

79/45

C

v. 1

*The Bancroft Library*

University of California • Berkeley

























Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

THOMAS CHURCH, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Volume I



This manuscript is made available for research purposes. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, 486 Library, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.





THOMAS D. CHURCH, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

VOLUME I

Theodore Bernardi  
Lucy Butler  
June Campbell  
Louis DeMonte  
Walter Doty  
Donn Emmons  
Floyd Gerow  
Harriet Henderson  
Joseph Howland  
Ruth Jaffe

Burton Litton  
Germano Milono  
Miriam Pierce  
George Rockrise  
Robert Royston  
Geraldine Knight Scott  
Roger Sturtevant  
Francis Violich  
Harold Watkin  
Jean Wolff

Interviews Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess

Copy No. 1

© 1978 by The Regents of the University of California





"Tommy"

Carolyn Caddes, 1974



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Thomas Church

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
INTRODUCTION	iii
TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIALS	vi

VOLUME I

Geraldine Knight Scott: A Landscape Architect Discusses Training Since 1926, and Changes in the Profession	1
Francis Violich: A Professor of City Planning and Landscape Architecture Considers Where the Professions Have Moved Since the 1930s	32
Harold Watkin: A Landscape Contractor Evokes Student Days in the 1930s, and Discusses His Own Profession	54
Ruth Jaffe: A 1934 Landscape Graduate's Memories of Early Days in the Church Office	75
Theodore Bernardi, Donn Emmons, Roger Sturtevant: Two Architects and a Photographer Recall the Hard Work and the Good Times with Church and Wurster, 1930s, 1940s	88
Harriet Henderson: A Hillsborough Client Recalls Two Gardens, 1934, 1954	114
Lucy Butler: A Pasatiempo Client Recreates the Scene in 1935: Church and Wurster	135
Miriam Pierce: A Piedmont Client Recalls Two Gardens, 1937, 1962	145
June Campbell: An Associate Details the Church Office Workings, 1940s-1960s	148
Floyd Gerow: A Landscape Contractor Views His Work with Church Since 1934	186
Robert Royston: A Landscape Architect Considers Changes in Practices Since His Church Apprenticeship	213

Walter Doty: A <u>Sunset</u> Editor Assesses the Development of Landscape Design Since 1939	234
Jean Wolff: A Garden and Flower Care Expert Analyses Her Thomas Church Garden	249
Louis DeMonte: A University Architect Summarizes Berkeley Planning, 1940-1973 and Church's Contribution	263
Germano Milono: An Architect Traces His Path to San Francisco, and Looks Back at Thomas Church's Influence	287
Burton Litton: A Landscape Architect Looks Back at the Training and the Professional Groups in the Field	311
Joseph Howland: <u>House Beautiful's</u> Garden Editor Volunteers Comments on Church, 1948-1956	322
George Rockrise: An Architect Associate Recalls His Role in the Church Office, 1948-1950	342

## VOLUME II

Elizabeth Roberts Church: A Life by the Side of Thomas Church: Family, Friends, Clients, Associates, Travels, Memories	368
Maggie Baylis: Doug Baylis, the Church Office, and Garden Publications	521
Jack Stafford: An Associate Surveys the Church Office, 1946-1965	551
Lou Schenone: A Nurseryman Views the Landscaping Business and How Church Used Plants	576
Robert Glasner: A Landscape Contractor Describes His Role in Working with Church	589
Jack Wagstaff: A Santa Cruz Campus Architect Describes UCSC Site Planning, 1962	622
Harry Sanders: A Stanford Planner Charts the History of Campus Planning, and Church's Contribution	636
Everitt Miller: A Horticulturalist Interprets Church's Work at Longwood Gardens, 1971-1975	667

Proctor Mellquist: A <u>Sunset</u> Editor Considers Church's Broad Architectural Understanding	679
Goodwin Steinberg: An Architect Recalls Joint Projects with Church, 1950s, 1960s	701
Grace Hall: Mr. Church's Secretary Reports on the Updating of <u>Gardens are for People</u>	718
Lawrence Halprin: A Landscape Architect's Appreciation of Church's Place in Environmental Design History	727
APPENDICES	756
INDEX	788





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Interviewees

I enthusiastically and repeatedly thank all of the interviewees for their participation in the Thomas D. Church Oral History Project. The keen interest in the project on their part was notable. They had deep good feelings about Thomas Church, a man whose manner was as remarkable as his craft. The interviewees felt connected with him, and for many his place in their history was near center.

In particular I am gratified by Betsy Church's contribution of her self and her humor to the project. "Betsy," it was said from the beginning, "is the one to talk to," and indeed she was. She says that her view of her husband was not as complete, factful, and dispassionate as she wanted it to be. A very literate person, she wished perpetually to have improved on her transcript and indeed on her thoughts. The Betsy Church interviews are the warm and lively heart of the work.

### Supporters

As important to the success of the project as the interviewees was the strong support of the financial contributors. It is notable that their geographical representation is nationwide. Because of the Churchs' wish that the Regional Oral History Office not make a general request for funding from clients and friends, many who would have contributed have not been offered a chance to do so.

The foundations, organizations, and friends who made the Thomas D. Church Oral History Project possible are:

Hubbard Educational Trust, Massachusetts  
Mariner Foundation, Delaware  
Wagner Fund, Washington  
an anonymous California donor  
Almaden Valley Nursery  
Cupertino Nursery  
Woodside-Atherton Garden Club  
Mrs. William Budge  
Mrs. Douglas Carver  
Mrs. Robert Homans  
George Rockrise  
Lou Schenone  
and Beatrix Farrand Endowment Fund and Sarah B. Child Endowment Fund,  
Department of Landscape Architecture, University of California, Berkeley

### Advisory Committee

The advisory committee to the Thomas D. Church Oral History Project was most helpful in suggesting interviewees and locating sources for funding. The committee members were particularly interested in supporting an oral historical project dealing with landscape architecture in the Bay Area in so far as it would prove valuable in educating students of landscape architecture.

Michael Laurie, professor of landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, was head of the committee which included Mai Arbegast, who spurred early funding, suggested the original interviewees, and gave generously of her time; Geraldine Knight Scott, who with her fine sense of the importance of history and instinct for teaching was an insightful interviewee and committee member; David Streatfield, of the University of Washington, who because of his research in landscape architecture history could suggest lines of questioning.

As often happens, the oral history interviewing for the Thomas Church project coincided with like research: Pam-Anela Messenger was writing her Master's dissertation on Mr. Church (available, UC Berkeley; also see Appendices). For two of the early Regional Oral History Office interviews, with Robert Royston and June Meehan Campbell, Ms. Messenger was present. Her generously-offered bibliography of Thomas Church was useful, and is deposited in The Bancroft Library.

### Related Interviews

Readers of these interviews may be interested in related interviews done by the Regional Oral History Office with architects William Wilson Wurster and William C. Hays; and landscape architect John Gregg; and in a study of Julia Morgan and her associates; in the University history series; and the group of memoirs on architecture, art, dance, literature, music and photography in the San Francisco Bay Area. These volumes are available in The Bancroft Library.

### The Office

The Regional Oral History Office, established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history, is under the administrative supervision of the director of The Bancroft Library, James D. Hart. Willa K. Baum is the department head.

## INTRODUCTION

### Conception of the Project

The Thomas D. Church Oral History Project is a memoir of Thomas Dolliver Church, landscape architect. It is as well a history, both broad and individual, of the profession of landscape architecture and not incidentally of architecture, planning, landscape construction, and environmental thinking in the Bay Area and beyond.

It is daunting to attempt to sum up the subject, Thomas Church. Over the years landscape writers, garden editors, professors and students have looked to his work as a benchmark. Of clients, there is no end to their enthusiasm. The experience with "Tommy" has to do with his integrity and honesty, his charm and energy, his learning and vision, his ability and sensibility. Whoever speaks emphasizes it differently.

Because the oral history project was begun at a point where Mr. Church's illness precluded his participation verbally, and because of his decision not to commit his limited energies to written answers, the project endeavored to extract from a selection of associates their view of his achievements and place in history. Now that the interviews and supporting documentary materials are spread before us, it is more obvious than it might have been at the outset that between Mr. Church's writings, which are important to the reading of his history, and the commentary from the many voices of the oral history within, there exists a context for the study of the work of Thomas D. Church, and a text for understanding the history of landscape architecture in the Bay Area.

### Landscape Architecture in the Bay Area

The history deals with a period in landscape design in this country that lies between nothing, or very little (preceded by the highly evolved professional consciousness of the Olmsteds), and the greatly enlarging, changing, and accelerating landscape architecture today where, as Michael Laurie says, "Most contemporary landscape architects, with a few notable exceptions, have given up designing private gardens." (Laurie, An Introduction to Landscape Design, 1975, p.48) Within that period, from the late twenties to the late sixties, Thomas Church delineated and led his profession.

Those forty years saw too the development of broadened concerns for landscape architects. They loosened their ties with horticultural sciences and found a home with the big family of environmental designers. A review of

events, from the San Francisco point of view, sums up those years:

In 1937 the San Francisco Museum of Art sponsored a show called "Contemporary Landscape Architecture and Its Sources." The museum's director, Grace McCann Morley, in the catalog foreword, said that this modern phase of landscape architecture "was grounded in the new clarity of expression of architecture." She warned the viewer that there were few definite principles involved, but that a fundamental conception was that a house to live in called for a garden to live in.

In 1948 the Museum and the San Francisco region association of landscape architects presented another exhibition and catalog. If late-Depression 1937 was the time of hopes, post-War 1948 was the partial fulfillment of those hopes and the time of planning for the future. William Wurster wrote of "The Unity of Landscape Architecture and Architecture." Other themes considered were sculpture and landscape architecture; landscape design and city planning; and the aesthetics of planting. There was a euphoria of wonderful possibilities: "The creation of a garden becomes something halfway between the making of a painting and the making of a house." (1948 catalog, p.5)

In a third exhibition in 1958 the issues were geography and climate, collaborative planning, parks and recreation, artists and landscape, and then came residential landscape. The profession was evolving toward a definition of landscape architect as site designer filling a gap--between planner and architect--dramatically visualized by Theodore Osmundson as "so vast as to be a vacuum."(1958 catalog, p.37)

That year Thomas Church wrote, "I am sorry our way of life seems to produce fewer clients who love gardening and that the old-fashioned garden, filled with flowers and overgrown shrubs and charm, is disappearing. On the other hand gardens and clients today are a greater challenge." (1958 catalog, p.35)

In 1968 there was no show. And now, another decade later, landscape architecture has gone elsewhere almost totally, which is not to bemoan the fact, but to hope that it has taken with it the high principles of scale, detailing, and attention to client need that are the Thomas Church hallmarks.

### The Interviews

The Thomas D. Church Oral History Project is the realization of a suggestion in late 1975 to the director of the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library that Thomas Church's role in landscape architecture history was so vital as to warrant a thorough-going historical treatment.

With assurances of support, and with the agreement of the Churches, an initial group of interviews was taped in early 1976. The bulk of the interviews were conducted between the fall of 1976 and the fall of 1977. They are ordered in the volumes according to the chronological periods of Thomas



Church's career rather than the chronology of the interviews. The variance between what was being asked and what was already understood by the interviewer can be accounted for by the organization of the volumes.

Each interview has received some editing by interviewer and interviewee, most often to comply with the interviewee's sense of what was relevant. To the extent that interviewees were inclined to speak of their own professional and tangential history, the manuscript is enriched: seldom have there been such opportunities as there were in the 1940s and 1950s in the Bay Area in so many creative fields, and happily the participants were aware that they lived in good times.

### Thomas Church's Participation in the Oral History

The reader will understand that underlying this introduction, and present to a degree in the interviews, is a certain disappointment that our subject for medical reasons could not himself speak. Not that there were mysteries that only he could clear up; his thoughts on gardens are put clearly and carefully in the two books that he has written, Gardens are for People and Your Private World. He has contributed quantities of published magazine and newspaper commentary, and he is working on a revision of Gardens are for People.

In fact, it is generally agreed that one of the ways in which Thomas Church stood apart from other landscape architect practitioners was in his high commitment to the needs of the client. The writing of the books is evidence that that model of commitment had a definition broad enough to include gardens he would never know but that, if words and pictures could lead the way, might become more glorious places.

The books are pithy samples of his thinking, and in Gardens are for People he significantly and modestly defines landscape architecture for him when he says "Trees, shrubs, vines, ground covers and grasses cover much of the earth; knowing them and how to use them is what distinguishes the landscape architect from those in closely related fields of design." (Gardens are for People, p.33)

Thomas Church is visible through the humane and understandable gardens he has designed, through his writings, which have the same qualities, and now through the translucent words of his friends and associates.

Suzanne B. Riess  
Interviewer-Editor

1 September 1978  
Regional Oral History Office  
486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California at Berkeley



## TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIALS

1. Robert Stockton Stryker	10a
2. Geraldine Knight Scott, Interview in <u>Landmark</u> , 1975	31a,b,c
3. Garrett Eckbo, Interview in <u>Landmark</u> , 1975	37a,b,c
4. Members of the UC Department of Landscape Architecture Classes, 1914-1950	77a
5. Notes from the social column, San Francisco <u>Chronicle</u> , Nov. 10, 1969	146a
6. Thomas D. Church and his office, four photographs by Carolyn Caddes	Following 158
7. Job List, Thomas D. Church Office	174a
8. Sullivan Garden, San Francisco	Following 213
9. "Telesis, Space for Living," <u>Sunset Magazine</u> , July 1940	235a,b,c
10. A Sketch by Thomas D. Church from <u>Sunset Magazine</u> , May 1942	237a
11. "This is Our West," by Walter Doty, <u>Sunset Magazine</u> , Jan. 1940	242a
12. Long Range Development Plan, UC Berkeley, Thomas D. Church designs	271a,b,c
13. Long Range Development Plan, UC Berkeley, Committee members	271d,e,f
14. Sketch, George Rockrise	365a
15. Four photographs from the scrapbooks of Thomas D. Church: Magnusson house, Göteborg; Stockholm waterfront; Aalto house; Aalto and ERC	Following 454
16. Decorative Arts Catalog, Golden Gate International Exposition	472a,b
17. "Beyond the Rim," poems by Thomas D. Church	494a
18. UC Santa Cruz, Notes on the Site, by Thomas D. Church	625a-e
19. Stanford University campus map	640a
20. Thomas D. Church's landscape designs on the Stanford campus	640b
21. A paragraph about Thomas D. Church, by Doug Stapleton	666a
22. Longwood Gardens, Map	667a

23. Longwood Gardens, Designs by Thomas D. Church, 1971-1973      Following 670
24. Longwood Gardens, the fountain gardens      Following 673
25. "The Backyard: America's most mis-used natural resource,"  
House Beautiful, Jan. 1949      740a

Additional research materials have been deposited for library use in The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. A slide show of Thomas Church's gardens, assembled by Jerry Campbell of Sasaki, Walker, Associates, for the Northern California Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, is available through inquiry to the society.



Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Geraldine Knight Scott

A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT DISCUSSES TRAINING SINCE 1926,  
AND CHANGES IN THE PROFESSION

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess

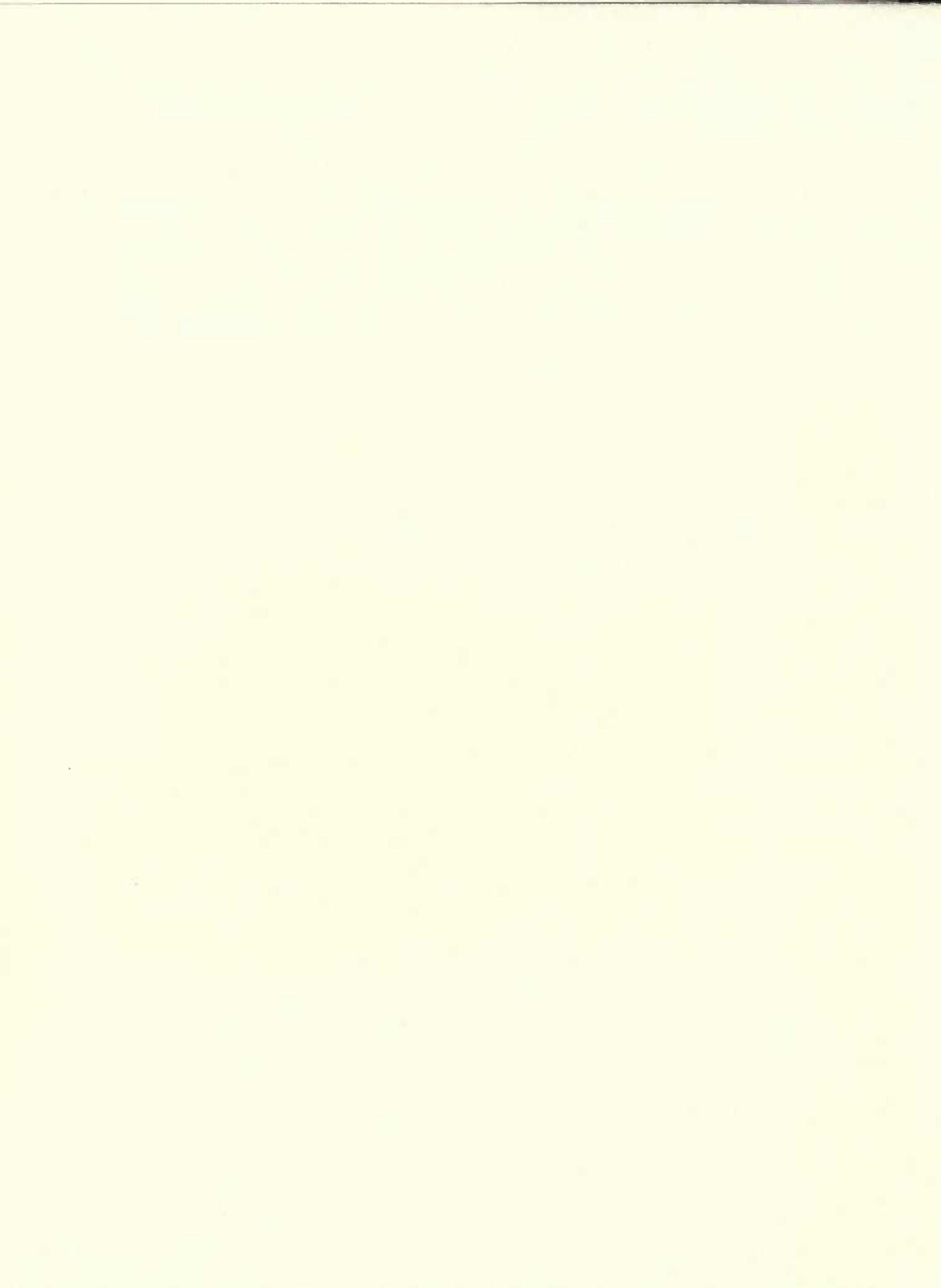


TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Geraldine Knight Scott

1) Faculty in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Berkeley	1
2) Gardens in California: The Summer Trips, Mid 1920s	6
3) Bob Stryker	9
4) The Training at Berkeley	11
5) Tommy Church, Planting the Gardens	16
6) The Critical Vacuum	20
7) The Architects and Engineers	22
8) Tommy Church's Friends and Clients	24
9) The American Society of Landscape Architects	27
10) Fellow Creators: The Artistic Climate	29
11) <u>Sunset</u> Magazine	30



Geraldine Knight Scott  
February 3, 1977  
Interview held at Mrs. Scott's home, Berkeley

1) Faculty in the Department of Landscape Architecture at Berkeley

Riess: I'd like to start out talking about the department of landscape architecture in the years when you were at the University of California, 1921-26. Professor John W. Gregg was a major figure both for you and for Thomas Church and I've often thought that Gregg's background was so much less design than horticulture that it's amazing that he produced the students that he did.

Scott: Gregg came from Massachusetts Agricultural College at Amherst. I really don't know precisely what his training was, but there were only three or four schools in the country that were offering courses in landscape architecture at the time he was in college. Harvard is where the first course had been set up. Harvard was more design-oriented, certainly, than the Land Grant colleges. Courses were set up in Land Grant colleges because that's where there was some money.

And because landscape architecture's roots in this country really come from England more than they do from continental Europe--England's practitioners came out of a great love of nature--they developed the term "landscape gardening," and that is what moved over to this country and what the first courses were called. It was Frederick Law Olmsted who coined the term "landscape architecture" with Theodora Kimball and [H.V.] Hubbard at Harvard when the first course was set up. Nobody has ever been completely satisfied with the name. Every once in awhile there is a revolt within the profession trying to find another name.

Riess: Even until today?

Scott: Oh, yes. Even more so today than ever before.

Riess: What are the implications of the name that are uncomfortable?

Scott: Well, it isn't architecture. It's much broader, you see. "Fitting land for human use and enjoyment" was the first definition. Well, this is a very broad concept, very much broader than architecture. Landscape architecture is dealing with outside space. Architecture deals with

Scott: structures put upon the land, and we're dealing with the space around structures, in and between. So that the term "architecture" is limiting and the term "landscape" is broad; it's a contradiction in terms. It wasn't gardening--they wanted to get rid of that concept--and put design into the idea, into the name, and so the term "landscape architecture" was coined.

Later, people began realizing that land planning, dealing with the land in a broad sense, was very much broader than designing estates, and that landscape architecture had social and economic and conservation principles imbedded in it. Then the planning professions developed and it was Olmsted who set that up also, Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Eliot [landscape architect, son of Harvard president] because they found that they couldn't encompass the whole spectrum of studies that needed to be brought together under the term "landscape architecture."\*

Riess: And when the department started here, under Gregg, he brought in...

Scott: That was really before planning got started. The landscape architecture department here was started in 1913. There were people doing so-called "planning" and they were mostly those people who had had their training in landscape architecture, but who broadened out. We still have many of these people who went into public offices and into planning.

Riess: The 1921-1922 directory lists a course in city and town planning, and a course in modern civic design.

Scott: Yes, I took both; they were given either under architecture or under the art department. They didn't amount to much. You might call it "civic design" or something of the sort that I took, and probably Tommy took, too, I have no idea.

If I'm not mistaken, the first planning course was set up in 1923, that's ten years later. It seems to me we ought to talk a little bit about the faculty that Gregg assembled. He came here as an individual and he brought in Ralph T. Stevens. Harry Shepherd was one of the first graduates.

---

\*In 1900 F.L. Olmsted and Arthur A. Shurtleff taught the first course at Harvard in Landscape Architecture. James Sturgis Pray in 1903 and H.V. Hubbard in 1906 joined Olmsted and Shurtleff as faculty and in 1906 a graduate School of Landscape Architecture was formed. Hubbard and Pray gave the first course at Harvard in City Planning in 1909. In 1923 Harvard gave a Master's in Landscape Architecture with Special Reference to City Planning and later in that decade began developing a separate School of City Planning. S.R.

Riess: Yes, Shepherd was the first graduate in 1914.

Scott: Shepherd graduated in agriculture and his background was primarily horticulture. Here's a picture of him I thought was kind of interesting.

Riess: Oh, yes.

Scott: They brought in Miss Jones to teach plants. Katherine D. Jones was a very unusual person. Here's a booklet written by her. She was a plants person and a very famous one in her day. There were two well-known Katherines, Kate Sessions in San Diego, and Katherine B. Jones here. And I believe they had both graduated in agricultural or horticultural courses here at Berkeley. Katie Jones was never made more than an instructor, which was a fine piece of discrimination because she really was the most informed person on the faculty I would say. She wasn't design-oriented at all. She taught the courses in plants, plant identification, all about plants. It was a very large part of the curriculum at that time.

Riess: Why was she kept back?

Scott: I don't know. I know that when she was about to retire, Shepherd did everything he could to get her made an assistant professor, so that her retirement would be adequate to live on. And he did not succeed. Whether she hadn't published enough, or what I don't know.

She was probably the only woman teaching in the agricultural college. She was a timid, shy person. She knew her subject and that's all. She was a character. Her teaching methods were not college level--a great deal of it was by rote and annoyed all of us, and yet we learned plants as nobody since has.

Riess: What kind of character was she?

Scott: Well, she was a Victorian lady. She was a maiden-lady and she wore long skirts that touched the ground. She wore a hat all the time; nobody had ever seen her without a hat. I invited her to my sorority one time for Sunday brunch wanting to see if she'd come without her hat, but she did not. She wore it all the time. She was very small, but when she took us on field trips she could out-walk any of us. She was vigorous and ardent. She always wore cotton gloves. She carried what amounted to a carpet-bag, a big bag, in which she had notebooks, pencils for everybody, little slips of paper, plant lists, and a little food because our classes were four hours long and she insisted you needed a little sustenance in the middle of that period.

Riess: She would make herself responsible for that?



Scott: No. She would do it once and then each person in the class was to take a turn. When it was her turn, she brought raisins. There were four raisins per person and she would put them out on a little paper plate that she had and pass them to us. It was so funny, we would all wink at each other when she'd say, "Take lots, take two." [Laughter] And then there'd be a second round and we got two more raisins. She was very frugal.

Riess: Well, this one woman in the field would be a strange model for women landscape architects.

Scott: [Laughter] Well, she was a model to work against I would say. She used to walk way ahead of us for instance, and put little papers on the trees on the campus with numbers. And that was our examination. We had to go by and put down the names for each number. Then she would come around to each of us and say, "Fred Barlow did better than you did on that quiz." [Laughter]

Riess: A few more raisins for Fred.

Scott: A little competition was part of her method. And of course we did lots of teasing of her. She was the most devoted teacher I ever had in my life, there's no question about it.

Riess: Was she here when Tommy was here?

Scott: Oh, yes. You see, Tommy was here ahead of me. Tommy graduated before I came into the department, he's four years ahead of me.

Riess: So Tommy would have had Gregg and Miss Jones and Harry Shepherd. And what about [C.L.] Flint?

Scott: Yes, Flint taught construction. I would say the less said about him, the better. He was the poorest professor I ever had. He didn't have knowledge and we all knew it.

Riess: So if Flint was short in his knowledge, then where else did you get the engineering?

Scott: We didn't.

Riess: You didn't at all.

Scott: No, we didn't, unless we went on to graduate school, which most of the people who really went into practice did. Tommy went to Harvard, I went to Cornell, knowing that I hadn't received adequate training here. But it wasn't entirely the fault of the instructors. A four-year course is



Scott: not sufficient, and especially when they allotted 16 units of it to learning plants; there wasn't enough design sequence instruction. The design faculty was Gregg and an occasional somebody else he brought in. And Mr. Flint giving a criticism on whether the path was right; it was feeble. That's why we went on to graduate school. I mean two years is not enough design.

There were very good people in my class, Bob [Robert] Stryker; this was a time when there were veterans and Bob Stryker was brilliant and quite as capable as Tommy Church in any and every way.

Riess: And did he go on?

Scott: He went on to Harvard. He won a traveling fellowship just as Tommy did.

Riess: Oh, that's interesting, because I had begun to get the picture that Tommy was the only one who had sort of upped and gone on. Who was advising Tommy and Bob Stryker and you? How did you all know what the next steps were?

Scott: Gregg encouraged us to go on. He was not able to set up a graduate program. At that time he was just barely keeping an undergraduate program going. He didn't have the faculty, he didn't have the money. He was trying all the time to get his department out of agriculture and allied with architecture.

Riess: Oh, he was?

Scott: Always. But he didn't have very much clout on this campus. He was a peculiar character, Gregg. A very unhappy man. He had problems at home. He had one son who was very capable, and one that was not, and this was a great care, a problem.

Gregg I always thought was a disillusioned idealist. It showed in his face. Everything about him showed that he was a disillusioned person, that he had had great aspirations and he had not been able to achieve what he wanted to achieve.

Riess: I think too if there were any things he had wanted to do as a landscape architect he would have been overshadowed on the campus by John Galen Howard in the same places where he might have been able to do something.

Scott: Right. He didn't make the right kinds of connections on the campus. Professor [Eugen] Neuhaus in the art department was a friend of his; it was Neuhaus who gave the course in Civic Art, for instance, Civic Architecture. But it was obvious that Gregg did not carry very much weight in the Academic Senate or in campus committees. He was never able to make this connection strong.

Scott: However, he did get enough recognition to put into his curriculum a requirement for courses in architecture. We all had to take Architecture I, II, and III, which were descriptive geometry, shades and shadows, and perspective drawing, which were taught in architecture. Landscape students did well enough, apparently, in all of those required courses. We didn't take any architectural design, nothing was required and we had so many requirements that we couldn't really elect to take any in that four-year course. I took extra units all the time I was here. I knew perfectly well that I didn't have enough design and I right away determined that I would go on to graduate school.

## 2) Gardens in California: The Summer Trips, Mid 1920s

Riess: Were there other landscape architects who came back and addressed the students so that you got a sense of what was out there, what the possibilities of the profession were?

Scott: No, but we were encouraged to go to meetings of the American Society of Landscape Architects. Gregg was a member. Practitioners came to the department; we read the Quarterly; we knew what the profession consisted of.

Riess: Well, who were the landscape architects you might have emulated?

Scott: I think I should talk a little bit more about the summer trips. One of the requirements was a six-week summer trip, which Gregg and Shepherd and Katie Jones conducted.

Riess: Was "Katie" how she was thought of, or how she was referred to?

Scott: Always we called her "Katie" Jones.)

We went all over the state of California. We saw all of the good existing gardens in the state. We went as far south as San Diego and north to Sacramento, we started in Sacramento and down through the valley and so on. We went to nurseries, to estates, to parks, and saw all of the then-practicing people in the state of California.

Riess: You met them?

Scott: We met them, we saw their work, we went to their offices, so that by the time we graduated we certainly knew what was going on in California.

Riess: That was two summers?

Scott: One summer, one six-week trip. With a class of six people, as there were in my class, and I think there were four in Tommy's, it's quite easy to do this. For three professors to take four or six students on a trip meant packing a terrific amount into every single day. Now they still have summer trips, but they're one week, two weeks, and classes are thirty people, so you can't begin to cover what we did in one summer.

Riess: Well, it sounds like it easily could be the most influential thing in the two-year major subject period.

Scott: I think it was exceedingly valuable. I still have my photographs; they're not very good. I wasn't good at camera-work then, but we all had cameras, we sketched, we made notes, we produced a notebook out of that summer, it was either a four or six-unit course and we worked very hard. And got a great deal out of it.

Riess: And do you remember the contacts with the landscape architects?

Scott: Ralph Stevens was then down in Santa Barbara. There were a number of very outstanding [practitioners] in that area who were basically landscape gardeners in the English tradition, as most everybody at that time was. They were doing large and interesting gardens and estates. Some of these estates had been designed by eastern landscape architects who had been brought out to California by owners to design them. Harland Bartholomew & Associates of St. Louis designed many California estates.

Riess: How about Fletcher Steele?

Scott: Fletcher Steele. Yes.

Riess: Is that a western name or an eastern?

Scott: Well, they all came from the east. Fletcher Steele, Cook and Hall in Los Angeles, later Cook, Hall, and Cornell, who were doing subdivision work already. There was a man in San Diego, Ralph Diggs, whose name comes to me, I haven't thought of him for years. I know when I struck him for a job much later, he said, "Absurd." He "couldn't possibly" have a woman in his office and that it was "absolutely ridiculous" for me to have thought of applying.

Riess: Did you ever offer yourself as somebody who was willing to answer the phone and do all those things too?

