

The Cultural Landscape Foundation
Pioneers of American Landscape Design

NICHOLAS QUENNELL

ORAL HISTORY

REFLECTIONS AND INTERVIEW

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Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Paul M. Friedberg

September 9, 2015

Hey Nicholas-

As one of the two “last men standing” New York landscape architects from the ‘60’s, TCLF thought I might have some insights or tidbits to add to your oral history. Not too much that you or I want made public. So this is about us...as friends and colleagues.

I have always felt like we are ships passing in the night. We share the same profession, in the same time frame, in the same city, and never competed for commissions. All of which does not answer to the source of our friendship.

Let me start with my first impression. New York is a city where you encounter many people that are not memorable, yet you are. Face to face with this tall, suave, elegant, off putting person, sporting this enviable accent—it was a lot for me to handle, coming from upstate New York where the English accent was considered a foreign language. An accent that by the virtue of having mastered it communicates intelligence and class and intimidation.

I was starting the urban landscape program at CCNY and thought that this nascent landscape program could use a little class—and possible a little intimidation. I invited you to teach in this hybrid program, housed in a converted garage on Broadway in Harlem. Picture the location, the building, the student body—and you may see how this was a leap of faith. However, as a Peruvian writer wrote after 9/11, after 15 minutes you are a New Yorker, and you were.

These CCNY students, not intimidated by the accent, took less than 15 minutes to embrace you as a New Yorker, educator and role model—but you could never manage the accent. Nor you theirs. It was a perfect choice. Your natural elegance, values and skills are a role model to emulate. You represented the profession and what it means to be a professional. A view we all share.

Although we meet infrequently, Nicholas you are more than a professional acquaintance. I maintain a real affection for you personally and a friendship that reinstates itself and is enriched at each meeting. I find your sense of social and public responsibility impressive.

So Nicholas (note I never referred to him as Nick), as I end this exposé of the man I know and the kind of friend I wish for us all, I am proud and fortunate that I know you.

Paul

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Mac Griswold

August 31, 2015

Nicholas Quennell generously shared his talents as a landscape architect and planner, his professional contacts, his redoubtable people skills, and his sense of humor—enlivened by his unstoppable flow of puns— to bring a village together.

A group of residents of Sag Harbor, New York, formed a nonprofit organization in 2003 when the board of the local John Jermain Memorial Library announced plans to move to a park on the outskirts of the village, on a site they had already purchased. They also had hired architects who had drawn up plans that the board had approved—without any public input sessions.

Nicholas, a part-time resident of Sag Harbor with a teeming office and a full career in New York City, nonetheless jumped right into the effort to keep the John Jermain on its original site in the heart of the village where it had stood since 1910.

A veteran problem solver in many thorny similar debates over siting and suitability during the years of his practice, he swiftly advised that our small group, the John Jermain Future Fund, begin by raising public awareness. Nicholas donated his professional skills pro bono. He drew on his broad range of contacts, bringing just the right library planner and architect, Elisabeth Martin, into the mix to draw up a needs assessment and help create a design workshop. That summer, almost a hundred village residents (village population about 2,500) gathered in the local high school cafeteria with pencils and paper to express their ideas for a library expansion. Guided by Nicholas, Elisabeth Martin, and a small volunteer band of other local architects, by the end of the day the village had begun to own the idea that the old library building could indeed become the new library, complete with all the new technology and areas of involvement that a modern library facility demands. When war cries of “there will not be enough parking” and “traffic will become a nightmare,” Nicholas didn’t argue—he simply offered the services of a local traffic planning expert, whom we hired to do a one-day traffic survey, and suggested we count the number of available parking spaces along Main Street.

His quiet, good-humored, effortless effort included donating his New York office as the place to screen and critique a PowerPoint comparing the facts and figures for staying put versus moving out. We screened it widely in the village. On a cold and snowy December 14, 2004, a referendum to vote on building a new facility at the park was held at the library. The turn-out dwarfed typical voter participation in public library decisions. By two to one, the community had said “Stay.” Now, in 2015, the resplendent old John Jermain is about to reopen in its 21st-century incarnation.

Thank you, Nicholas Quennell, for who you are and what you do.

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Hugh Hardy

September 1, 2015

Nicholas Quennell has been in the U.S. since 1970, providing leadership in landscape design and a host of issues involving urban affairs. His insightful guidance through the conflicting opinions of other directors has consistently helped shape appropriate policy, with his activities with the Municipal Art Society and the Architectural League as fine examples of leadership in cultural affairs, even when controversial.

I have often shared duties with Nicholas and have found him imaginative, humorous, and a stalwart worker whose quiet achievements represent the stuff of true accomplishment. New York has been fortunate to benefit from his multiple talents.

Nicholas is clearly worthy of this recognition for his many contributions to pioneering landscape design.

Reflection on Nicholas Quennell by Barbara Kruger

August 30, 2015

Nicholas and I have collaborated on a number of projects, along with Laurie Hawkinson, Henry Smith-Miller, and Guy Nordenson. Together we planned ambitious buildings and landscapes, and in doing so, discovered how pleasurable and productive our discussions and ruminations could be. Working with Nicholas was tremendously rewarding. His intelligence and complex problem solving made impossible situations possible. And always, his brilliance was couched in a kind of wonderfully casual, yet wicked humor. He never misses a thing and is quick to find the best way to do the best thing in the best manner.

