting view of the planning process. Whether one was ever able to take any of that and apply it in the real world is a very different matter. I was glad that I had had both the architectural background and the working for Halprin office, which is really where I learned most of what I learned other than learning a few dozen plants from Peter.

The critics at Harvard included Peter Hornbeck, Joe Hudak, who as I said, was my planting teacher, [and] Carl Steinitz, who really sort of invented computer graphic simulations or computer-aided planning I would say, with grid programs, which I found also very interesting. I did use [computer-aided planning simulations] a little bit later, but I never really had the opportunities to use it as much as I would have liked to, but it was a very [good] stimulus and made you think differently about the planning process. [Hideo Sasaki] was really more of an administrator. I think he maybe gave one lecture that I went to, but he was more of a figurehead.

I was only there for a year, and I sneaked through and I did my thesis, which was good training for doing computer graphics, but not much else. [My thesis] was sort of [a]

new town plan. It was through a friend of mine who actually thought he was going to get it as a real job; I don't think it ever came to anything. It was just the initial planning phase, and we had to get all the data maps and we did a lot of site investigations and plotting and so forth. It was a good experience, but it didn't lead to anything. For better or worse, I did my own thing. I used the resources and the people at Harvard like Carl Steinitz and Joe Hudak to fill the gaps and that was great, but it was not a real typical academic experience.

### ***Remembering Classmates***

In the class I was in, I don't know what the proportion of men to women was, but there [were] many women in the class. I don't remember there being any feeling of you can't mix with them or you can't talk to them, [but] I didn't live on campus. I lived in Boston in this attic of a friend's house, so I was insulated from [that]. We had a wild old time there, I can tell you. He was at MIT and we had quite a raucous time. He was a bon vivant, I think is the word they use, and has remained a friend ever since.

### ***The Ark Project***

While I was at Harvard I was hired to work on a new discotheque in Boston called the Ark, which was an old industrial space. I think it had been a garage. I was brought in by these sort of hippie group of designers and promoters who had worked on [the project]. We had a lot of fun together. We turned it into what became a very successful, hip place to be, but with psychedelic lights. We painted patterns on the floor, and we created ceilings with fabrics and all of that hippy stuff that people did in those days. It was great fun to actually

see it built because I actually supervised a lot of the construction, and then later, actually going back and enjoying [it]. It was a great success, and for quite a long time, the Ark was the place to be and the place to go. One went to discotheques in those days, unlike today, when I wouldn't go near them. But at least it was a fun thing to have done and to have experienced. The Ark project was how I paid my way through school.

### ***1960s Campus Atmosphere***

I was in Harvard from '68 to '69. Those were obviously years when there were a lot of stuff going on in other universities around the country, but somehow Harvard managed to, I don't think they consciously, they didn't clamp down on anything. There was virtually no student rebellion going on when I was there. I think that everybody felt that that was something that *they* did, that *we* didn't do. I just think that the people who were going to Harvard at that time just were not concerned and involved with the social upheavals that were going on elsewhere—for better or worse. I'm not saying it was a good thing necessarily, but certainly from my point of view, selfishly, it was great because there were no shut-outs, there were no strikes. We just went to class and did our thing and got the hell out of there as soon as I could get my degree. That was fine, but in terms of the bigger picture, I think there were obviously interesting things going on in other parts of the world, in the academic world, that were of interest. I don't know about Penn; I'm not sure how the McHarg program fared during those years, but my sense is that it probably was relatively unaffected also.

## Professional Practice

### An Early Partnership

My firm initially was me and this man I was at Harvard with, Jack Gaffney. [He] had a pretty diverse background; as I did. I think he started out as a graphic designer and then moved into Halprin's New York office, I think it might have been. That didn't last but at least we both recognized that there was strength in having two of us rather than one of us. Even though that partnership didn't last and I was on my own for many years, I still felt that a firm is stronger if it has more than one partner. Particularly you have different attitudes, different approaches, different contacts. There are a whole variety of reasons why it's good to have more than one partner.

### Nicholas Quennell

#### *Hanging a Shingle*

I started the office on my own as Nicholas Quennell and was joined by Peter about 10 years later. We eventually formed a legal partnership and changed the name of the firm to Quennell Rothschild and Partners.<sup>v</sup> That was probably about 15 years ago. For a long time [my practice] was like one and a half [people]. It was just me and then I had an architect friend who now has his own firm, Andy Freireich, who joined me on a part-time basis, and we worked out of my room at the Chelsea Hotel. It was fun. A lot of the work was with Hoberman and Wasserman Architects, who were old friends of mine. I went to school with Joe Wasserman and when I opened my office, he started feeding me work. [I]

immediately started work for Joe Wasserman and Norman Hoberman on housing projects

for the UDC; the Urban Development Corporation, was relatively new. Ed Logue—the great Ed Logue—had created [it]. It was a state agency, but it was called the New York State Urban Development Corporation and it was set up to build housing, public housing, which it did very effectively for many, many years.

One of the very first projects they initiated was out in Coney Island. There were two projects in Coney Island, both designed by Hoberman and Wasserman. One was for senior citizens and the other was for regular folks. Those were a lot of fun. They had quite a lot of open space and we were given a great free hand and [there were] good people at UDC who were very supportive. I haven't been back in a while. I have a feeling they don't look quite as they did then.

### ***Landscape Architecture in the 1970s***

To have a landscape practice in New York in the early '70s was not easy because many people didn't know what landscape architects did. And a lot of architects still thought that's what they did; they didn't need any help. But there were a handful of people who did understand it. I would say Paul [Friedberg] was definitely the torch bearer because Clarke and Rapuano, and Vollmer, they all were primarily engineers and secondarily landscape architects, whereas Paul didn't make any pretense. He didn't pretend to be an engineer or an architect. He was a landscape architect and his work was known, his signature work was known; his early playgrounds, which were very radical and dramatic and really made a mark. He went on to do, obviously, other kinds of landscape work, but he was an important figure. Bob Zion, who'd been around for a number of years, established, I think, the

profession as standalone profession that could do work with an architect's stamp. I think it was later that the State and the City actually allowed landscape architects to stamp drawings without an architect stamping them.

### *Licensure*

It [was] not just an attitudinal thing, it was a legal thing. There literally were agencies who didn't recognize that landscape architects were a stand-alone, legitimate profession, so, you had to have an architect or an engineer to be the prime. And it was frustrating because obviously landscape architects should have been recognized much, much earlier and been given the right to stamp their own drawings. I was fortunate in that I was able to get my license as an architect before I could get my license as a landscape architect, so legally I could stamp drawings that a landscape architect couldn't do for a while. So, there was a brief period when I had a slight edge. That changed, I guess, in the '80s. As I said, I was fortunate because I had both degrees; as long as I could keep my architect's license in force, which wasn't so easy when continuing education came into effect, but as long as I could, I could play both games. But eventually that became academic when landscape architects were awarded contracts on their own. It was a big move forward.

Initially, I had to take more of a backseat because almost all of my clients, I guess initially, all my clients were architects. Even though they didn't want to design everything, they wanted to have a strong say in the final product. It really was a collaboration; it was fairly mutual one. I mean, there was a dialogue that went back and forth. Then I began to get independent contracts with UDC among other agencies where the job was entirely mine

and I didn't have to depend on [anyone]. At the same time I got my license, and then I was able to stamp [drawings] as a landscape architect, not as an architect.

### ***Passing the Licensing Exam***

I think [the licensing exam is] better than it was. I think it's improved, but when I was taking it, it truly was I think intentionally meant to keep you out. Virtually nobody passed the first go around. I think it took me three times in order to get through all of the required segments. It was unnecessarily rigorous. Whether they consciously did it to keep the profession small or whether it was just a sadistic streak in the people who wrote the questions, I don't know, but it was hell.

### ***On Being Dual Licensed***

Licensed is one thing and degreed is another. It's relatively easy if you have the academic background to get your license in more than one profession, but the practice is the critical thing. I think from my point of view, the fact that I had worked as an architect for many years before I moved into landscape architecture gave me probably a different perspective. It also made it easier for me to communicate I think with the architects that I worked with because we often talked the same language. I think unfortunately there is probably a fairly widespread prejudice amongst architects against landscape architects. They see them as second class citizens. Having that architectural degree, even if they weren't even aware of it, I think gave me enough confidence to feel that I was on an equal footing with them.

I think landscape architects are recognized as a separate profession and as a viable profession now by many more people. It says something about architects to me. It says that architects are very protective of their territory and that for years their territory included landscape, and they were not very happy when the landscape architects began to say, “We’re on equal footing and we’re an equal profession. We’ll do the landscape. Don’t you mess with it because it’s against the law basically.” Although it’s not; I mean, an architect can in fact design a landscape and put his stamp on the drawing and it’s acceptable, but at least he’s not the only who can do it. Now I think architects by and large have come to terms with that. I don’t think there’s that same hostility that there was when we first came into being.

### ***Office Space***

I was in the Chelsea Hotel for probably not much more than a year and then I moved in with this architect Bob Rotner to an office on 16<sup>th</sup> Street. His uncle, I think, owned the building and he let his dear nephew have an entire floor, which was probably about 5,000, 4,000 square feet, so it was fantastic. We had very nice space and it was great being there. And Bob was a good friend and collaborated on things. I was there for about five years [until] 1970, I think. Then I think Bob’s uncle decided he could get more money from somebody else and we had to look elsewhere. I moved the office very briefly into my loft, the loft I still live in, but then very soon after that moved into a small, but quite nice space at Broadway and 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 752 Broadway, which was lovely. It was compact, but it was big enough for the five or six of us that were in the firm at that time. I can’t remember exactly

how long we were there, but I think it was after that Peter found the building on 20<sup>th</sup> Street, which we moved to and we had the whole floor on 20<sup>th</sup> Street for probably about 10 years.

### **Quennell Rothschild & Partners**

There are five partners: myself, Peter Rothschild, and three slightly younger, not so young anymore, but they are younger partners—Andy Moore, Mark Bunnell, and Alison Shipley. Her name was Alison Brawne when I first knew her, but then she married and changed her name. They've been wonderful and they're all very, very dedicated. They're talented. They have different strengths. Alison is probably the key liaison between us and city agencies, particularly parks. She gets along very, very well with them, and they trust her and they understand she doesn't just do everything they tell her to, but at the same time, she listens to them carefully and follows through. Andy and Mark both have their strengths and they have their clients. For some reason, Andy has done probably more of the private residences than any of the other partners. I think that's just happenstance, but he gets along very, very well with the private clients that we've had.

### ***Current Role at Quennell Rothschild***

At this point because so much of the work is done by others in the office, I'm more of a critic than an editor, although I'm not by and large, terribly critical. I do tend to overlook the work that gets done and obviously comment upon it. Sometimes they listen and sometimes they don't, but that is a role that I do play. I don't really like to think of myself as a mentor. I like to think that even though I'm older and been around longer that

every relationship, both in my office and in the rest of my life, is more of a collaboration. It's a two-way street. That's certainly been true in the office. There have been people who have come into the office almost fresh out of school who've taught us a lot because of the way they think and the way they look at things. That's certainly true of my partners, all of whom have brought their own point of view and their own perspective. So, we have a dialogue. I don't say this is the way you do it and they say, yes, sir. That has never been my style and it's certainly never been the character that we've encouraged in the office. There's always been room even amongst the youngest members when they first come in. If they're just straight out of school there's almost always a dialogue that occurs and I've encouraged that and would hope to continue to do so.

The things that are important to me are my colleagues and the work that we do. I don't want to sound patriarchal, but I do feel very honored and have gotten an enormous amount of pleasure from having the partners I have. Between Peter and the three senior members of the firm who really do hold everything together. The firm would not survive without them. Andy Moore, Mark Bunnell, and Alison Shipley; each have their strengths and they work together well. They're all extremely competent and capable and creative. Then, some of the not actually, technically partners, but people like Beth Franz Again, I don't think I could survive a single day without Beth being there. She is a wonderful support. She deals with clients in a way that is just quite extraordinary and she's technically and creatively very capable as well. And knows a lot more about plant materials than I do. So, thank goodness for that team of people who keep this firm together.

### ***Future of Quennell Rothschild***

I think we've been fortunate. We've obviously, sort of, aggressively gone after the kind of work that we feel we're good at, and we've been fortunate in getting a lot of that kind of work. We also get work that we're not so crazy about, but some of that work you have to do in order to stay in business. I think more of the work is enjoyable and challenging than the opposite. For that, we're very, very thankful. Some of it's probably just luck. What came along at the appropriate time and which projects we were selected for and which we weren't. There have been jobs that we would have liked to get that we didn't get, but we won't dwell on those.

I think that we'll probably continue to expand our collaborative role with other professions, engineers in particular. We do more and more work with civil engineers who need us to get things designed and to direct the overall character of the project. They're happy to do the nuts and bolts and make sure it gets built and everything gets constructed on time and on budget. That's, I think, a healthy relationship that we've fostered in the last few years and continue to do so. I would expect that to expand. Also, we're doing more and more work with public agencies. That clearly could change, but clearly at this point, it's a very important aspect of our work and of the entire profession. I don't see our role as private residence landscape architects expanding. It's not our strongest suit. And it's certainly not something I'm interested in, but the other partners may differ from me and they may choose to go in a different direction. I think that our strongest record is public work and working in larger scale projects, getting them built. There is the master planning

aspect and that's interesting, but I like to see things through, to see them actually on the ground, built.

## **Life outside the Office**

### **Public Engagement**

#### ***The Art Commission***

I took over Phil Winslow's place when he resigned from the Art Commission and served on the commission for a number of years and eventually became its president, while it still, I guess it was still called the Art Commission. It later became the Public Design Commission. I'm not quite sure whether the fact that I was both an architect and a landscape architect helped, because I think that they had pretty strict rules there anyhow, that space. Its role, its purpose, is to review work on city land; that's all it does. It doesn't review private projects. It's not like city planning that can review everything that's built in New York. It only reviews projects that are built on city property. But it reviews work done by the parks department obviously, but also the department of design and construction, General Services; you name it, DOT, whatever. It includes things like bridges and roads—although there's very little review of roads, but occasionally something would come up on a parkway or some other important scenic road that the Art Commission would have something to say about. But more of their energy was on park work and buildings that were being built by the city.

Perhaps because of my dual citizenship, my architect–landscape architect hats that I could wear, I think I was able to raise the awareness of the importance of landscape issues

to everybody on the commission—whether it was the artist or the sculptor or the graphic designer or whoever it might be—so that there was a real dialogue that focused, revolved around, landscape issues when they came before the commission. I hope that I was helpful in improving that. I think you can see it today with Signe Nielsen as the landscape architect [on the commission], who is very vocal and she doesn't mind voicing her opinions. People do listen to her, which is good. I know there were certainly projects that were controversial, and that we were able to either help or to influence in some way.

The Art Commission as it was then, now the Public Design Commission, has always comprised a number of different professions including architects, landscape architects, sculptor, a painter, and lay members.

Certainly my experience of serving on the Art Commission was enriched by some of the other people who were on it. Like Richard Haas, the muralist and a real public artist in the true sense of the word. And Louis [Lo-Yi] Chan, the architect on the commission when I was there, who is a good architect but more importantly he was a very thoughtful critic and he always brought a certain calm and wisdom to his judgments and his commentary. They were both crucial people. One of my closest and dearest friends is Alice Aycock, who was the artist, the sculptor on the Art Commission for a number of years and has been a very important figure in my life and become a very close friend.

### ***East River 60<sup>th</sup> Street Pavilion***

I met her through a project that I really initiated. It was through my connection with 60th with to build a high-rise apartment building on the site of the old sanitation garage, which is on the East River, just immediately north of the 59<sup>th</sup> Bridge.

I was horrified at this proposal because it seemed that this was public property. It was on the waterfront. It could potentially lead to the existing and just in the process of being developed the East River Waterfront from 59<sup>th</sup> Street north. I really started a protest movement to try and prevent this happening. One of the results of that was first of all, the development was avoided, and out of that came sort of what are we going to do on the site?

I said we should have an artist who should celebrate this structure which was a dilapidated garage that overlooked the river. I looked around for an artist who I thought would be appropriate. Even though I didn't know Alice Aycock at the time, I had seen her work and I thought this is the person we need. I approached Alice and she said yes, she would be interested in working on it.

