

The Last Word

THE VIEW AHEAD

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I just finished unpacking after a short stay in Toronto, where I attended CSLA's Annual Congress, PERSPECTIVES: 360° on 75. I had left Montreal with several questions in mind, and I came back carrying several more in my luggage. Yet something had changed. The feeling I shared with my travel companions was not discouragement or even doubt; it was excitement. But let's not kid ourselves, the road ahead is not obstacle free.

LANDSCAPE ALCHEMY

How can I explain it? Like many professional landscape architects, I tend to focus on my surroundings. I guess we LAs all think alike, since we spend our working life building, rebuilding and restoring all kinds of landscapes. As we work, we internalize the characteristics of the space we are creating, incorporating the needs of clients and users. Only when this exercise is over can we best give shape to the new space, fulfilling the near-chemical creative process.

Yet these days, the rules of the game have changed. Yesterday's ultimate goal may have been a quest for pure enjoyment, but that is now intimately coupled with overarching respect for environment and stakeholders. The crazy years of urban and economic development that followed World War II brought dramatic changes to our world. The technological revolution had impacts that until very recently, could not be foretold: they were, indeed, unthinkable. Results in the field – almost always – turned out to be very different from any forecasts. Alarms started resounding, and a global change of course began.

Were we, the landscape architects, really surprised as change took root, and people around the globe began to push for more sustainable development? I don't think so. In fact, more than a century ago, F. L. Olmsted was already pursuing most of the goals we set today.

THE PATHS OF OUR FOREFATHERS

This became very clear at Congress when our own acknowledged experts like Don Graham, Austen Floyd, Cecelia Payne, Jim Taylor and Cynthia Oberlander spoke of our foundations. We are, they said, heirs of generations of designers who always took time to factor sustainable values into their projects.

As you read this issue, you will see how our actions speak for themselves. We restore contaminated areas that have long been abandoned, transplanting in rejuvenated ecosystems. We protect mixed-use spaces by encouraging wildlife and plant biodiversity. We develop policies and visions that pave the way to implementing a solid,

sustainable, triple bottom line, and for decades, we have worked to perfect supportive decision making processes. This is all part of our work. We are, as Peter Jacobs said on our opening pages, “inventing the next landscape” and reinventing our profession while preserving the vision of our forefathers.

### THE NEXT WAVE

When I left Montreal for Toronto, I hadn't fully realized the force of our work and our engrained philosophy. The conference was a call to order disguised as a wave – the next wave of professional practice that will carry us to new shores. We don't know precisely what we will find there. Perhaps I can borrow a potent image from Cecelia Paine. A wave is coming, a wave of LAs that will carry us to new territories. What they envision – their “gestating landscapes” – will be drawn, in part, from the experience of their colleagues, from us. With the energy of future generations, we will once again reinvent our profession and take our rightful place in designing a sustainable world of infinite diversity and delight.