

Reflections on Joe Yamada by Pat Caughey



April 2013

I have had the privilege of working with Joe Yamada since 1984. As his Partner and Owner of the firm I owe Joe an endless amount of gratitude for my career.

The first time I met Joe Yamada was in a joint horticulture class between two local high schools in San Diego. The year was 1973 and Joe was visiting the class to describe his work as a Landscape Architect. He described his design work at Sea World, UCSD and other well-known San Diego landmarks and I became memorized about the profession of landscape architecture.

Several years later after completing my degree in Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture from Arizona State University, I contacted Joe for an informational interview. He was happy to meet with me after learning I was living in Phoenix. The firm had just begun doing projects in Arizona and needed local expertise. When we met I mentioned my fond memory of listening to him in high school many years earlier. He found this unusual and indicated that he did not do a lot of public speaking. He did however remember visiting his son's horticulture class. Garrett was from the other high school and I did not know him at the time. Joe named his son after Garrett Eckbo and went on to become a Presbyterian Minister.

I was given the opportunity to discover an early mentor and later would be privileged to become his business partner. I have told this story many times to young students and practitioners and always remind them that everything happens for a reason.



Reflections on Joseph Yamada by Sylvia Epperson

April 2013

I began my employment with Wimmer Yamada & Associates October 1984. I served as Secretary to the staff from 1984-1988 and Executive Secretary to Joe Yamada from 1989-1991. The firm with Joe's leadership always had the most interesting projects and high profile clients in San Diego which made the work very interesting and exciting. I loved working for Joe Yamada. He always appreciated my work and dedication to the firm. Joe always made time to mentor his young staff and kept the team inspired with fun excursions to see interesting landscape projects. "The cultural landscape profile is as much about the culture profile of the firm as it is about the profession and its design and planning."

When I think of Joe, I remember his kindness and generosity to his employees and especially to me and my family with yearly holiday dinners, bonuses, theatre, museum, and baseball tickets, fishing trips and birthday celebrations and even out of town excursions.

I especially remember the day before our Christmas break. The tradition at WYA was the employees would cook breakfast at the office for the bosses. All the employees' families were invited. The office was decorated with lights, a beautiful Christmas tree, festive music was playing, breakfast was cooking and everyone was having a fun time exchanging gifts and laughing. Then we all went off to spend Christmas week with our families.

I also had the pleasure of working beside Joe's wonderful wife Liz Yamada who was Joe's business partner and public relations/communication director for WYA. She is the sweetest most sincere person I have ever known. My husband and I have remained great friends with Joe and Liz and have vacationed many times with them over the last 22 years.

Cultural landscape extends beyond the design and planning. Cultural landscape is about people who share the love of the land and share in the work of creating a better world.

My Memories of Joe Yamada

July 2013

From Jim Furby: Former Head Superintendent of Chadwick & Buchanan, General Contractor of Sea World, San Diego

Professor Kubo was the Landscape Architect, hired by Kajima Construction Company to supervise the building of Murata Pearl Village at Sea World, San Diego.

I remember that Joe introduced me to Professor Kubo. We were placing rocks around the lagoon at the Japanese Village at Sea World, San Diego. Professor Kubo directed my crew to turn some of the rocks over or around as he said "Every rock has a face". A profound statement.

My Memories of Joe Yamada

From Joy Furby:

Another charming story was when the Murata Pearl Village opened in March 1964. Professor Kubo held a "Blessing Ceremony" and invited all key employees to attend. Each attendee was presented with a Hapi coat imprinted with some writing down each lapel. We were allowed to keep the jackets and I remember asking, Joe (thinking he spoke and understood Japanese) what the message on the jackets said? And he replied "I have no idea I don't speak Japanese, I was born in America". We found out later that the supposed "blessing" said "Kajima Construction Company" not any profound blessing as we all thought! Joe Yamada is an elegant, kind gentleman and an amazing landscape architect with an enviable legacy.

A Tribute to Joe Yamada by George Lattimer

May, 2013

It was my pleasure to work with Joe Yamada from concept to landscape installation on The Plaza at La Jolla Village. Joe shared and was a major contributor to the fun and excitement of creating a four-phase 850,000 square foot office project on 17 acres. He was very instrumental in the design of a development, which would establish a standard of excellence for future projects in the evolving University City community of San Diego.

Joe's early involvement provided the opportunity for significant input on almost every aspect of The Plaza. He suggested ways to attractively sculpt a relatively flat site and make a balanced grading operation to accommodate six office buildings ranging from two to eighteen stories, two six level parking structures and a stand-alone restaurant. Joe created a long rolling berm along the major thoroughfare adjacent to the site that provided a view from the street of the granite and dark glass buildings sitting on a lawn accented with tall sequoias. Within the project, the berm created a tranquil environment. That ambiance was greatly enhanced by the ponds, waterfalls, major plantings and colorful flowers that Joe designed throughout The Plaza. The landscaping, combined with excellent architecture, integrated the buildings into a cohesive development, while allowing each phase to be a completely finished element.

