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Conclusion

I HAVE ENGAGED in a lifelong pursuit of quality design. Landscape design provides a means to express our love for the Earth and for our immediate environment, whether urban, suburban, rural, or wild. It is a way to connect with the world, to learn and grow from that interaction. It grounds us physically and spiritually. For that reason, we must become more discerning buyers, users, and makers of design; we must hold high expectations of what design can accomplish. That's why I've written this book: to encourage each of you to pursue that quest and to provide techniques and strategies to improve the craft.

Over the past sixty years, I've witnessed many changes in the field of landscape architecture. The introduction of computer technology has increased speed and accuracy in design and planning. Computer programs often help us, and our clients, visualize the intended results, and they enable us to produce multimedia presentations for public audiences. Computers efficiently share work across disciplines as we work with architects, engineers, ecologists, municipalities, and regional planning agencies.

But I believe there is a downside to this technological efficiency. Digital technology consumes more and more of our mental capacity and design time. The risk is a reduced focus on **design thinking** and therefore diminished **design integrity**. The technology is based on the illusion that

digital representation of site conditions is sufficient for the designer to understand the natural systems at work. Quality design relies on focused human observation of, and on-site engagement with, unique, ephemeral, and underlying site conditions. Quality design is based on discovering—on *finding* form rather than *imposing* it.

Along with computer technology has come a greater emphasis on specialization. Landscape designers and planners now tend to develop expertise in increasingly narrow arenas and scales of design. A practitioner might concentrate on wetlands remediation or replication, or on recreation planning and facilities design, affordable housing, walkable neighborhoods, urban ecology, campus planning, permaculture, regional planning, or residential design. While this may be necessary in a competitive field, landscape architecture is by its very nature a field for generalists—what David Orr has termed “specialists of the whole.” As Orr has written (in *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture and Human Intention*), “it is coherence our culture lacks, not specialized knowledge.” He fears that specialization may diminish our ability to discern larger patterns and implications. The ability to bridge not only different disciplines but to bring good design to projects regardless of their scope is the unique province of the landscape designer. We have the ability—in fact a mandate—to maintain a

holistic view, to see any landscape in its larger context, be it historical, social, ecological, or spiritual.

The act of design inherently connects to a vision of a better future. That is to say, design is a manifestation of hope. This is particularly true of design on the land. We manifest hope to the degree to which we pay attention to the land, to its natural systems and its beauty. We express hope by envisioning a project in its intended completion: a family enjoying time together in their yard, surrounded by a healthy community of shade trees or the vista of productive farm fields in the distance. We picture an inclusive neighborhood gathering in a local park where the open space offers flexibility and beauty. We feel secure in the knowledge that a significant woodland property with its rare species will be protected in perpetuity. We look at a damaged environment and pursue ways to restore it to a healthy and functioning ecosystem. This is why we engage in the practice of landscape design. In short, design matters.

Human beings are elementally connected to the land and its processes. We are part of the ecology of the Earth. We crave a more meaningful and satisfying relationship with nature. We are drawn to places that embrace us, intrigue us, and reveal new dimensions of that relationship. We learn from these places; we become fuller human beings the more connected we are with the land. We feel centered

when a site is coherent, when it evokes a sense of place.

What is presented here is not new; the elements of the best design come from multiple fields: ecology, landscape architecture, art, sociology, planning. This book provides a logical and rigorous sequence to follow, a series of checks and balances, and a process that is replicable. I do believe that there is no real shortcut to a successful design; it is hard work to move through the process described in this book. However, once the process is internalized, once it becomes an inherent method you've adopted, it becomes a shortcut.

While the design process described in this book may initially seem onerous, its repeated practice tames the process. The benefits are disproportionately greater than the effort invested. That extra effort creates a magical synergy that moves a design from good to inspirational.

The resulting design will save resources, repair damages, and be resilient in the face of change over time. This is the most important aspect of our work as landscape designers.

We are all inherently designers. We have the capacity to be excellent designers. Whatever thoughts and techniques presented in this book resonate with you, use them—go out and make the world a better place. Continually search for ways to improve the landscape—to find, achieve, and honor quality landscape design. And urge others—your clients, your neighbors, your community—to become more informed consumers.

Attention, in its fullest form, is love. Our deep engagement in design of the land increases the love of our environments. Good design is functional and efficient. It holds our attention. It is inspiring. And it enables us to give our most enduring and precious gift, that of love.