A little anecdote that is absolute Quennellian: I was renting a little cottage at the beach with totally amazing 360 degree views of water and sky. Breath-taking for sure. Nicholas walked in, took a quick scan of the scenery and blithely commented, “How boring.” And he did so without a shred of malice. Just pure comedic quipping with great timing. And what could be better—a brilliant, but never pretentious mind, coupled with a gift for affable sociality and a great grasp of the goof. He’s just the best.

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Andrew Moore

August 31, 2015



The Art Commission at Work
"AFTER NOGARTH" ANDREW MOORE 1980

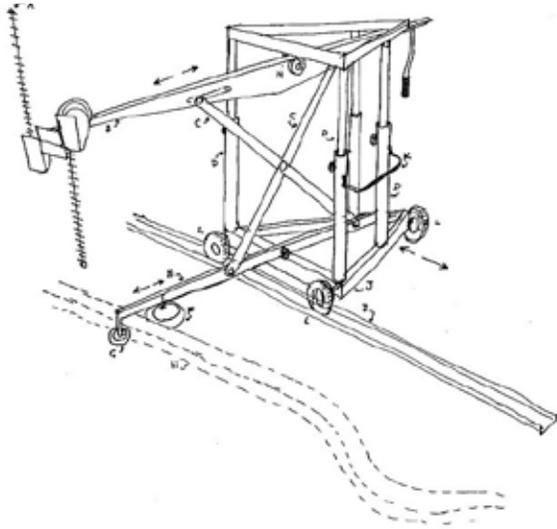
Just over thirty-five years ago I came to work for Nicholas and Peter, arriving in New York City from Oregon sight-unseen. I found an immediate welcoming environment at Quennell Rothschild, with good people who would become good friends, and interesting and challenging work that became a career.

Most of all the office was a very human place where daily lunches were shared around a big table, all birthdays celebrated and activities spilled over after work hours. Nicholas had a lot to do with the character of the office environment and how we felt about work and each other.



Humor has always been a hallmark of Nicholas' character. Puns and word play and risqué limericks come effortlessly. His facility with caricature is witty - and extremely hilarious. This ephemera was done for our amusement or his, and usually discarded.

Often, these were made during boring project meetings, or at a long afternoon at the Art Commission, or dashed off to note that the office was out of milk or toilet paper or paper towels. A favorite recurring cartoon featured "Mr. Tupperware" in tights and mask (and wearing Nicholas' national health glasses) who was coming to clean the kitchen shelves of accumulated plastic containers.



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A fanciful Rube Goldberg-esque sketch of a mechanized hedge trimmer was done only partly in jest while working on the South Garden for Battery Park City. I'm sure that if built, it would work perfectly!

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Signe Nielsen

August 6, 2015

Nicholas is a Renaissance man. He is both a skilled architect and landscape architect and equally versed in the fine arts. This ability has enabled him to craft award-winning projects with renowned artists such as Alice Aycock, Barbara Kruger and Maya Lin. In our increasingly specialized world, Nicholas' wide-ranging skills enable him to synthesize ideas from multiple viewpoints.

Nicholas is a teacher who has inspired many students at both City College and at Columbia University. Nicholas was my professor at City College and it was that first encounter when I realized that his firm grasp on so many aspects of culture made his subject matter come to life. His love of history and his passion for creative vision combine to infuse his courses with the path he has chosen in his career—that of thoughtful design that seamlessly intertwines multiple art forms and life lessons.

Nicholas is a mentor. He is generous, passionate and thoughtful. When I chose this path of landscape architecture I was clueless. Nicholas was the only person who answered my shot in the dark. During my interview with him he kindly advised me that my undergraduate political science degree and art minor would not exactly cut it as an employee in his burgeoning firm. “Did I type?” he asked. “No,” I replied, “or you will only hire me as a secretary.” “So may I suggest that you go to a landscape architecture program” he said. And that is how our relationship began. I hung on his every word of advice, visited each school he recommended. In the end I went to City College where, behold, he was my teacher. After the first semester he hired me to work in his office.

Nicholas is a leader. He has served as President of the NY Chapter of the ASLA, Vice President of the Municipal Arts Society, Co-Chairman of the National Association for Olmsted Parks, and President of the Design (Arts) Commission. In each of these roles he has demonstrated an uncanny ability to lead through a combination of wit, integrity and a spirit of collaboration. I had the occasion, while working for him, to get roped into supporting his role as NY ASLA Chapter President. We had many funny moments pretending to be party-planners amid the seriousness of trying to bridge a rift between the upstate and downstate chapters. Ultimately, we had a successful meeting at Bear Mountain with Nicholas moving graciously from host to speaker to professional peer. Much more importantly, Nicholas was a strong and forceful leader of the Public Design Commission, a position that I now hold. So yet again, Nicholas' sage advice and leading by example have been the anchors of my professional career.

And Nicholas is my friend of 42 years. We have each had our personal and profession hurdles and successes. We have always had each other to turn to—with honesty and without pretense. There is no one who has meant more to me in my professional career and I will be forever grateful.

