

# Fountain Place

Dallas, Texas

Photographs by Alan Ward 2013, 2022

# Notes on the Making of the Photographs

I was working on several planning projects in Dallas in the mid-1980s, when I heard from a client about Fountain Place in downtown Dallas being designed by Dan Kiley. It was described as having water over nearly the whole of a sloping site, with trees appearing to grow out of the water, and trees planted under a pair of very large office buildings. It all sounded unbelievable and quite impractical. However Texas was growing rapidly in the midst of a real estate boom and developers, particularly in Dallas, were risk takers. Dallas was one of the few large cities in the country without a waterfront; perhaps that was part of the motivation to use water so extensively. When I saw it built, I realized that this was Dan Kiley at his most imaginative. It was such a simple diagram in plan, but extraordinary when experienced. To walk through the site with the sound of water cascading from terraces with varying light through a grid of bald cypress trees, and at times, being under large glass buildings that reflected the watery landscape - was simply captivating. This was not a landscape that complemented the building; this was a landscape that eclipsed and upstaged the building.

When I returned years later to photograph Fountain Place for The Cultural Landscape Foundation exhibit on Dan Kiley in 2013, it had deteriorated badly, as this was a design that was certainly a challenge to build. Areas in disrepair that needed rehabilitation were cordoned off, which limited the potential for photographs. The few views that were possible show how the design exploits the multiple effects of water in its various forms. You enter the site on a path from a higher elevation on Ross Avenue with active water

on each side; it is immersion in the sights and sounds of numerous waterfalls. At the lower elevations, the water is quite still (because the jets were not working). The bright green cypress trees are reflected in the water giving a sense of melancholy in a dark dormant pool (18,19). Beyond the representation of water in these photographs, the actual experience of the site offers a series of deeper and more forceful set of images to the imagination. It is a landscape that exploits our inherent and instinctive attraction to water.\*

I returned in 2022, while once again working on real estate development projects in the region, after there was a thorough rehabilitation of much of the landscape. Fountain Place was returned to its original vision. Many of the trees were quite large, although some were missing (12). All of the water jets were working. The lower elevation of the site is flat with water at the same elevation as the paving, spilling over slot drains, so the paths appear to float on the surface of the water (12,15-17). The central plaza between the buildings was restored with a grid of programmed jets rising in variable heights from the paving as the centerpiece of Fountain Place (13,14). Landscapes composed of living things are dynamic. Water is the ultimate transitory element, in flux and central to the composition - and it defines the spirit of Fountain Place. There were some adjustments made to the design at the street edge with glass railings added (3), but the character of the original design remains of a modern water garden that stirs the imagination and feels like being in a dream.

# List of Photographs

1. Sidewalk along North Field Street, 2013
2. Sidewalk along Ross Avenue, 2013
3. Ross Avenue edge, 2022
4. Ross Avenue water terraces, 2022
5. Path from Ross Avenue, 2013
6. Path and lights, 2013
7. Path from Ross Avenue, 2022
8. Steps through cascades, 2022
9. Cascades at building edge, 2013
10. Cascades at building edge, 2022
11. Water terraces, jets, trees and cascades, 2013
12. Path to central plaza, 2022
13. Jets in central plaza, 2022
14. Trees and lawn in central plaza, 2022
15. Trees and lawn, building spanning the landscape, 2022
16. Under the building, 2022
17. Entrance to the building, 2022
18. Bald cypress trees reflected in water, 2013
19. Bald cypress trees in still water, 2013













































































# Notes

## Exhibitions of the Photographs:

“The Landscape Architecture Legacy of Dan Kiley.” Exhibition by The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2013 and circulating nationally

“Luminous Landscapes: Photographs by Alan Ward” The National Building Museum, 2016

“American Designed Landscapes: Space and Light” Sarasota Center for Architecture, 2018

# Appendix

\* See Gaston Bachelard’s *Water and Dreams; An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, published by the Dallas Institute of Humanities in 1983, for a philosophical interpretation of the significance of water. The Institute set up a conference in 1983 to recognize the publication of the book and to focus attention in the Dallas community on the place of water in the city, since Dallas was one of the few large cities without a waterfront. I gave a talk on the potential benefit of modifying the Trinity River to create a lake, or a series of lakes in a park, which was a study that I was working on with Sasaki at that time. Fountain Place opened when these issues were being discussed and debated.