We worked together. I ended up being the architect and she ended up being the sculptor and we did the project that is on the wall behind me, where she produced this wonderful playful piece of sculpture on the roof. The important thing about that was first of all it meant we could leave the structure even though we took away the skin and everything and it was just the structure of the pavilion. But that we could leave the pavilion as a sort of icon. But more importantly, her sculpture would then be up high enough up in the air so that you could see it from way inland.

You can see it from several blocks away. So, if you look towards the East River and you see this wacky crazy thing swirling around, it's called the East River Roundabout. I pushed her and pushed the project and we got it. We raised money and we got it built. So, that was very satisfying.

### ***Municipal Art Society***

My involvement with Times Square was really through the Municipal Art Society. That was a very different role. I think the Municipal Art Society really has over the years, I mean, it's varied in its effectiveness and also in its commitment to either resisting change or promoting change. When I went on the board of the Municipal Art Society it was a good period. Kent Barwick was active. I guess he was the director of the Municipal Art Society and then later became president. He was a dynamic person with ideas of what could be done and what couldn't be done. The board itself had some very interesting members some of whom were more active than others. But there was an interest in making sure that the city development was done in an orderly fashion and that change was hopefully for the better. Not always, but that was the goal at least. The Times Square effort working with Kent Barwick and people at the Municipal Art Society really was sort of in-the-streets, sort of, not [a] revolution, but it was a protest. A protest movement. We went and testified before city planning, and ultimately I think it made a big difference to what happened there.

I remember when I was serving on the Municipal Art Society board one of the major projects that came before us and that we ended up being active about was the proposal for Columbus Circle, which would have involved a very tall building being built right next to the

southwest corner of Central Park. We rallied ourselves and rallied other people and we actually did organize a protest in the park to show what that shadow would mean by standing in the park in what we thought would have been the shadow and what it would have caused on the park. I think that made a difference and it really did cause the building to be turned down and reduced in scale. I'm not against tall buildings everywhere, but there are some places where they work and some places where they don't. And I don't think next to Central Park is the appropriate place.

*INTERVIEWER: In your notes I think you mentioned Westway also?*

Yes. It was highly controversial. The Municipal Art Society was very concerned that this huge highway was going to be built along the West Side of Manhattan and that it would destroy what little open space there was there. And also destroy the potential for a continuous walkway and bikeway that could, everybody dreamt, would run from Lower Manhattan all the way to Harlem. We did lead a protest and, I think, ultimately that was successful in ensuring that those elements were incorporated in the final design for the highway improvements and the highway improvements were played down. The resulting highway, as you know, is a lot more accessible; pedestrians can cross it at intersections. It's not a good idea, but there are places where you can actually cross the street so that it's more like a city street than it is like a super-highway. Still, more of a highway than it might be, but nevertheless, considering that it's a major traffic artery, I think it's actually been a fairly good compromise.

## Teaching

Paul Friedberg asked me to come and help teach at City College in the program that he had been running for a number of years. It was, I guess, at that time the only landscape architecture program in the city and Paul had created it almost from scratch. I don't know whether it existed technically on paper before Paul's tenure, but if it did, he certainly turned it around and made it what it became, which was one of the better landscape schools in the country, with an emphasis on urban landscape and all of the problems that urban landscapes tend to carry with them. I taught there in the design studio for a while, and I think I gave a history of landscape architecture course there. It was a very diverse group of students, which made it very lively. It had its challenges at times, but by and large, it was a very interesting group of people, both on the faculty and teaching. Signe Nielsen, who I actually knew through connections, she'd worked in London for an old, old friend of mine. So, she came to New York and rang on my doorbell, so we got to know each other through that. Then later, I taught her at City College. Then there was somebody like the wonderful guy who worked for me, Raymundo Gomez, who's now at parks.

Then I was later invited to teach at Columbia, to teach a course in landscape architecture for the architects and the planning students. That was such a great offer, I couldn't refuse. I think I'd sort of run out of steam with teaching in the design studio up at City College. It was a long way to go and I'm not sure I ever really felt that comfortable teaching design, as such. Because my own design philosophy is not nearly as outspoken as somebody like Paul Friedberg. You know, push his point of view. I tend to be more objective, if you like, or just sort of less single-minded in terms of what is appropriate

design. I think design needs to respond; each project has its own set of parameters that need to be recognized. So, it was refreshing to go to Columbia and teach architects a little bit about landscape architecture. That was great because the course was open to undergraduates as well as graduate students. I almost always had two or three undergraduate students either from Barnard or from Columbia, and they sometimes were the liveliest and most interesting students because they didn't have a sort of mindset, whereas the architects tended to have a more limited view of what they wanted to get out of the course. I had some very lovely and very lively students over the years. Even though Columbia was a relief for me, going to Columbia [was] much more constrained and I had a much more limited scope of the area where I was teaching, but nevertheless, it was an exciting experience. I'm glad I did it.

## **Marriage**

[My wife] Grace and I had an interesting history because we first met outside the Laundromat on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue [in New York City] in about 1970 when I first moved into my loft and was then living with my then girlfriend. I went out to do the laundry because I didn't have a washing machine at that time. There I was standing outside the Laundromat with these two very cute young women and the Laundromat was closed because the boiler had burst or something. I said well, I think there's another Laundromat down the street. So, we all tromped down the street and found another Laundromat and sat there doing our laundry. That's how I got to know Grace and her then roommate Nancy. Then later, many years later, Nancy and I had a brief fling but that was aside. That really was a fling. So there

was a connection, but every now and then I'd run into Grace on the street. Then many years even later than that I was single and I ran into Grace on the street and said, "Oh, do you want to go for a drink?" She said sure and we went for a drink in a bar, which I don't think exists any longer. That's how it all began. Before we knew where we were, we were married and living happily ever after. It's been a long time. It's been how long did I say? 20 years? She's a great woman.

### **Grace Tankersley**

She was a film editor. And technically still is, although she hasn't done any film editing for a while, but more recently she's branched out. Her first book was *The Community Gardens of the East Village*. Maybe partly because of my landscape connections, but maybe not, she became very interested in the community gardens of the East Village. She'd lived in the East Village before we got together so she had seen many of these gardens emerge from nothing and watched them develop over the years. [The book is] a guide to the community gardens of the East Village, which has been quite successful. That inspired her to go on to write a cookbook. There's no connection between the gardens and the cooking, but she got interested in making cakes for couples, for two people. She found these little cake tins just right down the street, so she wrote this book which she sells complete with the cake tin. If you're in the market for cakes, I think it's called *Cakes for Two*, or whatever, it's cakes. But anyway, cakes for small households; I don't know. It's a very nice little book. A lot of the recipes she borrowed from other places [and] had to adapt them

because the quantities were different, and then in some cases she created them from scratch. So she's an interesting woman and a lot of fun.

## Remembering Colleagues & Muses

### Memories of Lawrence Halprin

*INTERVIEWER: What were the takeaways from [your experience] with larger than life personalities?*

Before [going to work for] Halprin, it was these smaller, briefer experiences with big ego types like Josep Lluís Sert and the other architects I worked for in Cambridge. On the one hand, I'm sure I never wanted to emulate Larry's own dominant personality and his style, but I had to admire it at the same time because it was very captivating. Clients loved when he would come in and wave his red handkerchief and do all this theatrical stuff, which I'm sure he learned from his wife. That was an interesting model, at least, not to imitate necessarily, but at least to have as an example. But of course, the interesting thing about Halprin was that he couldn't have survived without his partners. They were so different in their style and the way they operated. Their egos were far less apparent, but I'm sure they had their egos.

### Memories of Don Carter

Don Carter, who was probably the best designer in the [Halprin's] firm, was very modest, but at the same time, his design sense was very clear and made itself felt in the projects. He was a very good model from my point of view of how I would like to be.

### **Memories of Shlomo Aronson**

Shlomo Aronson, who came to Halprin's office I think straight out of school, was a very engaging guy. He was fun, he was smart, he was talented. I regret that I lost touch with him since then because he went back to Israel and I came back to New York, and I guess we exchanged Christmas cards or Hanukkah cards, or whatever they are, occasionally.

### **On Olmsted & Vaux**

Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux, who generally gets less credit than he should, they were extraordinary people for their time. For any time. I think they had a vision of the future. They recognized that the urban environment was by and large an unhealthy one. That people needed open space, they needed greenery, and they also needed space that was spiritually enlightening and uplifting. That's the amazing thing about Central Park and Prospect Park and other Olmsted and Vaux parks, but those two in particular; that they really do raise your whole sort of consciousness and awareness of what the world could be.

[Olmsted] clearly was one of the great thinkers of all time, but he stands out both as a 19<sup>th</sup> century figure and today. Even though he was preceded by other extraordinary people like Capability Brown, I think what was remarkable to me about Olmsted, and having read quite a bit about his life, was his political awareness, as well as his sense of timing. Central Park was just the right thing, at the right time, in the right place. Then, learning from that and moving on from that to Prospect Park, which in many ways, I think is a more

successful landscape than Central Park. I think the great Sheep Meadow of Prospect Park has to be one of the greatest spaces in the world. To build on that reputation, and then repeat it without copying it, because they're amazingly different, those two places, as they should be. They're very different geology and for a different population, so it was appropriate that they'd be different. But nevertheless, the fact that they were able to say, "Well, we're not just going to give you your own Central Park. We're giving you something special." They were pretty amazing people, both of them.

They are still places I love to visit. They refresh me. They exhilarate me. I always thank God they're there. Because they so easily could not be. We could have just repaved the whole island, and it's just a miracle that Central Park and Prospect Park exist and they were not bulldozed. Even Robert Moses couldn't destroy them. He did his best. Robert Moses is not number one on my favorite hit list.

### **On Robert Moses**

I think he was a bully. I think he had bad taste by and large. Many of the things that Robert Moses envisioned were wonderful. I mean, the idea of opening up the beaches and making them accessible, creating parks where there were no parks. There are a few, what I would call, classic "Moses things" like Jones Beach. I wouldn't say it's one of my favorite places, but Jones Beach and some of those other great pools that he designed, or had designed, had their place and I think that they are interesting to experience. They do perform a wonderful function. I mean Moses did understand the functional needs of people

I think. At least he understood a significant amount of what people needed for recreation and being healthy in an essentially unhealthy, overcrowded city.

The down side was that he would have been quite happy to pave over Central Park. He didn't give a damn about Olmsted and Vaux or anybody else. It was his ego and his vision that was important to him. History will, I think, look back and say that, "Robert Moses was definitely not all that." I think at this point in time we tend to sort of only see the dark side of Robert Moses, but I think actually there clearly was a visionary side, which produced good results.

## **Working with Nicholas**

### **Peter Rothschild**

*Peter Rothschild recalls his partnership with Nicholas Quennell*

ROTHSCHILD: We met at Vollmer Associates in the summer of maybe 1964 or '65, one of those. I got a job with a friend of my parents, who was an architect, and they had a small studio of architects. It immediately became clear within the sea of engineers that Nicholas and I were potential kindred spirits because we were the outliers in this otherwise graphite encrusted group of engineers and people who, you know, vertical curves was their orgasmic experience.

Anyway, we worked [together] actually for two summers. I worked at Vollmer Associates, and I didn't realize when I went there, but in fact Nicholas was in the process of converting himself from being an architect primarily to being a landscape architect. I discovered that it was really interesting doing a much greater variety of different projects

than I had associated with architecture in large firms where you tend to be pegged with one kind of work or another. We got to be great friends and that is really how it started. Then, Nicholas became a graduate student at Harvard while I was an undergraduate there, so we saw quite a bit of each other there. In fact, took some of the same courses.

When Nicholas came back and started his practice, I ultimately started moonlighting for him and then went to work for him. Nicholas introduced me to Carnaby Street, to fashion, to the art world of the Chelsea Hotel. We met Andy Warhol and Arthur C. Clarke and Virgil Thomson were all friends of ours. It was quite a heady environment that I felt no access to until I met Nicholas and his then girlfriend Sandy Daley. And after graduate school, we decided it was working pretty well. All the rest is history.

*INTERVIEWER: I'm curious about this idea of the partner coming in who has a graduate degree from the Pacific Northwest, and coming to New York City.*

ROTHSCHILD: That actually was all really because of Nicholas, my going to Oregon. When I became serious about working with Nicholas long term, I realized I needed to go to graduate school. And Nicholas, while he was working for Lawrence Halprin in San Francisco, met a guy and they became friends, who was teaching at Oregon. Nicholas said, "You ought to go visit Ron Lovinger." I did. I fell in love with the place and in fact fell in love with Oregon. Ron had a big impact on my life all because Nicholas had this connection. Then, actually, two of our current partners, Andy Moore and Mark Bunnell, also went through that program. Sometimes we had maybe five or six or seven people working in the office.

### ***Participatory Design***

The other thing that was seminal in my experience there, which had a huge impact I think on the whole firm and the way we do work and feel about the work, is that Chris Alexander of *A Pattern Language* was actually hired by the University of Oregon when I was there to create a master plan for the university called the “Oregon Experiment.” It involves what was then a radical idea of going to students and faculty members and employees of the university and putting them together in small groups and discussing how people wanted to see their community grow and change. It was that sort of commitment to participatory design; of communities working with designers to create environments that they then felt ownership in, that they felt they had a part in creating that sort of imbued them with a loyalty and a caring for the environment long past the design and implementation process that really influenced many projects we did. Hudson River Park being one, [or the] earlier Hartford waterfront project we did where we actually reached out to the entire community, had community for thousands of people attending in a time in which participation was, if anything, a heretical idea. So, it had a huge effect.

### ***Collaborating with Nicholas***

*INTERVIEWER: In terms of the two of you working side by side when the office started, what was that collaborative process like from your perspective?*

ROTHSCHILD: Initially, and for a good long time, I was a student of Nicholas's. I felt that he was the senior principal and he basically decided whether or not we would do this, that, or the other. To his credit, I think and the credit of our partnership, he has always been

extremely interested in collaboration, welcoming other opinions. I think the collaboration [continued] even as it became more implicit. Because the office grew and the projects grew and it's a central problem, I think, that the size of projects tend to be small enough that it's hard to involve many partners in the same project. But I think there was always the sense that we would get together and decide what we were going to do. [There was] very little pride of ownership; [no] "I did this, you did that." [It was] more about, "Did the job work out well or didn't it?"

On some projects we worked very closely together, like some of the Roosevelt Island work. The firm of course started in the '70s working on environmental impact statements. I think we totally collaborated on that. It was not a question of whose name went on the cover, but hitting all the bases we had to hit and interacting on what the collective impact of different natural systems and social systems might be. I think that there was always a lot of respect and a lot of sense of, if a problem came up that one of us had more experience with, of saying, "That's why we're here together."

*INTERVIEWER: One of the things that Nicholas said... is that from the outset in his professional experience, he was given a long cord. He was running projects right out of school. Did you have a long leash in that same way?*

ROTHSCHILD: I think I had enormous latitude. I mean, I think it was a combination of a deep and highly personal sort of friendship that we had. One summer we virtually lived together and it was not just what happened in the office: we went on vacations together, our girlfriends were girlfriends with each other. It was not something that ended at the end of

the day. I think very much one of the things I am most grateful to for finding Nicholas and his finding me is that it really didn't matter if you were inexperienced or experienced or had something to add of substance or not, everybody was listened to. [There was] a feeling like the sky is the limit. I never wanted to work for anybody else. That became clear to me sooner rather than later. I had endless opportunities to go work for other people or teach in universities, and I always came back to the idea that this was home and this was an expression of us, and that's what I wanted to do. We had some times which were extremely challenging financially and some disappointments in projects that were emotionally challenging, but there was never any question that this is where we were going to be.

### ***The Quennell Rothschild Approach to Landscape***

*INTERVIEWER: What is the Quennell Rothschild approach to landscape?*

ROTHSCHILD: I don't think anybody could go and look at a landscape and say, "Ah, Peter and Nicholas were the brains behind that operation." In a way, that's a source of pride. I think we're very contextual. We're very interested in how people interact with their environments and we, I think, all feel that the design of public places should in fact be an expression of the communities they're intended to serve and the culture of that community. I think back, way back, to an early park Nicholas was primarily involved with at the north end of Roosevelt Island. Actually before that even, a streetscape project we did in New Rochelle. One of the first projects we ever really worked on together, Nicholas came up with this idea of benches that allowed people to interact with one another as a way of

building community into an otherwise purely commercial situation. It was pretty innovative, but you couldn't look at that say, "Aha, Frank Gehry did this." It's never been that way.