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Peter Rothschild

August 30, 2015

Half a century spans a significant part of one's life. Nicholas and I will celebrate our fiftieth year together later this year. Partner, friend, mentor, confidant, and collaborator describes but a few of the many ways Nicholas helped me to define my life, and the lives of all who work with us.

We met at Vollmer Associates, Nicholas recently having left the Halprin office in San Francisco to move to New York, and me in my first job. We struck up a friendship as the radicals in the office, "long hairs" in an otherwise straight-laced world, suburban commuters, three martini lunches, and shirts and ties (required).

Nicholas and his girlfriend Dakota Daley lived in the Chelsea Hotel where I hung out for most of that summer. Through them I was introduced to the epicenter of New York pop culture: Andy Warhol, Edie Sedgwick, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Arthur C. Clarke. It was a heady, creative atmosphere inspiring aesthetic iconoclasm as well as alternative lifestyles and culture. It was here that he founded Nicholas Quennell and Associates, the genesis of our 50-year partnership, in a small room on the second floor of the hotel.

During those first years together, while introducing me and our growing staff to radical design ideas and a fundamental skepticism about previously accepted principles and methods, Nicholas selflessly shared responsibilities in the office, inspiring all who worked there to participate at every level. His inspirational talent was to collaborate, to support our collective efforts, and to promote an atmosphere of office-wide ownership of every project we undertook. Throughout his career, Nicholas' willingness to collaborate at every opportunity became a defining element in his creative talent and the keystone of our practice. At the age of 20, I found myself encouraged to think broadly about each of our commissions, flying all over the U.S. and meeting with clients to help create memorable works.

Through the ensuing decades, Nicholas provided seminal leadership in creating an international reputation for our firm, directing our efforts on projects from New York to Los Angeles, Sao Paulo, Cape Town, the Périgord, San Diego, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Hartford, New Haven, Raleigh, Syracuse, and innumerable other places. Consistently, we approached each project with humility, open-mindedness, and a willingness to consider unusual solutions to the unique challenges posed by each assignment. Nicholas led and supported us throughout.

His leadership extended far beyond the office. For the Municipal Art Society of New York, the NY Chapter of the ASLA, and the National Association of Olmsted Parks he injected vitality and vision where none existed before. As President of the New York City Art Commission, appointed by the mayor, Nicholas' influence and creative intelligence was realized throughout the city and in policy initiatives that will live on for decades.

His diverse and important legacy, manifested in so many different areas provides lasting benefit and inspiration. It is an honor to have called him my partner and friend.

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Anthony Russell

September 9, 2015

I've known Nicholas since the late seventies and have worked with him as a graphic designer on a number of projects, beginning with a streetscape project in Westchester. From his early days as an amateur printer (small press in backyard shed in Hampstead), Nicholas knew his Bodoni from his Times Roman, so this landscape architect could converse with this graphic designer. New Rochelle is where we met—two Brits trying to revive a dying downtown, victim of the surrounding malls, typical of what was happening all over the country at that time. We didn't succeed (I believe they are still trying), but that's how an everlasting friendship was started.

Designing wayfinding and signage is what my office does, admittedly a small component of any landscape project, but Nicholas and his team have always appreciated our contribution as a necessary enhancement, usually the result of a successful collaboration.

Our professional relationship is driven by Nicholas's impeccable (and instinctive) taste and overwhelming civility. Sorry, but here's the Brit factor again from one who knows one: Nicholas Quennell, Gentleman.

Outside of working together we share a true friendship that is reflective of the person that is Nicholas. We have renovated houses together, celebrated every birthday (ours are close), sketched together at the Century, wandered the B roads of France with the lovely Grace navigating towards a picnic with my wife Jean's sister in the Pyrenees, and happily sharing my grandchildren. Our humor is mutual (sometimes dark) and occasionally bitchy, but when you know as many people as Nicholas does it is inevitable.

For both of us, the professional and personal have been a meaningful package. It's been a wonderful ride. Thank you Nicholas.

Reflection on Nicholas Quennell by Alison Shipley

Partner at Quennell Rothschild & Partners

August 31, 2015



I've always admired Nicholas for his ease in connecting with people, and working with him on reimagining a ranch estate in New Mexico in 1997 I saw how quickly and effortlessly he transformed the many people involved into allies and friends, from the ranch manager and local contractors, to the architects and other designers.

Nicholas used our trips to New Mexico as a way for us to learn about the diverse landscape of the region, and while traveling with him from the desert to the highlands we educated each other on the altitude based ecology. I took this photo of Nicholas at White Sands National Monument in 1997, and I think it shows his unmistakable style. Although Nicholas prefers to keep his English complexion in the shade, he shows here he can take some sun with class!

Reflection on Nicholas Quennell by Henry Smith-Miller

September 25, 2015



From the left to right, Henry Smith-Miller, Barbara Kruger, Nicholas Quennell (looking far away) and Laurie Hawkinson.

As a trained architect, and the landscape architect who was supposed to have planned the first “Woodstock,” Nicholas has always somehow been ahead of the game. At the North Carolina Museum of Art, Nicholas, Barbara, Laurie and I worked together on a project we called “Imperfect Utopia – a Park for the New World.” The project and its fundamental driving concepts revolutionized thinking about our shared physical and cultural assets.