Scott: No, I did not. I refused to learn to type so that I could not be made a secretary, which was what was happening to some other women.

- Scott: We saw Katherine Bashford at that time; we saw probably a garden or two of hers.
- Riess: She was a graduate?
- Scott: I don't think so. I think she came from the east, but I'm not certain.
- Riess: Are the gardens you saw on the summer trips gardens that you had seen in plan before?
- Scott: No, they were not.
- Riess: When you studied design with Gregg, was it mostly European?
- Scott: Well, yes and no. We went around to see sites and did little designs for actual pieces of property. The Berkeley fire had occurred; we took burned-out sites and tried to make something of them, pretty practical kind of thing. We did historical studies, but we didn't necessarily try to emulate them. We tried to solve the problem of a client's needs.
- Riess: How about the [Duncan] McDuffie garden in Berkeley? Was that in existence then?
- Scott: The McDuffie garden existed and was one that we frequently went to see. Now that had been designed by Harland Bartholomew & Associates. As I said, they sent their representatives out to design a number of estates in California. The same man did the Livermore garden in Marin county, which I later worked on and modified in certain ways.
- Riess: Bruce Porter did the garden down at "Filoli."
- Scott: Yes. That was mainly supervised by the owner [William B.] Bourn, who was a very educated man. Mr. Bourn had one very fine gardener who was of the same order of intelligence and experience as John McLaren at Golden Gate Park to carry out the plan. Mr. Bourn was partially paralyzed. He went around the property in a wheelchair and directed much of the work.
- Riess: Amazing. And did he know about all the drainage things that I think of landscape architects having to know?
- Scott: Oh, this very fine Scotch gardener was a practical man in land management. He understood drainage.



## 3) Bob Stryker

Scott: I remember that we had a final problem which was to design an estate in southern California. We were given a contour map for the piece of property in the hills probably back of Santa Barbara for a big estate. And at that time architecture was eclectic. Spanish tradition was very, very strong, and I remember that we all did ours in obviously a Spanish idiom because this was what was popular. And Bob Stryker, I remember, received the highest honors, and I got second out of the six in my class. I even have a clipping about it; the Chronicle wrote up these awards. The plans were exhibited. We made big renderings in those days, you see.

Riess: You've mentioned Bob Stryker a couple of times. I would like to look at the list of early classmates because I'm interested in the very idea that somebody went through the same experiences that Tommy Church had that I thought were so unique. [Looking at graduate list] Harry Shepherd, we know what happened to Harry; there was Doris Hutchins the next year, Horace Cotton and Howard Gilkey.

Scott: I don't know about her at all. Yes, I know about Cotton and Gilkey. Here's Bob Stryker and here I am. [Laughter as she shows picture] Here are some clippings that I have.

Riess: Oh, splendid! You are a scrapbook-keeper?

Scott: No, I've just always stashed things away and now I'm trying to put them in scrapbooks.

Riess: A nation-wide competition, well that's really handsome.

Scott: Now I suppose there had been a nation-wide competition in Tommy's time, too, and he had probably placed first, without any doubt he placed first. The ASLA set up these competitions for the few schools of landscape architecture. But I came into the department after Tommy so I don't know really anything about his precise training.

I first met Tommy when he was working on the campus one summer after he'd been to Harvard.

Riess: Church was at Ohio until 1929 and I guess you would have both returned here then, 1929-1930? At that point he was Associate Professor in charge of construction courses.

Scott: I was only here during the summer. It was during the summer of '28. He must have been back here in the summer because I wasn't here in '29. In any case, that's when I first met Tommy.

Scott: Tommy made charming little drawings. We were both working in the drafting room. He was doing drafting for somebody in agriculture and I was doing something for either Gregg or Shepherd, in the same drafting room. There was no summer course going on so we worked in the drafting room. And that's where I first knew Tommy.

Riess: Had you heard of him before?

Scott: Oh, sure. We knew most of the former graduates. He made these very amusing little drawings all over things, and he would always sign them Thomas the Cat, which tickles me very much.

Anyway, Bob Stryker was quite a few years older than my other classmates because he was a veteran. He had come from New England. How he landed here I have no idea, but he was one of my classmates and he was a most capable fellow. He got a scholarship; he couldn't afford to go to Harvard. I think Gregg helped him get a scholarship and because he had won this competition he was known. He did get a [LeConte] scholarship to Harvard, went there, and there won a traveling fellowship.

He went to Europe in '30 and '31 when I did. I and several architects and landscape architects, too, traveled to see and measure some of the great Italian villas. Bob did very fine water colors; he was a very capable artist. He was very capable in every way. He was making his stipend go just as far as he could. So he went to Majorca, where he could live at about 80¢ a day at that time, and he painted literally hundreds of water colors. He'd do three, four, five a day and brought them back to Harvard where there was a big show, and some were sent out here to be exhibited later.

When he came back from that trip, he went back to Harvard, and at that time they were just developing Williamsburg. He did all of the working drawings for the restoration. Money had already been raised for this project. Bob was the logical person to do this work. He worked night and day because they had set up a goal, a time limit in getting it done. He worked so hard on that project that he got pneumonia and died.

Riess: Oh, that's a terribly sad story.

Scott: I have a file on trying to get a scholarship set up in his name. We did raise a small amount of money for the Stryker Memorial Scholarship at U.C. here. I don't know how much money was put into it, but not much. Whether it was so little that they finally paid it out in one gift, or whether they dribble along the income from it I don't know. I've not looked into this.

ROBERT STOCKTON STRYKER  
MEMORIAL LOAN FUND  
IN LANDSCAPE DESIGN  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
BERKELEY



**Robert Stockton Stryker**, a brilliant student of Landscape Architecture, educator, successful practitioner, and a lovable character, graduated from the University of California in 1926, winning the LeConte Fellowship to Harvard University, where he continued his studies at the Graduate School of Landscape Architecture leading to the degree of Master of Landscape Architecture. Graduating from Harvard with honors, he was awarded the Sheldon Traveling Fellowship for travel and study in European countries. Upon his return he became a member of the faculty of the graduate school at Harvard. He was associated with many important landscape projects and was rapidly making a name for himself in his chosen professional field when, due to overwork, he contracted an illness culminating in his death.

Alumni and friends desirous of honoring his memory are now establishing in his name a loan fund for worthy undergraduate, major students in Landscape Design at the University of California at Berkeley. The fund to be administered by the University under the usual rules and regulations. It is hoped that those who knew him well, Alumni, and friends of the art of landscape architecture, will want to contribute generously. You are asked to respond to this appeal at your earliest convenience. All contributions, no matter how small, will be gratefully acknowledged by the Pacific Coast Chapter of The American Society of Landscape Architects and the Landscape Design Club of the University of California as sponsors.





- Scott: He must have worked for Katherine Bashford at least the summer before he went to Harvard. I know he worked for her a little while in southern California and that could have been the summer before he went to Harvard.
- Riess: I'm really taken with this idea that four out of seven awards were won in Berkeley. I never knew that the landscape architecture department here was really so substantial. To think Gregg won first and second awards in an ASLA contest.
- Scott: Well, if you go back to the ASLA quarterlies--I've given all mine away to the University of Washington in Seattle, so I don't have the old file--but this kind of thing shows up in history.
- Riess: I know, and I'm not doing that kind of an historic study but I guess I've always thought that the department was really pulling itself up madly by its bootstraps.
- Scott: Well, Gregg just didn't have the personality, I think, to develop a force within the faculty of this University. And besides, there's always been a cleavage between, or there was up until the conservation movement and the ecological studies developed, there was a tremendous cleavage between what went on at a Land Grant based-campus, and the professions or the schools of architecture, medicine, so on. The endowed schools looked down on them and still do. At Cornell this attitude is still very, very pronounced where you have privately endowed schools on the same campus with state endowed schools. I served on the Advisory Council of the School of Architecture, Environmental Art and Planning at Cornell for three years and found this attitude still persisting.

#### 4) The Training at Berkeley

- Scott: What kind of a person Gregg was in his days, I don't know. I know that he had the decency to tell me before I went to Cornell--I couldn't get into Harvard, they wouldn't take a woman, so the next place I elected to go was Cornell--before I left he called me in and said, "Now, my arch-enemy is head of the department at Cornell and he will give you a bad time." Which he did.
- Riess: How did Gregg ever acquire an arch-enemy?
- Scott: Well, I don't know. These two men hated each other. They'd both been at college together, you see, at Massachusetts Aggie. E. Gorton Davis at Cornell hated Gregg, and Gregg hated Davis. It became clear the minute I got there.

- Riess: Were you reasonably well-prepared for Cornell in comparison with other graduate students?
- Scott: Well, that's a story in itself.
- Riess: What would you guess Tommy's experience would have been coming from Berkeley to Harvard?
- Scott: Well, I don't think that he would have had any trouble because he had very great facility with drawing and a great deal of charm as a person. Even as a very young person he had a natural ebullience and humor. I don't think he would have had any trouble at all.
- Riess: Had anyone preceded him from Berkeley to Harvard?
- Scott: Not that I know of.
- Riess: Of that list of people--F.B. Kennedy, Herbert Langhorn, Tommy Vint, Katherine Williams...
- Scott: Tommy Vint I think possibly went to Harvard. He went into the national Park Service. He might have gone to Harvard, I'm not sure.
- Riess: Budd Smith, Opal Waters, Milton Wolfe.
- Scott: I don't know any of those names.
- Riess: Lots of women, many women in those early days.
- Scott: But not many of them graduated I think. They went for a year or two.
- Riess: Carol Wagner; here's another man, Victor Anderson.
- Scott: Victor Anderson I know. He did some quite good work.
- Riess: Harry Newton, Jesse Tebbe, Harold Schroeder. You think maybe of all of that list, the only one that might have gone to Harvard also, then, would have been Tommy Vint.
- Scott: Yes. It's the only name that rings any bell in that group.
- Riess: Did Gregg make you feel that as a woman you could be at the top?
- Scott: No, he didn't ever question that. Gregg had certain prejudices. One very strong one against Japanese and the Japanese in California, but otherwise I didn't feel that he was prejudiced. He'd had many girls in the department and many older women, I didn't feel that. But he

Scott: hadn't done anything to help Miss Jones get ahead in his own department; that's the only evidence I have there that might have had some prejudice.

He used to tell me that I'd have a bad time. That was kind of a fatherly warning that it wasn't going to be easy. But afterall, Miss Bashford was practicing in southern California successfully, Florence Yock and Lucille Council, Ellen Shipman in New York, there were plenty of women practicing at that time. They were early models.

Riess: Harvard didn't want to train them?

Scott: They wouldn't take girls in and when I applied for jobs in state or county offices they wouldn't consider hiring me. In fact, I was the first woman employed in Los Angeles county and that was during the Second World War. The war is the only reason they took me into the office. They simply couldn't get any men, so they had to change the regulations because their civil service jobs were only open to men.

Riess: What sort of cultural history, or aesthetics, or what general training was given students so that you were well-rounded people who could design a garden within some sort of context of what else was beautiful in the world?

Scott: We had a very good course in history of landscape architecture; it was given by Gregg. He knew landscape history. That was an excellent course. We also took history of architecture in architecture, an elective. I took it. I'd had a very good course in history of art in high school, an excellent one, I still think the best; I've had three and I think it was the best. It happened to be a person who was superior and that's all, had had a very good art background.\*

I had come out of an art course in high school, a major in art, and I expected to go into a design profession here. I was absolutely flabbergasted when I found landscape design was in agriculture. I very much resented having to take all of the agricultural sciences, which I'm sure Tommy resented, too. But we did take them, and in the long run it has paid off, you see. But we had to take all of the ag sciences, which meant botany, zoology, bacteriology, chemistry, soil technology, forestry, taxonomy, genetics.

Riess: Then you had to go and learn all of the engineering and all of the construction?

Scott: Yes, we took some of that--well, agricultural engineering we had, but the construction was very meager. But at Cornell I had very good instruction in construction. I personally was always interested in

---

\*See Jaffe interview.

Scott: construction from the time I was a child. I'd been fascinated by construction so that I've always been the one female watching construction projects from the time I was five years old. I found out how to do things.

Riess: So when you were through school, you knew that area. You didn't really have to apprentice yourself then?

Scott: Of course, in a way I was very fortunate, after working for Gregg and Shepherd, in going to work for A.E. Hansen in southern California. He was really a promoter and not a designer at all, but he had his own construction company. He did some of the biggest jobs in southern California. He was basically a tree mover. We didn't bother to make working drawings. We didn't have to because he had his own construction crew. You just went out on the job and told them how to do it. His head designer was an architect who had also won the Prix de Rome, and he was a person I really learned the most from. I had a year and a half there. When the stock market crash came, that's where I was working. We were working on probably forty of the biggest jobs in southern California. I had gone directly into this job and had to learn to supervise right away.

Riess: I guess Tommy learned the construction thing on the job too.

Scott: Well, we all had to. There were no landscape contractors as I think I mentioned to you before. You had to develop your own construction crew and go on learning all the time.

Riess: Was Olmsted always viewed as the greatest landscape architect?

Scott: Olmsted is unique. We've never had a single practitioner that was as broad a person as Olmsted. He's not only the father of the profession, but he's been our ideal. And nobody yet has touched him. He was a poet, he was an excellent writer, he had a tremendous social consciousness, he had knowledge of the law, he set up the first sanitary commission in this country that later became the Red Cross. He was a man of such broad interests; we have nobody to compare with him. We could roll twenty landscape architects together today and they wouldn't equal one Olmsted. Nobody has shown that kind of breadth, in my opinion. He should be known as one of the great Americans.

We're trying to make his home and office a national historic landmark. All of his letters and reports are in the Smithsonian now. It's very belatedly that he's coming to be recognized as one of the great early Americans. There's no landscape architect coming out of any school today that isn't well aware of how broad Olmsted was. Several biographies of Olmsted had been published in the last few years.



Scott: You were asking if I felt I had a broad basic education here. Well, no, I didn't. Not only was design lacking, but there were very few electives that one could take out of the department. It was a very narrow curriculum. My own background is quite deficient in history, in literature. The University requirements included one year of English, and American History, and I had about two other electives.

I took a course from [Frederick J.] Teggert, which was one of the best courses I ever had here; it was called The Idea of Progress. I was fascinated by it. It was an eye-opener, marvelous, a real mind-expander! And I was so excited about it, that I wanted to go on and take another, but Gregg wouldn't let me. He said, "It's a waste of time." I should apply myself to the profession. He was my advisor.

Riess: I should think that would be very hampering.

Scott: It was. I knew all the time that this course was not adequate and everybody--Garrett Eckbo, Corwin Mocine, Fran Violich--everybody that came along later, that wanted to advance, knew that they had to get more training than they got here at Berkeley.

Riess: Well, more training and also more general background.

Scott: Right, broader.

Riess: I wonder how Gregg viewed Tommy.

Scott: Oh, he was very proud of him, he was very proud of him. He took pride that he'd come out of his school.

Riess: Wouldn't Gregg have thought that Tommy was going off in rash new directions?

Scott: I don't think so. He would have thought of Tommy as realizing his own dream.

Riess: Gregg's own dream?

Scott: Yes.

Riess: Gee, Gregg is becoming sort of a tragic figure.

Scott: Oh, he always was to me. His face showed it. A very sad man. A very unhappy man. He put up little maxims all over the wall. One of them was from Daniel Burnham: "Let your imagination revel in magnificent fancies, but discipline them for their perfect realization..." There were things like this in the drafting room and his office. He had pictures of Olmsted and pictures of Daniel Burnham and pictures of several of the landscape architects in England on the walls. These were his heroes.

Scott: I think Gregg was trying very hard probably to erase the idea of himself as a plantsman and as a horticultural person. He thought of himself as a well-equipped landscape architect. He did a number of estates here on the Peninsula. The Moore estate, which I have a few pictures of, was quite acceptable. It was in the Spanish tradition, as most places of that time were. The detail of it is quite good. It isn't one of the great estates, but how do we know what the clients ask for, what they were willing to pay for.