### ***Impact of Technology***

*INTERVIEWER: [How has the firm's practice changed in the last 20 years in response to technology?]*

ROTHSCHILD: Back to the whole question of collaboration, I will just say that as we both have gotten older, we, I think, share a desire and goal of passing the torch and allowing our younger partners to take over. I think that's what they want and I think that's very much what we want. I think that what's changed in our practice, which is not entirely due to decisions we've made but more the way the world has evolved, is that it's terribly competitive. I think for years both of us were very effective in soliciting new work from people we met, from organizations we were involved with, and we were not usually competing against other firms for every job. That's the way it is now.

I think that the technology and the size of the operations and the aggressiveness of some of our historic competitors as they have evolved is such that the nature of getting and doing work has changed—not fundamentally, but it has changed significantly. Maybe that's just a 67-year-old talking about [how] it used to be. But I think that that has changed, and maybe it is age. I think that [the] computerization of landscape design [was] a very aggressive sort of evolution or going ahead so that if you're not up to speed on the latest technology, you're basically in a position where you are looking to other people to do what you want them to do as opposed to doing it yourself. I think when Nicholas and I founded

this practice we were absolutely confident we could do everything in the office. If we had to fire all employees and just do it ourselves, we could, whether it was writing the specs or doing the working drawings or negotiating the contracts, that's what it meant to be a partner. It's [not] that way anymore. We can't do everything that needs to be done and we need these other people to help us do some of the simplest tasks now. That's changed.

I think that's only going to continue. I don't think this is the end. I mean, the people in our office, maybe with one or two minor exceptions, never pick up a pencil. They don't even know what that is. They don't have drafting tables. I can't think that way. I mean, I can learn to write on computers, but if I want to design something, I have to draw it. That's just antediluvian. Nobody does that anymore. So, that's changed.

And I think scale. I think it's harder and harder for very small firms to compete on very large projects. I think also there are firms that have acquired firms like ours. We've resisted that on a number of occasions, but I'm not sure that was the best business decision. It's what we wanted. We wanted to work for ourselves, but I think there's increasing pressure to aggregate. I don't know what that means for the world. I believe one of the things that's great about this firm is that we are absolutely accessible at every level to everybody we work with. I used to brag by saying [at] every public meeting I ever got up in, I said, "My phone number is..." and I'd give them my home phone number. Because you're hiring us, me. That's just what I think [it] is offering the service we offer. I think that's increasingly in a minority. I think that's too bad, but you can't fight progress.

QUENNELL: I agree absolutely with what Peter said. I mean, there are pluses and minuses to this trend. There's some nostalgia for the good old days of yellow trace and sitting around the table and scribbling, which nobody does anymore.

ROTHSCHILD: One thing that always enthralled me about Nicholas is he's a wonderful draftsman. He is an accomplished artist. I don't even know if anybody in our office today could draw anything. It's not relevant.

### ***Future of the Profession***

*INTERVIEWER: Where is the future of the profession heading?*

ROTHSCHILD: In terms of public perception of what we do, we are in a totally different renovated, expanded world from the way it was 40 years ago. I always thought it was so amusing that my mother would say to me in the early days of my practice, "It's so wonderful what you're doing, but what is it you really do?" There's no understanding of that; this whole thing about licensure. But, the contrast between the New York City parks department figuring out clever ways of hiring landscape architects sub rosa because we couldn't pass muster with the, whatever it was, the OMB, [Office of Management and Budget] or something, to Governors Island, Presidents Park, Hudson River Park, where the client said, "This has to be led by a landscape architect." And huge, huge projects. When Princeton University approached us, they went to four landscape architects, or six, to solicit proposals. They didn't even ask an architect. They had had architects doing master plans for Princeton and they didn't like what they got. So, I mean, that is just a complete revolution.

I think Mayor Bloomberg was fabulous in terms of Patti Harris and Amanda [Burden] in promoting this. They appreciated what they were really talking about and that was one of the things we'll remember Bloomberg's administration for, is what he did with open spaces and streetscapes and so on in New York. There's never been that kind of initiative or that kind of support. Starting with, maybe Paul Goldberger, who started writing in the architecture section of the New York Times, that set a gold standard of publicity. It was really a change and I think it's so established now that it will only get better from that point of view. I think we are recognized as a profession today as never before, as having a unique expertise that is a fundamental, necessary part to cities and the environment more broadly. It's very interesting, I think, that many universities we've worked for, Trinity College and Princeton and Colgate and Cornell and so on, they came to us independent of architects because they recognized [what] the campus is, that students spend more of their time outside than inside. It's much more important that the environment supports them broadly than that they have architects doing some signature building.

QUENNELL: I echo all of those sentiments. I think Peter's put them very well. I think it really has been a significant move forward from our point of view. I don't [know] whether the architects would agree, but I think most of them do. I think most of them recognize that we need both sets of skills to work side by side. Not one beneath the other.

**Mark Bunnell, Alison Shipley, Andrew Moore**

*Partners Mark Bunnell, Alison Shipley, and Andrew Moore recall working with Nicholas Quennell*

***Joining the Firm***

MOORE: We're the three junior partners and we've all been with the firm for a very long time. I joined the firm right out of school in 1980. I went to the University of Oregon and Mark [Bunnell] went to the University of Oregon.

SHIPLEY: I started a couple years later in 1983. I actually went to school in England. I went to school in Cheltenham, which is where Nicholas was during the War Years. I think we had [that] in common, and it actually turns out he worked with my next-door neighbor when we were in England.

I worked a year in England and I worked a year in New York before I started here. When I interviewed, it turned out we had a lot in common. Actually my dad was in school with Nicholas too, but I didn't actually know that when I interviewed.

BUNNELL: I joined the firm right out of school as well in 1985.

***What Makes a Quennell Rothschild Landscape?***

MOORE: What makes a Quennell Rothschild landscape? Part of it I think is very hard to define, because in many ways we don't have a house style. There's not a really strong vocabulary that people identify.

I think that's to a large extent because we look at each project and each landscape we work within its own context, its own history. Even though sometimes we might make some radical interesting different modern interventions, it always most of the time feels like something that belongs where we're working.

SHIPLEY: One of the things in our firm is we do have five partners. Although at the beginning it was somewhat led by Peter and Nicholas, we've always been the three of us boys contributing to the design. And I think we all have our own style as well.

So, I think if [you] looked at Mark's projects or Andy's projects or mine, you could see some stylistic similarities and even when we first started and Nicholas was more of a design force, he never really pushed design ideas. He always encouraged us to find our own style

MOORE: I kind of felt that that was one of the real strengths of Nicholas and the office is that kind of culture of the office as much as specific designs that he would push on us. That I know he's talked before about in Larry Halprin's office that Halprin gave them the license to pursue their own ideas and was supportive of that. And I definitely feel that in the office too.

### ***Early Environmental Design***

BUNNELL: I think he's really always talked about natural systems and the environmental approach to designing even before it was really fashionable.

SHIPLEY: Like for instance out on Roosevelt Island.

SHIPLEY: So you were saying about natural systems. Back in the early '80s, was that in the early '80s?

MOORE: Even before.

SHIPLEY: Maybe the late '70s. Nicholas was kind of designing like constructive wetlands before anybody else was talking about it, so I think that is something that we've always been aware of in the office.

BUNNELL: I remember one of the first projects that I worked with him on, he was interested in choosing plants that he sees that would be attractive to birds. That's something that had never really occurred to me before that. It just opened a whole new sort of approach to design for me.

BUNNELL: One of the first projects I worked on with Nicholas, it surprised me because one of the things he thought about most in choosing plants was which ones would be most attractive to birds? Which ones would have fruits that they would adjust and then fly off and seed them in various places? It was a different approach than I had anticipated.

SHIPLEY: He is a bird lover.

***Working with Nicholas***

*INTERVIEWER: Are there other things you would tell us about Nicholas while we're on the subject? That can be a personal recollection the story of that particular project through the lens of being a landscape architect. Was there a life lesson that came out of somewhere? Or an anecdotal story?*

SHIPLEY: We were talking earlier about one of the things. I don't know if you talked at all about his cartoons and the things that he's done. It kind of ties back into his love of sort of like these Rube Goldberg contraptions. Some of the early designs like when you were working with him or with Jennifer Bartlett on the South Garden and they wanted to have these very pruned hedges. Nicholas kind of did this invention of a hedge pruner.

MOORE: It was incredible.

SHIPLEY: It was a quite normal like plaza project but he was very concerned how the drainage would work and how he could construct a drain that would perfectly align with the pavements and the paving units. He kind of sketched out this thing that was really complicated and during the construction meeting , the construction manager said something like, oh no, we're not building a watch here. But he loves to do those things. Those kind of like overly-complicated things.

### ***Landscape as Palimpsest***

*INTERVIEWER: I think you said Andy about not having a house style, if you will. One of the things that is kind of intriguing to me when we look over projects that we've been looking at is that the firm's work is part of a larger palimpsest. Especially in the municipal work. That there's just layers of history. Nicholas spoke very eloquently about Olmsted and Vaux, or the Olmsted Brothers on Fort Tryon.*

*But even many of these projects like Sakura Park, you're going in there and there's Charles Downing Lay and so, in terms of the land, the same in terms of the community process which we've heard about, how was the firm prepared to deal with these landscape narratives of multiple layers?*

MOORE: Personally, this issue of layers of the landscape narrative is a really interesting and a compelling part of working in New York City. Because as you walk around the city, you have that same sense. There's new buildings and old buildings and there's traces of old streets. The parks and open spaces are very much like that too.

I think the work that we do for the most part in historic parks, whether it's Olmsted's or even the Robert Moses parks, we're not doing strict restoration work. Most often it's trying to insert some modern usage or some desired program into an existing park. I think that's what exciting to try and figure out how to do new things to make the parks revitalized or reinterpreted in ways that still honor the history, which might be not just the history of when it's created, but these layers of changes through history too.

SHIPLEY: I mean in a way that does relate to the type of projects you're doing. I mean if you're creating something from scratch obviously you're not going to have that, but I think that anyone who's respectful of history would treat in maybe a somewhat similar way.

BUNNELL: In a lot of the projects of that we worked on, at least early on, I did have a sense that we were trying to wade through or were kind of review all the original Olmstedian influence and get under the Robert Moses. Several projects, Morningside Park, Marcus Garvey Park, Fort Tryon Park, others, that was a real challenge.

SHIPLEY: Yes. Kind of revealed the landscape, original landscape.

MOORE: I feel, you guy probably do too, that the working under Nicholas on these projects was a really opportunity because coming right out of school we probably wouldn't have had as much access to work on things. My very first project literally off the plane into the office was to work on Central Park, which coming out of school was just a little star struck.

But I went up with Nicholas before Fort Tryon we went to Fairsted<sup>vi</sup> to look at the drawings and the original documents, and it's just a great opportunity. A good experience.

### ***Collaborating with Nicholas***

*INTERVIEWER: One of the things we witnessed in our time with Nicholas is this constant quest for collaboration. Whether it's with artists or other scientists. It's funny. Before we*

*embarked on this process, I had never heard of Leonard Manasseh, who Nicholas worked for in the UK for four to five years.*

SHIPLEY: I'd never heard of him either.

*INTERVIEWER: Last night I was on Google. I was reading his obituaries. He was a professor of Nicholas's at the AA. Then, he [Nicholas] worked with this man for almost as long as he was in Halprin's office. I'll read to you two statement and one that you had just mentioned about a modern insertion.*

*On that Manasseh, it says lauded for his modernist designs that were in keeping in with their historical settings or landscapes. Then his interest was in the apparent conflict between the architect as creative artist on one hand, and as the rational technologist and scientist on the other. I thought well, that sounds like Larry. But it also sounds like what we were listening in terms of Nicholas's quest through the creative collaborations.*

*I was curious from your own experiences as having all been here from for multiple decades and now carrying on in these projects that are complex and looking at the idea of putting together teams for them. I mean can you speak to this idea of the collaborative spirit not just within the office, but in terms of the kinds of creative and expert people in various fields? And is that part of what makes a Quennell Rothschild undertaking?*

BUNNELL: I think it was very easy to do collaborative projects with Nicholas leading them because he has a very kind of personal style and disarming style. Especially working with

people like Maya Lin. It made her feel very comfortable and his combination of engaging personality and extremely technical expertise was very clearly comforting to somebody like that.

SHIPLEY: And not ego driven at all. I mean like a lot of especially architects and well known landscape architects, it's all about themselves and their design. I think Nicholas is always willing to take a back seat and kind of he wants the other people to shine. You know? That does, as you say, that makes it easier for those people.

MOORE: That's true. I mean he's a great collaborator, a really good critic. Also, I mean just those things that you described. It's a sort of wide range of interests. So, Mark mentioned the birds. He's really passionately interested in birds and sort of applied that to design and sort of technical things like that watch making Alison's talking about. That gets applied.

It's taking these different and the art work, different strands of interest of his and combining that into these projects. Having a project that's something that you're really interested in different parts of it makes all the difference. It's like having a job that you love to come to.

### ***Nicholas as Critic***

*INTERVIEWER: You've also just mentioned the idea of him being a critic. We've talked a lot about that because of his various roles in MAS and the Commission and parks council and so on and so forth. One of the statements that Nicholas made to us which I thought was really*

*quite wonderful is being successful as a critic is not about imposing your ideas but trying to understand what the person is presenting. I was curious if you guys speak to Nicholas as a critic. The idea of learning how to be a critic. To look at things critically. To offer constructive criticism.*

MOORE: In terms of being a critic in the office and outside of the office as well, it kind of goes back to that idea of him being fostering other people and helping other people do their best. Whereas I think Nicholas hasn't ever really imposed a lot of design ideas, but he's really supportive and trying to make even the people in the office better at what they're doing.

SHIPLEY: He does tend to want to avoid conflict a lot. So, I think that sometimes he won't be as harsh in his criticism in terms of actual design criticism because he wants to be the nice guy. I mean Nicholas, everybody thinks of Nicholas as the nice guy. He's the good, he is a really nice guy. So, he never really would come up to someone and say that design sucks. He never would say that. Ever. Even if it totally sucked.

BUNNELL: I have always found Nicholas to be very supportive. And it's always a pleasure to work with him. One of the things that's most fun to do with Nicholas is just go for a drive to a very distant site and just enjoy that ride and the conversation. It's always whimsical. Always not about work, just about life.

SHIPLEY: What whimsical things would he say? I don't think I've had a whimsical conversation with him.

BUNNELL: It could be about fixing the carpentry. It could be about the environment. It could be about art. It could be about problems with plumbing. I don't know.

SHIPLEY: Plumbing. I was going to say plumbing too. He likes plumbing.

MOORE: I remember after you and Nicholas came back from one of these long site trip that Nicholas told us that you were a terrific joke teller, which we had never really heard before. So, you must have had a good time.

### ***Looking Forward and Back***

*INTERVIEWER: Looking forward then, what is the future of Quennell Rothschild through the lens of this sort of period of the firm now building on this question of what makes a Quennell Rothschild project or approach?*

*What I find remarkable in sitting here with the three of you and I feel very disappointed that I've only known you and not you guys because we've filmed a lot of next generations. I'm just so moved listening to the three of you together because there's a charm [in it]. Now, maybe you've gotten me fooled her.*

*Talking about how you have this person who doesn't like conflict. And how the three of you have been with this person for 90 years collectively. I just along the way listening to*

*something which I find incredibly musical. How do you move forward through the lens of what you've learned in what we know is a very changed landscape here in New York in terms of how things function?*

*I'm asking a question a little sloppy but it's OK. I mean I just think I don't really know how to ask is what I'm saying in terms of how do you take this through the lens of Nicholas? The whole culture of practice as we heard from Peter that the number of larger firms and bold face names, and the way that things changed during their time where a landscape architect can be a prime on a New York City parks project. It's just a natural evolution of changing dynamics. Through of the lens of who this practice is and who you people are as a result of that, how do you move forward?*

MOORE: As the office moves forward I sort of feel like that diversity of the work is something that I think will help us move forward in the future. I mean we've all been with the firm forever so there's been, we've had 30 people, we've had five people and we've gone through really fat busy times and things where we were kind of scraping.

I think it's given us a really good base of understanding of how to do landscape architecture of all different kinds. We've done residential work, large scale planning, historic restoration, which is also why it's fun to do that work is because it's always different

SHIPLEY: I mean in a way we have a sort of slightly our specialties. I mean sometimes it's just the luck of the draw, but Mark has ended up doing a lot of like plazas and streetscape.