The Theory

To disperse the univocality of a “Master Plan” into an aerosol of imaginary conversations and inclusionary tactics.

To bring in rather than leave out.

To make signs.

To re-naturalize.

To question the priorities of style and taste.

P To anticipate change and invite alteration.

To construct a cycle of repair and discovery.

To question the limitations of vocation.

To be brought down to earth.

To make the permanent temporary.

To see the forest for the trees.

To have no end in sight.

The Program

To restructure the approach to the museum.

To allow for laboratory settings for artists and designers.

To provide a visible, inexpensive, short-term botanical strategy to alter the place.

To introduce movie-going, walking, wading, eating, reading, bird watching, relaxing and other familiar pleasures.

To punctuate the site with regional, cultural and vernacular signage.

To replace the forest that’s been lost.



Long before “green” in 1986 Nicholas brought his keen wit and droll humor to the project. After winning the commission for the Master Plan for the Museum’s future development, we had the opportunity to design an outdoor performing arts amphitheater and cinema.

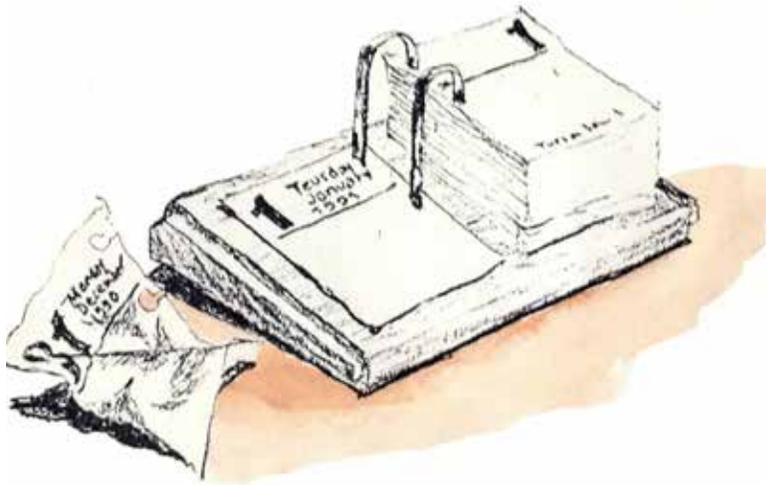
His most brilliant contribution to the project was not only the integration of a fully operational amphitheater in a natural landscape swale, but the orchestration of the several modes of access to the seating and stage, a stepped stair (schramp) and an elliptical ever decreasing radius and sloped ramp that surrounded the place providing the requisite Americans with Disabilities Act access for all.

Both were dynamic, the stair a “sashaying” ceremonial way to descend to the seating and stage, and the second, even more dramatic, offered an oblique perimeter view of the site while descending in elevation.

Were Olmsted alive he would have marveled at Nicholas’ genius – just as we have each and every time we meet.

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Grace Tankersley

August 30, 2015



A note to Nicholas.

As I sit in our garden watching two delicate white butterflies circling one another, I try to think of what to write. What does one say about the person one has been married to for more than 30 years?

Some of your friends and colleagues who have been asked to contribute to these reflections may very well mention your kindness, your generosity, your wit and humor, your sometimes very bad and often quite good puns, your confident ease, your fairness in your dealings with other people, your problem-solving instinct, and your sense of civic responsibility. Many people have experienced those things about you.

Will anyone else, I wonder, mention your fondness for 20s and 30s popular music, your collection of cowboy boots, or that you're a great cook, and a not bad dancer? The way you reach for a pencil to draw when you want to explain something?

There have been some sad times and some anxious times, but on the whole, we've had a very fortunate life together. At least two of my friends think you are wasted on me because I prefer sitting on uncomfortable chairs in a darkened basement with a handful of other people watching obscure, abstract films to attending gala civic events with the movers and shakers of New York that you enjoy, but we've never minded that about one another, and our overlapping interests are plenty enough. There has always been an easiness between us that is quite likely more attributable to you than to me, with your affable temperament and ability to make just about anyone feel comfortable.

While looking for material for The Cultural Landscape Foundation video of you, I came across a drawing you did for one of our New Year's cards. It's a lovely, witty, somewhat melancholy expression of the discarding of the old year and the hopeful, unblemished start of another. We have many discarded years behind us, and, I hope, a few ahead to blemish in our way as they come along.

To finish, I'd like to mention a few things someone considering marrying a landscape architect might expect:

- That photo being taken of you is often actually to give scale to the real subject of the photograph—a tree, shrub, or other landscape feature.
- Your vacation photos will be liberally sprinkled with shots of paving.
- The *Quercus alba* you are constantly hearing about is none other than the tree you've known all your life as a white oak.
- The word CAD does not always refer to a person of questionable character.
- Walks through parks are always on the agenda when visiting both new and familiar places. And that is one of the nicest things about traveling with a landscape architect.

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Tupper Thomas

August 26, 2015

Nicholas has always been an amazing advocate... for parks and open space, for good architecture and great landscapes, for historic restoration, for his city. I first met him when he was working on the design for Willink Entrance in Prospect Park in the mid 1980's. He was perfect because he was not only a great landscape architect, but he was a good teacher. And I really needed teaching. He understood Olmsted who had designed the park, and he had certainly studied McKim, Mead and White who had designed the entrance to that section of the Park. That project lead to many other ways in which I worked with Nicholas.