I don't think anyone ever thought of him as a great designer, but he certainly was adequately trained and capable enough. Gregg's own place was kind of a romantic landscape. [705 The Alameda, Berkeley]

#### 5) Tommy Church, Planting the Gardens

Riess: It seems odd to me that Tommy is sometimes spoken of as being "old-fashioned" and loving gardens, as if there were a special trait. I would have always thought that that would be why people got into the profession in the first place.

Scott: Well, I think it was. Tommy is one of the few practitioners who's been practicing for a long time who has used plants well, who has liked them, and never played down that part of landscape design. He has realized that plants were a part of his design material and he has used them very well.

Courses in universities, in order to get in more design, and some economics, sociology, broader courses, had to drop off something. And what they dropped off was the teaching of plants. Now students learn here maybe 100 plants, whereas Tommy and I probably learned 2,000.

Riess: You're saying that makes sense because the profession has tried to rid itself of the "pansy planter" image.

Scott: Right. You can find all kinds of references, all the way through the literature, of people countering a statement of being called a "pansy planter," assuring people that "I do very much more than plant pansies, and plants are not my main concern," that planting is less than 20 percent of a total landscape project, etc. There's a lot of evidence, and it is true, planting is a small portion of landscape design. But it's the visible portion, it's the thing that makes the great visual impact and makes people like gardens.

In order to use your materials well, you have to like them. Tommy knows them, likes them. He's always gone around to nurseries and put on a hold on the best specimens, much to my consternation. I go around to

Scott: do the same thing and Tommy's already got a "hold" tag on a specimen I'd like to have. [Laughter] We've joshed about this a lot. But all of us who really learned our plants like them and use them rather well.

Riess: So the landscape architects who say, "Well, plants aren't really important anyway" are really reflecting their lack of information about them.

Scott: Right. And they have in their offices, if they employed a woman, given her the job of making the planting plans. It requires detailed knowledge of plants to use them, to specify them.

There's a tremendous amount of detail in landscape architecture. And it's very hard for one person to know it all. As an office develops, you tend to get somebody who's good in construction, and somebody else who is good in planting, and so on. I don't think that the girls have the option. "You know plants?" They start them right in doing planting plans and they seldom get out of that niche in an office.

Now there are big offices like Skidmore, Owings and Merrill which are architectural firms that take on a landscape architect. If it's a woman what they have her do is the planting plan for the total site. They seldom have her do anything else. And this is very common.

Tommy had several women working for him at various times and they did planting plans. They also supervised planting. But he liked plants and he took them [employees] to nurseries and he trained them to see plants his way so that they really were carrying out his desire, he wasn't just shunting them off. But you'd have to ask Tommy whether he felt that women had an aptitude for it. From teaching planting design, I don't think so. I've had fellows that I thought had far more sensitivity and aptitude for doing planting design than the girls. Some of the girls didn't have any special feeling for plants as design materials.

Riess: Don't the girls object to that narrow view?

Scott: It depends on the person. Some of them wanted a full, broad spectrum of kinds of practice or experience in an office. And they'd leave that office and try another one. Today many of them are getting into other jobs, but I'm talking about this big period from the Second World War to within the last ten years, say, when that was true.

Now you've got lots of girls working in public offices that are doing environmental impact studies and doing the writing, because now they give the girls the writing of the reports to do.

Riess: That's interesting. I guess you'd begin to wonder whether landscape architects weren't just frustrated architects then.

Scott: Well, that's a common statement. [Laughter] I'll try to make the case again. A landscape architect is dealing with space and very broad spaces. Those landscape architects who are capable of getting the big jobs are working on whole watersheds. They're working on huge campus designs and layouts for big institutions of various sorts. This is what a landscape architect wants to work on, it's what Olmsted worked on. It's the bigger field.

If you are tooled up in your thinking or in your office to handle this kind of a project, you really can't bother with choosing the precise little plants for Mrs. Jones' garden, unless you're a genius and can handle both scales of design. It's like designing jewelry on one hand and a huge cathedral on the other. They're such different scales. They're all part of the process.

Now a good many young people think they only want to design residential gardens. It's a reaction to the very large scale of some projects. There are always people who really want to work at the residential design level. And the courses today are not offering that. Some can't get what they want in the University because the universities, and certainly Berkeley precisely, is going into regional design more and more, and urban design, design within the urban context, each having different kinds of special problems.

Riess: I gathered in talking with Floyd Gerow that Tommy did all the design first and then the planting thinking came after the construction work was finished. He would walk around and very skillfully but very rapidly dispose of that.

Scott: Well, of course I've never been on the job with Tommy. Floyd would know more about how he worked than I would. Early designers in England and in the east, all worked that way. If you're not putting a job out to bid, you can work that way. But if you're putting it out to bid, it's got to all be on paper and specified very clearly. Tommy worked directly with Floyd; he didn't have to put jobs out to bid, so that he could work that way. He probably did. Because, as I said, he went around to nurseries and tagged good specimens and knew what he could draw from for any particular job.

Riess: Well, when you put something out to bid, though, does the bid go also to a nursery man?

Scott: Oh, indeed.

Riess: I see.



Scott: It's specified down to the last number of ground cover plants that have to go in.

Riess: So that's why you would have to have a person in the office doing all of that sort of detail.

Scott: Yes, it's a very detailed job to do a planting plan, but there's an awful lot of detail to construction and to irrigation and to all parts of landscape work. When I worked for A.E. Hansen in Los Angeles, we didn't have to specify anything. I had to learn how to write specifications later on.

Tommy avoided a lot of that detail. However, when Tommy worked for the universities, as he did, for all the campuses, he was an advisor most of the time, but there were instances where he had to produce plans and detailed specifications. He worked on many kinds of big institutions. He did a big place in the east, General Motors. But any big job or one outside of California had to be specified and Tommy employed very capable people in his office who could do those things.

The planting in institutions tends to be very much simpler than it does on a home garden. Fewer species are used, because people aren't seeing the areas so often. A home garden is observed every day. It has to be interesting over a long period of time.

Now, I would say here in passing that Tommy tended to become simpler and simpler in his plantings, because that makes maintenance simpler. If you use fewer varieties, you have fewer complications in maintenance. Also the degree of complexity depends on the kind of client one has.

Tommy had many clients who were wealthy, had growing families, had many interests, who traveled a lot, who wanted their places to look very nice but didn't want to spend a lot of time on maintenance. And you can't get good gardeners; in fact we have fewer and fewer trained gardeners in this country. Everything tended to make his planting plans simpler. Very good, but simple.

Quite a few of his clients came to me to enrich his plantings later. This is not to play them down. The first time this happened, I was very embarrassed and I said, "I can't touch one of Tommy's jobs." This was maybe five, ten years afterward.

They said, "Well, it's gotten kind of dull to me. I'd like you to make it more interesting."

I said, "Why don't you go back to Tommy?"

Scott: "Well, Tommy, he's too busy or he won't do it now."

The first time that happened to me I called Tommy and said--I like Tommy, he's a friend--I said, "Tommy, I'm embarrassed."

Tommy said, "Oh, forget it. Go ahead and do it." He said, "I always like what you do. I knew there wouldn't be any conflict. Just go ahead and do it." And after talking to him a time or two on particular places, I'd go ahead and do the revising if I liked the person and really wanted to work with them.

I think David Streatfield asked me, he said, "Well, did you ever want to change the whole garden the way most people do? They don't like this."\* And I said, "No, never. Tommy and I were in perfect accord. I would never have the slightest desire to change one of the main lines of anything he did. No, we came out of the same tradition, we worked in the same way." No conflict whatsoever.

#### 6) The Critical Vacuum

Riess: I am certainly not surprised that one would change, and change one's ideas about planting. How can you assume that at the age twenty-two or twenty-three that you have any kind of real taste at all anyway; I think that develops and is a product of middle years rather than early years.

Scott: Right. And young clients are busy with children who can't give a great deal of time to their gardens. Others start with a lot of interest in the garden and then lose it. They become interested in many other things.

Riess: And how about the professionals' taste? Don't you think it changes?

Scott: Oh, it changes very much, sure. It matures, and you learn so much more about plants. They're living, they're complex, you learn much more about micro-climate, how to deal with it, what's going to be successful, what isn't, out of experience. In your own garden you have to change, things die out, it's not through any fault, it's the nature of some plants to be short-lived, but you don't necessarily want to replace the one that dies. You want something similar but different--more bloom or less shade perhaps.

---

\*David C. Streatfield, Assistant Professor, University of Washington, Department of Landscape Architecture.

Scott: It concerns me that since we do not teach visual perception in our schools most people are visually illiterate so they are not critical of executed designs. We don't have any body of landscape criticism, there's not one that criticizes landscape jobs the way a play or a painting is criticized.

Riess: I read an article by you that called it a profession without a voice.

Scott: We're not subjected to criticism. When a garden is ready and pictures are taken of it, which appear in magazines all over the country or books, ipso facto it must be good; nobody goes back to look at it and evaluate it later. They're beginning to go back now, just beginning to make user studies, to get criticism of a place after its done, ten years later, whether it really worked or not.

Houses are criticized somewhat, not a lot. The same thing [deficiency of criticism] obtains for architecture. Criticism, judgment, is passed on buildings after they're done, much more than it is on landscape, but they're both deficient in critical appraisal in my opinion.

Riess: Don't you think that the client gets more involved in the landscape, so that after ten years as a client, your own identity would be really--

Scott: Well, I think this depends on whether you're thinking of an individual client or a corporate client and a lot of bigger projects are corporate clients you're dealing with--school boards, corporations, park boards, etc.

The value of criticism is to educate a public, it seems to me, to understand what is within the public domain. The private garden is something else again and I wasn't really thinking of the private garden.

Riess: I guess that's what I think of mostly in relation to Tommy.

Scott: Well, he's done a good many plans that are public; however, not anything like the number of public works that Garrett Eckbo or Eckbo, Royston and Williams have done. I think even I have landscaped more schools and professional buildings than he has. However, he's designed a good many campus layouts which I have not.

Riess: Can you recall any work of his that's ever been controversial?

Scott: Not that I know of. On the campus, of course, we had big fights over things happening on this campus and they probably do on the Stanford campus. But that's an internal fight because of the way the faculty committees are organized. You have a campus planning committee that doesn't include any landscape architects, or architects. The campus sets up very strange committees.

Riess: It has had, or did have Doug Baylis as a consulting, a regular consulting architect, and Church, didn't it?

Scott: Doug was a consultant for awhile; of course Tommy employed Allen Ribera as his liaison with the campus for a long time.

Riess: Was this a case of what you were talking about before, the landscape architect seen as the pansy-planter and probably not paid attention to in campus planning? Even though they were given token place.

Scott: Well, it's this feeling that the architect is superior.

## 7) The Architects and the Engineers

Scott: I've often referred to the architects as the "arrogant profession." Architects are an exceedingly arrogant group of people. They really feel that [laughing] they have the only keys to design. And they're very loathe to accept landscape architects.

Now in the School of Environmental Design, the cleavage is probably even more pronounced than it was many years ago. Although planning, architecture and landscape are in the same building and should be getting to know each other better, architects are not our best friends. Many think there's no need for a landscape architect except to put plants around their buildings.

Riess: So if there were to be terraces and levels, they would also take care of drawing and specifying them also.

Scott: Now you're really on a subject. Architects work with engineers. And engineers will say that they want a terrace and they want it to "look level." Nothing can be level and drain. Drainage is the biggest problem in landscape architecture. The engineer drains to too fine a tolerance which in practice often doesn't work. That's one of the biggest battles we have with architects all the time. And I've worked on many schools which are big layouts.

When the architect brings me into the job, he has a tentative layout, and tentative grades set up, and I start right in and go over the grading and say, "It won't work."

"Our engineer says it will work. Who are you?"

He says, "A tenth of an inch to the foot," I say, "A quarter of an inch to the foot," on play fields, because we don't get good enough workmanship.



Scott: This battle goes on all the time. Neither architects nor engineers are our friends. We have a bad time. Right now the engineers are trying to take our license away from us. They snipe at landscape architects all the time. And we may lose our licensing in the state of California; we're battling it right now.

Riess: That's a retrogressive step.

Scott: Yes. We were the first state in the Union to get licensing, been copied by thirty-eight states, and we're about to lose it. Engineers don't want us to do irrigation, or any kind of retaining walls, etc., want that all to be done by engineers. This makes landscape architecture cost more if you have to employ these consultants for things you could do yourself.

Riess: Very interesting. Well, landscape architecture is really not at all well settled in. It sounds like the landscape construction field isn't well settled in, either, what with the unions always making that difficult.

Scott: It's becoming a very much more complex profession all the time. The profession that we're more closely allied to are the planners.

As planners are moving into economic and social planning, realizing that the implications of their broad planning processes have to be thought of in much more human terms than they were, that you can't impose a plan involving thousands of people without consulting those people, they're employing sociologists and lots of people to help them, and they're broadening out all of their courses in those directions, economic, political, and social. As they move out of physical planning, landscape architecture is moving into physical planning.

As I've told you, it was Olmsted who set up both professions. Planning is much closer than architecture, and another reason why the term "landscape architecture" is a curious contradiction in terms. Really one makes personal friends with some architects he can work with, so the generalization can't be always applied, certainly. But the planners and landscape architects have much more understanding of each other's problems, than architects or engineers and landscape architects.

Now Tommy established very good rapport with many architects, and particularly with Wurster, Bernardi, and Emmons right there in the same building. Practically did most everything that they did, and they must have called him in to set the grades. He established that kind of rapport. They had separate offices, one floor separated, so they could work back and forth easily.

Riess: In fact, where do you think he would have gone without Wurster?

Scott: Oh, he would have made some other friends. Hervey Parke Clark was another one of his friends, although Hervey Parke Clark never produced as much or became as influential as Wurster. But Tommy had a great ability to work with people, not only clients, but with architects and engineers. He could disagree with them pleasantly. He could maintain a relationship, he was a persuasive person.

Riess: Right. So despite all these issues, his personality...

Scott: Yes, his personality would have triumphed, I think. Some other architect would have been his main sponsor.

#### 8) Tommy Church's Friends and Clients

Riess: You know, whenever you refer to Tommy you smile. [Laughter] He really must be absolutely amazing.

Scott: Well, that's curious. Tommy is a charming person, that's all. I never had a great deal to do with him, but he had charm and he was amusing, always amusing.

Tommy was witty. I'll give you an instance. We had a big fight on the campus over one of his plantings in which I protested. Plans were brought in and I insisted on there being a discussion and changing some of the plants. Wurster opened the meeting by praising Tommy, saying, "I've worked with Tommy all these years and I respect his judgment," and so on and on. As he went on Tommy turned around and said, "That's big of you, Bill, but you remember what happened on another building here?" [Laughter] "When you objected to my plan." And everybody laughed.

The meeting was very tense up to that point because Tommy knew we were all there to put him on the spot, we didn't like what he was doing, but he broke the tension. Then everybody laughed and we got out the plans and looked at them and Tommy said, "Well, maybe you're right. I don't mind changing that, but I'll hold for this." And the compromises were worked out. But only Tommy could do this.

Riess: I should think Tommy's great success would have made for a good deal of envy and resentment.

Scott: I think it might have if he hadn't had charm and the ability to laugh and be a generous-minded person. Tommy has had a tremendous amount of publicity, in every national magazine; every month another garden by Tommy Church. But Tommy, if I occasionally got something in, Tommy would write me a note. He found time to do things like this, you know. He was a generous-minded person.

Scott: They gave him a seventieth birthday party; it was the jolliest party I ever went to. They called up from his office, his secretary, whoever was working in the office said, "Tommy's going to be seventy. Don't you think we ought to throw a birthday party for him?"

