

# Toward a Contemporary Christian Discourse on 'Good Design'

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[architects], disagree on issues so fundamental that their discussion must be interpreted as an expression of groping uncertainty.

*Christian Norberg-Schulz,  
Intentions in Architecture,  
1980*



when there are conflicting paradigms of professional practice, such as we find in the pluralism of psychiatry, social work, or town planning there is no clearly established context for the use of technique. There is contention over multiple ways of framing the practice role...

*Donald Schön,*

*The Reflective Practitioner:  
How Professionals Think in Action,  
1983*



[Expanding the professional body of knowledge] requires a profound philosophical base to work from...Without this we are not much more than a collection of individuals with specific personal points of view... not a profession.

*M. Paul Friedberg as quoted in Patrick A. Miller,  
"A Profession in Peril?", Landscape Architecture,  
August, 1997*



## Working Thesis

By engaging the common and practical goal of achieving 'good design' we can season the disciplinary discourse with salt and induce our colleagues to examine the underpinnings for professional practice afforded by a biblical worldview.



Most recent significant Judeo-Christian contribution to the discussion of 'good design'

John Ruskin

*Seven Lamps of Architecture*

1889



How does one identify good design in the context of teaching?



Study Model –  
'Green' Parking Garage



Study Drawing –  
Tsunami Relief Housing



## Outline

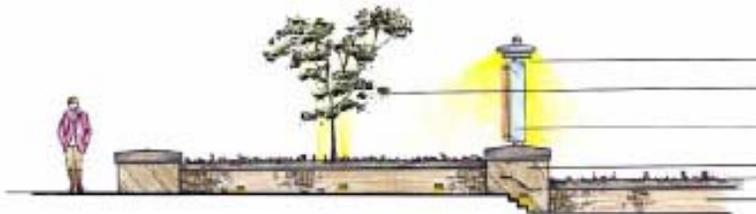
- Context –  
a brief look at student work
- Framing Issues –  
focusing ideas and addressing caveats
- Theological Prerequisites –  
a godly view of designing
- This Year's Model –  
for evaluating goodness in design
- Examples in one Domain –  
comparing concepts to things



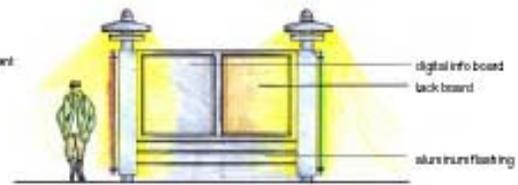
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

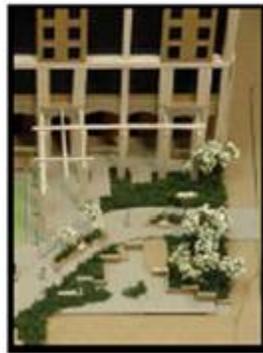
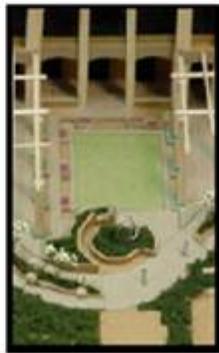


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information kiosk 0 1 2 4





**SITE DESIGN:** *Sustainable Mixed Use Development Master Plan for Former BMS Site*

The final design for the former BMS site offers a wide range of activities and truly becomes a vibrant livable community space. The site includes a central activity core, artist district, mix of housing types, and recreational area. The specific aspects of the site design will be discussed on the following pages.



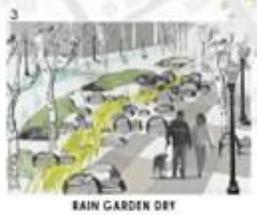




Fig 005-01. The waterfront has four primary elements: the expansion of city hall and a new civic plaza, a public library, and an arts center.

**MASTERPLAN**

**A CIVIC EDGE**

The civic edge concept promotes public life. This new public life is physically as well as psychologically tied to the river. The daily as well as the celebratory lives of those within the city are provided an opportunity to mix, collide, and develop.

This new waterfront for Alexandria is an attempt to capture my three values about public space design [enduring, responsive, critical] in a design. As the concepts and ideas were developing, other issues, such as proximity, balance, current potentials became important in bridging the gap between the ideas and the material execution.

The design infuses a set of monumental public institutions along a new edge that is reminiscent of a bay. These institutions are symbolic of the ideals and necessities of society. With these institutions setting a framework for public life, a strong set of spatial relationships converge at the waterfront to provide circulation, inhabitation, and chances for encounter.

Starting with the current city's grid system, the waterfront begins to pull the grid inward towards a center.