I had joined an organization called National Association for Olmsted Parks (NAOP), my first work in open space advocacy. After a few years I was able to convince Nicholas to join the Board. He was a fighter for great urban design causes. He helped in so many ways. NAOP worked to save Olmsted landscapes. He added his great advocacy skills to NAOP, and again taught us so much. He does not come off as a radical but that is what makes him so effective. His knowledge and demeanor make him a very strong advocate. He brings calm to any contentious situation and is always respected.

Nicholas is a wonderful person with whom to visit parks in other cities. He knows so much and is able to make landscapes come alive. We would all try to keep up with him whenever he was walking through a park, even one he had never seen before. He has taught so many people all about how to look at a park, not just his students, but so many of his colleagues. Not to say that it is all intellectual...it is also so fun to be with him, great humor and always so charming! And where ever he is, he seems to know where to eat!

Nicholas is also willing to be political. Not many people in the design world are willing to get involved politically, but Nicholas knows how to get things done. He worked on Mayor David Dinkins transition team. Then he joined the Art Commission (now called the Design Commission) and he made informed decisions for the preservation of great landscapes and the creation of new ones...right here in New York. Again his calm but persuasive voice has made this city a better and more beautiful space.

Reflections on Nicholas Quennell by Carol Williams

August 28, 2015

I know more about my friend Nicholas Quennell as human than as professional. But can you separate those things?

I met him in Boston when we were both students, though at different stages in our educations. Nicholas was already an architect and landscape designer. He had come to Harvard for a landscape architecture degree. Realizing what Nicholas already knew, the chairman, Hideo Sasaki, chopped a year off the courses. This Nicholas seemed to have no trouble completing, while running an office with Jack Gaffney on the side. I was an undergraduate at MIT, majoring in architecture out of a vague longing to discover what makes a good place.

We met through a mutual friend who owned the crumbling, but well-proportioned, house on the wrong side of Beacon Hill in which Nicholas was a lodger. At first it was just nice to meet another English person. Then I noticed how much he noticed. His spot-on little jokes brought breathing space to a heated-up time to be at school. Nicholas was tolerant (except of “jerks”), often kind in his observant way. He phoned to warn me not to go to Woodstock—he and Jack had had something to do with planning the initial parking scheme. He thought it might be crowded.

Nicholas often spent summers in Sag Harbor. I settled there with my then husband who had a commercial orchard where he grew Nicholas’ and my favorite Cox’s Orange Pippins. I always enjoyed seeing Nicholas, and eventually the well-named Grace, over walks and pear tarts in their garden or mine.

It wasn’t until I left off being a full-time mother and farmer’s wife and moved into writing about gardening and landscape that I began to discover that Nicholas was Big. Distinguished, even. I’d get assignments—such as the exquisite and amazingly successful remake at Fort Tryon Park—or stumble into some enlivened civic space and be astonished to find Nicholas’ name on it. I hadn’t asked him much about his career, and he never said. When pressed, he would tell me more about his jobs. But not much: he always seemed to find someone else on the project, horticulturalist say, or sculptor, to praise.

Lately we’ve been talking about the distant past. We discovered that we share vivid childhood memories of the same part of Gloucestershire. His center around Cleeve Hill, mine around Elkstone, hamlets only nine miles apart. So I know what he saw: steep hillsides, limestone escarpments, beeches, yews, walls, martagon lilies, neolithic barrows on ridges, square Norman towers. Nicholas father’s firm had moved to Cheltenham for the war years. They had no car; walking was for joy as well as transport.

I asked Nicholas if the daily hikes and walks he’d taken with his father around Cleeve Common were what made him a landscape architect. (I did not say what I really meant—a wonderful landscape architect, of unusual perception and restraint—because I thought it might embarrass us.) He allowed as how the thing about the walks might be true.

Interview with Nicholas Quennell by Alice Aycock

August 26, 2015

Conversation between Aycock and Quennell re: East River Roundabout

AA – The obvious thing that we would talk about is the project we worked on, but I thought I would ask you why you decided to work, not just with me, but you have worked with quite a few artists and what was it that made that interesting for you because so many architects don't really like to work with artists? I think there may have been other artists that you worked with before me. Jennifer Bartlett is one that comes to mind.

NQ – Barbara Kruger. That was through Laurie Hawkinson and Henry Smith-Miller and that was really interesting, working with the three of them.

AA – And what is it about bringing an artist onboard that interests you?

NQ – Partly because of their training and their cultural background, they allow themselves to think more freely than us tight ass professionals. They don't have to make sure everything follows the code and it was just wonderful, in every case to see that happen. So when I got involved with the East River Pavilion, which was about to be demolished, and I felt should be kept as an important landmark on the East River, there it seemed absolutely the appropriate thing to do to look for an artist to work with to take it to that next dimension.

AA – So how did that project come about?

