



Landscape Symphonies

Why Do We Create Landscapes? An Introduction to Our Survey of Historical Principles of Landscape Design



In this first brief essay, I start with a general study of what may be some of the underlying reasons for creating outdoor spaces. In essence: what is it that makes us do what we do, yearn for what we yearn, and create what we create in our landscapes? It is a quest to find out which chords make us resonate with inner joy and peace, which chords are strung in natural spaces, which invigorate our being with new life?

Nature, being after all man's natural environment, has always been something we have had a relationship with. This relationship has not been the same throughout time or even throughout different geographical regions. The question arises: why and how is it different?

To find answers to some of these questions, I start with one of the deepest and oldest quests to man, and that is to find out what our place is in the universe, who we are? I find that the degree and depth to which societies seek answers to this question determines the relationship between man and nature and man and himself. This enigma and the fruits of the search for answers to this, determine the attitudes of entire societies: their values and their ways of life. Many cultures built and decorated inner and outer spaces with the aim of enabling the members of their societies to create the way of life that supported the values and attitudes that that particular society in space and time had between man and himself and the outer world, nature or cosmos.

Going back to the original question, we are trying to discover our attitudes and values in the present. The expression of each culture/civilization has changed throughout time not only because of this values but because of their economic development as well, which was also based on what the region, its resources and nature itself had to offer at the time. We can see that aesthetic and practical, values have also been different in societies due to the region they have flourished under; European aesthetics being different than that from Indian aesthetics or Mesoamerican. So, we could also say one of the reasons for doing things the way we do is dictated by the nature of the region. Saying this, I see fit to start this study by looking at what moved some of the past civilizations/cultures to design outdoor spaces, moving towards what may be the reasons for creating outdoor spaces today and attempting to instill and inspire the reasons for doing landscapes in the future.

Martin Carrion van Rijn (530) 632-3263
martin@landscapesymphonies.com