The 'center' is a new civic plaza that facilitates use by City Hall, those on the waterfront, and the adjacent mixed uses that surround the space. The center of the waterfront becomes the symbolic 'heart' of Alexandria.

The centering effect of the new edge's sweeping form is reinforced by a grand stair down to the water at the eastern end of the plaza. The resulting pinch effect promotes an intensity of uses, interaction, and programming in this area. The new civic plaza facilitates and promotes this intensity of use at the waterfront. The civic plaza space becomes the everyday and celebratory destination within Old Town.

To the south of the civic plaza a new public library reits of the old Robinson Terminal site. The new public library is a community driven institution that is sited in close proximity to the older residential areas of Old Town. The library's arrangement and structure involve three primary components: (a) an expression of grandeur towards the water (b) a more interactive, use space facing the community, and (c) a landscape as infrastructure element incorporating stormwater treatment throughout the site as an amenity. The library is a place where all are invited to learn in a sheltered environment.

Robinson Terminal North has been retrofitted into the new arts and cultural center. Following the tradition of and taking the place of the Torpedo Factory, the new arts center promotes more public services as well as the traditional economic services of the Torpedo Factory. The site is playfully designed with elements drawn from the wharf heritage of Old Town. Lively 'biots' throughout the site are reminiscent of coal wharves while the irregular plank water walk is inspired by a lumber wharf, etc. The key spatial issue engaged by this design involves temporary space. At the waterfront, a linear strip of promenade juts out into the water to provide an opportunity for barges to dock. These barges become a focus of festivals, live music, and anything else that the city chooses. Days before an event, the barges could be docked to give a visual cue that something is soon to occur. The arts center's proximity to the professional area of Old Town as well as its adjacency to Oranoco Bay Park yield a rich set of everyday possibilities.

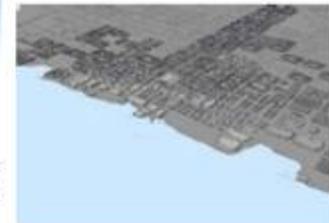


Fig 005-02. The design proposes a significantly different spatial arrangement for Alexandria's waterfront. The new waterfront is much more inwardly focused embracing the edge as opportunities to reflect upon the parts of the city across the water.





**Fig. 00-03.** The design proposes a series of transitions to the water from the city. Above, the majority of the waterfront is pedestrian. To support and encourage use without the interference of vehicles, Altona streets, and others are designed to accommodate emergency and service vehicles.

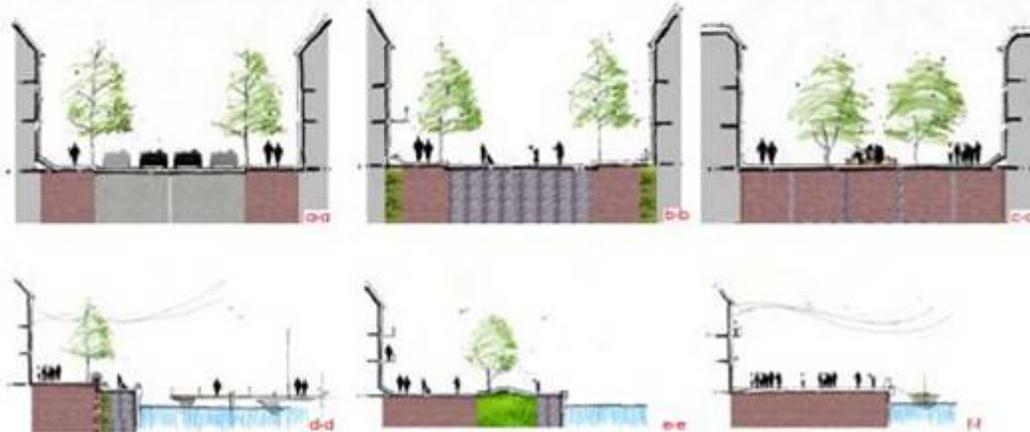
tion with the current DASH bus system, a more efficient, higher capacity public transportation system renders the mile gap between metros and waterfront a non-issue. The waterfront can still feel close to everything.

Within the boundaries of the redevelopment at three parking garages. These garages go down below ground level as well as provide three or four levels for parking above ground. Along the edges of the waterfront district and near the public institutions there are still opportunities to park along the street. Falta Street becomes the last road accessible by car along the new urban waterfront.