NQ – I think it was through the Municipal Art Society, where I was on the board and through Carole Rifkind who lived nearby. She had heard rumors that they were going to demolish it and make a waterfront park and she thought I would be interested in that. When I went to see it I felt that it was, potentially, an important element, a landmark on the waterfront, a transition from the south portion to the north portion, which was the more conventional narrow waterfront park along the highway. And I convinced the people that that would be a good idea. I said we could take a lot of the covering off the structure, that had already vanished or was falling apart, I said we could strip everything off the outside surface and that would leave us with this framework that would work like a gazebo which we could paint to make it very visible both from the FDR and along the river so it would draw people from multiple directions. And one thing led to another and I said what we really need here is an artist to do something on the roof. Some crazy artist.

AA – My memory of it is that you were interviewing a number of artists. I think Nancy Rosen was the art consultant and I think she brought Carole Rifkind and you to my studio and we had a conversation. I'm not sure, but I don't think I made a proposal at that point. I think we just had a conversation and you were having conversations with a number of other artists and then at some point, on the basis of that conversation, it was decided that we would work together. And in my memory, I did get the East River Pavilion, or whatever

we're going to call it, as a model, which I still have, that your office gave me, with the ramp, the little bit of the off ramp to the street and then the ramp that descended to the lower section, and the steel framework of the building. It was stripped at the time that I encountered it. And then there were conversations with Carole and you and various people. I don't know if, right off the bat, we decided that it would all be on the roof. It seemed to me that there were various conversations that we had in which there was this interest in keeping the ground level free so they could engage in all kinds of activities and had there been something that had some kind of footprint on the ground floor of the pavilion it would somehow have interfered with the kind of openness of the possibilities for activities.

NQ – I think you're right about that.

AA – Yeah, because I do remember thinking about, could I put anything on the ground? And then at some point it seems to me that HOK got involved. They were involved in the floor pattern I think. And it seemed to be more than your office came on board. And the way it was presented to me was that New York Hospitals was taking air rights from the city and, if I'm not mistaken, if they were going to do that they had to give something back to the city.

NQ – I think that's how Dick Rifkind got involved, through his involvement with the hospital.

AA – Yeah, I guess. And Rockefeller Institute. There were a number of, I hate this word, I guess "stakeholders," but there were quite a few stakeholders. But the way we got the funding to do whatever we did there, which was a number of things beside the sculpture... the floor pattern and you did a wall. But the way we got the funding was through this giveback from New York Hospital, I think.

NQ – What I can't remember is whether they transferred the air rights from that site, which presumably had some development rights as a potential building site, whether they were able to transfer those to the hospital to build larger or new wings or whatever they were building.

AA – Well, I think we'd have to double-check that, but that was my understanding. That they wanted to build up and so therefore the package was that they got the air rights somewhere else by giving back to the city this site.

NQ – That's my recollection, too.

AA – I also think at some point a developer was interested in building a hotel complex or an apartment complex there and that's how that was stopped in fact. The notion was that this should belong to the people and I think it was an interesting way of getting it. That type of exchange allowed for a piece of art to exist that otherwise would not. That was somewhat unusual and I don't think it ever happened again for me, or at least I've not been aware of it.

NQ – Which is strange because it established such a good precedent – here’s how we can help pay for public art, let’s do it again.

AA – Yeah. Thinking about it from a practical point of view what was nice about it for me is that I was chosen. I didn’t make a proposal. I’m not sure about that, because it was a long time ago, but it seemed to me that I was chosen as opposed to me making a proposal with other artists competing.

NQ – Which doesn’t mean to say that we didn’t interview other artists. We did, but I think all of us on the selection committee agreed, after we met you, particularly after you showed us your work and talked about your approach that you were absolutely the right person for that job. And I think we were right.

AA – Well, I think it was a matter of trust and I’m sure you had a big say in it, but the way we got the funding to do the project and the way I was chosen to work was optimal for me as well, because, by and large, what happens is that 3-5 artists are short listed and they all make proposals and one of those proposals is chosen as opposed to choosing the artist and saying, “We want to work with you. Let’s have a dialogue and then develop the project.” Which to me makes more sense, but that’s not often how it happens. And also from the point of view of an artist, it meant that I was more involved. I spent more time on the proposal, and the conversations that I had with the various interested parties was more serious and I had the sense that I could try this, change this, elaborate on it, get a lot more information. Whereas, generally in the public art business, they send you some pictures. They say something about, it almost sounds like anybody could have written it. “We want a wonderful piece that speaks to the people.” The artists make proposals based on very little information, a committee chooses one and it’s kind of like a crapshoot. So there were many aspects of this project that made it attractive to me as an artist. And then we got to spend time talking about ideas before I generated my proposal and I think that’s the intelligent way to go about it.

NQ – We talked about alternatives that would have demolished the entire superstructure, wouldn’t it, as I recall.

AA – I think we might have. We bounced a number of ideas.

NQ – We thought of having a flat table up there rather than leaving the frame.