And Andy had done a little bit more of the historic and also residential stuff. Like for the past few years I've just been doing all the public parks. It's not necessarily that we chose that. It kind of almost like it chose us because it's like who answers the phone gets the job practically, you know?

We're a little disorganized actually. I mean I don't think we're very good as a firm at really planning what the future is going to be, what direction we're going to go in. It's more like what jobs do you get? Are those good jobs? Do we want to do them? Maybe we're not as narrowly focused on a goal as some people might be.

MOORE: There was a woman who used to work here, a friend who is now working out in San Diego. Her bosses asked her if she could share the Quennell Rothschild technique for project managing and we all laughed. The same way [you asked] what was Quennell Rothschild's style. There's times we feel like we're fumbling our way along still.

*INTERVIEWER: I think your answer to the question is what I hoped it would be when I asked the style question. The other thing I want you guys to recognize is for better or worse, these projects are time capsules. I know the office is moving in January --*

SHIPLEY: March, actually. Nicholas might think January.

*INTERVIEWER: Moving next year. So, for better or worse this moment right now, this is for posterity. I know we're doing this larger project about Nicholas's life and the firm's*

*evolution, but it also is an opportunity with the camera rolling if there's anything that you want to say that becomes documented as part of this. As part of a reflection on at least that is the time that you've spent together collaborating.*

BUNNELL: I'll ask the question. Do you mean about Nicholas? Or about...?

*INTERVIEWER: I think it's about practice with Nicholas and the firm. It's Nicholas and it's the firm, but I'm asking it a little open endedly just by design.*

*I just think that having done this enough times and this is documented. It's very different than reading something. It's someone telling something intimate and personal. And it's hard stuff, but I feel that from where I've been when I've done this that there's so much inspiration that can come from something like that. Also I think it's also about the family and friends because this becomes something that's out there and there's no one else that's in a position that you three are to ask a question like that.*

MOORE: Myself, I feel like the office has been like this, for a lot of periods in my life it's been like the major sort of focus. I grew up in Oregon, moved to New York with the intention of living here for a year and it's been here for 33 years. So, maybe the office is like a family sort of substitute and definitely dysfunctional. We all have our, I mean certain character traits that we all bump into all the time and Peter and Nicholas maybe are this kind of weird parent figure.

SHIPLEY: Thank god they're not really.

MOORE: But as you say, this period right now, the last couple of years it's been different and in some ways kind of strange because they've been much less involved in the projects and we've really been functioning as the partners for a while before it was more officially recognized about taking over the firm. It definitely feels, to me it feels like a transition. I feel like this move of the office is a chance to mark that in a certain way. With that I'm rambling a little bit, but there's good and bad about this. I'm kind of a little sad that it's not the same dynamic as it is before. It's like moving out of home or losing a parent or something.

BUNNELL: I think that there is a lot of trust between the three of us. We've shared a lot and there's also this sense that we've all built a lot of projects now. I have a sort of confidence that we can attack projects and build things that will last. I had a sense early in my career that a lot of what I did was kind of experimental. I didn't know it was going to work, but I think for all of us we've probably done enough projects that we have the confidence that we can do things that will last.

SHIPLEY: Yes, I mean I think that the staff kind of recognizes that too because they look to us like as mentors to guide them in things and come to some weird kind of like passing it on to the next generation. That's all kind of normal, I guess.

### ***Generating Ideas***

*INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you guys want to add? Does it start with a sketch?*

*Does it start with a light bulb moment? An idea that Nicholas [had] or any of you? How does it start? How does it grow?*

SHIPLEY: One of the things we were talking about collaboration, but in some ways there's not that much collaboration within the office on individual projects. We have five partners and each of us is designing our own project, so each of us has our own way of doing that. The way that I approach it might be different from the way Andy approaches it.

I might do a sketch or have a kind of an idea from a photograph or a landscape of the goal that you're working to. But I don't we actually really talk to each other that much about design in the office. I mean sometimes we do kind of bounce ideas off each other, but a lot of times it's more like talking about technical things like how do you think this wall could work?

Or is it feasible to attach this to this, you know? But not kind of say, I don't know. Maybe we're afraid that the other person is going to criticize what we're doing, but I think either we feel confident enough in our designs or we don't want to hear negative criticism, but it's like we all do tend to just design ourselves. So, I think to answer sort of go to how does it start? That's just individual for each person.

*INTERVIEWER: But how does it start with Nicholas and having --*

SHIPLEY: I have no idea. I mean I don't know how it starts with him. Do you?

MOORE: I don't know. The only thing I remember where there actually was like a napkin sketch was the LIU plaza and the arch. We were going for a meeting before the project started and we were sitting at Junior's Cheesecake and he took out a napkin and drew this arch and said I had this idea about making an arch, I mean it's talking about a time capsule. It's like very post-modern now, but this kind of stylized arch that referred to the arch at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn and the one over the Manhattan Bridge. But the napkin moments don't happen all that often.

*INTERVIEWER: Do you still have the napkin?*

MOORE: I don't. No, sorry.

SHIPLEY: I don't know. I don't think Nicholas has ever really discussed like how he comes the idea or anything. I mean a lot of times it just seems more of a problem solving approach rather than that napkin kind of like this is the big concept.

BUNNELL: Yes, I can think of the projects that I did early on with Nicholas, a lot of it was about exploring alternatives except that we could have an intelligent conversation with the client and being open and working with the client toward the solution that would work. And not forcing solutions on people.

### ***Seeing Projects Mature***

*INTERVIEWER: Have you had any experiences where because you've been the firm for multiple decades where there might have been an earlier project that you guys worked on together that you hadn't seen in a decade and you went back to? And you got to see it mature?*

MOORE: There is a few. I mean sometimes, there's good and bad. There's some where they haven't been maintained and it's heartbreaking. Or, you look at it and it doesn't look very good. That LIU plaza, every time I drive down Flatbush Avenue and I see how big those trees are I get a little shook up in thinking how much time has passed.

SHIPLEY: Yes, the willow trees are pretty big.

MOORE: Actually I was going to say it's a little bit like kids or people you know that you don't see them age. But when you look at some of the photographs of construction and you see how tiny the trees go in. Like at Lighthouse Park, the willows there are just magnificent now. They're beautiful trees.

## **DESIGN**

### **Principles of Design**

#### **Approaching Landscape Design**

*INTERVIEWER: What makes a Quennell Rothschild landscape?*

I would hope that what makes a Quennell Rothschild landscape distinguishable is very often because you don't know who's designed it because it steps back into, almost anonymity; rather [than someone] saying, "Oh, shoot, that's got to be done by so and so," [where] you know who it was just because of the kind of design and the detailing. You could argue that's a weakness and that we're just wimps, but I think I really believe that you shouldn't be conscious of [the designer's hand] at all times.

*INTERVIEWER: When Nicholas Quennell approaches a landscape in a city, what are the questions that you ask? How do you approach a landscape?*

I clearly look at the history and I want to see what that space was before. If it had been an open space for a long time, what changes it had gone through. We obviously look at whatever exists in that space, whether it be the trees; the most important thing being the trees because almost everything else is replaceable, the pavings or the drainage or the electrical systems. But you need to look at all of those because you have to tailor work to the budget and if you don't have enough money to put in a new drainage system or if you don't have to put in a new drainage system, why do it? So, there is always that sort of balancing act between what is there, what's been there in the past, what exists, what repair it's in, what shape it's in. But the trees are probably the number one concern because they're the hardest thing to replace in the size that you've confined them on an existing site. Keeping trees alive with construction work, particularly if you're going to make any changes to the grades and the levels, is very, very difficult so you have to be wary of that.

## **Working to Scale**

*INTERVIEWER: Is there a particular scale at which you're happiest working?*

No, I don't think so. I've enjoyed working at larger scale, but I do like to get down to the detail. I mean, I'm not crazy about doing master plans and then handing them over and saying goodbye. I like the idea of doing a master plan for a site and then building it over time in phases as whatever is appropriate. You're not often given the opportunity to do both because it's either the master plan and, "Thank you very much and then we'll hand it to somebody else to carry out," or you're given the three acres or the one acre or whatever it might be, and told to build it. It has to do with one's ability to focus on specific details of a project [and] that [is] very hard to do when you're doing the 50 acres or something.

*INTERVIEWER: How do you understand how much you can propose?*

When thinking about [how] a site is furnished, whether it's the paving materials or the street furniture or the light fixtures or even the planting, if it comes to that, I think you do need to discipline, because you don't want things to get out of hand. But on the other hand you do want there to be a response to the site and a response to its history. Whenever you can, I think it's worth it to respond to the specifics of the site in that way.

## **Design Palette**

One needs to have I think an understanding of the complexity of the ecology of wherever you're working, whether it's an urban ecology or a rural one. As long as you keep

that attitude [of limits] in the back of your mind, it's always going to first say, "Calm down. [Don't] pull out all the plugs, don't blow all the whistles," whether it be in the planting plan or whether it be in the lighting plan. I veer towards muting rather than exploding the palette and the plant materials. There are places [where it] is appropriate, but I wouldn't want to see that everywhere. [In Fort Tryon Park] I wouldn't want to see the whole park planted with eight million different species of perennials and annual flowers. In planting, you want a richness, you want a diversity, you want to be ecologically responsible so you're not planting [species] that are not going to grow where you're planting, but at the same time the palette, I think, needs to be kept muted. That was its intent [at Fort Tryon Park] and it worked very well there because it's a unique place. But it's a unique piece of a much bigger landscape, most of which is much more muted. It's like the jewel in the crown, or however you want to describe it, and its fine.

### **Need for Maintenance**

I think more and more philanthropists and philanthropic organizations like the Greenacre Foundation have become aware of how important maintenance is. It's much harder to raise money for maintenance. Because traditionally private money tended to be put into capital projects. It was easy. You could go to somebody and say, "Oh, wouldn't you like to fund this park or this playground? Oh, yes." "A skating rink? Sure." "Here's a couple million dollars. Go and build it; put my name on it." Then they can go back and relax, and they've done their bit. People like to give money for something, and they can put their name plate on it and they can say, "This is the Wollman Rink," or whoever it is; whatever

the money was given for and they'll be remembered for that forever. But, to say that, "This is the Wollman rake or the Wollman lawn sweeper or lawn mower" doesn't have the same ring. So, it's a tough road to travel.

I think people have become much, much more aware of that issue in recent years, partly because after the Robert Moses years so many parks fell into disrepair and neglect and there never seemed to be enough public money. But I think certainly, the current administration and people like Tupper Thomas and Betsy Rogers have been extraordinary effective I think at getting people involved and getting people to fund the ongoing maintenance, which is so important. People like Betsy Rogers, who said, "We need to get private money into this process so we can care for these parks in an ongoing way." I think we've been very fortunate to have had a relatively small group of people who have taken initiative to both give money and raise money because you need to do both. It's a lot easier to raise money if you've also given it because you say, "Match [my] funds." You know, "Look what I gave?" Bette Midler and Tupper Thomas in Prospect Park and Betsy Rogers in Central Park, they have been very, very effective at probably twisting people's arms, but, at least encouraging people to give to the maintenance, not just the construction. In Bette Midler's case, she gave her own money, but she also helped raise money from other people. In the case of Tupper and Betsy Rogers, they were very, very good at fundraising, which is a skill, which I wouldn't want to have to do.

## **Thoughts on Practice**

### **On the Role of the Landscape Architect**

The users are much more important than us landscape architects. I think many of the users, if they even knew that we existed, would probably recognize that the landscape architects' role is very important. The fact that we are perceived as being green as opposed to architects, who are only concerned with building monuments to themselves. I mean, just an exaggeration obviously; there are green-like architects too. But I think the fact that landscape architects are really concerned about the environment in its most complex ways, whether it be the air quality or whether it be how we deal with storm runoff or how we protect trees, or, obviously, protect open space. I think that those are all related areas, which landscape architects I think have unique ability to respond to.

### ***The Element of Fun***

I think it's important for landscape and one of the things that I think distinguishes landscape from architecture often is the element of fun. Not necessarily humor, although that can be a part of it too, but I think the fact that so much open space and the way people use open space is about fun and about enjoying themselves. Whether they're enjoying themselves playing in Central Park or wherever it might be, or whether they're enjoying the experience of seeing something like the words "Picture This" marching across the landscape, those are things that you can do in a landscape that you could have a much harder time doing. I'm not saying that there aren't buildings that have a playful aspect to them and humor, but it's much harder to do I think.

### **Being a Good Critic**

I think what makes a good critic is the ability to understand and appreciate the point of view of the artist or the person whose work you're evaluating. Being open and aware of the motives of the creator, the artist or whoever the designer [is], so that you're not just bringing your own baggage to that design. You have to really try and understand. I think particularly at the Art Commission this is true; but I think in any public agency that has any review function, it's terribly important to not impose your own views and your own aesthetic and your own prejudices. And to try to really listen to the person who is the designer or the client, whoever it is that's presenting work, to see where they're coming from and what drove their design and what produced the results. It doesn't mean to say you always have to agree with them. Sometimes you feel they've made a terrible mistake and you try and straighten that out. And there was some pretty bad work that came before us occasionally. But I think it's still important even when it's not the greatest work to understand the motivation and what drove it, whether it was economics or whether it's just somebody who isn't such a good designer. And sometimes you try [to go] behind the scenes perhaps a little bit; try and say, "Well, maybe it would be a good idea if you brought somebody else in to work on this," if it was an important enough project to warrant that. Occasionally we were effective in that regard. That's obviously a very difficult road to take, because it can get you into trouble and cause a lot of ill feeling, which I'm not crazy about doing.

### **Political Support for Landscape Architecture through the Years**

As I look back over the last 60 or 70 years of New York City's history, and particularly the parks in New York City after the Olmsted and Vaux era, clearly the first person who really jumps out at you is Robert Moses. I'm the first to trash Robert Moses. I think he did some awful things, but he also did some wonderful things. He was a visionary. He was an ambitious son of a bitch. He had pretty bad taste, by and large, but not always. He hired people, some of whom were very talented: Clarke and Rapuano and some of the other landscape architects of the '30s who designed places like Jones Beach. Some of them did a great deal of damage, particularly to the historic parks. Probably, if Robert Moses had his way, Central Park would probably be very, very different from the way Olmsted and Vaux and intended it to be and the way it is today.

Having said that, move on in time to the more recent era. I think Ed Koch made some pretty good moves and appointed some pretty good people. People like Bronson Binger, who I assume Koch appointed to the parks department, who was both a visionary and a practical guy at the same time, knew where he should put his effort, where it would be most effective. But he knew also not [to] try beat City Hall or fight City Hall, because he was part of it.

Mike Bloomberg, I think he's been a terrific mayor and he doesn't pretend to have the design expertise, but that he knows that is needed. It's really through Bloomberg that people like deputy mayor Patti [Patricia] Harris, who came from a design background and has a very strong sense of design, were appointed and put in the places where they were. By putting people of the caliber of Patti Harris in those positions of power, I think he says something very strongly about his attitude to design and how important it is to the city. And

the Public Design Commission has been given the strength that it needs to carry out its duties, along with agencies like [UDC] where good people with good design sense have been put fairly high up in the ranks, [and] have really pushed the design point of view and made sure that new buildings and new parks and new spaces are designed to be responsive and well carried out.

[Comparing Robert Moses to Mayor Bloomberg], to me it's kind of interesting to bracket a career. The difference between these two mayors is<sup>vii</sup>, under the first mayor, all of the work was done by two landscape architects who never got credit. I mean, when we say Robert Moses landscapes, we don't [say] they're Clarke and Rapuano landscapes; we say Robert Moses. Yet, the flip side is under Bloomberg, because this administration has enabled people like Michael Van Valkenburgh and Diller Scofidio + Renfro and Field Operations. He's created a cadre of star architects and star landscape architects because he's enabled as a patron that work to happen.

### **On Creating Public Spaces**

I think that the wonderful thing about landscape, particularly public landscapes, is that they are about people. They're about the way people use space, the way people experience it; what they do in the space, whether it's playing a sport or whether it's just sitting enjoying the scenery, or whatever it might be. So, I think that there's always that relationship between people and landscape that you have to keep aware of and keep in mind. I certainly do. I mean, that's how I arrive at what I usually do. It's not because I think we should impose this geometry on this place. I'm thinking now of Maya Lin and the skating

rink that we did with her in Grand Rapids: Her design of the little lights in the skating rink was a piece of art, but it's also a joyful expression, and it's something that brings joy to people when they're skating in it.