**AN EDGE FOR EVERYONE**

The new waterfront is completely pedestrian. To make this new circulation pattern work, the approach to the waterfront involves three spatial scales and patterns. As one moves along the current city grid, a simple transition occurs into blocks that are pedestrian streets. These spaces are much like present day Prince Street, with the cobble stone roadways. After passing through this block, the street ends but the grid continues toward the water. From the waterfront to a block back the grids of pedestrian promenades converge with the city streets resulting in a cohesive circulation pattern. As the space types go from street to promenade there is an increase in space for pedestrians to interact and rest while interacting with the public realm of various levels. The two zones closest to the water are pedestrian, but their widths and access points are meant to facilitate service and emergency needs.

Providing access to this new public edge is important. Issues associated with access are addressed at three scales: public transportation, vehicular, and pedestrian. To meet the needs of a more demanding waterfront, a trolley system has been proposed that would run along a single circuit between the King Street Metro, City Hall, and Broadback Road Metro stop. This trolley would provide more immediate access to the waterfront for those within the community as well as its visitors. Working in conjunc-



**Fig. 00-04.** Sections are through a-c demonstrate the transitions in scale an pedestrian opportunities toward the waterfront. Sections d-f through f-f represent a type set of spatial relationships found along the waterfront.



**CIVIC PLAZA**

**THE HEART OF ALEXANDRIA**

The civic plaza area is the heart of Old Town. It is a space that works as a joint between the city and the waterfront. It serves the everyday functions that promote life along the waterfront, while providing flexibility and opportunity for ritual and celebration.

The space is comprised of: the upper plaza and lower waterfront steps.

**UPPER PLAZA**

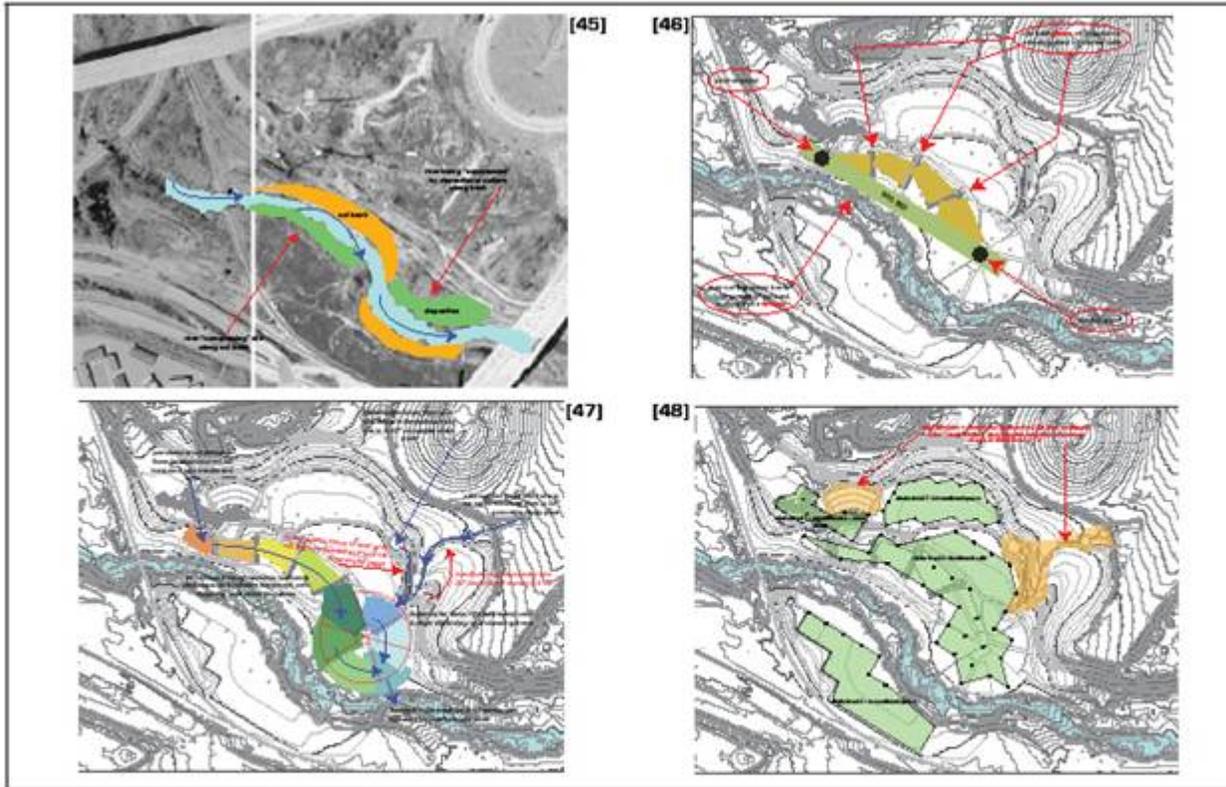
An earthen landform rests on the southern end of the space. This space allows retreat from the bustle of its surroundings, as well as seating for events in the center space. A boardwalk runs along the landform's edge to provide a street-scale experience of circulation and rest. As the boardwalk puts towards the water a small fill emerges which begins a day-lighted stormwater treatment system that descends towards the northern and southern public anchors, then ultimately into the Potomac. The unprogrammed center space facilitates special occasions and larger gatherings.