Why, everybody came for miles around, every contractor and architect, and they carried Wurster up in his chair. (He was already very ill.)

They knew Tommy would be away. He was on a job supervising down the Peninsula. He came back and here was this mob in the office. It wasn't precisely on his birthday, but a day or two before maybe, but it didn't make any difference. Tommy said, "Gee, what a great idea! Why didn't I think of it?" [Laughter] It was so typical you know.

Imogen Cunningham was there, oh, everybody was there. It was a marvelous party, best party I ever went to in my life.

Everybody had pleasant enough relations with Tommy. I've never heard anybody that did work for him say they didn't like him or anything. They'd leave the office because he didn't put their name on jobs perhaps. He remained Tommy Church and when it was time for them to go out for themselves, they went. But they didn't leave because they resented Tommy, really.

Riess: And then, as you said before, he got on very well with his clients. Would he get along with just any client or did he pick and choose his clients?

Scott: Well, I don't know whether I told you this. I used to call Tommy and ask him all kinds of questions...

You get all kinds of people; you don't know, when you're called up by somebody, anything about them. They maybe already own a house on a piece of property and they call you and you go there and you find a woman who is a nervous wreck, who is a dope, or an alcoholic, or who is just cantankerous one way or another. All kinds of things happen. Or you start working for somebody and you find you can't work with them. And this is one of the big headaches in landscape architecture is that unless you have a natural aptitude, you find yourself sort of holding hands with some woman who says she wants to tell you all about her troubles with her husband or her family. You get into a pretty intimate situation with people.

In any case, I had a whole series of really difficult clients one time and I called Tommy and I said, "Tommy, what do you do when you get somebody you just can't work with?"

Scott: He said, "Well, I just call them up and tell them 'I'm not your landscape architect.'"

And I said, "But, Tommy, do you call them up or do you have your secretary do it?"

"You're right. I have a secretary and you don't."

And I said, "Well, do you think you could call them up and tell them?"

He said, "No, but I could write them a note. Why don't you do that."

Good advice. So I did.

But I was kind of embarrassed that I couldn't get along with some clients. He said, "Oh, hell, only about one client in ten is any good. A lot of them you can't work with."

Riess: But he didn't eliminate the other nine?

Scott: No, but he must have eliminated some. He always told you things straight; he didn't beat around the bush about it. He was always direct.

Riess: Well, as far as the hand-holding, and the sort of intimate relationships that you found yourself stuck with, what did he do with that?

Scott: Of course as a man it was a different situation, and his personality and mine are very, very different. He could josh people out of their problems, charm them out or josh them. Whereas I'm too serious a person and it took me a long time to be able to joke with my clients. I took them too seriously. Tommy didn't let himself get that involved.

Also a lot of his clients he knew socially before he ever went to work for them. And I always made just the opposite point of never working for friends. I've seen many instances where it didn't work out, where you lost a friendship and the job didn't come out well anyway. Whenever in my office a friend wanted me to do the garden, I would always say, "No, if my partner wants to do it, fine, but I will not." I refused social invitations with clients consistently during my entire practice and I broke with both of my former partners on this very point. They thought it was fun to go to dinner and accepted invitations to their summer homes or weekends, but I never did. I don't like to mix business and pleasure. As I said, several of my clients have become my lifelong friends, but after the job was done. I accepted no social engagement during the time the job was being planned or constructed. And this is a very strong point with me, but Tommy didn't work that way at all.



Riess: Does it make a difference whether money is an issue, I mean, if money is no problem then everything is always much easier. It sounds like money was no problem with many of Tommy's clients.

Scott: This could be. I couldn't say that I had more than four or five clients in my life where money was no problem. I think Tommy had many. I think the money issue was a factor in almost every job I ever did. I can only remember one job where we never discussed money at all. Only one. But Tommy had lots of these. I discussed that point with Tommy, too.

"We never discussed money; we'd just do it and send them a bill." See, that's quite different.

Riess: Speaking of Tommy's wit, there was some talk where he admitted that the only minority group he was interested in was the rich.

Scott: Sounds like Tommy. [Laughter] I don't know what Tommy's politics are, but I bet he's a Republican. Never asked him.

Riess: So he ends up responsible only to himself in all his work.

Scott: He did do a few public housing projects, but I don't think it was because he had a social consciousness or felt a great desire to do them. [Laughter] It was because he was prominent and whoever the architect was probably said, "Well, I'd like Tommy Church to be the landscape architect," and that was that.

#### 9) The American Society of Landscape Architects

Riess: This issue of membership in the ASLA: would you repeat what you told me earlier about Tommy's relationship with that group?

Scott: Yes, I'll have to go back a little bit. Tommy never joined the ASLA early in his life.\*

Riess: Yet in 1937 he exhibited with the ASLA.

Scott: Oh, yes, he was always respected by them and he's been honored by them several times.

---

\*Church elected [non-voting] member in 1930; no longer a member by 1934. ASLA Yearbooks show some Church work 1930-1934.

Scott: But one of the requirements in the ASLA ethical practice code is that you not take any discounts or make any money on the side for materials, that your fees are entirely for services. Now he was in effect doing his own contracting and buying materials at wholesale from nurseries and charging them out at retail. In other words, he was making money on materials.

He knew and recognized that and said, "I can't belong to the ASLA. I can't practice their way and make a living," said he. "Two girls to raise, I can't practice that way. I have to practice the way I feel that I must practice to make a living. So I'm going to go on practicing the way I practice, therefore I can't be a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects." Which is a very honest, great way to be.

Now, the ASLA was set up in Boston and its headquarters were there for a long time and it was very exclusive, instead of being an inclusive organization. Its standards were very high. It had members who were not practicing ethically, this always happens when you really start your standards unreasonably high. It became known as the "landscape priesthood." An article appeared in Harpers magazine, of all places, I wouldn't know the year, an anonymous article which castigated the profession for being exclusive and not representative of the profession as it existed. (Slowly things came about that made the organization become a little bit more broad and more inclusive. One of the things was the establishment here in California of a California Association of Landscape Architects.)

I was a member of the ASLA; I went in about what year? 1929, '30, '32, something like that, but I drew out later. This exclusive eastern organization knew nothing and cared less about our practice here in the west which was quite different, kicked back no money to the chapter from what seemed like very high dues, and did not respond to the problems we presented to them. So a number of people drew out and others who had never been members went together to form a California Association of Landscape Architects of which Professor Vaughan was the first president. This was a bay region organization. It wasn't southern California; they later formed a southern California chapter.

The California group set up an ethical code that was broader, less stringent than the national, and began to try to solve some of our particular problems, such as the fact that there were no landscape contractors and that we had to practice the way Tommy was practicing because there was no established group that could construct our jobs. That was just one of our problems. California was a new state, looked at in comparison with Massachusetts and Washington and the places where the big estates were in the east, where they have an established professional contracting group.

Scott: Tommy joined this association out here which became quite influential and formed the pattern for the broadening of the ASLA and finally one of our members was asked to be the director of the ASLA, went from this organization, moved the office from Boston to Washington, and patterned the organization on the concepts developed here in this California organization.

Tommy just went right along doing what he was doing. He didn't bother to join the ASLA, he was very successful in working the way he wanted to, there was no reason for him to change. He was doing very outstanding work which everybody recognized. He'd been made a director of the American Academy in Rome, he'd been back at Harvard lecturing. Tommy could do no wrong. I mean Tommy was recognized as a successful professional and perfectly honest about his practice.

Riess: Others couldn't have gotten away with it?

Scott: No, I think they could not. Harry Shepherd was one of the prime movers towards registration. Of course, Tommy had to become registered when we did get registration, but we all went in under the grandfather's clause, because we'd been practicing, a great group of us, had been practicing for some time, so we automatically became registered in the state without taking the examination, whereas all new people had to qualify.

Riess: Yes, well, that's interesting in light of that to think that now landscape architects in this state are having to battle even to exist.

Scott: Yes, all over again.

#### 10) Fellow Creators: The Artistic Climate

Riess: I'm interested that Imogen Cunningham was at Tommy's birthday party. Was he involved with a whole artistic crowd also, would you say? What was the extent of his bohemian side?

Scott: Yes, Streatfield asked this same question the last time he was down here. I think all of us were involved with and knew the artists in this region. Tommy knew Adaline Kent very well and, of course, commissioned her to do the big piece of sculpture in the pool up in the Donnell garden. His clients were wealthy enough to occasionally commission a piece of sculpture or buy a piece of sculpture. It was Mrs. Morley at the San Francisco Museum who set up these three exhibits that were held there. She coupled in her mind landscape architecture and art, and she could see the relationship. After the war, there was a great burst of creative activity in all the arts here and we all knew each other.

Scott: All the artists, architects and landscape architects had been brought together planning for the Exposition in 1939, but they couldn't work together well because the Musician's Union threw a monkey wrench in the planning of the Exposition, insisting that all works on Treasure Island had to be executed by union members, and this really threw the artists, and the sculptors particularly, into a frenzy of dissension, whereas we'd all been friends before.

Florence Swift--several people had placed works of hers in gardens. I know Royston put one of her things on a garden in Marin county. Claire Falkenstein we all knew, and her sculpture appeared in the museum and at garden shows. I had a mobile of Claire's in my garden down in Palo Alto. I did a garden for Mrs. Kent, Sr. to display many of Adeline's sculpture; we placed eight or ten pieces of Adeline's sculpture in the garden, designed it for that purpose.

We were a small group of artists and landscape architects. Painters didn't really come into the act, it was mainly sculptors.

Riess: Were you saying that the contact at Treasure Island was the thing that made you all know each other?

Scott: No, there were many artists here and we were all invited to participate in the Exposition. There was a real spirit of creativity and it was recognized by all of the artists at that time.

Riess: Did it center around any particular institutions like the California School of Fine Arts or the museum or any particular gallery?

Scott: Yes, as I said, it was Mrs. Morley at the San Francisco Museum who could see the relationship and invited artists to exhibit together. Of course, there were people teaching at the Labor School also. Claire Falkenstein taught at the Labor School and Bob Howard taught there. Art courses at the Labor School was very strong and of course this was considered radical. [Laughter]

#### 11) Sunset Magazine

Riess: What would you say Sunset magazine did for the profession out here?

Scott: The Lanes bought Sunset and they brought in Walter Doty.\* Elsa Knoll was working on Sunset already as garden editor. But the Lane Publishing Company gave it a new direction certainly.

---

\*[Walter Doty hired as editor by L.W. Lane in 1939. L.W. Lane purchased magazine in 1928. Mel and Bill Lane active with magazine since World War II. S.R.]



Scott: But to answer your question, no magazine would have anything to publish if there weren't a profession producing something for them to publish. There was great activity in this San Francisco Bay Area which they saw, and they began to exploit their opportunity much more than the previous publisher. And, of course, during the war there hadn't been anything happening. This great burst of creative activity came at the end of the war. They began to have flower shows again with model gardens in the flower shows, and to open art and garden centers. People were bursting to build and to express themselves with the use of new materials. It was a wonderful period.

Sunset kept increasing its circulation and its staff; it was exploiting this rebirth of energy and interest in gardening. Sunset did a great deal, I would say, for landscape architects in a way. But they wouldn't have had anything to publish if the work hadn't been there to publish. They began photographing gardens and publishing them.

In another way they did us a disservice, maybe not intentionally. They made people want to employ landscape architects, but they gave the impression that our services were very reasonable, that they weren't exorbitant. That made many people come to us wanting services that we couldn't perform for the price they could afford to pay. It made a group of people who really couldn't afford services for a custom-designed garden at all think that they could do it themselves.

Sunset is a do-it-yourself magazine. Now people do have lots of skills, and American males really have enormous amount of ingenuity and strength and many of them are very good, and can do a lot of the work, but there are techniques to be learned. If you're going to teach an individual client, this is the kind of tutoring that's the most expensive form of education in the world. So that you maybe could produce a plan for them, but then they couldn't interpret it. They wanted to install their gardens themselves. So they forced us into a position of trying to instruct some of these clients in how to do it, a service we simply couldn't perform.

from Landmark, a UCB, Department of Landscape Architecture publication, 1975

## Interviews



### GERALDINE KNIGHT SCOTT

*Geraldine Knight Scott graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. After graduation she continued her studies at Cornell University. In her long career she has been involved with both public and private projects, and in both design and planning. Her experiences also include teaching at the University of California at Berkeley. She has practiced and lived in the Bay Area for many years.*

*"What made you choose landscape architecture in the first place?"*

I'm not sure, I was very young. I was in high school and somehow I did not know any landscape architects. I don't know really how I knew the words, but I only remember that a teacher went around the class asking what were we going to do when we graduated and of course I was going to college, what were we going to study and I said landscape architecture and the class just roared. This was a girls high school in San Francisco. The teacher who was an unusual person, thought this was absolutely crazy. And she said "do you know any landscape architects?" and I said, "no" and she said, "do you want to meet one?" and of course I said I'd like to. She said "you'll never make a living at it, this is a crazy thing for you to study." She took me to see Stephen Child and Stephen Child obviously hadn't starved to death. He lived very well and had a lovely home and fine books and pictures and every evidence of culture and of a life that had been a successful one. And he was a very charming man. I don't remember anything about the interview but I never deviated in my desire to become a landscape architect.

*"What experiences have influenced you most regarding landscape architecture?"*

Well, I guess I go back to when I was shocked to find that landscape architecture was originally in the College of Agriculture, and that I had to take so much science, because I felt that landscape architecture was a design profession and that the design should have been emphasized more, and that's what I strove to get, because I feel that it's both an art and a science. This is part of the great dilemma of the whole profession, that it is both an art and a science and very few people are good at both. So each practitioner tends to emphasize one or the other. My own bent is more toward the artistic though as for math and science, I don't regret having had those. I did learn a lot and with the later emphasis on ecology I found that I was well prepared because I had had a pretty balanced education by the time I got through. I have gone on adding, not to science, but in my practice I have always added and added and added all I could on the art side.

In my later life I think that going to Japan was really a very great esthetic experience for me. It was a kind of fulfillment, because I had studied Japanese brush painting with Mr. Obata here during the depression. I had studied Chinese art in some courses in University Extension. I came back from Europe being very impressed with European art but feeling that there was always something left out, that the emphasis on western European art was wrong and the omission of all the oriental in all art teaching was a disgrace. So I kept trying to fill this void in my art education. Mr. Obata was in the art department here. He kept saying that when he went to Japan he would take me. Well, with wars and one thing and another it wasn't possible until after the 2nd World War. This was in 1954. Mr. Obata of course had entré being a Japanese artist and an American citizen, but having come from a line of Japanese artists, he had entré for us to anything and every place. This was really a very great esthetic experience, because this was before Japan changed into the modern country it is today. It was the beginning of their industrialization. Also I think that going at that time I appreciated it and enjoyed it more than if I had gone twenty years earlier, when I first wanted to go, because I was a more mature person and I could understand and accept the traditional in a way that I, as a young rebel, could never have. Had I been a young person studying landscape architecture in Japan at the same time I would have rebelled, as they later did, because the schools were really perpetuating a set of forms out of which the life had gone. What they were really teaching in landscape architecture in Japan was archeology.

They were measuring the old gardens and redrawing them and doing things in the tradition. They were not fostering the kind of originality which had produced those gardens in the first place, but looking at them from my standpoint I could see through that and really got a very very great lift out of it. . . . I really began to understand the principles behind the Japanese gardens, and for me it was a great inspiration.

The freedom of design, the influence of line and of getting away completely from the geometric has certainly been a very great influence on western design. The Japanese experience had a very great effect in loosening up my design, I feel, and also in giving me a greater appreciation of textures and materials.