### ***Celebrating Community***

There is also that opportunity for celebrating communally or community by gathering together, whether it be for a concert or whether it be for some kind of sale event or whatever it might be. We [at Quennell Rothschild] often have looked for opportunities to put in a small structure because the structures tend to become the focal point for those sorts of events. If they don't exist, you can always bring something in temporarily and people do that, but, I think when it's appropriate and when we can, we like to; [in] Sakura Park and other places we've actually been able to build a small structure, which becomes a venue for events, whether it's concerts or theatrical events or weddings. I've actually performed a wedding ceremony in my brief days as a priest; I did do that in one of the structures in one of our parks.

### **Balancing Different Stakeholders**

*INTERVIEWER: Speak to why landscape architects have to communicate, and... about the public process in terms of how heavy is your hand.*

I'm convinced that landscape architects have to respond to the public needs and the public demands, but they have to also be an arbiter at times because there are frequently conflicting goals. I mean, one group wants an area to be a ballfield and another group wants

it to be a wetland and another group wants it to be a dog run. So, somewhere in there you have to sometimes strike a balance, but I think listening is very important, and creating and establishing a dialogue and figuring out, somehow within this process, who are the appropriate spokespeople for a particular place at a particular time. Sometimes you have to just be tough and say this group can't be accommodated because their demands are too exclusive to other people's uses.

## **Reinvigorating Spaces**

### **A Love of Restoration**

I'm sure a lot of that had to do with my early childhood because the house I grew up in, my father had bought probably as a ruin in 1920 or thereabouts and had lovingly fixed up over the years; not major restoration, but he had painted everything and had plumbing put in. It was a very beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> century, three-story house, plus basement, which is where I spent most of my time. I loved that house and my father just loved it too. I inherited that love of old houses from him. So, I think that was, a sort of, basis upon which I've led a lot of my life. The loft I live in [now], for a long time, it had no partitions whatsoever. It was just an open space with the bathroom and a kitchen in the corner, and then eventually I added a bedroom. It still has much of the feeling that it did when I first moved there. It's very important to me; trying to keep, maintain, without being slavish about preserving everything from the past, but maintaining one's connection to the past and the things that we grew up with and that our parents grew up with, and so forth.

### **On Site-Specific Design**

I've always felt that the design had to be a response to the site, to the problem, the program, and so that it could vary tremendously. The outcome could vary tremendously from a project in Central Park, which I feel has to reflect and respond to the historic landscape in one way or another, to something as dramatically new as the North Carolina Museum of Art, where there were no holds-barred and there was no precedent so that you could go crazy, or wild at least. I think to me a single-minded designer, and it's not fair to say that either Paul Friedberg or Larry Halprin [was], that they only had one idea that they applied in every case. But certainly, you look at Paul's work and there was a style and a character which is thematic throughout. I'm sure that he did stuff that you wouldn't be able to identify as a Friedberg landscape, but a lot of his work definitely had an imprint.

### ***Power of a Light Hand***

I don't like landscapes where you're constantly aware of, "Oh, that must have been so and so." There are some that I know and have enjoyed. I'm not going to mention any names, but there are a few who get away with that either because they're very skillful with form or texture or art materials or whatever it might be. I mean, obviously, I'm sure you could say that about Capability Brown. He imposed his own view of the world and the universe on the landscape and the result was extraordinary by and large. It isn't true unfortunately of every other practitioner since then.

### ***Art in Landscapes***

Clearly the role of art in landscape can vary enormously from a landscape that is dominated by an artist who imposes his or her vision and will on that landscape, to one where art can be embraced and incorporated but without driving the whole show. I prefer the latter to the former because it [leaves] more room for us to explore our ideas and our creativity. [The firm has] had some very good experiences with both ends. Somebody like Maya Lin who's a very strong-minded, strong-willed person, we worked with in Grand Rapids, [on Rosa Parks Circle] but we all contributed to that project and I think the end result couldn't be what it is without all of us. It wasn't just Maya Lin's.

Similarly, [the] North Carolina Museum of Art, which is one of my favorite projects; that was a true dialogue from day one and from the get-go with Barbara Kruger, Laurie Hawkinson and Henry Smith-Miller as to what kind of place it wanted to be and what it could accommodate. We all agreed that it would be great to have Barbara Kruger's [artistic] imprint on the project, [but] we all participated in making that happen and I think it makes for a great space.

### ***The Land Art Movement***

*INTERVIEWER: The practice comes into its own, or it begins to evolve during the land art movement. [Were] you influenced by any of [the land art] people, like Smithson or Goldsworthy, or in terms of the blurring of the boundaries [between art and landscape design]?*

I like the work. I mean, I wouldn't imitate it necessarily, but I love what those people have done. Almost every one of them that I've experienced, I've found stimulating. I don't

always love them, but I usually find something interesting about it. It's just a breakaway from the standard rubber-stamp kind of trees and grass and all the boring stuff we do.

### ***Color in Landscapes***

I think that using color both in plants and in the built elements is important. And working with sculptors as we've done many, many times, offers that opportunity for color. Not always, but sometimes. I like to use color in the landscape where it's appropriate, whether it be in a Calder sculpture or in the case of the backstop at Roosevelt Island, where we had wanted to make it a sculpture. Another project that I'm very attached to and very fond of and proud of is the arch at the LIU campus in Brooklyn, which I designed from scratch and which is like a ceremonial arch done in red painted steel. At least I think it's still red. I hope it is. I never quite trust that people won't [go] back and paint it a different color because that's inevitable.

I would hesitate to talk about color in plants because I'm just not that knowledgeable. [At Fort Tryon Park], the heather garden is not garish. I think it's very important to say that it's a muted array of colors, which is typical of heaths and heathers as opposed to annuals and perennials, which tend to be gaudier. There's a place for the gaudy too, but the heather garden was certainly not it and not the place for that. That's why I need the Lynden Millers and the other people to explore all those possibilities because it's very specialized area of expertise.

[Landscape architects] tend to plant trees which are brown and green, I think, with an occasional flower if you're not careful. It's a very different color palette. I think I tend to

be more conservative in choice of color in plant materials. But I think in the built environment, whether it be something like the LIU arch in Brooklyn or a piece of sculpture, then you really can. You have the opportunity to do things so much more daring and sometimes shocking. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but by and large, I think the outdoor sculptures, the Storm King or other outdoor sculptures that use primary colors, I think work very well in the landscape. Using color in the landscape is not something to be afraid of.

### **On Preserving Landscapes**

*INTERVIEWER: Why should landscape architects care about preserving historic landscapes?*

I think partly because of the lineage, but that in itself, I think, is not enough to warrant [protection], but I think the important thing is that they're irreplaceable. Olmsted and Vaux have been dead for more than a hundred years, but their work has not aged, has not become less important because of that passage of time. Some of their work admittedly may be less important than others, but I think by and large when we find an Olmsted and Vaux landscape we need to, first of all, see how it's been changed and whether it's been compromised over time. And B, whether it can be, or needs to be, restored back to some earlier vestige or earlier period when it had its best. I think Central Park being an example; a lot of changes have occurred to Central Park since Olmsted and Vaux passed on, but the inherent structure is there. And I think people like Betsy Barlow Rogers have done a fantastic job of recapturing the spirit of the place and in many cases the real physical qualities of the place. That's I think what we need to try and do whenever we possibly can.

### ***Working on Olmsted & Vaux Landscapes***

*INTERVIEWER: What does it mean when you're creating anything new in a landscape of a master, or someone that is part of a city's cultural heritage?*

I would say that when approaching a landscape, particularly Olmsted and Vaux, I single them out because they are head and shoulders above almost everybody else. I think it's terribly important to try and understand what their goals were. Who their audience was or who their users were and how those users differ from the users today, and to try [to] describe the timeless qualities because that's the thing, again, that's so important about Olmsted and Vaux, is that the landscape and others, Capability Brown and others before them, but Olmsted and Vaux because they both were artistic artists and social innovators. [They] really did try and create places that improve people's lives and could compensate for some of the awful things. I mean, if you lived in the Lower East Side in 1860, it's amazing that you survived at all, and if you could make it all the way up to Central Park, you could experience a pastoral and a healthier environment in a way that you couldn't anywhere else, or not as easily. So, it became doable and accessible.

### **On Creating Timeless Landscapes**

I think the most successful landscapes are those that can accommodate a bunch of different uses at different times without becoming so exclusive. I think one of the great things about the Olmsted landscapes is that they are flexible. They do allow an awful lot of different things to happen within them. I would say flexibility in design means flexibility in

one's attitude to what you're designing and who you're designing for. In other words, you're not coming in with a rigid preconceived notion of, "Oh, yes, this has to be this, or this has to be that." I think it's very hard to do that when you're handed a program by the client that says, "Here, you've got eight acres and [you have] to get three ball fields and two running tracks and blah blah blah." So, trying to meet the goals and the needs of the client, whether it's a public agency or whoever it is, and at the same time meet that bigger goal of providing for spaces that can be flexible and can meet different people's needs at different times, is a challenge. I think we try and do the same thing whenever we can to create and make spaces that, if it's appropriate, if a softball group of players wants to play a game of softball they can do it without taking over the whole space forever. And that somebody else can move in later and run their dogs or somebody else can then come in later and play a game of soccer, or just go for a walk. It's tough because when people want a softball field to look like a softball field, they don't want it to look like the Long Meadow at Prospect Park which just happens be able to have a softball game in it, although I think that works very, very well there. I don't say we're always successful, but we try to do it.

### **On the Value of Open Space**

I think open space is absolutely essential for our survival, both symbolically and physically in terms of places where you can get exercise, where you can get fresh air. Certainly my early childhood growing up in the country made me conscious and aware of the importance and the beauty of open space, and the importance of preserving open space. Growing up in a country with a long tradition of both natural and designed

landscapes, from a very early age I was made aware of how important landscapes are as places that bring pleasure and joy of all kinds, not just a beautiful rolling greenswards where I grew up, but gardens and squares—some of those London squares are magical. Those experiences really did make me extremely conscious of the importance of preserving open space and how fragile it is and how easily you can lose it if you don't fight to preserve it.

So, I think that I was probably psychologically ready to look at landscapes with a more professional eye. Then, my years at the Architectural Association, we actually did have, even though they didn't call it landscape, quite a few projects that really were more about landscape than about buildings as such. Projects where we had to go out and look at open spaces and make commentary on them and evaluate them, not necessarily design them. I think that was a good experience because even though I ended up abandoning architecture because I couldn't deal with all those details, it was a foundation for thinking about the environment and thinking about the world at large, which I think was useful and helpful. Then, going on to thinking about what that meant for actual designed, manmade landscapes

I think that our underlying view and our underlying attitude to open space is crucial. That's influenced a lot of [Quennell Rothschild's] work from very small scale things to large scale things. On the bigger scale, I think Hudson River Park, which Peter really conceived of and created the master plan for, I think has been a wonderful addition to the city. I think he should get full credit for his role and fighting for that because it was a struggle at times, an uphill struggle. I think Hudson River Park has really been a great addition to the city's open space system. When I first opened the office, the opportunities for influencing and working

within the parks department were very limited. I had to keep looking for opportunities and then later, as we began to work for the city agencies and particularly parks, it was possible to see areas where you could make a difference, where you could either prevent something from being over-paved or over-developed. For example, working in Central Park and the Children's Zoo was probably one of the biggest challenges in that respect because it was clearly a highly developed, intensely used place. But at the same time I felt [the design] had to respond to and reflect the character and the qualities of Central Park as a whole.

### ***Bike Lanes and Linkage***

This whole idea of linkage, which is something that Olmsted talked about, and obviously in Boston, he was very successful at achieving. But there are far too few linkages. I use the bike lane every day and the bike lanes are an improvement, but they're not very scenic. They're a convenient way of getting from A to B and they do link more important open spaces. I like to ride my bike. I don't ride very far. I live only a little over a mile away from the office, so it's not exactly a rigorous bike ride and it's pretty flat, but I do think biking is a wonderful way to get around the city and I'm so glad that the bike lane program has continued to grow and it continues to be expanded. I know that some people hate the bicyclists and there are times when I do too, particularly the new city bike program where people rent one of these blue bikes and usually ride with no helmet and with no idea of how you're supposed to ride in the city. That will probably change. As a way of getting around and as a way of experiencing [the city], I think bicycling is wonderful. I like to walk as well, but you can cover a lot more ground [on a bike]. For me, it's a perfect way of getting

from home to work every day. [But] I think the idea of linkage and making sure that open spaces do connect to one another is something that we should be pushing for and looking for opportunities for.

### ***Restrained Design***

Certainly, I do feel very, very strongly that open space is a crucial piece of the city as a whole, and that it's also often under threat and that we have to be constantly on the alert to see and make sure that we don't lose a single inch. Hopefully we can gain space rather than lose it over time. Within that context, how we improve open space is important. It's very easy and I'm sure I'm guilty of it, [or] have been; it's very easy for architects and landscape architects to want to impose their own ego on the work they do. Sometimes that's positive and sometimes it's negative. But all of us have to be very careful to make sure that the ego is restrained and not allowed. I mean there may be rare exceptions when you say well, thank goodness that person really went out on a limb and did something wacky. But those events are not very frequent and more often than not I think we need to, sort of, take a back seat and say, "All right, the landscape is more important," particularly in existing parks which have their history and understanding what that is and how it may have been compromised. I mean Morningside Park, which [Peter Rothschild] designed, I think was a very good case in point: a park that inherently was wonderful and was an original Olmsted and Vaux design, but which had been compromised over the years. We were able to, in many ways, bring it back and bring back many of the characteristics that made it so special when it was originally built.

### ***Protecting Open Space***

Looking into the future I think that, first of all, we have to be absolutely rigid and adamant about protecting the open space that we have. We happen to have lived through a period where I think Mayor Bloomberg and his deputy mayors have been very pro-open space. So, we've been fortunate in the last few years, but that could change. Some future mayor could decide that really what we want to do is plop high-rise buildings in every available piece of city-owned land to build up revenue, for example, because they need the money. That's something we have to be very, very wary about and cautious of. The other important thing is recognizing the historic importance of so many open spaces. The crucial ones, like Central Park and Prospect Park, are protected by their landmark status, but there are others that aren't. I think we need to be sure that we keep reviewing the list and maybe adding parks to that list so that they get that additional level of protection. I think those are crucial things to watch out for in the future.

### **On Changing Cities**

#### ***The Renewal of New York Green Space***

I came to New York for totally different reasons that had nothing to do with landscape. I clearly could go to Prospect Park, go to Central Park, and understand what important places they were. But the damage that had been done to both of them in the intervening years [since their creation], largely unfortunately, through the interventions of Robert Moses, were pretty distressing. In the ensuing years, seeing the fact that other

people appreciated that and were willing to get up and do something about it, the Betsy Barlow Rogerses, was extraordinary. I really take my hat off to those people because they got down in the trenches and they made sure the politicians understood, and they made sure the money was made available. And they went out to the private sector. I mean, Betsy was out there with her hat collecting money from the wealthy people who lived around Central Park, who didn't really realize what had gone on, I don't think, many of them. That was extremely laudable. And I think Tupper Thomas and Prospect Park in the same way. A more modest style, but basically very effective. I'm seeing it happen elsewhere: Dr. Ruth in Fort Tryon Park—give her her due.

It makes me realize that there was a communal experience that I think that I shared. I was just one of those people of that period, during that period of the '60s, who woke up one day and realized that we were losing some of the great, *our* great landscapes and that something needed to be done about it. Thank goodness there were people like Betsy and Tupper and people who got in there and did. I did a little bit, but nothing like as much as they did. Anyway all of that convinced me that I really wanted to practice as a landscape architect and no longer as an architect. That prompted me to look around to see where I could go back to school.

I think what makes the parks so extraordinary and so important in New York is that they provide a relief from the dominance of the buildings. I love all, most, of New York City's buildings, not all of them, but particularly the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building are two of my favorite buildings. But thank goodness not every square inch of New York is covered with buildings like that or worse. Prospect Park and Central Park are just this

contrast, this extraordinary sort of yin and yang between the built environment and the unbuilt environment, although we know that they're both highly contrived, highly sophisticated piece[s] of art. That they're not just bits of land that happen to be left over when people ran out of steam building buildings around the edges. I think particularly that's true of Prospect Park where the sculpting of the landscape was so remarkable and extraordinary.