AA – Yeah. But I think leaving the frame gave me something to ping off, and it seemed to me that you had developed that idea and by giving me that model, which I still have gathering dust in my studio, it then allowed me to play and to think and to move all around it. And that too was a big bonus and very generous because, a lot of times I would have had to build the site, it and myself was pre-computer. I also remember that summer I was still renting in the Hamptons. I think I was in the Springs and I brought the model out there and I brought an assistant and we played with paper and actually made, out of paper, all the little elements and taped them on and took them off and taped them on and took

them off and then you would come over and we would talk. I'm trying to think of when I started coming out here. I think I started coming out here in 1988 and that was probably, well maybe my son was 4 so it was probably like 1990 or something like that. But, again, I think what was so important about the project was the kind of dialogue that we could engage in, which is not often the case and that you were very generous with your time and your interest and very giving as opposed being fearful that I would somehow screw up your...

NQ – [interrupts] My dream.

AA – Your dream. And frequently architects are afraid that they're either pushed out of the whole discussion with the artist and have no say or they are feeling very defensive and fearful that the artist will do some screwball thing that will completely humiliate them.

NQ – It's funny. I think I've experienced that indirectly, but, you know, my other close collaboration was with Laurie Hawkinson and Henry Smith-Miller and Barbara Kruger, and there Barbara was part and parcel of the team. She contributed significantly to that project and there was never anything like "oh, the artist is coming." It was a real collaboration so it can happen.

AA – It can and I don't know how frequently. It was kind of an idealistic period. Because I was also collaborating with Jim Freed at the library in San Francisco and I remember we got finished first, you and I, and he came to the opening and I remember teasing him, "Well, Jim, when are you going to let me finish up the one in San Francisco?" Because we started earlier, but again it was at a time when I don't know how often it happens. It doesn't happen for me anymore, but I think there was this sense that we could build this sort of utopian neo-renaissance time in which creative people could come together and create some terrific public work.

NQ – Yep. What do you think happened? I think that's a very accurate description and it's exactly what did happen and it felt great and why wouldn't it have continued? I'd think that clients and public agencies would have jumped on that and said, "Let's do this again."

AA – Well, I do present, frequently, in front of committees on which there are architects and it always seems to me that I'm speaking to the architects in the room. That we make eye contact and that they have a sense of enthusiasm. I don't know how frequently they're actually on the committee, but they're there as an advisor so I think that is part of it. I think they are frequently not on the committee that makes the decisions. They're not given the power, at least in a number of cases that I've been involved in. But on the other hand they may just have advised against me for all I know. It has also been my experience with many things around creativity that in the very early parts of it that there's enormous energy and that things break through. Things happen. And then it closes down. And you usually have this window of a few years before it's over. That's true, I've found, in teaching with students, certain classes. It's true with art movements and artists. It's just that there's a moment in which there's a lot of dynamism and possibility and you can break the rules

and nobody's there to stop you and then everything begins to freeze again. So I think that that's part of it. And at some point many cutting edge artists were no longer engaged in purely visual form. I also think that some architects saw a moment in which artists did not have access to the technology and the money that they did and they actually said, "Why don't we make sculpture?" and their buildings became sculpture. So when they did the museums and all that they actually said to themselves, "Hey, let's run with these ideas. Let's go for it because we have all of the technological expertise, we have access to the suppliers, we have the clients ear.

NQ – That's short sighted isn't it?

AA – Well, it is or it isn't depending on your competitive instinct. And maybe people were not as generous as you or Jim Freed. Both of you really liked artists and did not feel that sense of competition, but again, I also, think it was just that moment and then it sort of closed down. It happens over and over again and you seize the situation when it's there. And then I think a lot of these situations reverted back to a more bureaucratic, institutionalized situation. We did have to deal with bureaucracy, but less so. We had to go in front of the Art Commission numerous times—we still were outsiders. We were not working directly through the Percent for the Arts.

NQ – Was I still on the Commission at that time?

AA – I think you may still have been on and you may have had to recuse yourself. But I also know that you were very diplomatic and never gave up. There were times when I would get very frustrated because we were taken off the docket several times. You know, I get pissed off a lot, and you kept pulling me back from that and diplomatically saying, "No, we'll just keep on." That was another thing. You shepherded the project, and you maintained the project and you maintained a sense of decorum that I, at a certain point, would not have been able to. I think there were a lot of late night calls....

NQ – I'm so glad we stuck it out though.

AA – [big laugh] Yeah. Well, the other thing I might say on this is that we recently painted the structure and it took me 20 some years to actually finish the piece because, now that we've painted it, it's a gazillion times better than it was. All of which is to say that the artist doesn't always know best. She has to come around to believing that color is significant. Back then I was very much against color. I think it finally came into its own last year. The final thing I would say about this is, "When the hell is the park going to get done?"

NQ – I have no control over that.

AA – So, what do you remember about that time? What would you like to point out?

NQ – Well, I think I've said this already, but, the idea of working collaboratively with artists and architects, and very specifically artists, is something very appealing to me and I don't

know whether that was because of the experiences I'd had in California, when I gave up the idea of being an landscape architect and tried to be an artist, which didn't last very long, but it was fun while it lasted, but that did expose me to a world I had not seen before and one thing led to another, and the idea that you could indeed have a collaboration with artist and architects. I knew I could work with architects because I had started out as an architect and switched to landscape architecture as a career. And that is not something I regretted. I always found architecture frustrating. An awful lot of nonsense you have to go through as an architect that you're spared when you're a landscape architect, like building codes and things like that. But then my experience with Laurie and Henry and Barbara was so great that it really did inspire me to further seek out collaborations with other disciplines. There's something about artists that gives them a freedom to look at a lot of different aspects of the work that architects can't do. Architects tend to get much more bogged down in the details, whereas artists can look beyond that and say, "What is this really about? What should it be about? And what's inspiring about this project that the public can use?" And that was certainly true working with you. It was certainly true of working with Barbara Kruger and Laurie Hawkinson and Henry Smith Miller.