Joe's valuable suggestions also improved the lobbies of the two ten-story buildings. He recommended incorporating subtle water elements to add an audible component to the unique experience created by large colorful salt-water aquariums.

Upon its completion, the first ten-story building won the Pacific Coast Builders Conference Golden Nugget Award as the best new office building of more than 100,000 square feet in the thirteen western states. Almost thirty years later The Plaza continues to be an exceptionally attractive project that commands well above average leasing rates.

Joe's wisdom, creativity and always-cheerful demeanor encouraged and stimulated the best efforts of everyone involved in creating the project. His contributions helped make The Plaza at La Jolla Village a development of which we are all proud, as we are of our continuing friendship with Joe & Liz.

Memories of Joe Yamada by Robert Mosher, FAIA

June 2013

Late one sunny September afternoon in 1952, my secretary called me to say there was an attractive, shy young man at reception asking to see me. The day had been only partially productive and I was ready for a pleasant interruption, so I told her to show him in.

This was my introduction to Joe Yamada and because of the comfort of that first meeting; it will remain one of my most valued memories.

Joe had just graduated from the University of California, Berkeley School of Landscape Architecture. It was obvious from this initial conversation that he had responded in a positive way to the significant lessons to be learned at that superior school.

I felt that were we able to make a place for him, he could make a valuable contribution to our office. However, I had to tell him that all of the landscape design for our projects was done by Landscape Architect Harriet Wimmer in her San Diego office.

I thus suggested to Joe that I would call Harriet and recommend that she interview him. This she did and the rest is history.

During the following 61 years, the firm of Wimmer Yamada set a standard of excellence for landscape design in southern California. Joe has been largely responsible for its achievement.



Reflections of Joseph Yamada by Kenneth S. Nakaba

April, 2013

It is with great pleasure I write this letter sharing my personal and professional knowledge of Joe Yamada over the years. It is an honor to have been acquainted with Joe for almost 40 years. Joe has been a role model and inspiration for myself and many, many others.

12 years my senior, Joe and I have been indirectly connected in various ways. Most of which I found out later through readings about the firm and meeting with Joe at various times over the years. Meeting with Joe and Liz at professional conferences and meetings has always been a pleasure my wife and I looked forward to, including the 2011 ASLA Annual Meeting in San Diego.

As a college student in the mid-sixties, it was easy looking for heroes to emulate and to relate to. Major firm names came easily during those early years of growth for the profession. There weren't very many. And, of course, of the ones that there were, several nationally, statewide and local names were based in California. As students we were familiar with all of the names of individuals and firms especially noted and rising firms like Wimmer & Yamada.

Living in the Los Angeles area for my entire life, excluding the war years, I was close enough to San Diego to have contact with firms there but not close enough to be able to be employed by them. But it was close enough for contact through various professional opportunities.

I believe one of the first times I met Joe was in the late sixties at a meeting of the local southern California ASLA chapter and thereafter at other statewide and national professional conferences and meetings. At the time the San Diego Chapter was a Section of the Los Angeles Chapter.

As mentioned above, I've always felt connected with Joe, mostly indirectly. Maybe connected is not the right word, similar backgrounds is maybe more accurate; such as being a Japanese American, the son of a gardener, being sent to Santa Anita Race Track Assembly Center (point of embarkation to war internment camps), studying landscape architecture and ultimately, becoming a landscape architect. Joe's family was sent to the Internment Camp at Poston, Arizona and our family was sent to Granada, Colorado.

In professional practice in the 70's and after several decades of teaching at Cal Poly Pomona, I had the honor and pleasure of meeting Joe many times. Joe always had a friendly word and positive commentary on whatever was the subject of discussion of the meeting.

I believe Joe's activities in the San Diego community and ASLA Chapter and ASLA National was inspiration for my participation in the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), locally and as a National Trustee.

In 1992, then President of ASLA National, Dennis Otsuji (a friend and college classmate of mine) proposed the Manzanar Initiative and formed a design advisory committee for the Manzanar National Historic Site to assist the National Park Service. The volunteer group included Dennis, Asa Hanamoto, Ron Izumita, Frank Kawasaki, Robert Murase, Hideo Sasaki, Joe Yamada and myself. It was an amazing experience to work with all these thoughtful, experienced and exceptional designers.

In all the years I have known Joe Yamada he has been and is the epitome of the consummate professional, engaging and involved, friendly, reserved and a true gentleman. To me, he remains a distinguished professional and mentor.

Sincerely,

Ken Nakaba

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Reflections on Joe Yamada.... by Darwina L. Neal, FASLA



May 2013

I've known Joe and Liz Yamada for so long that I don't remember exactly when I met Joe for the first time. In reminiscing, however, it had to be at least in 1980, when Joe became National Treasurer of ASLA, taking over my duties as prior Treasurer after I had been elected National Vice President. We served on the ASLA Executive Committee together in 1980-81. Liz reminded me that Joe enlivened one Board meeting with a "Japanese sword" performance. What I remember most about him, though, is his calm steadfastness and good sense of humor, usually with a twinkle in his eye...and with Liz at his side – also with a twinkle and a smile.