### ***Landscape Architecture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

Landscape architecture today has come, not full circle, but it has come at the end of a very long and interesting period of ups and downs. I mean, starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Olmsted and Vaux, who obviously created the profession and made their mark on the city in a dramatic way and created landscapes that thank goodness have by and large remained intact through the '30s and the '40s, [to] the Robert Moses years where I think things went into something of a decline and where the practicalities of utilitarian landscapes were more important. "Get those pools working and get those skating rinks in and up and running." That was Moses, I think, prime motivation. He wasn't interested in pastoral landscapes. He was interested in built stuff. To a more recent era where landscape architects like Bob Zion and Paul Friedberg emerged in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s and began to really make their mark on the public landscape in a dramatic way. Paul Friedberg had an extraordinary impact; not just the work he did himself, but the influence he had through the people who worked for him and also, through his teaching at City College, on a whole generation of landscape architects, many of whom are working to this day.

I think the last decade, the focus has been on the emergence of the public landscapes as important places, [and] not just parks, although [including] the restoration of parks. The Betsy Barlow Rogerses and the Tupper Thomases of Central Park and Prospect Park made an enormous difference to both the way the public perceived those parks, but that has spilled over into the creation of smaller parks—Vest pocket parks, the Paley Parks. Our little one that we did, Louise Nevelson Plaza downtown. The [smaller] parks I think have become very important to the city because not everybody can take a 40 minute subway ride to take a walk in Central Park. And to have a place within a five or ten minute walk of your home, where you can sit and eat a sandwich at lunch or, heaven forbid, take your dog, to allow your dog to poop. [They] are very important and I think they've become more important in the last five or ten years in New York.

## **Developing Your Craft**

### **On Sketching**

*INTERVIEWER: Let's begin by talking about sketching as a tool for problem solving.*

I've always felt it was very important and I drew from a very early age, so drawing was what came naturally to me as a way of expressing myself. I drew people. If I wasn't drawing from life, I was doing cartoons of people; they were always about people. I tried my hand at drawing landscapes a few times, and I just found it so difficult. I just couldn't capture the feel of what I was looking at, and I never learned to do watercolors. One of my parents' closest friends was a very good watercolorist, and he could just sit there with his brush and there would be this landscape. I could never do that and I was frustrated by that

inability, but I just gave up even trying. More recently, I occasionally will draw a landscape in pen or pencil so it's a line drawing rather than a painting, and that I find more interesting because it forces you to look at the way the landscape is structured. [Landscapes are] hard, particularly pastoral landscapes, because to get the shape of the soil... And I'm not terribly good at drawing trees, but I can manage, particularly for my own use when I'm trying to work out a design idea rather than doing a presentation to show a client. I let other people do that now. They do it much better than I do.

### **On Mentorship**

*INTERVIEWER: [When you came into] Halprin's office and [when] you talked about being in the UK, you came in as this young [architect and] they basically handed the projects over to you. Do you think [your mentorship style] evolved from your own experience?*

I was very fortunate in that the two jobs that I had in England before I came to the States, they both gave me a great deal of more freedom than I probably should have had at that age. Working for Leonard Manasseh and sort of being handed a project and say, "All right. Here's the design, but you have to take it from here." Because he obviously was an important and a strong designer. I needed a lot of help and a lot of guidance and there were other people in the office who were willing to give me that, but at the same time, I was really given a lot of freedom to expand my expertise, both through doing construction documents, writing specifications, and then later supervising construction. That was a great benefit. Then, from there I went to the London County Council thinking I was going to be designing housing projects for thousands of people. I did a little of that, but it was very

frustrating; not a great environment at that time. I think the kind of work that we got at the London County Council probably just varied enormously from year to year depending on the economy and what was going on. But when I was there, I ended up being handed one little building that I had to design, which I designed from scratch and got built.

### **Landscape Architects and Government**

I think that the inclusion of landscape architects in city government in many aspects, whether it's to be as unpaid commissioners on the planning commission or the art commission, as it was then called, now the Public Design Commission, is absolutely crucial. It was a long haul; it was a long struggle. It took I think quite a while for landscape architects to be recognized as, not an equal profession with architects, but as a parallel profession that have a real role to play in public government and in the creation of public space. That has been a huge step forward during the time I've practiced and have lived in New York. And the recognition of landscape architects for their value and their role has been very, very crucial.

*INTERVIEWER: What are the takeaways about when you personally become a torch-carrier for the cityscape and the public landscape?*

You need organizations like the Municipal Art Society or the parks council or whatever it's called these days to carry the torch and point to errors that the city may be making. Errors of judgment. I think that both roles are very important and I think we'll always need them both. At the same time you know you need the city planning commission

and the Art Commission because they're really down in the trenches, whereas the Public Design Commission<sup>viii</sup> is essentially a reactive group. I think they could be more pro-active than they are, but nevertheless just even as a reactive group, they play a very, very important role. Because they have to review everything that's built on public land, whether it's built by a public agency or a private agency. It's not always negative by any means. I mean they can also be extremely supportive. When I was there we tried to keep our balance so that when we saw something good, we could really push for it; or we saw the potential for something good, we could push for it. Whereas only when something really dreadful came up did we sort of take that extremely negative position. That, luckily, didn't happen very often.

I think that ASLA [American Society of Landscape Architects] itself, obviously as a civic group, could be more active than it has been. It could really take an initiative following the example of the Municipal Art Society, where if they see something really bad happening, they could jump up and down. And I'm not saying that ASLA doesn't do that, but I think it could do more of that. Hopefully with the new director, as new executive boards come in, they will take that role and take it more seriously.

### **Creative Collaboration**

*INTERVIEWER: What does the idea of creative collaboration mean to you?*

Oh, I think it's terribly important. The idea of collaboration for me started really with working with Sandy Daley on these paintings, which were truly collaborative. We both did them together and posed for them together, so we were in them and of them at the same

time. That was a very exciting and exhilarating experience to be able to see work that you had produced that you knew was a collaboration of two people, different thinking and different skills. Because we each brought our own background and what we were good at together to that. I mean it was back and forth and arguing and fighting, but it was by and large a pretty healthy and happy relationship. Ultimately it didn't work out in terms of our relationship with one another as lovers, but in terms of work, it was good while it lasted. I think, ultimately I was able to carry that over into many years later, in some cases into the work we've done [at Quennell Rothschild], where a lot of which has been collaborating with both other architects and also artists.

### **Museum Park at the North Carolina Museum of Art**

I think probably the most powerful relationship I ever had over the years in that regard was with Laurie Hawkinson and Henry Smith-Miller and Barbara Kruger. Our involvement in the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, North Carolina, began with a commission to do a master plan for the site. That's probably one of my favorite projects of all the things I worked on over the years. I think it's turned out very, very well. The building itself had been built probably in the '60s or maybe early '70s. It was a rather grim example of that period of architecture. And they did want to expand the building, but they also wanted to really expand out into the landscape because they knew that they were never going to build on the entire site and they had all this land that had really never been developed. They approached Laurie Hawkinson and Henry Smith-Miller, who brought in

Barbara Kruger as the artist and myself as the landscape architect. Together, we developed a master plan for the entire site.

The first phase of construction involved an outdoor amphitheater with a roofed structure, which Laurie and Henry designed. Then the amphitheater itself was built into this sort of bowl shaped side of the hill, which faced the museum. So, it was a very appropriate use because people could sit on the slopes of the hill facing the amphitheater if they couldn't actually sit down in the formal seats that were provided.

***“Picture This”***

[Barbara] is known for a sort of commercial poster-like [art], applying the commercial advertising imagery to art. A lot of her work has to do with texts and with big giant scripts on the canvas. She had, of course, the idea of putting a great big script on the landscape that sort of tied the whole thing together. I can remember the moment when we were all sitting around trying to decide what to do and Barbara said, “Screw it, let's put some text in the landscape.” We said, “Oh whoopee, that's a great idea.”

It was her idea to write the words picture this marching through, across the landscape, over the building and out into the far distance. I think it was her idea to use the words: “PICTURE THIS,” which was sort of related to the museum and what went on inside the museum, but also made you think about what you were seeing, and “picturing this” in your head. These smart letters, these giant letters, marching across the landscape saying “PICTURE THIS” were done in different kinds of landscape materials; different paving materials, different plantings, but you could still read the words. It was almost as if you

lifted bits of the North Carolina landscape and dropped them down into the site. One of them was filled with wetland plants and another one was done in brick or whatever it was. I can't remember all of them at this point, but each letter was a different material.

It's always fun to see little kids; the father will say, "What does it say? Hm." These kids have to work out these words that are marching across the landscape. That's a sort of ongoing game.

### **On Collaborating with Architects**

*INTERVIEWER: What makes a good architect?*

I would say what makes a good architect is an ability to listen, to understand what the client's needs are and desires are without necessarily agreeing with everything the client says because you have to maintain some independence. He has to be willing to listen to his consultants. [And someone that] has a strong sense of form, but understands the technology also, and the human needs for architect for buildings. Too many buildings ignore the fact that they're actually meant to be used by people rather than just being pieces of large outdoor sculpture. I think the best architects really do understand that and respond to that.

Clearly there are very many different qualities and very different kinds of architects who are good at different things. I mean some, [like] Le Corbusier, are creative, original, always breaking new boundaries conceptually and formally. Then there are very solid, good architects who are real craftsmen, who build good building that are decent. There are so many examples. Mies van der Rohe sort of straddles I think both of those—I mean, one of

the classics of being both a creative architect and also a very good craftsman. Whereas I would say Le Corbusier was more in the wild and wacky creative area, but both are very important seminal figures. I like Frank Lloyd Wright's work, but he's not somebody who's influenced me particularly.

I'm not saying [Quennell Rothschild] have bad relations with anybody, which we don't, but there are a few architects particularly who we've worked with very closely over the years. The two that stand out immediately in my mind are Henry Smith-Miller and Laurie Hawkinson, with whom we did North Carolina [Museum of Art], and several other projects over the years. They're also very close friends now. There are other people like Alex Cooper, who we've worked closely with and we have a good rapport with. It's a very important relationship for landscape architects to maintain. I think sometimes there's conflict because [architects] see overlap in their disciplines, and there is some overlap clearly, but you have to be willing to listen and collaborate, but not always kow-tow. It's that balance between what I call collaboration rather than just doing what you're told.

### **On Collaborating with Women**

*INTERVIEWER: Women as collaborators have played an important role throughout your life.*

*[Can] you speak to the gender issue in the profession?*

I think it's great. Women should be on an equal footing with men and haven't been for hundreds and hundreds of years. The fact that landscape architecture was open to women very early on—look back in time and there were women involved almost from day one. I think that as distinct from architecture, although there are women architects too, but

I think that landscape architecture has been more accessible and more open to women for longer. I may be wrong statistically, but my sense is that that's the case. I think that's been great because why not? Why should men dominate any field, but particularly landscape architecture, which has this great tradition of early on people like Gertrude Jekyll, who really established the profession in its infancy. I've been very impressed looking back over [the] history of the profession and looking at the profession today to see the important role that women have played almost from day one in making the profession what it is, and as it goes forward, making it what it will be.

### **On Collaborating with Clients**

The best clients are those who come to you with some sense of what they're looking for, but are also open to different ideas and sometimes alternative ideas. So, it's not just a completely blank slate, but then [they] are willing to listen to alternatives of what their preconception is [on aspects] you end up not agreeing with. Sometimes it's great to show a client, "You could do this or you could do this, and we can go in either direction." The client can either say, "Yes, I'd like to explore both of those and see where they end up" or "Yes, I like A or B," and we go with that. So, the ideal client I think is [a client] who works with you collaboratively and isn't either sitting back and being totally neutral or is ramming something down your throat. We've had both.

### **Reflections**

#### **Formative Influences**

### ***The English Countryside***

Growing up in the English landscape definitely influenced me then as a child and later as a professional. My father being an avid if not obsessive walker would drag us on these endless walks which of course we complained about bitterly, but looking back upon it, I'm glad we went because they were wonderful. You're walking across these miles of open countryside with nothing but a few sheep, to look with the dog; we had a dog. Then as a kid just playing in an environment with other friends, with other school friends. That image of that place is still very vivid in my memory. It certainly made me in love with rolling treeless pastoral landscapes, which Olmsted did pretty well himself later, but these pre-dated Olmsted by a few hundred years.

### ***Inspirations***

I think Paul Friedberg is an obvious example. You have somebody who early on developed a very personal style which people responded to positively. His own personality is quite dynamic, so it reflected in his work. His work and his personality really sort of went hand in hand. I think there are obviously some new people coming on the scene whose work I find interesting, including Jim Corner, who has clearly made a big difference I think to the way we think about public landscapes. [His work is] very accessible. His proposal for the park in Greenport, which I was on the jury of, which didn't get carried out, but it was just a very interesting idea. There was this whole carousel, which had been an important part of the village history for many, many years. His idea was to put it on railroad tracks and trundle it out over the water in the summer, and then trundle it back in the winter so you

could access it from the village main street. I thought that was a wonderful idea. It was playful and creative, and unfortunately it didn't get carried out. So, he's clearly somebody who has imagination and a very creative way of looking at things.

### ***A Personal Quest***

*INTERVIEWER: Is there a personal quest to bring people together in a community?*

Oh, absolutely. Whether it's on a personal level or whether it's what one designs and how you design it, I think bringing people together, I mean, it's one of the reasons I love New York is because people come here to meet other people. Central Park is probably one of the greatest examples anywhere of an open space that I think was designed [to bring people together]. [Olmsted and Vaux] thought [about] the way people would use the park in a celebratory manner, whether it was riding your horse or taking your carriage or walking through the Ramble. All of these different experiences were consciously thought about as ways to get people out of their own, and out of the slums and into the open air and into a healthier environment. In a joyful way. You're not just doing it for your health. You're doing it because you will enjoy it when you're there, and people did. Right from the very beginning. Reading [about] people writing about or talking about Central Park is this extraordinary sort of mind-blowing experience. I like to think that landscape architects have made a real difference to people's lives through that sort of intervention.

### ***The Users***

I think that the most important aspect of our work as landscape architects is creating places that people can enjoy and people can use and can take on as their own. You're not standing there in this building saying, "Oh, my goodness, the architect is God and I have to kow-tow." People should take over those spaces and appropriate them and to hell with the landscape architects. If they change over time, that's tough, but that's the way it is. I think that's true [with] the best of Olmsted and Vaux's work. Central Park is still their work and the bones are still there, but it has things that have been introduced and uses that have been introduced that could never have been envisaged a hundred years ago. I think that's one of the great [things] about landscape architects is that we don't create monuments. We create spaces that are organic and can change; just like the trees grow, the landscape itself grows and shifts over time.

### ***The Ghirardelli Experience***

From my own personal point of view, working in the outdoor environment and the outdoors, was serendipitous when I went to for Lawrence Halprin. I never imagined I was going to give up detailing windows and toilet cubicles and move into things a little more challenging like Ghirardelli Square. But the Ghirardelli Square experience was a real eye opener. It involved collaboration. It involved working with a client who was both demanding and very receptive, and working with Lawrence Halprin, who was demanding and receptive also, to create a place that became probably of the most important people-gathering spaces in this country. I don't take full credit for that, but I take some credit for it. Working with Larry's partners, Don Carter in particular, to make those spaces as welcoming and accessible

in every way, not just wheelchair use, but accessible for everybody. And enjoyable through the introduction of fountains, the light fixtures, which were sort of celebratory and playful, and plant materials.

## PROJECTS

### Alliance for Downtown New York

The Alliance for Downtown New York was created in the late '80s, maybe early '90s, to improve the appearance of Lower Manhattan. It was a response to the business community who felt that Lower Manhattan had gotten a bad rap for being dilapidated. They hired Cooper, Robertson and Partners, who in turn hired us, or we went in jointly with them to work on the streetscape aspects. We needed to look specifically at traffic patterns wherever we could, [to] expand the pedestrian areas and reduce the vehicular areas, which is very difficult in Lower Manhattan. Streets aren't terribly wide. But also to improve the pedestrian environment, particularly with new paving and lighting.