*"What do you see as your most rewarding projects?"*

I think the most rewarding projects have been those in which there was a really sympathetic understanding between the client and myself, . . . where in effect, you worked with the client and where the client had some understanding of design. So you present an idea or several ideas and really talk them over, and really modify as you got to know the people, and make the thing much more sympathetic and appropriate for the client. Now this is true whether the client is an individual or a corporation, school board or whatever, finding an individual on that school board, in that corporate structure with whom you really had a sense of rapport. The other kind of exciting job, for me, has been to be part of a very big project. . . . I enjoyed very much working on the Exposition (on Treasure Island) with many, many people dealing with a big idea, which was to exhibit the best of the Pacific area. I also enjoyed very much working on some public housing projects, until I found that the Federal restrictions were too great and you did not have enough liberty to design within the restrictions. I enjoyed the Oakland Museum. Again I was not the principal but I enjoyed very much working on it, because I think its a great building and a great concept. Kevin Roche wanted it to look like an old villa, where artifacts were collected and remained. He wanted the building to be timeless and I believe it is.

What the University's job is, it seems to me, is to somehow make it possible for students to develop more of their individual talents. Now, one of the things, one of the great things that came out of the Free Speech Movement at the University, was a peripheral thing: I saw many very timid students who had deep convictions about free speech, suddenly became very good propagandists, they became very good politicians, such ability had never shown up at all. I don't know whether professors intimidate students. . . . or we don't give enough time, but I think, (and I hate the word selling,) you must be able to put your ideas across, clearly. . . . I think sincerity carries a good deal of weight, I think that if you

believe in what you are doing this is conveyed to other people.

What you do as you come out of the University, what you do next to try to supplement (your education) is your own decision. I think if you are honest with yourself you know what your weaknesses are and your strengths and you try to pick up your weaknesses. You try to supplement what you don't have somehow, as I didn't feel that I'd had enough design and I worked and worked to get it. I think you can do this yourself. It isn't always possible. You have to earn a living, you have to take a job, any kind of a job you can get. And you can learn out of any kind of experience, for a time, but as soon as that situation begins to annoy you and irritate you, you should leave it no matter what. When you are more concerned with the irritations of a situation than with what you're getting out of it, drop it, go hungry first, do anything, because it corrodes your personality, rapidly. There is nothing worse than to work in a situation or for a person that you hate.

I think you have to get both design and science. You can't have too much of either. The unfortunate thing is that the science departments in the University do not want to provide service courses for landscape architects and it takes too much time to take laboratory sciences. You simply haven't time. This is a very big problem. The architect relies on the landscape architect for his knowledge of drainage, of road conditions, of soils, and very often the landscape architect lets him down. So more and more we have specialists, soil technologists, hydrologists, etc. You can't know it all but if you know your weakness then you know the kind of specialist you have to bring on the job, anything that you can't supply, but you have to know enough to be able to talk to that expert and know what he is telling you. Landscape architecture is a synthesizing job, you've got to know enough about a great many subjects to synthesize a lot of material and put it to use. I certainly don't think that a four year course can begin to do it. Its a start that's all it is. . . .

*"What sort of an obligation do you think landscape architects have to serve society and to buck the system when they feel pressured to do something they don't believe in?"*

Hard to generalize here. I think that some people, some landscape architects have strong social consciousness, and if they have they are going to feel a very great obligation to society. I think others don't have this at all. Perhaps the ones that don't have it are the ones who tend to be heavy on the design or art side. They feel that if they do whatever they are able to do as well as they can, then they have fulfilled their obligation to society. . . . Others want to do something very significant on a much larger scale and if they do, they have to work politically, they have to understand the society in which they operate and they have to understand a good deal about economics, and sociology or else they



---

can't do it. And I don't think you can make one kind of person into the other. It goes back again to the particular character traits that the individual has. They're all possible within the field of landscape architecture which is an exceedingly broad one.

If you desperately want to do something in the social sense you will find a way to do it. You will be much happier working for one of the agencies such as the National Parks Service or the National Forest Service or the Environmental Protection Agency — which would have very little precise design in the terms of drawing. But I still consider design a synthesis, of taking conditions, analyzing them and putting them together, if its protection or conservation or whatever, its a design, its a plan. All planning is a synthesis.

There's still an emotional problem here: of the relationship of the individual to the thing that he creates, just as some artists make jewelery and some artists want to put an 18 mile fence across Sonoma County.

What is Christo doing? Is he an artist, is he a landscape architect? I think the environmental design department should bring in Christo and debate this with him. Whether you like it or not it should be discussed. I think we should know what Christo thinks he's doing. I see some very great significance in this . . . jurisdictional boundaries are invisible but you fight them all the time, the lot boundary, the county boundary, the sewer district, its there, its real and you fight it but its not visible. Christo by doing this is cutting across all kinds of things and making a boundary visible. . . Christo is able to put a very big idea across, to get somebody to finance him to do it, it gets a lot of publicity, all of that I deplore, in a way, and yet he makes people think. I don't mean that landscape architects ought to imitate him in anyway but I think landscape architects ought to be learning something from what he is doing, when he wraps a cliff down in Australia or when he builds a curtain across a gorge or when he puts a fence out across the hills of California. . . But I find that the university never grapples with these problems. Universities don't lead, they follow.

Landscape architects ought to do some daring things, occasionally, but they ought to be done out of deep conviction, not as stunts. If they feel for big, significant things they ought to be daring about it. Big ideas are desperately needed in this country but I don't think they can be cooked up in short order and served forth. We have too much of that. I think that landscape architects have only begun, in the schools and elsewhere, to grapple with really big issues and they are not yet trained and so its going to take a long time before we can do it adequately.

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Francis Violich

A PROFESSOR OF CITY PLANNING AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE CONSIDERS  
WHERE THE PROFESSIONS HAVE MOVED SINCE THE 1930s

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Francis Violich

1) The 1930s: In Revolt Against the Eclectics	32
2) Some Categories: Plodders, Sophisticates, Radicals	36
3) Thomas Church, Not a Public Figure	38
4) Twenties Prosperity; Thirties Hard Times	40
5) The Profession Previous to Thomas Church	43
6) "When We Came Along," and Since	45
7) Added Questions on Thomas D. Church and Housing Projects, Hooked Rugs, "Exterior Decoration," and Significance	48

Francis Violich  
January 21, 1976

Interview held at Violich's office, Wurster Hall, U.C., Berkeley

1) The 1930s: In Revolt Against the Eclectics

Violich: In seeking our own identity in the environmental design field, we felt that we were throwing over the traces. But, the traces of whom? I think we were trying to get out from under the eclectics.

You see, most landscape architects and city planners were locked into a set way of working. So were the architects and we were inspired by men like Bill Wurster, Richard Neutra, or Frank Lloyd Wright, each of whom "threw over the traces," in their own way. There was a greater tendency in architecture to be innovative, try new ideas and see things in a new context. Architects began doing that before anyone in landscape architecture.

In the transcript of my tape which you read I think I covered Garrett Eckbo's role in innovation at Harvard and his fresh approaches.\* In my view of things, Garrett "threw over the traces" before any of the landscape architects around here did, certainly including Tommy Church.

Tommy was not really a reformer; he wasn't intellectually stimulated--as was Eckbo--in rather radical change. Church began by redoing the Colonial boxwood garden in the indoor-outdoor context of California. He was playing with forms to a degree but was at first more inspired by the past than the future. For example, the Italian villas he'd seen which have boxwood parterres and that sort of thing were reflected in his early designs. But he didn't propose drastic changes. Rather, he simplified the forms and used them as integral parts of Bill Wurster's buildings, which were mildly contemporary.

---

\*"Interview with Francis Violich" by David Streatfield, October 13, 1973.

Violich: I believe there was a paragraph or two in the Streatfield transcript that talks about my first having met Tommy Church, and what I was doing at that moment.\* That was back when I was a junior at U.C. We were well groomed and well trained in Italian villa design and the traditions of Le Notre and Versailles.

We had excellent coverage; we knew about everything that happened in the history of landscape architecture. And the word "eclectic" had been made a kind of dirty word to us by Frank Lloyd Wright, that is, for those of us who read. We tried to see design in earlier periods as "contemporary" to its time, not to be copied.

Riess: That was separate from your training, though, because your training wasn't assigning you reading Frank Lloyd Wright, by any means.

Violich: No, but I can remember around 1933 my bringing the book [Wright's autobiography] in and showing it to people in the Department at U.C. There was Bill Mott who in the 1950s revised the Oakland Park System and went on to build the East Bay Regional Parks, then later became Reagan's state recreation appointment. Many of my contemporaries learned how to do it, without asking too many basic questions. A lot of teaching gets done that way, and a lot of learning too. You "learn how to do it." Then, for the rest of your life you "do it." But that isn't the way we thought; we felt there must be some other way. So we began going into Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier and new thinkers of that sort.

---

\*I remember that in the summer between my junior and senior years, I had heard of William Wurster, who already had been identified with modern architecture, and I had the bright idea to play around with some contemporary garden designs over the summer. So I went to Bill Wurster's office in San Francisco and I can remember like it was yesterday, Bill standing there looking so erect and perfectly confident in his small office up on Montgomery Street. I felt I was just a little student and explained to him that I would like to borrow some plans of contemporary houses he had done, just to experiment with contemporary garden design on my own. His mouth went wide open at the idea and he turned to the man standing next to him and said, "Well, Tommy, this must be one of Punk Vaughan's boys." His exact words... "This must be one of Punk Vaughan's boys." ...

But Tommy was not integrated into the Department. Punk never made any attempt to bring him in. Punk was never a very lively person in this sense. What he did bring to us was this--he had been in Europe and had already broken with Beaux Arts and he gave you the feeling that there was something else..... [From Interview with Francis Violich, Oct. 17, 1973, by David C. Streatfield.]



Violich: I remember when I had the book around school people were saying, "You're not reading that, are you? Wright left his wife and went off with another woman." They considered him an evil, immoral man, who had little to say about how to do it.

But at any rate the idea of eclecticism entered our heads as being something that would stultify us and restrain us. Therefore we weren't going to do things the way they had been done. Eckbo was really the first of us to go boldly in new directions.

Riess: When you talk about "we," is this the undergraduate "we," or the Telesis "we"?

Violich: Well, it was sort of the Telesis "we" which was our little corner in the undergraduate "we" in the Department of Landscape Architecture. We were the minorities that were always causing trouble for the conservative faculty and the rest of the class who were quietly going ahead and learning "how to do it."

Riess: I have a list of the people in the landscape architecture classes back then, and I wondered which were the ones who would have read Frank Lloyd Wright.

Violich: Well, I can pick out more easily the ones who wouldn't. Now here's one who was part of the questioners.

Riess: Dudley Trudgett?

Violich: Yes, he's been in southern California now and worked for years with Phil Shipley who was conservative but a good businessman. Dudley's ideas prevailed. Cordy Sunderman was just about as conservative! Many of these were people from small towns in California. Let's say there were one, two, three or four out of our class of about sixteen who would be caught dead reading, you see, let alone conversing about these new directions. I'd certainly include Ruth Jaffe and Corwin Mocine.

Riess: Then could you talk to Vaughan about it?

Violich: Yes, we could talk to Vaughan about it and as a matter of fact I was pulling out some of my old college work and sketches recently and my children were around--"Dad, you mean you did all these things?"--I never throw anything away. And there was a photo copy about so big of an assignment that Vaughan gave us when he first came to the department.



Violich: I remember clearly when he joined the faculty, the way he walked into the room...I was the chairman of the committee who wrote Vaughan's memorial statement. It hasn't been published yet, but that would be something interesting to get.\* In that I mentioned that when he opened the door into the drafting room, and walked in--the first morning he was going to start to work--we were waiting there to see what we were going to get, and we see this young guy walk into the room. Well, as we said in the memorial statement this was one of the first breaths of fresh air to enter our design studio.

One of the first assignments he gave us when he discovered that we couldn't letter well was intended to give practice in lettering and graphic layout. He asked us to design a poster which would be all hand-lettering, but which would form a design. So I took "FLW," Frank Lloyd Wright's initials, in big block letters and filled them with "Form Follows Function," and other phrases from his philosophy. When Vaughan saw that he just patted me on the back and hung it up, and I went home to mother with head in clouds. "The new teacher thinks I'm great."

Well, to get back to that first time I met Tommy Church in Bill Wurster's office, the reason I had gone there was because I was eager to do some of this exploratory designing, you see, as a student, I was looking for new forms and I was saying that since Wurster was doing buildings in new forms, then what were the new garden forms going to be? (Vaughan really was pushing us in this direction.)

I went to Bill Wurster's office. I'd never met him. And I asked him if I could borrow the plans of one of the houses that he had done so that I could play around with this during the summer. He turned to the man standing next to me and said, "Well, Tommy, this must be one of Punk Vaughan's boys." [Laughter] (It's amazing what you do, you know, when you're young.)

The point is that that kind of "throwing over of the traces" was the kind that grew out of deep personal convictions that some individuals had, and you either had it or you didn't, then. And a little later on it came to be the thing to do. You had to do it differently. And maybe that's one of the problems today, that everyone's still caught up in that, that no matter how you do a new thing, you've got to do it differently. You can't do it the same way it's been done.\*\*

---

\*Hollyngsworth Leland Vaughan, 1905-1974. In Memoriam, U.C., Berkeley, March 1976.

\*\*See end of interview for further discussion.

Riess: Do you think in all fields, or just especially in design fields?

Violich: I mean in design fields. I think there is a certain amount of that, that you wouldn't be caught dead conforming, or doing it the old way, but in those days it took a great deal of personal conviction...

I'm assuming you want to keep the conversation more directed toward Tommy Church.

Riess: Well, but also towards the background of landscape architecture. For instance, the curriculum was unchanging at least prior to the arrival of Vaughan for ten or twenty years.

Violich: Yes. Even then it didn't change all that much.

Riess: Were there changes within it? I mean, when you say each year the new student wants to do something slightly different, how does that work inside of a curriculum where nothing is changing?

## 2) Some Categories: Plodders, Sophisticates, Radicals

Violich: Well, as I showed you here [looking at graduates' list], out of those sixteen students there were only about three of us who were eager beavers, seeing things differently. For example, we marched right up to the architecture building and became involved with any among the faculty and students with whom we could make friends. Among them were Howard Moise and Michael Goodman, to name only two. The other landscape students who were sort of rosebush-planter types and not very broad, culturally--they'd been raised in valley towns like Fresno and I'd been raised in San Francisco, and it makes all the difference--they'd say, "What do you hang out with those guys for, those architects?"

I mean to say that there's no parallel between our times and the 1960s here--the mass rebellions and overthrowing the curriculum and so forth. Ours was a very small minority movement.

Later Eckbo and I went back to Harvard together. Just to show you how Harvard was following a similar sort of pattern, Eckbo became the ringleader of a small group of rebellionists back there. He stayed right in landscape architecture and I went over to city planning at M.I.T. But he and Jim Rose, Dan Kiley--I don't know if those names mean anything to you, but Dan Kiley did Dulles Airport, and he's one of the most superior, how can you say it, may be the most superior landscape architect in the country. And J.O. Simonds--another leader in the field--was back there, too.

Violich: At any rate, Garrett was the ringleader of those few people back there. It was a similar type of minority that started "throwing over the traces," throwing it all out.

Riess: What did everyone go to Harvard for, then?

Violich: Well, partially to get away from home, partially to see the east coast, and partially because Harvard was the Jerusalem of the field. [Laughter] And to pursue graduate work, as a symbol of the higher education our parents never had. There were no graduate programs of any meaning out here. Oh, there was a graduate program, but just two or three students.

Riess: But it wasn't in the vanguard of anything?

Violich: No, it wasn't in the vanguard. I mean being in the vanguard wasn't the big thing then, you see? At least in design, in landscape architecture. We were there when Gropius came, and I remember that like yesterday, the day Gropius walked into the hall of casts and they had taken all the casts out to clean it up and the first thing he said was, "Where are all the plaster casts of all the fine Beaux Arts architecture?"