**Fig. 005-08.** The civic plaza and grand stairs represent the new "heart" of Alexandria.

**Fig. 005-16.** The section through the space reveals how the plaza descends towards the water via a series of sets and landings. The upper plaza also slightly slopes towards City Hall acknowledging its place within the context.





[45] **River compressing site:** Analyzing the cut and depositional banks of the river, certain areas are in compression and others are in tension.

[46] **Effects of tension:** The abandoned rail bed sits along a portion of the river bank that is being compressed by the river. Thus, the rail bed is being put into tension, and since it is abandoned, it is perceived to be weak, thus it breaks, or shears off into cells that will be part of the treatment system for the acid mine drainage discharge.

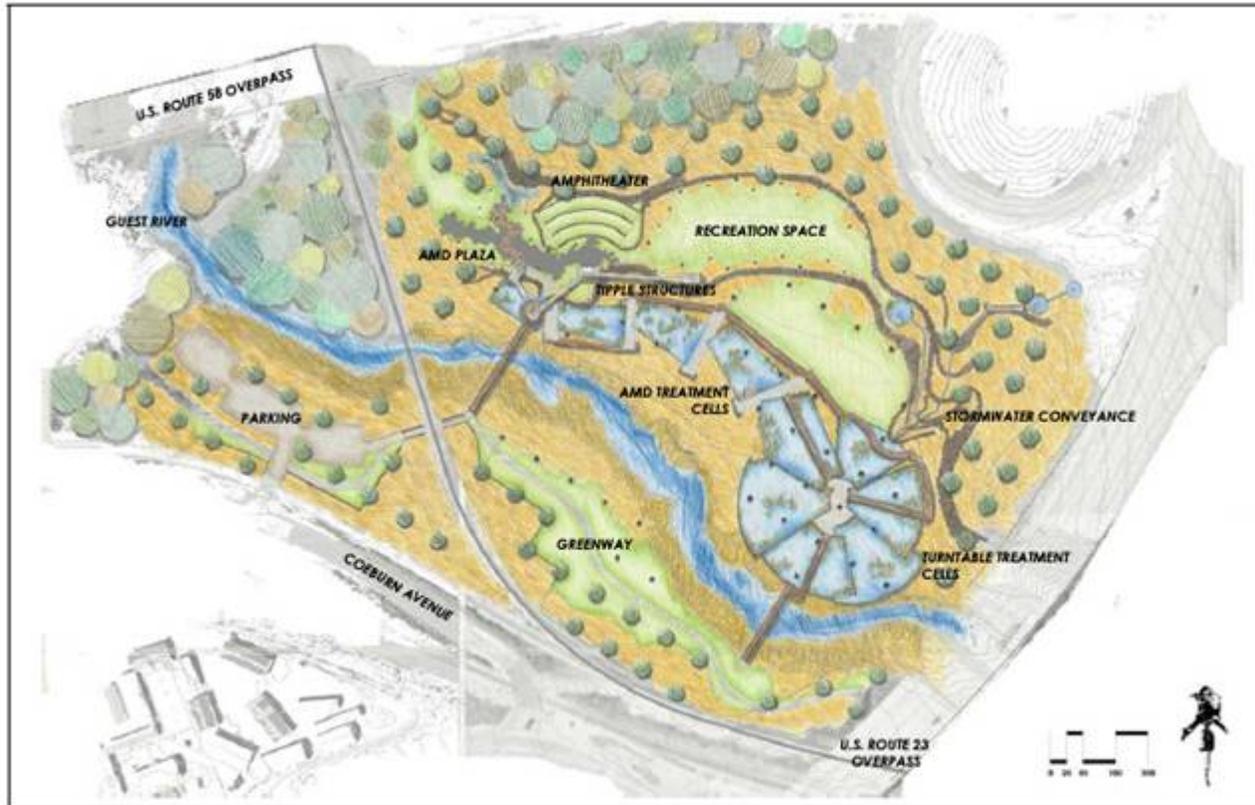
[47] **Ripple effects:** The compression of the river is furthered into the site and begins to affect the stormwater pipes and landform. The stormwater pipes are put into tension and sheared off as they traverse the slopes from their daylighting point to where they enter the treatment system. A railroad turntable model is implemented at the end of the rail bed to keep the AMD and stormwater separate until the final stage of treatment. Its cells are disjointed due to the forces from each respective water source entering the treatment cells.

