

Harvard University - Harvard Yard

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Photographs by Alan Ward 1977, 1996, 2022

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Harvard Yard is a landscape begun in the seventeenth century that has endured after adjustments and refinements over several centuries. It remains the historic center of the campus. There are well-defined boundaries with walls and fences, and a clear sense of entry at each of the twenty-five gates (1,2,27). The landscape of mature trees shading lawns and paths is at the crossroads of the campus and is as significant as the buildings in the experience of Harvard Yard. The buildings are laid out in a grid framing several quads. There are overlapping patterns in the layout of the linear paths; some align with the geometry of the buildings, either along the edges of the spaces or centered on the symmetrical facades of important buildings, such as Memorial Church or Widener Library (20,21). Most of the key routes, however, reflect pedestrian desire lines which slice obliquely through the quads (3,16,18). The buildings in varied styles date from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, but the experience is unified by the simple repetition of landscape elements.

I selected views to illustrate the canopy of trees overhead along with the distinctive pattern of walks - shown straight on to emphasize the axial relationships to landmark buildings, as well as oblique views to show the dynamic nature of the walks angling across the quads.

Normally, I avoid showing people in images with early morning photography - to express a sort of timeless quality and to focus on the design elements, however including people seemed appropriate for Harvard Yard with its ebb and flow of activity. Setting up a tripod with a relatively long exposure and showing people walking on paths blurred, expresses a sense of time and movement (19). The canopy of trees with older elms, often exceeding the heights of buildings, creates a pattern overhead of intertwining branches and vegetation, that is even more pronounced in winter with dark twisting lines against the pale gray sky (3,4,6).

Light striking and revealing building facades is predictable, while light on the landscape can be elusive, varying with the weather and season. I set up a view of Tercentenary Theatre in the early morning anticipating a dramatic backlit scene, which unfolded for a few minutes, while I bracketed several different exposures (16). The dynamic nature of a living design, along with the variability of light revealing the landscape, is an ever changing phenomenon. It can make it worthwhile to return several times in different seasons, as shown here, to exploit the ephemeral quality of light on the landscape.

List of Photographs

1. View of McKean Gate south to Massachusetts Avenue, 1996
2. View of Class of 1885 Gate east toward Quincy Street, 2022
3. Old Yard with Massachusetts and Harvard Halls, 1996
4. Mower Hall, Brooks House and Stoughton Hall Courtyard, 1996
5. Straus, Massachusetts and Matthews Halls Courtyard, 2022
6. Old Yard and Holden Chapel, 1996
7. Path between Boylston Hall and Wigglesworth Hall, 1996
8. View north of the Old Yard, 1996
9. View toward University Hall, 1996
10. View east across Old Yard to Thayer Hall, 1996
11. View east across Old Yard to Holworthy Hall, 1996
12. North end of Old Yard, 2022
13. View south in Old Yard with Hollis Hall, 2022
14. Chinese memorial stele on turtle pedestal and Weld Hall, 2022
15. Paths along north side of Tercentenary Theatre, 1996
16. Tercentenary Theatre and Memorial Church, 1996
17. Tercentenary Theatre and Sever Hall in winter, 1977
18. Path to Widener between Emerson and Sever Halls, 1996
19. Steps of Widener Library, 1996
20. Path to Widener Library, 1996
21. Memorial Church south portico, 1996
22. Memorial Church in winter, 1977
23. Robinson Hall, 2022
24. Lamont Library and Gate, 2022
25. Art Museum and Carpenter Center, 1977
26. Tercentenary Theatre set up for graduation, 1996
27. Exiting through Dexter Gate, 1996























































Notes

Exhibitions of the Photographs:

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

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