Let me see if I can explain in this way. There are all the people who are really not very creative and therefore couldn't do anything else but to do it the way it had been done. But very observant, very good taste and all that. So they could work in this eclectic fashion of picking up styles that had been done and piecing them together for application in the California situation.

Riess: In the expensive estates?

Violich: Yes, well the expensive estates or even like Tommy started doing-- there weren't any more estates so he started doing tiny, very sophisticated gardens for well-to-do people. And a lot of what Tommy Church did, the gravel and the boxwood came out of the French-Italian villas and all that type of thing, though later he became much more inventive.

There's a garden of Tommy Church's in this book that demonstrates what I was saying.\* It's absolutely Versailles done on a teeny-weeny scale. And it's symmetry but with a very subtle variation. See, on this side he has a slightly different hedge arrangement than on that side. There wasn't any real breaking away.

---

\*"Contemporary Landscape Architecture," catalog, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1938.







## GARRETT ECKBO

*Garret Eckbo has been a leader in landscape architecture for over 30 years. He received his undergraduate education at the University of California at Berkeley and then went on to Harvard for a masters degree. In his diverse career he has travelled throughout the world, been a founder of EDAW and taught at the University of California at Berkeley. He continues to teach and has recently opened an office in San Francisco.*

*What do you see as the important phases of Landscape Architecture?*

In the late 19th century, landscape architecture included the broad concerns of today but was not so sophisticated technically. Olmsted and his colleagues had influential clients who were not as narrow minded as today, were less fearful and did various big things like park systems. Then in the first part of the 20th century landscape architecture became an elite design profession influenced by the Chicago exhibition of 1898, dealing with Civic Centers and serving the upper income bracket.

In the 1920's the depression produced the P.W.A. (Public Works Administration) and the C.C.C. (Civilian Conservation Corps.) It also generated a more middle class and economy minded garden clientele. This is where I got started after I finished school. I worked a year in nurseries in southern California. And then I went into a Depression project called the Farm Security Administration which designed camps and housing for migrant workers.

During the war, I did war housing. In 1945 I set up an office and then for about 15 years I did mostly gardens, a few schools, parks, a kind of practice generated by the profession, a middle class garden practice with a few richer clients here and there. Of course the joke of the middle class garden client is that they never have the resources to solve the problem the way it could be solved. That is a byprod-

uct of the way we use the land and use our building resources. People get so spaced that they cannot afford to develop and manage the land according to its potential so that if you take an airplane ride over any suburban area, you see mostly backyards with fruit trees, clotheslines, motorcycles and things and that's about all in spite of all the effort of *Sunset Magazine*.

Later there was a gradual expansion of public works such as schools and parks. It was different for different people. In 1962 the emphasis began to shift towards large scale things and from then on it expanded to the point where I have done maybe two or three gardens in the last ten years. It expanded further into environmental planning, area planning, system planning and it keeps proliferating with endless ingenuity in the writing of planning programs and environmental studies.

*"Is the emphasis of the profession changing, with the economics of the country or because of attitude changes?"*

There has always been the planning wing and the design wing. The planning wing are the people who do the large scale conservation oriented work (such as national parks) which is important, but it is a management oriented rationalized way of looking at the environment. Then there is the design wing which concentrates on new development at any scale. The fascination of design is to do something no one has done before. It gets you into a little argument about being original. It is a fact that the design oriented person, the creative person, wants to go beyond what has been done, and of course that is the essence of the human process, to go beyond what has been done before. If that force did not exist we would still be living in caves.

A designer is a person who is interested in the world, curious, fascinated, always open to impressions and information, and feelings. He or she does not have preconceptions. It is like a sponge with a critical eye. This sets up a dichotomy. It is critical in the sense that you have a qualitative standard and attitude so that you can have some notions of how things can be better. So that means that as you are working you are at the same time gathering information and being critical of it, analyzing it and reacting to it and the essence of design is a balancing of these two processes, being open to the world and reacting to it in a constructive way. A designer is not necessarily a professional. All kinds of people are designers. They put together information and make judgements. What color necktie do you wear today? Should we have hamburger or sole for dinner tonight? A professional designer is a person who gets paid to do design. That gets you into the whole professionalization of things that perhaps people should be able to do for themselves.

A lot of design practice is education. It is hard to set up a clientele unless it already exists. In an area like this there have been high powered professionals

operating for a long time starting with Tommy Church. When I was in school he had already been in business for ten years and at that time there were no more than 4 or 5 landscape architects in the Bay Area. Then the existence of the department at Berkeley influenced landscape architecture. So this is an exceptional area. You have this in a few other places, in Boston or Washington D.C., a little less in Los Angeles. And then there are parts of the country where there are very few landscape architects.

*"How do you see people's change in attitude toward the outdoor environment influenced by this profession?"*

The profession is still complaining that people are not understanding their environment. The profession has expanded to the point where there are 50 offices in the Bay Area today. I remember when there were just 5. We would all like to sit in our office and have a line of clients out our door and not have to chase jobs. But, it just does not work that way. That's a dichotomy of the society. There are very few who do not have to chase jobs. The one's who do not are the ones who for many years used the technique of public relations and images to get them in a position that clients will come to them. That involves diversion of energies and time. The situation tends to get so that the professional puts most of his creative energy into promotion and getting work and less into actually doing work. There is that tendency. It takes so much nervous energy. One can get so wound up in getting work, that there is a tendency to relax when you get it. Then there's the pressure for growth. You get one job and you do that yourself but if you want to spend time getting more jobs then you hire someone to do the first job. Then you get three jobs and you need to hire another person and it goes on and on. And there's a tendency to chase work in order to keep the office working.

I started alone in 1942 and last year when I left the firm after all those years we had 75 people, 4 offices, 4 principles and 15 shareholders. So there are big offices and small offices. The big offices tend to dominate the field just because their kind of organization has a geometric veil. When there are plenty of eager beavers chasing for jobs you get a multiplying effect.

*"Do you see the profession changing with the economy, depression?"*

Just as I saw in the past, there will be an expan-



sion of public work and reduction of private work. This does not mean that government will take up the whole slack. It is hard to predict because of the whole politics of the economic situation. It is the same old story of the special interests trying to manipulate the situation for their own benefit. Special interests in one way or another produced the situation. The question of energy is used to set back the 'Environmental Movement'. People try to tell us that economics is like the law of nature but that's as they say, bull. It isn't a law of nature, it is a system produced by people and may be modified by people; it is a question of power.

*"What projects have you found most exciting during different times in your life?"*

I used to love to do gardens when the resources were adequate. The garden is the grassroots of design. It is sneered at today. It is dismissed as an era of frivolous activity. It is in the garden that you get down to the case of how people relate intimately with their environment. And seen properly this can be the salvation of community design at all scales because without that individualized experience and approach you tend to produce what I call 'institutionalized design' where everything looks alike because people are seen as being alike. It is designed for common denominators, least controversial, least amount of reaction, a thing that everyone will accept, which is what the old beaux-arts system was and what park design has become. Park design is still what Olmsted set out to do, with the meadow, the trees, and the pond except it has an added input of a recreational element.

The work I did for the Farm Security Administration after I got out of school was a great stimulus for me. We were dealing with camps and housing developments in rural land, cheap land with lots of acreage, in areas like the central valley in Arizona. There was no particular natural landscape to deal with, a flat land, nothing much there. Well, I developed a lot of big ideas, tree systems and such and we actually planted it. You can still see the remnants, in some of those camps up and down the valley. Trees are important in hot countries. I over-designed a lot. I saw impractical things that we had done. I should mention that the Farm Security work politicized me. I had not been politically minded before. We were dealing with people who had been tracked off the land. They had been living out of the back seats of their car. It was like in *The Grapes of Wrath*. I began to wonder how come the richest nation in the world could maintain an institution of migrating families, where kids never get through school. This made me think.

Other projects were exciting not so much for the kind of job as much as the potential. We did a few downtown malls, in Sacramento and Fresno, which were quite rewarding because they were complex urban design situations in the center of cities.

Some planning studies are interesting just because there is a potential in them. Any examination





of the environment is interesting in which we can project something that might happen and might be an improvement. People who study analysis information and never comes up with an answer are boring. You just become a geographer. A geographer is all right but we are not geographers. You have to find some kind of answer which is potentially exciting. The exciting time for a designer is the relatively short period when the information and the reaction come together and we begin to see what may be done. It may be an hour or it may be weeks or months. It is the production of the ideas that keeps the designer growing and also keeps the society that he is working in growing. The society or culture which does not generate ideas to improve itself is dying, so it is not just a personal venture or ego trip. For some it is, and it is easy to get off on that aspect of it. Everyone has an ego and it is a matter of proportions and relationships. Creative production comes out of the unpredictable ways and places. You learn a lot about the potential for geometric design in relationship to how it is done. Geometry does not necessarily mean a formal feeling, any more than irregularity means an informal feeling.

You get into the questions for instance in housing of the relationship of private space and public space. The standard American single family housing development has been based on a kind of rationalization of private land use which was the most convenient way to segregate the land, build up and sell and get out. And yet the public services like schools and parks participate in the same market scramble as does the home buyer. A free for all, each interest trying to get its piece of land to do its thing. There is little public control. This has produced an enormous waste of land because the subdivision precedes the design. So no one knows how the lots could be used. You get sideyards and front

yards. Sideyards are certainly wasted space. Frontyards may or may not be depending on what they do for the street, but they really are a part of the street. The backyards may or may not be a waste of space depending on how the house is designed and how they relate to each other. There may or may not be adequate public facilities. So there has been a long struggle for adequate parks. We had a break through some years ago in the condominium idea, cluster housing which made it possible to take a piece of land of some size and develop a more reasonable relationship between public and private spaces. All the experts tell us that we have to expect to live in high rise, high density housing close together and all the people including the experts want to live in low density single family housing. So it is a struggle over the use of resources. There is no reason why everyone in the U.S. could not live on 1/2 acre lots if we could all get together and decide we wanted to. It would not use up more than 10% of the land. That is not true of all countries. Probably everywhere, we could live the way we wanted to, (maybe not in Japan) if all could bring themselves to some kind of organized planning and programming. That gets you into another problem of centralization of power and authority because to do that kind of planning you have got to have some kind of centralized direction. That leads you into bureaucracy and arbitrary rulings. There is no fine and simple answer.

Violich: But there is something here that Ernest Born did; this, you see, this is really breaking away.

Riess: Yes, that's very dramatic.

Violich: That is, what didn't happen in Church's work, that did happen in Eckbo's work. But in speaking of Tommy I am getting over to a second group. In the first group were the people who were just not very competent. I'd say that John W. Gregg fell into that position, and many of the students who were intelligent and capable.

Then there were the people who I would say Tommy Church and Punk Vaughan were part of, who were much more sophisticated, much broader culturally, and could bring to a design more of the sophistication and refinement and adapt it to the needs in a really integrating kind of way. Okay, that was the second group.

The third group would be the people like Eckbo and Jim Rose and Dan Kiley who really shifted their design--and even whole political philosophy over to the left of center. We all took strong positions lined up with philosophies from New Deal and further to the left. For example, Ruth Jaffe, in my class, and Corwin Mocine--in the class that followed and now teaching here--and I worked for Roosevelt's Farm Security Administration on housing in farm communities for migratory Dust Bowl refugees and that led to Telesis.

Well, there was a direct line, you could say, from this "ready-to-throw-off-the-traces," "Frank Lloyd Wright is our hero," attitude, and Eckbo back at Harvard going into it completely--almost influenced by the abstract painters and artists and all and from there to a broad social philosophy--right into the Farm Security Administration and from there, to Telesis.

Whereas Tommy Church, Punk Vaughan, and others in the second group I referred to, didn't have that kind of active intellectual and professional growth.

### 3) Thomas Church, Not a Public Figure

Riess: Well now we're talking about a ten year difference. Where does all that fit in there? I mean Tommy Church is a whole ten years before you, I mean the year he graduated.

Violich: No, but he didn't graduate from Berkeley. He came out and took graduate work.

Riess: He graduated from Berkeley in 1923.

Violich: You're right. My goodness--a full ten years--from 1920's prosperity to 1930's depression--no wonder! Then what did he do?

Riess: And then he went to Harvard, you see. And I was wondering whether you all would have gone to him to find out about going to Harvard and all that sort of thing.

Violich: No. Frankly, we didn't even know about Tommy Church as a public figure or anything like that in 1934.

Riess: He went to Harvard, then he traveled and had a few jobs and then he was teaching here for a year when you were a freshman.

Violich: No. I don't remember him teaching while I was there. I came in '29 and that was when I first met Tommy Church, when we met him. And he was, it's true, something of a leader in the field even before Vaughan came to teach.

Riess: That's right. Tommy Church taught at Ohio and met Vaughan there and brought him here.

Violich: Where was Church born? He's not a West Coaster, is he?

Riess: No, he was born in Boston but then got out here in his early school years.

Violich: I didn't realize that. But I wanted to make clear that he was not a figure that influenced us the whole time that I was here between '29 and '34. He just didn't come around often. Of course, he was looked upon with special distinction because he was doing interesting, sophisticated work and producing landscape work when there were few others around at that time.

But I don't have an image of Church being an intellectual, or even having any particular contact with the students. However, at an ASLA meeting or alumni gathering he was a very friendly guy to have around.

But in terms of the things that were stirring and worrying us, we turned further afield to Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier and the like. And as I said, that summer--probably 1931--when I was looking for a garden to do some experimenting with, that may have been the first time I actually met him personally.

Riess: I guess that's when he was working very closely with Wurster on Pasatiempo in Santa Cruz county.



Violich: I suppose you'll have to follow Wurster's development at this time because as Wurster went up, Tommy Church went right up with him.

Riess: And yet Wurster was able to be much more political and go up and down all sides of the street in a way that Tommy Church never did.

Violich: Oh, yes. That's what I was saying on the phone yesterday, that in all the things we were doing later on in the 1930s--Farm Security, rural communities, Telesis and all--Church wasn't a guy to get around, and become involved. Though I know he was interested and did lend some support. He was much more of a loner than Bill Wurster who was a very gregarious person. Bill just loved to have audiences, to be with people and to influence them with ideas and all that. Tommy Church didn't play that kind of game.

And it was probably just as well for us, because that meant there just wasn't any dominant landscape architecture figure in the Bay Area that we would have wanted to follow. This was great for us because it gave us a chance to take certain kinds of leadership and be innovative in a way that wouldn't have otherwise happened. Yet, he took a leading position ultimately by doing such fine professional work.

Riess: Betsy Church said that Tommy deliberately cut out all the garden club speeches and public stuff early in his career.

Violich: I always had the feeling about Tommy that he wasn't very comfortable with other people. You might say he played his ego down and his gardens up! You always felt in a group that any moment he was going to be on his way out. It was hard to grasp him. He lived to a very productive schedule and you had contact with him sort of in passing. He had a lovely, soft personality but he didn't have the warm sociability that made you attracted to Punk Vaughan. They were both similar in that way, that they were kind of loners. Vaughan was much more gregarious, parties out at his bay front house in Richmond every year; year after year, even up to the time he started to become very ill, he's always had many, many people there. But Tommy Church didn't do that kind of thing so much. His small-scale urban dwelling on Hyde Street was not designed for large groups.

#### 4) Twenties Prosperity; Thirties Hard Times

Riess: Well, now, would someone who was ten years earlier than you just already be ten years too late to be in on a revolutionary movement?

Violich: I think you have to look at this in the context of other forces. Tommy Church was in school in '23 out here, which meant that the effects of World War I were already over. The prosperity of the '20s was beginning.

Violich: The automobile had just arrived as a major environmental influence. In about '23, when I was around twelve years old, I can remember running down Fifth Avenue to Golden Gate Park and Lincoln Way in San Francisco, and shouting, "Come on, everybody, there's an automobile!" Well, these automobiles were what made suburbia and the break-up of Marin and Peninsula estates possibilities--the growth, money, and so forth.