[48] **Strata layers + mining methods:** The site is graded into two separate strata levels, reminiscent of the strip mining method. On each of these layers, a grid of rock pillars emerges from the base of the slope, perpendicular to the abandoned rail line, calling to mind the manner in which Norton was laid out in relation to the rail yard. These pillars are arranged to define landscape rooms for water treatment and recreational space. The stormwater conveyance and amphitheater sit on "collapsed" slopes, implying a collapsed underground mine.

Architectural model  
 site plan  
 story of landscape  
 story of the river  
 story of the site  
 story of research  
**story of design**  
 construction  
 maintenance



# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



**A site composed...**

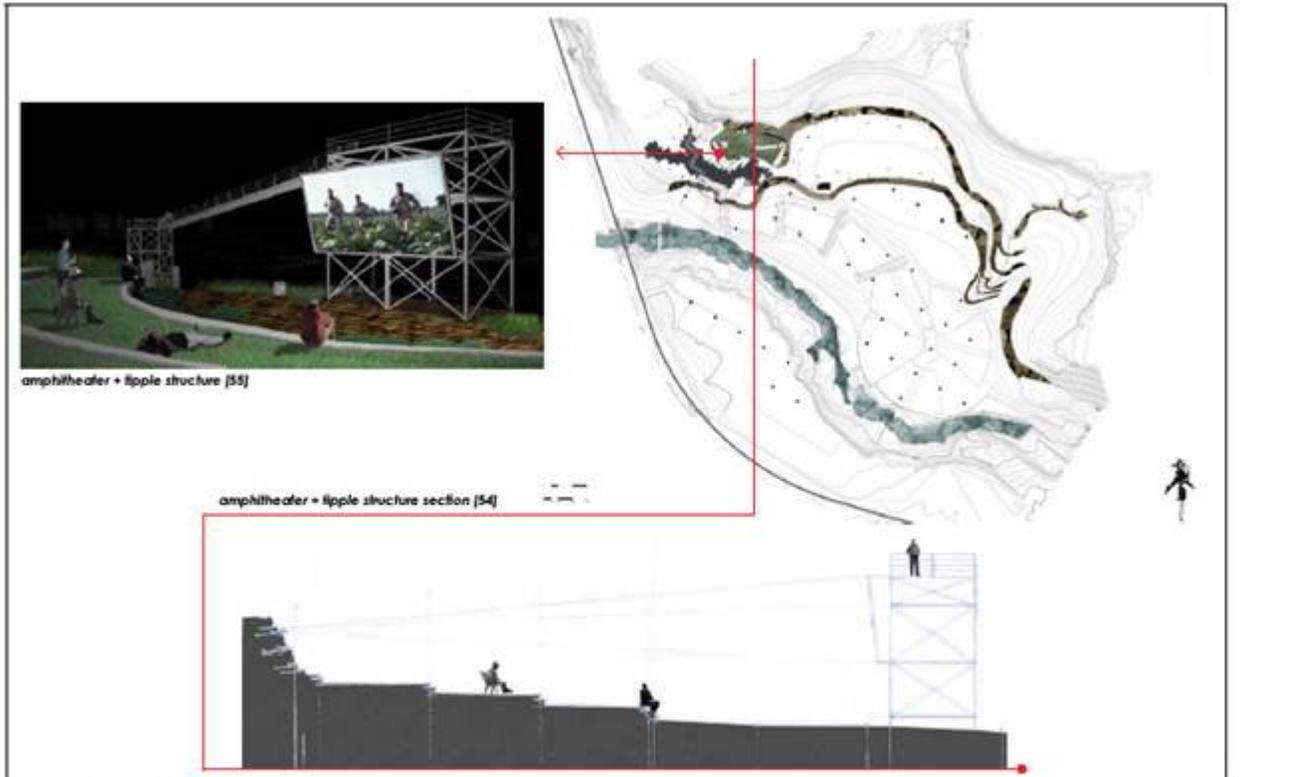
The AMD and stormwater treatment systems are the predominant features on site. The entire site is tied together with the rock pillars resembling the underground mining method. This grid is allowed to feather into the contextual landscape through trees planted on the same grid lines as the pillars. The trees vary in species so as to break up the effect.

The part of the site on the south side of the river is programmed to be a corridor in which the greenway connecting Essenville and Ramsey runs. Furthermore, it serves as the interface between the tipple site and the connection back into downtown.

