

John Deere Administrative Center

Moline, Illinois

Photographs by Alan Ward 1996

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

The John Deere Administrative Center was built in the early 1960s, and is one of the earliest corporate headquarters sited within an extensive designed landscape. Located outside of Moline, Illinois, near where the company was founded, the landscape was designed by Stuart Dawson of Sasaki (The firm was then known as Sasaki Walker and Associates).

I photographed John Deere to add an important modern landmark to the collection of sites for the book *American Designed Landscapes: A Photographic Interpretation*. The design is significant to me because of my own forty-plus-year career as a planner and designer at Sasaki. While the design predated my tenure at Sasaki, it was a well-known example of the firm's legacy. I recall Stu Dawson describing how as a young professional he went to Eero Saarinen's office and showed some initial designs to Kevin Roche, Saarinen's design partner, who urged him to rethink his approach. Stu worked all night and when Saarinen came into the office the next morning, he walked slowly around the room, and said "this is the one," and left the room. This ultimately became the vision for the landscape with two lakes as the foreground for a building, which straddled a valley, and parking out of sight on the adjacent hilltops (5).*

I photographed the site with medium format cameras, both in square and panoramic formats. My earlier work was done with a 4" X 5" view camera that required carrying a sizable and heavy camera with film holders, along with a large sturdy tripod. Both the 2 ¼" square as well as the 2 ¼" X 6 ½" panoramic configuration still required a tripod, however they were much lighter than a view camera because they both used roll film, which was more portable on large sites.

An inherent characteristic of the more horizontal frame of the panoramic camera was its utility in depicting the landscape. It is my sense that our perception of exterior space is dominated by seeing from side to side, while we tend to diminish the significance of the immediate foreground, and what is overhead. The panoramic camera seems to capture this horizontal emphasis in the experience of the landscape. For example, the view of the south terrace (18) includes the building on the left, the south terrace in the center, and the upper lake and island on the right. The foreground below and trees overhead are edited out to amplify the key features of the design. My process involves walking a site with a camera format in mind as a tool to create and frame views, as well as edit out what is unessential to the image.

List of Photographs

1. Entrance to the campus
2. View north on approach drive
3. View south on approach drive
4. Approach drive and administrative building
5. Lower lake and administrative building spanning the valley
6. View to willows at lower lake
7. View to administrative building from east bank of lower lake
8. Administrative building and upper lake
9. Approach road on east side and flowering trees
10. Road between entry building and administration building
11. Entrance from east parking
12. Employee terrace over service area
13. View south to terrace and lakes
14. Upper lake and island with Henry Moore sculpture
15. Path under south side of administration building
16. Terraces and upper lake at sunset
17. View south from main administration building
18. Vertical panoramic view of upper and lower lake

























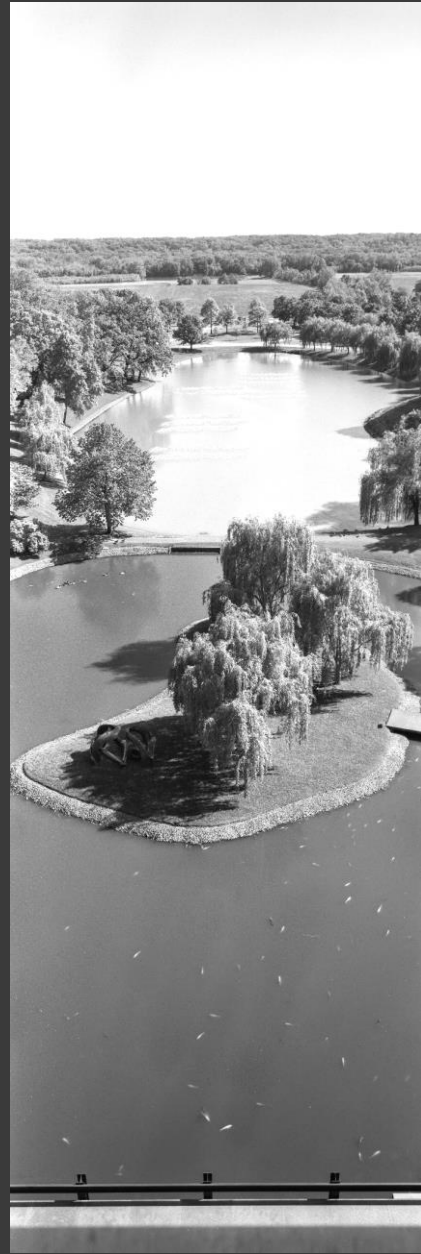












Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Simo, Melanie, *Sasaki Associates: Integrated Environments*, 1997

Ward, Alan, *American Designed Landscapes: A Photographic Interpretation*, 1998

“American Designed Landscapes,” Book Review, *Architectural Record*, October, 1998

Simo, Melanie, *100 Years of Landscape Architecture: Some Patterns of a Century*, 1999

Ward, Alan, “American Designed Landscapes,” *View Camera: The Journal of Large-Format Photography*, January/February 1999

Simo, Melanie, *A History of Landscape Architecture at Harvard 1900-1999*, 2000

Sasaki Associates: 50, Academy Press, 2003

Birnbaum, Charles, *Preserving Landscape Architecture II: Making Postwar Landscapes Visible*, 2004

Exhibitions of the Photographs

“Modernism, Interdisciplinarity, and Landscape: The Sasaki Years at Harvard,” Harvard Graduate School of Design, 1999

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

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

Appendix

* Interview with Stuart Dawson, December, 2022:

“Kevin Roche, Saarinen’s right hand design partner, advised me to prepare numerous alternatives, thus my all-night charette. When Saarinen came into the office the next morning, I was there just barely. He walked slowly, circling the room, hands behind his back, stopped in front of one and pointed, saying ‘this is the one’ and left the room. I was elated, especially when I was told that he had invited me to lunch. During the rest of the morning, I was introduced to his contracts person – Bill Lacey, and his ‘how to build the impossible’ John Dinkeloo, and to a young Bruce Detmers, who had spent hours getting to know the site. We got to know each other quite well. Needless to say, Deere’s CEO Bill Hewitt was an inspiration for all of us. He cared as much about the building as an icon as he cared about the site as an icon. I was asked year after year to revisit the site in order to clear out overplanting, as well as add plant material where needed. Chubb Harper was the Deere landscape manager and we became very good friends. Chairman Hewitt asked us to help site sculpture for which he had a keen eye. The most memorable experience was working with Henry Moore, in London and in Moline, on ‘Hill Piece.’ He had called it ‘Hill Piece’ so we needed to site it on a hill. Bill Hewitt and I liked the island site, but the island site was flat and embellished with three yellow-stem weeping willows. A decision was made, remove the willows and regrade the island, which we did. We leaned on a small professional art academy and had them build a full size Styrofoam maquette of ‘Hill Piece.’ It was a win/win for both the academy and Deere and Company. The full-scale maquette was built and placed on the island. After several rotations, the best orientation was decided upon. We then raised ‘Hill Piece’ to a height we thought perfect and secured numerous radial white strings from the base of the maquette to the perimeter of the island, PERFECT!. It looks great at eye level and from the Executive Dining Room under the terrace, from the terrace, from the HQ building and from the many viewpoints on the site.”

All Photographs © Alan Ward