AA – Wasn't your mother an actress?

NQ – She was indeed.

AA – So maybe the exposure to that way of... I mean, of course, acting is a craft just like anything, but the fact of the matter is that you have to step outside yourself, break the boundaries of who you are and step inside other characters and explore other worlds, other ways of thinking besides the one you're in, other value systems or whatever that may have, from the very beginning exposed you to something that you could empathize with.

NQ – Of course I was a child actor.

AA – I didn't know that.

NQ – Briefly. I had a brief career in radio and in the school play, where I played Ariel in the Tempest. But then I did a lot of radio work. Julie Andrews was one of the people I acted with. I didn't see her again, but we were in a couple of things together. Then my voice broke and I was on the trash heap.

AA – Well. It may have given you a certain kind of empathy and generosity and I also thought that your ability to work in a very collaborative way with women, your ability to be less competitive, is also, I'd say, somewhat unusual. I felt very safe. I didn't feel like I had to prove myself. I felt that I could create in a safe way and therefore be free and experimental. It wasn't like going to the father principal, so to speak. And I say that retrospectively, remembering. I don't know that I was conscious of it at the time, but I do know that I felt I could very much be myself as an artist and that meant I felt safe to be vulnerable, to try this or try that to experiment and create. And you created that space for me. Which again, I think, is quite unusual. That doesn't happen very frequently. Whether

or not it was a male-female thing. In any arena people are vying politically with each other and this felt like a zone in which I could move very freely and you weren't setting up a lot of barriers.

NQ – I'm glad. I certainly intended that.

AA – Yeah. And I'd say that's quite unusual in the world at large regardless. Particularly in these situations. But it could have been that you were early on, more or less, open to a kind of creative freedom, because you were exposed to it so early and surrounded by it, which allows people to be more collaborative or less defensive or less fearful. It's a way of thinking which a lot of people don't have.

NQ – You know it's funny. I look back at the time that I was at the Architectural Association and I was the youngest person in the class and there were quite a few older people who'd been through military service and come back, so it was a very mixed bag and it was also a nice mix of men and women. It was not quite 50-50, but there were a lot more women than there had been earlier in that profession, and that idea of collaboration started there because we were forced to collaborate as students. You know, "Alright, do this project together." I don't remember now whether they picked the people we worked with or whether we were allowed to pick. I think we were allowed to pick the people we worked with so there was a little group of four of us I think who worked on several projects over the years and that was great experience too.

AA – Well I have to tell you that I probably, if the shoe would have been on the other foot, I probably would have been very competitive. [Lots of laughter] Wanting my own way. I mean, here I am saying this, but the truth is that I'm probably the...

NQ – The worst.

AA – The least capable of... I'm sort of making a joke, but not totally.

NQ – I certainly didn't find that to be true.

AA – And I don't know if we want to say anything about the content. What I would say is that, at the time, there was still the heliport there, and we didn't know that the heliport was going to move. So that part of the idea was that it was a more or less urban park and I think we were thinking that people would go there to look at the river and whatever river traffic, but also the excitement of seeing a helicopter taking off and landing. But of course that was moved and it became more of the idea of what, I believe, the lower section has been made into a park, but we've still got that empty space there that we can't seem to fill. And I think we still have the problem of getting people to go there who are more than dog people or people who are just in the hospital complex. And that from the street it still feels very urban.

NQ – It may also be that people may not know how to get there or how to get away from it

once they're there and get back down on the waterfront.

AA – Well, I think they still come from the north and go south, but the south movement is broken and you have to contend with all the traffic and it is not easy to get across the street. You don't feel so safe getting across, but coming down from the esplanade going south, it does feel pretty comfortable and you can get over that way if you know the bridge is there.

NQ – Yes, you have to know it's there though.

AA – Yeah.

NQ – Did they ever use it for...?

AA – For concerts and stuff? No.

NQ – Because that would be one way to put it on the map and get people to know that it's there.

AA – We all thought that's what was going to happen, which is why we kept it open. I think it would have been a good idea to try to schedule things there. I think that was the idea, but it just never happened.

NQ – It still could.

AA – It still could. I think when they green it up down there, however that's going to go, it's going to be quite green underneath. As with everything in New York, things go through all kinds of iterations and...

NQ – And politics

AA – Yeah, politics and all kinds of accidental things happen, so we'll see. The other thing I'd like to say before we close this, even though I'm doing too much of the talking, is that what did happen is that we became good friends. We did that project together and I think we proposed several other things, but that was our main project together and after that then we became friends and continued to see each other socially as sort of an extended family, and it went from professional to a personal, you know. As my son was growing up, we became part of each other's family. That doesn't always happen, but in this case it did and that was the real after effect of that collaboration. Wouldn't you say?

NQ – It was a pleasure. You're one of my dearest friends.

AA – Yes.