The site is intended to be honest, beautiful, and educational to residents and visitors alike. It will create a new aesthetic by taking industrial elements and composing them sculpturally into a cohesive landscape that is once again healthy.

story of design  
 story of research  
 story of people who  
 story of place  
 story of environment  
 story of culture  
 story of site  
 story of landscape  
 story of history





In creating the topography for the wider treatment systems, the site is graded into two main strata levels by a retaining wall that resembles the high wall for a strip mine. This wall will be similar to the strata interpretation feature of Tear Drop Park by Van Valkenburg in New York City.

Creeching from the base of these retaining wall are rock pillars set on a grid pattern resembling the room and pillar method of underground mining. The pillars are set so as to form landscape rooms for

treatment, recreational, and cultural events.

Entering the site through another collapsed mine slope interpretation is the **amphitheater [54]**. Its stage is part of the previously described AMD plaza and it is backed by the largest of the four tippie structures. The seating will be graded terraces with stone steps between levels.

The tippie structures at present are rusted, dilapidated, and tarnished unsightly by a majority of the

folk in the city. Thus, to make a beautiful sight, yet retain historical honesty, the structures are proposed to be torn down and their steel skeleton re-erected. This will do two things: first, it will provide a backdrop to the amphitheater in which sound equipment can be mounted and/or an **outdoor movie screen [55]** can be attached. Secondly, the structures will make excellent vantage points as lookout towers, affording views into downtown and a new perspective to the site and contextual landscape.

story of design  
 story of structure  
 story of landscape  
 story of culture  
 story of history  
 story of nature  
 story of life



Design is a verb  
focusing on the activity of making

*Harry is a great designer*

Design is an adjective  
focusing on a made object

*The park is a delightful place*

Design is an adjective  
focusing on the affected subject

*I dislike Peter Eisenman's designs (my  
experience of the buildings resulting there  
from)*



Must be able to distinguish  
subjective preference from  
objective (though qualitative)  
attributes of student work?

As per C. S. Lewis –  
*The Abolition of Man*  
1947



In the academic realm student work often does not extend beyond a representational stage



Determining the probable qualities of a thing from various representations of it is a problem in its own right



Creation of making of buildings,  
landscapes and cities is a complex  
shared task not the work of a  
single individual

Focusing on individual student work  
permits us to set aside this complexity



The broad theological framework  
for evaluation of environmental  
design – very similar to that of  
environmental ethics



## God's building is very good

- Universe is created
- Objective and full of value
- Knowable and meaningful
- God's view of creation



## Design as wor-k-ship

- God's view of humanity
- Our duty to God
- All humankind created in God's image



## Humankind and Creation

- Dominion means Lordship
- A Steward is a servant
- Forms of stewardship
  - Observation
  - Protection
  - Conservation
  - Restoration
  - Creation

Environmental design is a particular form of *creative stewardship* undertaken in our culture as a professional endeavor



Creative stewardships is distinguished by its primary intention – *making*.

The task is to define goodness as it relates to the things environmental designers '*make*'



## Sources

Theories of art

Theories of environmental design

Empirical data – teaching/learning  
and practicing design

Biblical Principles - that lend  
perspective on making/building



## Common contemporary theories of art

Mimetic –  
works of art are representations  
of other objects

Pragmatic –  
works of art are intended to please

Expressive –  
vehicles for personal expression

Objective –  
art for art's sake



# Empirical Model of Form Justification in Design

*Paul Tesar*



Circumstances of  
a problem  
*(form follows  
function)*



Rules of Order  
*(idealized rules of  
composition)*



Evolution of  
Traditional  
Form  
*(cultural  
adaptation)*



Personal  
Expression  
*(artistic vehicle)*



# Translation to Christian Cosmology



Circumstances of a problem  
*(creation and its normative order)*



Rules of Order  
*(reason and the ideal)*



Evolution of Traditional Form  
*(language and symbolic meaning)*



Personal Expression  
*(emotion and creativity)*



## Instrumentalist view of art

works of art are objects and instruments of action... whereby we carry out our intentions with respect to the world, our fellows, ourselves, and our gods.