One of the ideas that we all came up with was to celebrate Broadway which, of course, had been famous for many, many years as the place where parades happened. We christened it the Canyon of Heroes because it was like a canyon, but it was the street where all these heroic deeds and people had been celebrated with parades at one time or another. We came up with this idea of having strips within the concrete. We were basically stuck with the concrete sidewalks. That's what the city wanted and didn't want to branch out into something much more expensive and difficult to maintain and we felt comfortable with

that. So, we suggested that we could color the concrete slightly with a darker grey so that it was[n't] just your standard run-of-the-mill city concrete sidewalk, but [one] that we could demark the pattern of black granite strips, with the names of the heroes or the events inscribed in stainless steel letters, along with a new lighting plan, which created a different, more pedestrian-friendly sort of lighting. We developed that and I guess it's still being done. There are still more parades to come, and more Canyon of Heroes to be celebrated, but the basic pattern is in place and it's been quite successful. I think they've had a few failures of letters popping out every now and then, but by and large, I think it's stood up pretty well.

## Central Park Children's Zoo

The Central Park Children's Zoo was a zoo that had been designed originally in the '30s<sup>ix</sup> and had fallen on hard times. It contained a lot of kind of rather tacky elements like Noah's Ark and other animal related artifacts that were no longer part of the zoo's style. [Before] it was much less about experiencing animals directly and much more about the story-telling aspect on fantasy. Who knows which the kids prefer? We like to think that the children would prefer to see and experience real animals than fantasy animals.

But we also wanted to create an element of fantasy. We had a few ideas to do that, one of which was to create a way of entering the zoo through the huge stump of an enormous tree, which was of course fake. It was made of concrete, but the children felt like they were walking through this tree in order to get into the zoo. That's something I'm not sure I would recommend doing now, but it worked and it's playful and the kids love it.

Underlying it was a somewhat corny theme of Alice in Wonderland<sup>x</sup> or whatever. I can't even remember now exactly what the theme was, but there was a storied theme too which children could pick up on or not and experience as they walk through. There was a certain almost Disney-like quality.

We really tried to create, without trying to recreate a 19th century zoo; we tried to make something that was sympathetic and responded to the landscape of the park itself. The approach into the zoo was this winding path, which we felt was sort of sympathetic to the Olmstedian landscape in its way. It was more like the Ramble than any other part of Central Park, but it had some of those qualities and [was] heavily planted and so forth. Then, once they were in the zoo the experience was really aimed at children, so there was many different things that children could do; different ways of experiencing both the animals, but also how they got around the zoo. There were places where they could hop over water, jumping on lily pads and other things of that kind that were playful and we think children enjoyed them. I think they do, because I watched them many times later actually experiencing them.

Then, the animals themselves, wherever possible, the animals were animals that could be petted. So they were sheep and they were cows. They were domestic animals. There were no wild animals. They were animals that were children-friendly and that weren't totally freaked out by the constant attention of these kids.

Working with the Wildlife Conservation Society was a real collaborative process. We developed ideas together. They had certain principles and certain goals in mind, which we shared but which we certainly didn't generate because that was their specialty. Then we

brought to it our own design ideas and some sense of having worked in other zoos with animals, a sense of what worked and what didn't work in terms of how animals could be shown and how they could be experienced, particularly by little kids.

The Paul Manship gates were something rather special, and which we obviously wanted to keep, [but] there wasn't much else that was so sacred that we had to hang onto it. The buildings, clearly, the comfort station and the little restaurant; the infrastructure had to stay. The job couldn't afford to completely rip everything apart. And as many of the trees as we could save, we did.

### **Early Zoo Experiences**

I must have gone to the London Zoo as a child, but my most vivid memories of the London Zoo was when I was a student, I worked there one summer as a busboy hauling dirty plates back and forth from the cafeteria to the dishwashing establishment. I don't have very fond memories. I always found the London Zoo to be a rather unpleasant and rather hostile place, which it was not. There were a few individual exhibits that worked and were fun, but by and large it was not one of my favorite places. So, I think, doing the children's zoo was a way of exploring some of the ideas that I had of how animals and children should relate.

### **Keeping the Zoo**

*INTERVIEWER: [As Olmsted was] against the original menagerie, was there ever any kind of thought process, recognizing that this is within Central Park?*

We couldn't destroy [the zoo]; there was nowhere to move it to and it was enormously popular with kids and the adults too who came to it. Both the Children's Zoo, and even the zoo across the street, even though that's not the most wonderful zoo in the world, it has enough in it to make it a place that people like to go to and see the polar bears and the penguins and see the other elements that make it distinctive.

### **Charging Admission**

*INTERVIEWER: [Can you] comment on the controversy about the fact that you had to pay to go to the zoo versus where it had been free before?*

I think that really comes back to the partnership between the parks department and the Wildlife Conservation Society. The Wildlife Conservation Society has its own set of criteria. Its own funding sources. I'm not saying that they don't have good funding and they have good support, but they've always charged admission to all of their facilities and I think that that was something that, for them, was not an issue. It was not something that could be discussed; I don't know that it ever was. It may have been discussed from a higher level with the commissioner, but we were not party to that. As far as we were concerned, the zoo charged people to get in and that was going to continue into the future. I don't know if they can make any special allowance for kids who are underprivileged or kids who really can't afford to go. It seemed to me there should be some kind of program, but I don't think there is.

## Green-Wood Cemetery

Green-Wood Cemetery is one of the first [of] what we would call a rural cemetery, a cemetery that was primarily a place that was green and welcoming. And it wasn't designed to be a public park, but the interesting thing is that it very rapidly became a public park. Before Central Park existed, Green-Wood Cemetery was a place where people went to walk and see and be seen on the weekends and I guess take their carriage rides through the roads. It's worth going to. Just the entrance gates [are] a wonderful sort of Neo-Gothic [style]; it's equivalent [to] a three- or four-story building. There are offices, tiny little offices, but it's more an architectural folly. You sort of go through these Gothic arches to get into the cemetery.

## Future of the Cemetery

We were brought in about 20 years ago to look at the cemetery and primarily to see what opportunities there were for the future of [the] cemetery. Green-Wood [was] concerned that they were running out of space. They asked us to do a sort of master plan and evaluation of the entire cemetery to see what opportunities there were for future burials. While probably nowadays more than half of a cemetery's business is involved in cremating people and spreading the ashes or giving the ashes back to the family to deal with, there is still a demand for whole body burial. We know, of course, many cemeteries where the whole body burial still takes place.

We did identify several thousand potential burial sites. Through that, we also became involved in their ongoing program of building crematoria. I guess they call these

things crypts: vertical, high-rise cemeteries where you put bodies in structures built above—  
—Mausolea, I think, is the correct term in the business. So you continue to offer whole body  
burial because not everybody wants to be cremated; they want their remains to stay.  
Finding ways to respond to that demand was a very interesting challenge.

### **Early Public Park**

*INTERVIEWER: What was it like to work on this kind of premier first rural cemetery in New York that predated the parks?*

It was exciting because Green-Wood Cemetery inspired Calvert Vaux and probably Olmsted in their design for Central Park. They saw what a desperate need there was for open spaces that people could promenade in and ride their carriages in. But you didn't have to be surrounded by dead bodies, so fortunately, Central Park hasn't offered that facility as yet. But clearly Green-Wood was seen as much of a recreational space as a place for internment. It was very popular in the early, mid-19th century. It was a place to go. Until Prospect Park, which came later than Central Park, it was probably the most important open space in Brooklyn.

### **The Viewshed**

*INTERVIEWER: Were there any challenges with Green-Wood in terms of spaces that you didn't want to see given over to structure?*

It was a challenge but I think fortunately our client [Green-Wood] understood the importance of the rurality of Green-Wood Cemetery. It was a dilemma for them: "We've got

to make more places to bury bodies, because not everybody wants to be cremated. What can we do? Where can we find? How can we deal with that?" One way of dealing with it is sort of the mausoleum approach where you stack the bodies like file cabinets. We found places where that could be done in the landscape so that you didn't have to build a great big structure. You could tuck these into the hillside, for example, in the retaining walls so they already felt like part of the landscape rather than as a stand-alone structure. Wherever possible we did that, as well as finding sites for a future whole body burial within the larger landscape of the cemetery, because the cemetery had not been built out by any means.

It was a challenge because we didn't want to see every tree cut down in order to make room for more burials, so it was a balance. Because why would somebody want to be buried at Green-Wood Cemetery? A lot of it was because of the beautiful landscape, not just because it was the nearest cemetery. There are plenty of cemeteries out in Queens where the bodies are stacked so close together I don't know how you can get any more in. But Green-Wood has managed to maintain that balance between the needs for interment and the needs for an open space and welcoming beautiful landscape.

*INTERVIEWER: [Can you comment on the] controversy about a building that was going to be in the viewshed?*

It happens that Green-Wood Cemetery is built on the side of a hill, which gives extraordinary views out to Brooklyn<sup>xi</sup> and to the water and to the Statue of Liberty. Making sure that those views are protected and celebrated was part of the challenge of the master plan. Many people go to Green-Wood Cemetery to enjoy the views out to the bay and

where you can see the Statue of Liberty from some spots in the cemetery, which is extraordinary. Perhaps the good thing about a cemetery is most of the activity is underground so, with a few exceptions, you're not dealing with high-rise buildings that block vistas. But you still need to understand, if suddenly somebody says, "We could put in a mausoleum there," you say, "Wait, a minute. That's not the best place for a mausoleum because it will impede the important views out of the cemetery for the living as well as for the dead." You know, even the dead would like to enjoy that view, I'm sure, if they were aware of it.

Fortunately, Green-Wood [has] a very enlightened board of trustees. Richard Moylan who directs the cemetery, he's very sensitive to these issues. He was always willing to say, "All right, we'll back off on that," or "We'll move it somewhere else," or whatever it might be. It's been a good relationship and one that continues today.

## **Roosevelt Island**

Roosevelt Island had been called Blackwell's Island, and it had been the repository for everybody that nobody wanted anywhere else. There was a smallpox hospital. There was a lunatic asylum. There were a number of, basically, health facilities of one kind or another. Ed Logue, who was the leader of UDC, the Urban Development Corporation, had this idea that it would make a wonderful place for a new community and was able to acquire the property. Some of the hospitals still had to remain. There was a veterans' hospital and another; there were two hospitals, one at either end of the island. I'm not sure whether both of them are still functioning because I haven't been involved in a while, but

for a long time, they were both functioning hospitals. Ed Logue, with the creative planning team that he put together, came up with this idea of a densely built residential area with a main street with shops so it would be like a real town. Then, interspersed with small open spaces, plazas and little parks, and then larger parks distributed throughout the island. We were luckily involved with almost all of them. The Northtown Park immediately north of the housing [development], which was an active recreation park, [was] followed later by [Lighthouse Park], which was a passive recreation. Then, of course, later the Lou Kahn<sup>xii</sup> [park], which we weren't involved with, at the southern end. The island is tied together with these open spaces. It was a lot of fun, a really interesting experience.

#### **Tony Capobianco Field (Northtown Park)**

I was involved with Roosevelt Island fairly early on in its early development period. The first project I think we were given there was a sort of on-call contract with UDC. Ted Liebman was the architect at the UDC who was really instrumental in getting me involved. The first little project we were given was a playground at the southern end of the housing development. That was in a park that had originally been designed by I think Dan Kiley, so we added this little playground. That one thing led to another and then eventually, the first big project we were awarded was for the park immediately north of the housing [development], which was called Northtown Park. The program for that was clearly active recreation. They wanted a baseball field, some handball courts, and other built elements. Really, though, I think from my point of view, the most significant contribution in that park was I decided to design a backstop that was more than just a backstop; it was going to be a

piece of outdoor sculpture. I used [these] large diameter steel tubes to create the backstop, which I painted red so the whole thing told you, you knew it was a backstop.

### **Lighthouse Park**

That led to being given the project for Lighthouse Park, which is at the northern end, which was a totally different kind of program and commission. We were fortunately successful in convincing [the UDC] that it should be essentially a passive park that could accommodate some informal playground, [for] play or sports, but it was not going to be dominated by sports fields as such. The lighthouse itself is a wonderful structure from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century even though it no longer functions as a navigational lighthouse, but it's a structure and a monument and, I think, for people on the water as well as on the land, it's an important element. We were able to shape and model the landscape and we were lucky that it happened right at the time that major subway construction was going on in Queens, so there was a lot of available fill, cheap fill. They should have been paid to dump it, but it was clean fill, so we were able to shape the landscape with hills and then scoop it down. I created a little wetland in front of the lighthouse at the very northern tip of the island, which we planted originally with wetland species so that it could be, we hoped it would be, mapped as [a] wetland and then be protected. But I think later the maintenance people came and filled it in, so that it wouldn't be a headache for them, so we lost that little jewel of an element. But it's still a very nice park.

Personally, I think its place in the river and the fact that it's surrounded by water, and that wonderful turbulent water is, for me, more important than the view of Manhattan,

because you can see the view of Manhattan from a lot of different places in Queens and other parts of Roosevelt Island. [But] When you're out on that tip of the island there, and you see the river swirling by you; that to me is the exciting moment. That's one of the reasons why we tried to create these raised areas by building up the elevation so you could get different perspectives on that.

## Upper Manhattan

Fort Tryon Park and Sakura Park: they're both parks in upper Manhattan. They're very, very different from one another. My involvement with both of them I believe stemmed from my involvement with the Greenacre Foundation, which I've been a board member of for many, many years. The Greenacre Foundation is owned and operated and financed by the Rockefeller family. It's very active. They built Greenacre Park and they built other parks, but they started to expand their interest and Sakura Park was a natural [fit] because they had, I guess, funded the International House.

## Sakura Park

Sakura Park has been in existence I assume for at least a hundred years. It's located immediately north<sup>xiii</sup> of International House, which is [the] place where students from all over the world come and live while they're going to school in New York. But there never really [had] been a real relationship between the two; I mean, I'm sure the students used the park, but it was accidental rather than intentional. So, when we were asked by the Rockefeller family to look at Sakura Park and see what we could do to restore it and to

make it more useful, one of the ideas that we had was to create a little gazebo, a little structure, which would invite students into the park and also could be a place where performances and events could take place. That's what we did. We built this little gazebo there which I think has been very successful. It was a gazebo similar to one that we had designed earlier for a project in Staten Island, so we were able to sort of segue from the design with minor modifications.

It's a classical, typical park of that period, like Bryant Park in many ways. Sort of formal paths and lawns, and trees and shrubs around the edge. We didn't want to depart from that. I think the major departure was we probably did clear out some of the shrubbery to make more green space, create more lawn space, because the kids do like to sit on the lawn, play Frisbee and do all the other things that kids do. Because of its sort of role as the front yard to International House, as well as being a local neighborhood park, and because [the] International House [was] willing to take over its maintenance, we were able to do a much richer planting than we would have dared to do in a more typical New York City park. We also did whatever we could to make sure that the existing trees [were protected], many of which were very beautiful, but some of which were probably on their way out. There were some elms<sup>xiv</sup> there which probably have succumbed since then. We wanted to replace those even though cherry trees are not my favorite species of tree and I think they've generally overused, particularly in Washington, but it was Sakura Park<sup>xv</sup> and it seemed appropriate, so we planted some cherry trees which I think have done quite well and have certainly given the park the character that it has today.

The connection between Sakura Park and Fort Tryon Park, are partly that they were both I think funded by the Rockefeller family originally.

### **Fort Tryon Park**

Fort Tryon Park, which is almost [at] the northern tip of Manhattan, was a very crucial element in the open space system. I think really [it] is recognized and is described as one of those jewels in the crown of the New York City park system. In addition to that, it was designed as the site for the Cloisters museum, which [was] going to be, and still is, one of the important destinations for New Yorkers and tourists alike who come to it to see the wonderful medieval artifacts that it contains. I guess most of it [is] actually pieces of medieval buildings that were brought to this country and reconstructed and re-erected in the park.

Fort Tryon Park was designed and conceived by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the son of Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted, Jr. saw this Fort Tryon Park as an opportunity to create a kind of landscape that really didn't exist anywhere else in New York. I wouldn't use the word Beaux-Arts. It has formal aspects, but it's not a formal park in that sense and the key elements are the way the park spills over and down towards the river, and in a much more informal fashion. There's nothing like it really in Central Park, which is a much more bucolic green, sort of [a] rolling green kind of landscape, with exceptions. But Fort Tryon Park was seen as an opportunity to do something extraordinary horticulturally. I think it was always perceived as a very horticultural rich place. It was not seen as a sort of extension of the Central Park idea of the greensward and trees. It was intended to be brief, compact,

concentrated, but horticulturally extremely rich. The Heather Garden, which was the key element, was designed to be that. It did fall on sad times over the years. It had been neglected, but with the introduction of the Rockefeller family back into its upkeep and its maintenance and creation of a sort of trust for that section of New York, we were able to really restore it back to what it had been.