He was always so modest that I was not aware of the full extent of his work and significant contributions to both the practice of the profession of landscape architecture and the landscape of the San Diego area. In the years since, I've enjoyed seeing Joe and Liz at various ASLA Annual Meetings and was especially pleased to be able to see them at the preview of his oral history at the 2011 ASLA Annual Meeting in San Diego: *A Half Century of San Diego Landscape Architecture with Joe Yamada*. Now that the oral history has been launched, Joe will receive just recognition for his legacy of excellence in landscape architecture and design.

Congratulations, Joe!

Reflections of Joe Yamada by Harold Sadler

April 2013



Joe Yamada is a treasure to San Diego and Southern California. His projects span over the last fifty years and include residences, education facilities, civic complexes, and the San Diego waterfront and parks. In addition, he has served on numerous governmental and community planning boards, and has influenced the creative growth of the San Diego Regional Planning.

I have known Joe as a design partner on numerous major projects. Our region is the home of many Asian families. His personal growth is based on great family values and the culture and strength of the Japanese heritage. During World War II the federal government felt national security required the relocation of Asian families to camps throughout the western United States. The Yamada family business was lost, their father separated, but they survived. After the war Joe's father took up landscape work for himself and Joe. He entered the University of California Berkley where they were starting a landscape architecture program. After graduating he joined the firm of Harriett Wimmer. The relationship proved successful and the firm grew to a major landscape design firm in Southern California.

Joe insisted that great design is the collaboration early and continues through evolution of the concept. He and his wonderful wife Liz enjoyed leading associates and friends on trips through Japan. Those of us who were lucky enough to go with him will never forget the trips, talents, and wonderful friendship of Joe Yamada.



Reflections on Joseph Yamada by Ron Teshima

April, 2013

I owe my professional career in San Diego to Joe Yamada. He took a chance on a young college grad in 1971 and gave me the amazing opportunity to learn from him and eventually be promoted to his partner. I learned so much by watching and listening to him interact with clients and other professionals, giving presentations, and seeing his design process. He also introduced me to the San Diego business community and many of his friends. My wife and I were new in San Diego, but as soon as we said Joe and Liz's name, we were welcomed like locals. And that continues to today.

I have many fond memories of our 17 years working together and am grateful for the friendship we continue to have. From 'all nighter' project design sessions, annual holiday office parties and breakfasts, social events, travels, meals out together (often reading the menu for him), to remodeling and moving into his dad's pool hall in the Gaslamp. I have wonderful memories that will last a lifetime.

I also had the opportunity to share many great rounds of golf with Joe. His true love and one we share. There is one incident that sticks out in my mind, Hawaii 1982 at the ASLA National Conference. We were at the course having breakfast before our start and then we saw patio furniture flying around us! Hurricane Iwa had arrived! Even though no golf playing that day, it is a great story to tell!

Some projects that I am especially proud of working with Joe on are: Super Block in El Cajon (an ASLA Award winner), Embarcadero Marina Park, and Seaport Village. I learned so much from my many years working at Wimmer Yamada. Much more than a formal education could ever teach me. I will always be indebted to Joe for teaching me so much about the business and giving me the opportunity to be a part of such a fine landscape architectural firm. There are many other landscape architects who worked with him that can say the same. San Diego has been blessed with Joe's many contributions.

Reflection from Garrett Yamada (about my dad)



Joe, Brent and Garrett Yamada

April 2013

My dad named me Garrett after the Landscape Architect, Garrett Eckbo. It is the very distinctive name of a very distinguished person. However, when I was in elementary school, I felt it was too different for me. No one else was named Garrett at that time, so I decided to call myself Gary for a couple of years. But when I got to Jr. High, I felt I wanted to once again be called Garrett; being unique was what I wanted. I have loved the name ever since.

My name reminds me of my dad's approach to life and his profession. He is one who is willing to be creative and distinctive in his own way. I appreciate his work and the designs that are unique to Joe Yamada (like the "Yamada roll" as seen in Sea World and many of his projects). I have always been proud of the way my father's work brings beauty and interest to our world.

I also believe that Joe has been a great ambassador for Landscape Architecture because of his personal warmth, sense of humor, and laughter. I believe it is both his talent and his enjoyment of life that have helped him be the success that he is. Of course, my mother Elizabeth was an important part of his life and success, too.

On a personal side, I appreciate the way Joe never let his work get in the way of being a great father. He was always there for dinner and to spend time with the family. Family meals remained very important to me as I became a parent with my own children. I have so many wonderful memories of my dad spending time with us: taking vacations, trips to the park, playing cards, teaching me to cook, fish, play tennis and later golf, and of course, eating and lots of laughter.

I am so glad that there will be this record of his work that can be shared and passed on to others.