*Nicholas Wolterstorff,*

*Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic,*  
1980

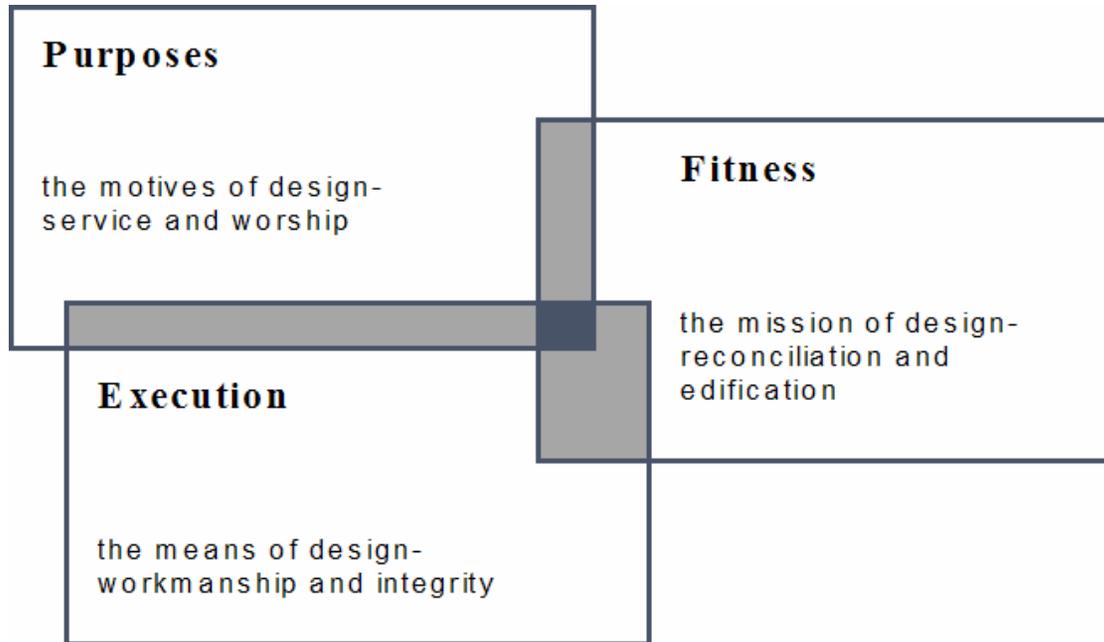


“the quality of a work of art- like any other artifact produced or distributed for a purpose-inheres in how effectively it serves that purpose”

a quality work of art will also performs its intended purpose “in a generally good and satisfying way”



# My Expansion of Wolterstorff's Model



Assessment of purposes is comparatively easy to derive from biblical descriptions of godly character

My focus is on elaborating the ideas of fitness and execution based on biblical metaphors



The Bible uses aspects of creation  
in a metaphorical sense to describe  
spiritual truths



This tells us something about the signified - God's character or will - but also about goodness in the object of the metaphor

If the qualities that are referenced are not objective and recognizable within the signifier the power of the metaphor is lost



In relation to fitness the New Testament cites:

- Communion (Community)
- Edification and
- the Body of Christ



# Body

body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts;  
and though all its parts are many, they form one  
body. So it is with Christ. For we were... all given the  
one Spirit to drink.

1 Corinthians 12:12&13.



## Communion/Community

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf

1 Corinthians 10:16 & 17



## Edifice/Edify

the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Ephesians 2:21&22.

The whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work

Ephesians 4:16



## Fitness

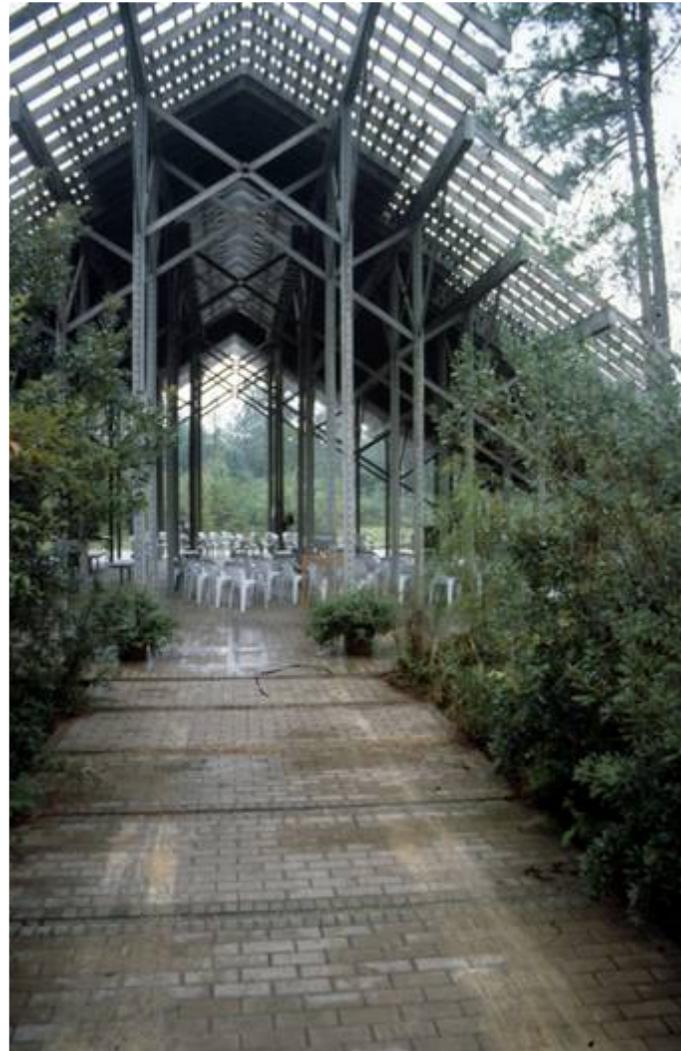
The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!"  
And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary... God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

