

OCTOBER 2019

SITELINES

Landscape Architecture in British Columbia



The Cultures of Design and Construction

Under Construction: The Relationship Between Designer and Builder | 7 Tips for Managing Risks on Design-Build Projects | ON SITE INSIGHT: Authentic Collaboration | Review: Imagining Uplands | CSLA Fellow: Virginia Burt

CSLA Fellow

PROFILE OF

Virginia Burt

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It was Canadian Thanksgiving of 1976 that I first learned the term landscape architecture. My brother brought home a friend in the program at University of Guelph. I was astounded that such a profession existed, and my passion for drawing and sciences could be applied. I immediately fell in love — and applied as soon as I could.

Design Workshop hired me directly from U of G in 1985 — indeed a dream job where I learned the business of preparing working drawings, coordination and truly understanding how things get made — from detail to ski area master planning. After two years, I returned to Toronto and began working with JSW+ Associates. There we worked side by side with engineers and planners again developing the understanding of how things are made — developing large complex projects both on the water and off.

Then a brief time at a planning firm — opening a landscape architecture division of that person's business. Not long after I realized a traditional approach was not a fit. Waiting on tables would be better than continue in the way being promoted. Eleven years of landscape architecture

and after many years pursuing various spiritual practices, my heart wanted something more. I packed my files in the car.

That evening I was volunteering to help facilitate an inspirational process for executives and high school students called *World Council*. The *World Council* tagline: “Access greatness within to act with greatness outside of yourself”. Midway through the evening, a woman approached me to express her appreciation and asked what I did in my “real” work life.... Remember I had my files in the car... an answer came flying out of my mouth: “I am a landscape architect and I design spirit and healing gardens.”

“Wow!” she exclaimed “tell me more. “to which I paused and replied, “Ah, May I get back to you?”. Indeed, an epiphany.

Still astonished, I relayed this same story at a dinner party the following evening. A gentleman across the table said “I’d like a garden like that “. The next morning on June 13, 1996, my fledgling firm began. At the time, very few had heard of a healing garden, so I began a journey of exploration, research and read and write and design — what is a healing garden? Is it possible? Who

is writing about the importance of gardens? is there any research? To me a garden made specifically with an intent to connect people with nature is, and continues to be, more than universal/accessible design or planting echinacea, there are mental, emotional and spiritual benefits to these places. My firm has evolved over time, I am dedicated to creating meaningful spaces with a profound respect for stakeholders, clients and those we serve. This includes both public and private clients, seeking to connect with those who are a fit.

Inspirations: Edward O. Willson, author of *Biophilia* and his hypothesis that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature. His notion of environmental stewardship includes the satisfaction derived from direct interaction with nature and the physical appeal of nature, evident in its role as a source of inspiration and peace. The importance of our green spaces to human health and well-being is more relevant each day as our towns and cities increase in density. I grew up on an apple farm, so my connection to nature is deep and wide — and I am grateful for this innate knowledge of nature and how we interact with it.

All images courtesy of Virginia Burt



Ms. Oliver’s work is simply magnificent. Give your work time and space and power.

Turning points in my firm’s evolution.

The first: combining organizational development large group intervention techniques with landscape architecture to tap the innate wisdom of people and create a master plan that has heart and get implemented. This technique was employed by our firm during a master planning project called Common Ground — A spiritual retreat in nature for inner-city children and corporate groups to be in touch with nature. The project won a national ASLA award in Planning in 1999. During that trip, I had dinner with three influential thinkers: Clare Cooper Marcus (Environmental Psychologist and award winning Author), Marni Barnes (Landscape Architect and researcher) and Julie Messervy (author and garden designer). We deliberated on the importance of gardens with meaning and heart — I simply didn’t want the evening to end.

Another turning point was Norman’s Garden at The Gathering Place in 2006. This garden has had over 180,000 visits by ▶



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We must keep every scrap of nature in and around our cities. Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction.

E.O. Wilson

Mary Oliver, poet laureate for the United States continues to inspire. Her latest book *Upstream*, speaks about the creative process: “The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power nor time.”

people touched by cancer in the past 13 years. This project was elevating — in collaboration, in applying the craft of landscape architecture in an inspirational way. The garden affects so many people as demonstrated by ongoing phenomenological research by staff. It is an award-winning project that continues to engage and encourage people. It has been my honour to work with the staff — they are angels.

Overlaid is my ongoing deep friendship with Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, C.C. My first interaction with Cornelia's work was at Expo '67. As a young girl aged 6, I played on the dory and cried when we were directed inside. Our next interaction was in 1986, where during a cold call by yours truly, Cornelia agreed to take three young landscape architects on a tour of Robson Square. Cornelia inspires all of us to say yes. Today we talk and visit often.

To our younger landscape architects, I encourage you to continue to push yourself. Our clients deserve us to be the best we can be. Ongoing education is important for our mental advancement and professionalism. Meditation, compassion, integrity, empathy and passion all contribute to our spiritual health and well-being. In my opinion, the result of our work — be it public or private — affects people in profound ways. With climate change, urban development and ecosystems needing our attention, the world needs landscape architects — we the stewards of the land — more than ever.

As one of seven women in the world who are Fellows of both the ASLA and CSLA, it is my intention to continue to pursue meaningful work that elevates our profession. I am grateful for the opportunities to participate with so many wonderful people. It is my belief that small moves made continuously over time truly make a difference. We can do this. **sl**



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