The nice thing about the way that park was designed is it works with the subway system. When it was designed everybody knew it was going to be one of the most popular tourist spots in New York. It's pretty extraordinary because it's a long way north and I think for a lot of tourists it's a little scary. You have to go through Harlem, my goodness! So, getting there is something of an adventure. I remember taking my parents there when they visited here many, many years ago. For them, it was quite an adventure.

If you're taking the subway to visit the Cloisters Museum, you get off at the southern end of Fort Tryon Park. The natural movement is to walk through what is now the Heather Garden, which is up at the top of the hill and is relatively flat. Then as you move west it drops off very, very steeply down to the Henry Hudson Parkway. Along the Heather Garden's eastern edge, there's a promenade with benches. The benches are actually raised above the path itself so that they, in turn, give views out to the Heather Garden and to the river beyond. That brings you ultimately to a little overlook, a little terrace, which is raised and which again gives views out to the river and to the park surrounding it. It's a 10-minute walk perhaps from south to north, but it acts as a sort of foyer to the experience of the Cloisters Museum, which is up high on that escarpment. Although it's not slavishly medieval in its design, it does have some of the feeling, I think, of a medieval cloister garden. It's

clearly not intended to be that, but it does sort of act very successfully I think as an introduction to that later experience. I think many people who are going to the Cloisters now, enter from the south and go through the Heather Garden and through Fort Tryon Park, so it's a very important part of the sequence of open space.

We were asked to look at the Heather Garden, see what shape it was in. It had become pretty overgrown and many of the heaths and heathers had probably died over the years. We were lucky to be able to collaborate with Lynden Miller<sup>xvi</sup>, who is one of the more interesting and imaginative, creative horticulturists working in the city today. We went back to the Olmsted office<sup>xvii</sup> and we got all of the planting plans we could, and wherever we could, we would replace the plants that were missing with the same. But there were some cases where they were inappropriate or unavailable, so that today's Heather Garden I think is somewhat different from probably its original. Then, that segues into the northern parts of the park, which are much more pastoral and much steeper, [and] very hilly as it slopes down to Broadway at the northeastern corner of the park. On the park's eastern side, the park drops off dramatically. There we had to redesign paths, and we're actually working now on restoring some of the stairways and paths that wind their way down the hill to Broadway. So, it's an ongoing project.

### ***Working with Lynden Miller***

*INTERVIEWER: What was it like to collaborate with Lynden Miller?*

Working with Lynden Miller was a great joy. She is passionate about plants. She has her own point of view. She's very knowledgeable, but at the same time she was willing to

listen. She didn't just mandate everything that should happen. So, it was a very healthy collaboration and I think the results show. The fact that she's still involved there, still participates in [the] selection of plant materials and how they're maintained, and working with the staff at Fort Tryon Park, I think is a very good relationship, which I'm glad to see fostered.

### ***The Rockefeller Family***

*INTERVIEWER: Do you want to say anything about the Rockefeller family? Their patronage?*

Obviously the Rockefeller family have been very, very important in not just building Rockefeller Center, but in expanding their scope and their interests into parks, certainly throughout Manhattan. I don't know how much involvement they've had in other boroughs, but certainly they have been very key players in making sure that open spaces [in Manhattan] are preserved and restored, and that continues to this day. I'm on the Greenacre Park board, which gives money, not just to the Greenacre Park itself, but obviously gives money to other parks and playgrounds around the city and that's a very important function. It really is giving back to the public, which is the extraordinary thing that I think the Rockefellers have done in many, many areas and continue to do to this day.

### **College Campus Projects**

I think landscape architects have an understanding of the complex problems that face campuses, both in terms of circulation, in terms of how open spaces are used, and how the buildings relate to that open space. They're much less interested in creating little

monuments, which architects unfortunately tend to be; that tends to be a quality of many architects. Almost all these campuses are an integral part of the community in which they sit. You can't live in Cambridge without crossing Harvard Yard at some point. And similarly, in Trinity, if you lived in that neighborhood you're inevitably going to walk through that campus. The campuses I think that are less welcoming to the outside community are the ones that are least desirable and least successful. It's a balance because clearly if you allow everybody and their uncle to come in, particularly if they are cars, which are much more of a problem than pedestrians, you do have a problem of upkeep and littering and graffiti and all the other urban problems that exist on the city streets. But I think both at Princeton and at Trinity, I think we've struck a successful balance.

I've not been involved with all the campus projects by any means. Peter's had much more to do with many of them, but I think in all of our campus work, we really do try and understand the needs of students as well as people who are not part of the campus but who use the campus. Sometimes we will start out as the consultant to an overall planner like Cooper Robertson. As the projects become defined and have to get [the] design and construction documents prepared and get built, we often then become the lead because [we] are the registered, qualified consultant for that part of the work.

### **Trinity College**

*INTERVIEWER: When you're doing campus work, [is there] a particular campus that you're very fond of, that you think back to because of certain qualities of that campus?*

Trinity, I think of all of them, I have the best memories of just because of its balance between open space and built construction. Some of the buildings are very beautiful and very welcoming. I think one of the things that is so appealing about the Trinity campus was that it didn't rely on the grand statement, the big central space around which everything hinged and then everything else sort of fell off. That main walk that goes through the campus is very important. That's what we were celebrating, but we also wanted to look at the detail of smaller spaces that were welcome places where people could sit, where students could gather or hang out or smoke dope or whatever students do in these outdoor spaces. (I never saw anybody smoke dope at Trinity. They were much too well-behaved.) I think some of those spaces were quite successful, and I think they really did bring an element of life to the Trinity campus that it really hadn't had before, or it hadn't been recognized perhaps.

Certainly we were conscious of the problem with elm disease, which affected many campuses, not just Trinity. Finding replacements for those trees that would survive and also have some stature and would grow fast enough so that they wouldn't have to wait 75 years for trees to fill in, that was a challenge in selecting trees. We felt that the trees were very important at Trinity in defining pedestrian walks and circulation routes as well as providing shade and the beauty in themselves. I do remember that there were some quite beautiful trees which we were very, very anxious to preserve and make sure they didn't get damaged by construction. It's one thing to put in the foundation of a building where you really do have a problem with what to do with the tree roots. But, paths and paving can be equally damaging if you're lowering the grade at all; those surface roots are some of the most

important roots. We were very conscious of that in terms of laying out new paths and how we regarded them, how we finally graded them.

## **Dowling College**

*INTERVIEWER: Tell me about Dowling College.*

Dowling College was one of the few projects in the last 20 or so where we actually did architecture rather than landscape. We were hired because we were landscape architects and architects. The project involved a conservatory, [which] are traditionally associated with plants. I guess they figured, "Well, we need a landscape architect." But in fact, the challenge there was restoring this conservatory, which had been built I guess at the end of the 19th, maybe early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was in dire need of repair. I think the conservatory was certainly built as part of the private estate. It was not an add-on when [the site] became a college, so it really needed to be embraced and integrated into the college environment. That was one of the challenges: to make it a welcoming place for students, not just a little jewel that they could look at say, "Oh, that's what it was like in the old days when it was the Vanderbilt estate."

It was fine. I mean, I still kept my hand in architecture. I kept my license in force for a number of years. I had to let it lapse now because the continuing education requirements are so rigorous, but as long as I could keep my license, I did because it was valuable for projects like this. Dowling College needed an architect. It needed somebody who could work the glass technology. We had consultants who we worked with, but essentially we ran the project and made determinations on the kind of glazing, the kind of materials, floor

materials, that we used to make that celebratory space. It was fun because we had to learn about glazing and the technologies, and we had to understand that modern technologies were probably an improvement on the original technologies, so that replacing the glass roof with new glazing was a challenge but I think it was ultimately [a] successful result. We turned it into a really celebratory space. It became a very welcoming space, which was, and I presume still is, heavily used by students to hang out in. It was connected to the other campus buildings, so it wasn't just out there in the middle of the park somewhere. You could actually walk through it to get from one part of the campus to another.

## **Waterfront Parks**

### **New York City Waterfronts**

*INTERVIEWER: [Can you begin] with a big picture [explanation] about the [firm's involvement] as New York City has reclaimed its waterfronts?*

[For me] the connection and experience of the waterfront goes back to my days with Halprin at Ghirardelli Square. Ghirardelli Square was as much about the water as it was about saving a 19<sup>th</sup> century factory building and the views to the water, and that [is the] relationship that San Francisco has, which is probably more emotional than New York's relationship with the waterfront, which we've tended to dump on rather than celebrate.

In recent years people recognized how important the waterfront to New York City was. Battery Park City celebrated it, then the idea of the creation of the Hudson River Park [ensured] that the waterfront would be protected as an open space resource rather than just covered with garbage removal structures and all the other nonsense. We need those

things too unfortunately, so they have to be recognized, and some of them do have to exist on the waterfront because they're dumping garbage into barges, which I think is fine. I think [we need] a balance between the industrial aspects of the waterfront as it's truly waterfront related. The thing that troubled us when we started thinking about the waterfront was that so many uses on the waterfront had absolutely nothing to do with water. They had turned their back on it and [the uses] could have been anywhere.

Those were sort of what drove the ideas behind a lot of what we've done on the waterfront. Hudson River Park was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate those things. We've done other projects on the waterfront. On the East River. I'm still very proud of the project that I guess is sitting right behind me on the East River, which was tiny but nevertheless an important sort of way of getting people to the waterfront as well as celebrating the waterfront. Allowing people inland to get a sense that there was something out there that they should be drawn to. So, it's not just what happens on the waterfront, it's how you get there and how you ensure that people know that it's there. It's amazing how many New Yorkers don't realize that you can actually walk along the waterfront. They think it's just there for industry and garbage removal and all the other utilitarian uses that it's been put to over the years. Battery Park City obviously has made a huge breakthrough, which we had very little to do with, in terms of celebrating the waterfront and how people relate to it.

### **Battery Park**

We worked on an overall master plan for the improvement and for the restoration of Battery Park.<sup>xviii</sup> It involved improving walkways along the waterfront itself to encourage people to walk along the waterfront, but also to penetrate the park and to enjoy the trees that are there and the open lawns. There is so little open space available in Lower Manhattan that to have a place as green and as welcoming as Battery Park.... Also, I think one of the things that we were very much aware of, and that we kept in our minds as we developed plans for the park, were the views of the park from surrounding buildings. There are so many tall buildings that surround Battery Park and people look down in it. We wanted people to see the park and to be drawn to it and say, "This is a magnet. This is a place which you should come to and enjoy. Come down, bring a sandwich here at lunchtime. Jog here. Even walk your dog here," if you happen to have a dog and live in Lower Manhattan. There are a few of those.

It's a great space and I think it's beautifully cared for, and I think Warrie Price and the people that worked with Warrie really [brought] it back. Or, more than [brought] it back; [brought] it forward because it was not just a matter of going back and saying we'll restore it to the Robert Moses era. It was a matter of looking forward to seeing how it could be improved; adding the carousel and these sort of elements which really made it a tourist Mecca.

### **Harborfront Park (Port Jefferson)**

*INTERVIEWER: [Can you speak on the] brownfield dimension and tell us the story of Port Jefferson Harborfront Park?*

Port Jefferson, which is a small, very active [town], and rapidly being gentrified, on the north shore of Long Island. The Harborfront Park was not a park. It had been an industrial site. I'm pretty sure there had been buildings on it at one time, which probably had been demolished, but it remained a sort of wasteland. There was one building left, an old sort of warehouse, loft-like building. The village took it over and asked us to develop a master plan, which included the building that remained on the site as well as the park itself.

We proposed a park that really celebrated the waterfront, its site. It's a great site. It has views out to the north, to Long Island Sound. We proposed shaping the landscape somewhat with the introduction of fill so that it wouldn't just be a dead, flat space, but essentially be a green space. We were very concerned that it not be taken over by active recreation because we wanted to make it accessible to people at all times and not suddenly, "You can't go into the park because there's a major soccer game going on," or whatever it might be. There [is] active recreation, [but] that is played down, it's modest, in contrast to the passive recreational aspects. We created a path that ran along the waterfront. There is a little beach, but it's not really accessible and not very useable; it was really more a matter of making paths that ran along the top of the embankment at the shoreline so that you could circulate through the park. There's a pier which allowed boaters access to moor their boats and get on land. Then, the old chandlery building, the last remaining industrial structure, we turned into a sort of community center. It's been very successful. It's used for all sorts of activities. They have dances there. They have concerts, I'm sure. I don't even know all the things they do, but they have it programmed most of the time.

It really had made a big difference, I think, to the town of Port Jefferson. It's really given that town a reason for being there, which is the waterfront, which they had ignored for many, many years. I'm sure there are other little parks in Port Jefferson. But this clearly became the central park of Port Jefferson and [has] been an important addition to the town.

### ***Sculpting the Land***

*INTERVIEWER: We talked about Lighthouse [Park]...and you talked with great passion about the opportunity to sculpt the land for people. It seems like this is another one of those projects where you go to sculpt the land.*

We didn't have all that fill available to us at Port Jefferson that we happened to have a Lighthouse Park, which was just serendipitous. We were able to shape the landscape somewhat by cut and fill. I guess we did bring in some fill, but not on the scale that we did on Roosevelt Island.

Clearly, one of the most significant interventions that a landscape architect can do is shift changing the shape of the land. It's been going on for hundreds of years. Capability Brown did it probably on a scale that we would never be able to match, but it certainly is a very important tool and it's a very interesting one. How you shape the land, how you move earth around, how you bring new earth in when you can. At Lighthouse Park we were lucky in that there was all this excavation going on for the subway construction and they wanted to get rid of earth. That is very unusual. What you're usually faced with is either trying to find a source for additional fill or moving earth within the site itself. That cannot always be

done. Sometimes you can dig a lake and use the earth from the lake or pond to create new hills, but there aren't too many times when you can do that. So, the shaping of the land or the soil at Port Jefferson was a much subtler process. It was really a matter of moving material from one place to another so that we could create some undulation and improve the draining and create places where people got better views. We didn't create any real sort of sheltered nooks in the landscape, although that exists on the beach. There was an attempt there and I think it was successful. I think it works pretty well even though it's subtle.

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<sup>i</sup> Although Quennell mentions Capability Brown, the grounds are attributed to Humphry Repton.

<sup>ii</sup> "Gabrielle d'Estrees and one of her sisters in the bath," circa 1595. Attributed to the Fontainebleau School.

<sup>iii</sup> "The Arena of Love," Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles. 5 January to 6 February 1965.

<sup>iv</sup> "Dakota Daley and Nicholas Quennell," Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles. 16 March to 10 April 1965.

<sup>v</sup> Nicholas Quennell Associates, 1968. Quennell Rothschild Associates (Nicholas Quennell with Peter Rothschild), 1979. Quennell Rothschild & Partners (with Andrew Moore, Alison Shipley, Mark Bunnell), 1998.

<sup>vi</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, MA.

<sup>vii</sup> Quennell misspoke: Robert Moses was the Parks Commissioner, not the mayor.

<sup>viii</sup> The Public Design Commission was formerly known as the Art Commission.

<sup>ix</sup> The Central Park Children's Zoo was originally designed in the early 1960s.

<sup>x</sup> The theme was the Enchanted Forest: Quennell misspoke.

<sup>xi</sup> Green-Wood Cemetery offers views of Manhattan, not Brooklyn as Quennell states.

<sup>xii</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park, designed by Louis Kahn and Harriet Pattison, is located on the southern tip of Roosevelt Island.

<sup>xiii</sup> Quennell misspoke: Sakura Park is immediately south of International House.

<sup>xiv</sup> The trees that were in danger were large, mature lindens, not elms as Quennell stated.

<sup>xv</sup> Sakura is the Japanese word for cherry tree.

<sup>xvi</sup> Lynden Miller worked on later iterations of the plantings of the Heather Garden and elsewhere in Fort Tryon Park. She did not collaborate on the initial restoration which was done with Timothy Steinhoff and Jane Shackett

<sup>xvii</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, MA.

<sup>xviii</sup> Quennell Rothschild & Partners updated the master plans originally done by Saratoga Associates, Phil Winslow, and Stan Eckstut.