1 Corinthians 12:21-25.



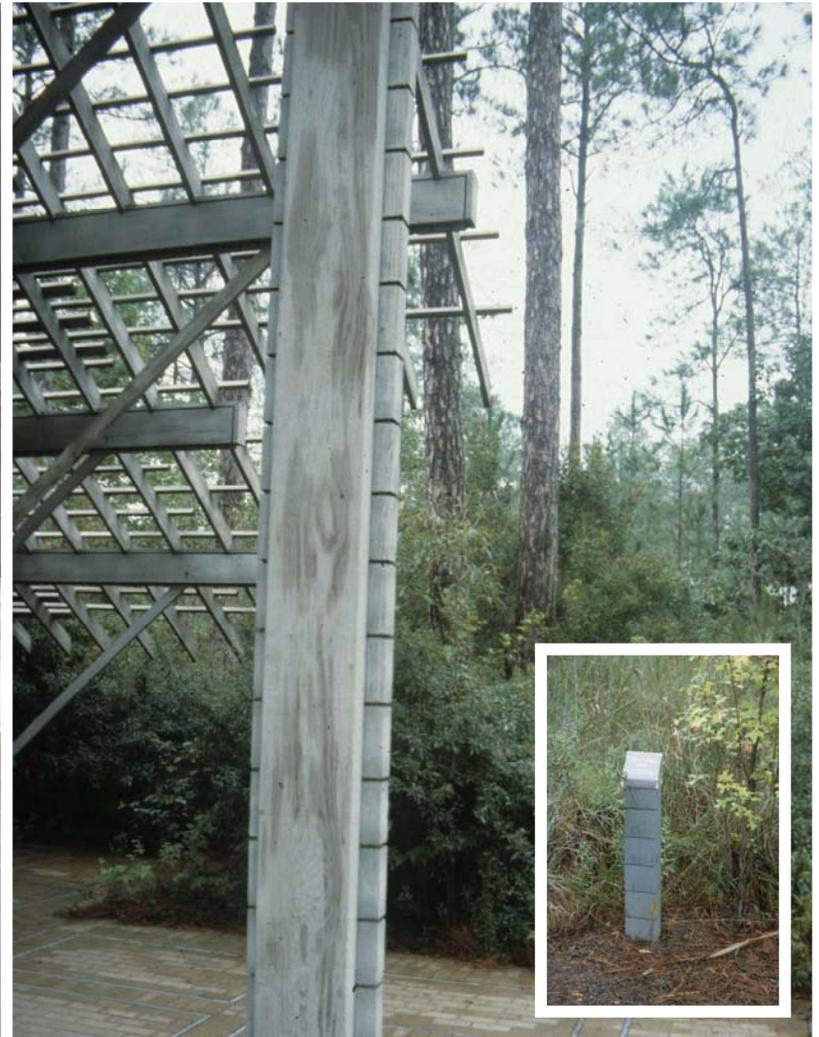






LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE





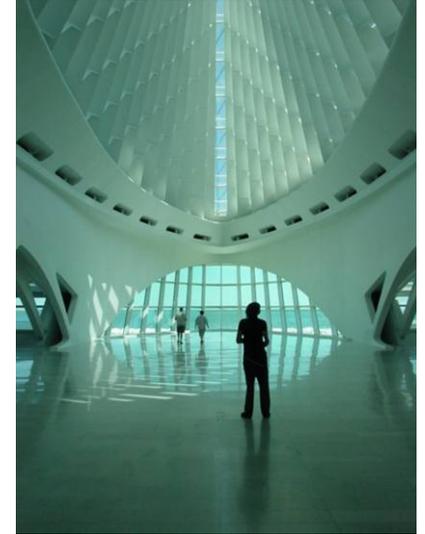
# LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



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<Context>

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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

