

PWP LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

FRAMING A MODERN MASTERPIECE The City + The Arch + The River 2015



Stage I: Portfolio
January 28, 2010

Statement of Design Intent

The setting for the Gateway Arch presents a complex challenge for it is, at once, a major park of 91 acres at the foot of the mall and the city, a setting for the iconic Arch, and a potentially lively front porch at the edge of the Mississippi River. It is also part of the heritage of the 1948 competition won by Eero Saarinen and Dan Kiley. The Arch captured the world's admiration even before its completion in 1968. However, the park has never achieved the acclaim hoped for in the designer's vision, its reputation never growing beyond its role as the setting for the Arch, its role in the life of St. Louis and its ceremonial and spiritual joining of the river and the town yet to be realized.

Throughout history the greatest works of landscape art have always been more than simple settings for churches, palaces, commemorative sculptures, arches, needles, and fountains. They have, rather, a unique quality that engages our attention and remains in our memories as more than mere extensions of an architectural focus. They complement with their own intrinsic character, reaching out and positively connecting the centerpiece to their surrounds. Among great landscapes that come to mind are the Washington Mall, the Champs Élysées, and such great riverfront parks as Grant Park in Chicago, the parks along the Seine in Paris and the Tiber in Rome. And certainly the great classical gardens have never served as mere backgrounds for chateaus and palaces. All of these landscapes, which might initially have been thought subsidiary, have become immediately recognizable images in their own right.

Great works of landscape art are complex and layered, both in their original forms and in their subsequent readings. They are always complex, multi-faceted creations, filled with formal delights and surprises as well as activities that lend themselves to pleasant exploration and intellectual and physical recreation. Few, if any, are single-purposed. Unlike the products of much contemporary city planning, they lend themselves to many

uses, some of an everyday nature and some of celebration, perhaps for only a few days in a year or even a decade. They often accommodate multiple activities. Both local families and visitors spend days exploring their various delights, museums, and interpretive and educational centers. They provide settings for outdoor activities as diverse as theatrical and musical performances, weddings, and birthday parties. Some of the most beloved public open spaces are remembered as much for their social and athletic opportunities as for their great formal characters.

A key problem is how to elegantly enrich the realized park with significant spaces while still providing a subtle, restrained, and respectful setting for the Arch. The original concept included this enrichment.

For the World Trade Center Memorial, our team was asked to provide a memorial that is solemn and reverential—and a public open space that can serve one of the most densely populated sections of New York City. Although the Memorial is located in the heart of a great city, it must provide security, comfort, and conveniences to a wide array of visitors, who will arrive on foot or in taxis, cars, buses, and trains from many directions. Every day large numbers will come to visit the Memorial and see programs that will educate them about the horrible events of September 11, 2001. Every year the park will also be the site of the reading of the names of the dead, an event attended by more than twenty thousand family members and friends. The Memorial will serve large crowds on warm summer days as well as the much smaller number of visitors who arrive on rainy or snowy days and even at night. And always the park and the voids that mark the vanished buildings will convey their meanings with emotional power.

A single formal design must accommodate all of these needs as well as give identity and vibrancy to the downtown renewal.

When we look at the setting for the Arch we note that visitors primarily move from the garage at the north end, south to the Arch and interpretive center, and then back to the garage, where they exit. There is little in the way of recreation or additional experiential reward for them. Services and amenities are meager and worn. Although long views are focused by the Arch, the actual connection to the city and mall with their urban activities and services is weak; the surrounding roads separate the park from the city rather than provide access. This isolated and limited experience is not the case in most National parks and monuments, and it is not the fulfillment of Saarinen and Kiley's vision.



I was fortunate to know and occasionally work with Saarinen, at Yale's Ingalls Rink, the GM Technical Center outside Detroit, and the IBM Research Center at Yorktown, New York. As for Dan, I first met him when I was in graduate school at the University of Illinois and he took me to Columbus, Indiana, to visit the Miller Garden, which was then under construction. Throughout the rest of his life, Dan was both friend and mentor. We had many wonderful conversations, both at Charlotte, his home in Vermont, and with students at Harvard, where we mounted the first photographic exhibition of his work during my chairmanship. We shared a deep respect for Olmsted, but a deeper love of Le Notre and

the great European gardens. I particularly remember Dan's rhapsodic description of Villandry in a light snow, late in the fall when the leaves were still on the ground. Dan taught us all that simplicity was not simple; we learned that even Dan's beloved northern hardwood forests were beautifully complex for those who chose to look at them carefully.

In my view, Dan Kiley is the greatest modern landscape architect. He has exerted perhaps the greatest influence on our design.

It may be that the Kiley plan for the Arch landscape should be seen as a formal beginning rather than an historic end. Almost sixty years after its completion we are aware of the history and formal effect of the Arch. Its conception and execution are completely successful. It is a beloved modern icon, pure, original, and clear in our minds. However, the park has yet to be fully realized. It is neither memorable nor beloved. Its connection to the river and the city and its value to visitors as well as the citizens of St. Louis have not yet been made clear.

The realization of a beautiful house, a memorable garden, a great city is often a long-term enterprise, the product of thought and creative re-imagining. We feel that the landscape at the Arch offers one of those great opportunities to revise, add, and refine—an opportunity that Saarinen and Kiley as young designers so many years ago could not possibly have foreseen as a means of fulfilling their dream. To the goals of respect for history and preservation, we might add the goals of renewal, refinement, and realization.

The task now is to complete their vision in a way that builds on their original conception. For this reason, as well as for others that are more personal, I apply to you for this chance to perfect their dream. It would be a very great pleasure for me and an even greater honor.