He came into that kind of thinking and naturally you wouldn't start rebelling against something which was already a new direction to begin with. So I think that there wasn't a reason for "kicking over traces," but I suppose in a certain way Church was changing the thinking of the people that had gone before him, but that's too far back for me to have any connection with. What I'm saying is that in the context in which we worked, I came into the University at the end of the 1920s when my father had just gone through bankruptcy and was home with a stroke, and my mother was having to work to support the family, and at the time I was earning around \$3 a day at the Emporium, life was just at the bottom of the barrel.

And we at the University during that period couldn't envision upper-income homes. We felt that our teaching was all wrong because we were having to think in terms of elite life styles and we knew very well that this wasn't going to be a part of our lives.

It is so interesting to look at these names! Here's a name that might have some bearing, at least in setting Tommy Church in what kind of role he played among all these different people, classifying him: Sharon Farr!

Sharon Farr came from the Sharon family. And he is a nephew or first cousin of Fred Farr, the former state legislator from Monterey, who was responsible for a lot of legislation for scenic highway planning, Big Sur, and all that. Well, Sharon Farr's family owned the Palace Hotel and when I was a boy we were very close friends with the interior decorator for Sloane's, who had decorated the Sharon's estate, and knew the caretaker, a Mr. Dumesnil, a very cultivated person. We would get invited down to the Sharon estate on the Peninsula to go swimming.

[Laughing] This was one of the reasons we children in both families just looked forward to going down in the Studebaker with the windows that slid back, and to swimming in the Sharon's pool--and there was a lake with swans. It was just the height of everything! That, plus the movies of the 1920s, was enough to give you childish delusions of grandeur. When I came to school here, Sharon Farr was just finishing, and we had something to share in his background of the Palace Hotel and

Violich: the Sharon family estate. We still receive a Christmas card, never missed, from his wife, every year! They've lived in Washington, D.C. all these years and I went to gatherings at their house in Chevy Chase when I was with the Pan American Union 1945 to '47. Yes, the University was a great place for bringing together people of different backgrounds.

Riess: I read your other interview and I know some of your reasons for choosing landscape architecture, but did you think in those pre-Depression days that it was going to be a place to make money, ever?

Violich: The last thing we ever thought about was making money!

Riess: Okay, but you just gave a good reason to be thinking about making money, because life was so tough.

Violich: Oh, to earn a living! Yes, to earn a living, yes, but not to make money. No, we were not thinking in that direction at all. No, we were interested in advancing the culture, in creative works that we would be personally identified with, like the great architects and the great landscape architects of the past. And I think we were also imbued with a kind of social philosophy of reform of the environment, the social environment, and, to a certain extent, the whole social and economic system.

That was something new that didn't exist in the mid-twenties, the idea of our preferring to work for Farm Security Administration and public housing and things of that sort. I remember Vernon deMars. (I don't know whether you've run into his name, but he was a leader in the Farm Security Administration and recently retired from the Architecture faculty.) I just thought of this because I ran into him and he was talking about his mother, the other day. I can remember Vernon's mother saying, "I know that Vernon is very talented but we've always felt so disappointed that he really didn't go into architecture." You see, architecture to her was designing people's houses.

And that was the last thing he wanted to do. He's designed probably only three "houses" in his whole life. He was much more interested in the social problems that Steinbeck dealt with in Grapes of Wrath and providing the kind of environment that would improve life for people. That was the thing that swept us up, this minority group we were speaking of earlier among us, that was probably not thought of much in the mid-twenties.

I think I would have been a very different person if I had come out of school when Tommy Church did. He started college in 1919. He would have been in high school in World War I. So naturally coming out of school at the very beginning of the '20s, this was his formative period. Do you think I've got that idea so that it makes sense?



Riess: I do think it makes sense. I mean in a way it's what I wanted you to say because I think it makes sense, too. [Laughter]

Wasn't the line you and your "minority" group took so "all or nothing" that a landscape architect couldn't do both the public works and the private? Except perhaps Eckbo?

Violich: True--but private work came later on. Eckbo had a number of years with the Farm Security Administration and so did I. That served to soften our edges. He began to realize that if he was going to do anything creative in the visual and physical sense, he wasn't going to be able to reform the social and economic system at the same time. And he began to write books and relax into a lively prosperous private practice. In both books and practice he maintained an innovative view through the years.

#### 5) The Profession Previous to Thomas Church

Violich: Just let me look down this list of people of Tommy Church's time and see if there are any comments I could make about them that would highlight his special qualities. Harry Shepherd, he was our plant materials instructor, and the first student in the Department! Gosh!

Horace Cotton. If I remember right, when I looked in the yellow section of the San Francisco telephone books in 1933 or 1934 to see who had landscape architecture offices where I might get experience, I think that he and Tommy Church were the only two. But I don't remember what Cotton did. My general impression was that he stayed sort of close to engineering and possibly horticulture.

Howard Gilkey. For years he pioneered the Garden Shows in Oakland. And talk about people throwing over their traces, when Butler Sturtevant was hired to do the Garden Show, in 1935, he departed completely from the woodsy and rustic effects of Howard Gilkey. Have you ever seen any of the Oakland Garden Shows?

Riess: Yes.

Violich: Gilkey used to do the shows with the wire frames 20 feet wide covered with Sphagnum moss and with orchids spilling out, nearby a waterfall. All invented by Howard Gilkey.

Well, then Butler Sturtevant came along. He was in this second group I was talking about, not revolutionists, more refined and sophisticated in design. One year when I was working with him, he had

Violich: a basic theme--the French Renaissance garden--and we had a grand allée at the end of the second story terrace. You came in the building, up ramps to a great terrace on the top and looked down this allée of poplar trees several hundred feet long terminating in a huge pool and fountain.

We had to get these poplar trees from the nurseries early in the year and keep them in wet sawdust out in an unheated warehouse to retard their leafing out. Then a week or so before the show we brought them in and placed them to form the allée. We built artificial hedges of wild huckleberry that I obtained from a friend's place near La Honda.

Then he wanted me to force the leaves out by heating the interior space of the exhibit hall. We improvised stoves of some kind and began to build fires. Well, that was when I came to the parting of the ways with Butler Sturtevant! The fire department came and said, "What are you doing?" [Laughter]

This was a very exciting idea and great experience, but the design was only sophisticatedly eclectic--not sophisticatedly creative.

Riess: Also, I thought garden shows were to show people what they could do on their own.

Violich: Well, yes, the grand allée was the main theme and around the back of the hedge you had all these individual demonstration gardens. I designed several.

So, Tommy Church would fall pretty much into that category with Butler Sturtevant, but maybe not quite as literal in his design.

You know some of these names I've never seen before. That's interesting, I might suspect that some of these people preceding Tommy Church were really non-entities because I just don't recall hearing of them in practice. Thomas Vint, I know that name, but most of these names just don't mean anything to me.

Riess: From what I remember of Professor Gregg's oral history, he seemed to be a little amazed at this whole field of landscape architecture himself; even though he was there in charge of it, he subscribed to the notion, it seems to me, that any individual could still just go to the nursery and buy some plants and make a nice backyard for themselves.

Violich: Yes. He was way over on the horticulturalist side. The horticulturalist with an understanding of history, because he did know his landscape history and he could design you a French garden or an Italian garden,

Violich: but mostly it was the pastoral British-English informal style that was his cup of tea. He was not a creative designer, but devoted to the field and to his students.

Looking at the people who preceded Tommy Church here, there isn't a one of them, neither Cotton, nor Gilkey, who were any more than Greggian, design-minded horticulturalists. Vint became quite a well-known person in national parks.

You could probably say with some assurance that Tommy Church was probably the first out of this group of students who was basically a designer. I note that there are almost the same number of students that preceded Tommy Church as there are in my entire class so he would seem to be the first that developed a sense of design and its relation to architecture.

Remember I mentioned earlier the way some of the other students would say, "What are you going up with those architecture students for? Consorting with them, taking architecture courses?" So that may be a clue: preceding Church it was quite agriculturally and horticulturally-oriented, without very much sense of architectural relationship. Tommy Church may have gotten a broader point of view from Harvard and Europe.

Riess: Well he had a much more sophisticated background, also, I think.

Violich: Yes, that's what I was thinking. I don't know about his family but I suspect that he seemed to have the cut of a person from a somewhat more cultured level of society.

He [Church] might have well been the pioneer among the students who went through U.C., who went east, and his big thing was embracing architecture. Also, it was probably easy for him to identify with the well-being of the twenties and feel comfortable with people who had money and could do very sophisticatedly-designed gardens, which Gregg wouldn't have had, most of these people wouldn't have had.

6) "When We Came Along," and Since

Violich: Whereas when we came along we came in just when the world was falling apart, and as I said, I would have a nickel in my pocket when I got home to my house on Fifth Avenue in San Francisco on Friday night, and with that nickel I'd get down to the Emporium the next day to go to work and then I'd come home with my \$2.67 that I earned. That same \$2.67 would get me back and forth to Berkeley for the rest of the week and I'd have one nickel left to start the weekly cycle again.

Riess: And that makes a revolutionary out of you.

Violich: Exactly! Garrett Eckbo was in very, very impoverished circumstances. His mother and father were separated, and there'd be days he'd be on campus hungry, and seemed to be just skin and bones. We were all very hard up. So these were very different times than Tommy Church's.

Another thing: maybe there weren't very many people who came into the field in the first place interested in doing gardens. Some of them were interested in the wide open spaces. The National Park movement in the 1920s was very important after World War I, with the automobile, which could get people to the parks in large numbers. When I finished I was besieged with telegrams with offers from state and national parks.

Riess: Gregg did teach a class called Modern Civic Design, I believe.

Violich: That is one of the reasons why I went there [Landscape Architecture Department, U.C.]. I was interested in city planning even before I came because of my feeling for San Francisco and the Civic Center. And that course was one of the great disappointments that made me decide to go back to Harvard. I knew I wanted to go somewhere else, because the Modern Civic Design course was nothing but landscaping for the city hall and the civic center--I remember that was the project, the civic center for Berkeley. But it wasn't designing a whole city.

[Speaking of rebellions] It seems to me that as a young person you're supposed to be coming up with new things. And then it gets to be that we have a campus like we have. I mean outside of our well-designed private gardens, shambles! For example, the courtyard of Wurster Hall is absolutely a disaster in design. There's no place to sit in it; there are no comforts, there's no feeling of sociability.

This was brought out by one of the other faculty members in landscape architecture who did a slide presentation in a class of mine analyzing this whole building. He took that courtyard apart, in terms of its utter failure to be of service to humanity. Like you want to go and sit in the sun: well, you find you can sit in the sun but the bench is made about 24" deep which is just too deep for you to be able to get your back comfortable, so that you have to bring your feet up. And the reason that it's that deep is because Joe Esherick, the architect, wanted it to be in scale with the building, not in scale with a person's body. Okay. And then furthermore, if you want to sit in the sun you're faced with 65 feet of solid concrete and below that a couple hundred feet of asphalt on which the sun is glaring so that your eyes are all squinted up.

I think this is what's the problem at the moment, that young people don't seem to be willing to settle down and do, in a way, what Church was doing. Not being too concerned about what the total intellectual



Violich: content is of what he's doing, but are doing a very solid, substantial and pleasing, psychologically pleasing and visually pleasing, design for outdoor uses.

This garden of Tommy's [looking at picture], the young revolutionists around this building would just tear apart in terms of its smooth way of providing a setting for the leaders of the capitalist movement. They would see it in that intellectual light. But they couldn't design anything as good as this.

This is a point that Allan Temko makes often. He pointed to the old Mining Building one day when I was walking across the campus with him, and he said, "These sophisticated modernists who designed Wurster Hall and all that, they couldn't do a building like that [John Galen Howard Mining Building] because they don't have that much talent." So a lot of the creative talent around here that did get its full expression in the early works of people like Tommy Church and Garrett Eckbo and others has become submerged in our generation by all this intellectual foam.

Riess: I could also imagine that a lot of cynicism would develop about the whole thing. It doesn't sound like you are particularly cynical, but there'd be a clear and present danger of that.

Violich: Well, I shouldn't really overdramatize the situation. I'm talking about a condition that exists in varying degrees. The period of the sixties was full of that. You couldn't do any serious work, you know, with tear gas drifting in the windows and with so many of the young people feeling that they really should revolt just because it was the thing to do.

A friend who came to visit us recently from the east coast was recalling a story I had told her ten years earlier about a landscape presentation during the height of the counter-culture movement. The story involved a move to make fun of the whole project that was being designed. When it came to the turn of two of the girls to make their presentation, they came in with a large board with a plastic wrapper over it and said, "You all can get your coffee because now we're going to have the dessert." First they made a presentation of the drawings, which was just terrible! Then they were supposed to do a model. So they unfurled this thing and it's a cake with the whole plan drawn on it in frosting. [Laughter] The whole thing was so tongue-in-cheek.

But, those students at that time couldn't even draw. Some of them still can't draw very well. Well, that whole picture is changing considerably now and I think that's really the key note of the present time.



Violich: Now we have a student whose doing a biography of Tommy Church.\* And we have another one who's doing a thesis on Beatrice Farrand, who was a woman landscape architect in the east who left a considerable estate and a marvelous collection of books, and she left money to the department as well as her whole collection of drawings and books on landscape architecture. We have a Farrand Fund that produces eight or ten thousand dollars a year.

We do have students and people like David Streatfield, who are going back into the forces that formed our field. I think what I'm saying is not a steady-state situation, it's what we have had. We have some of it now, but it's considerably less. And I think that currently students are getting aboard very nicely. They seem to want to be able to design what will get built and they want to have their work in a social context, and they're not happy to just intellectualize about it. Of course, that's landscape architecture. When you get into the area of city planning and environmental design, then you are involved more with word people where the commitment is less clear and demanding in terms of time.

7) Added Questions on Thomas D. Church and Housing Projects, Hooked Rugs, "Exterior Decoration," and Significance\*\*

Violich: Suzanne, I'll answer your questions on the typewriter, just as if I were speaking into your recorder. Then we'll see how we come out.

Riess: Thomas Church worked on a number of housing projects--Potrero, Sunnydale, Valencia Gardens, North Beach, in San Francisco; South Vallejo and North Vallejo Defense Housing; and on Parkmerced. (I think the housing projects, not Parkmerced, were done with Wurster.) How do you rate these environments for "the people." What was the Church contribution that was different from what your more socially-oriented landscape architects (Eckbo, Violich, Jaffe, Mocine) would have done? What would have been there or not been there?

Violich: Actually, I'm not too clear on Church's work on the public housing projects you mentioned, although I knew the projects fairly well. The ones you mentioned were by Wurster, except for North Beach which was

---

\*Pam-Anela Messenger, "The Art of Thomas Dolliver Church," U.C. Master's Thesis, Landscape Architecture, 1976.

\*\*September 10, 1977

Violich: Ernest Born's. But my general impression of both the architecture and the landscape development was that they reflected the somewhat institutional attitude of the public housing movement of the period and gave the designers of the complexes an opportunity to reflect their own ideas of form on a fairly large scale rather than the user's values and interests.

Of course, they were ever so much better than the environments people had to live in--the dark flats, reached by long stairways, and overcrowded and all that--in the North Beach, Mission and elsewhere. I remember even in the 1930s the newspaper write-ups of the infamous "Cuneo flats," a tenement on the high side of Bay Street above the corner with Columbus. We contrasted those with the North Beach housing project in the 1940 Telesis exhibit, if I remember correctly.

But I think they differed from what we went after in the rural housing work of Farm Security Administration. In that we were more concerned with finding out what people wanted to do in the out-of-door areas and tried to develop plans which would engage their participation in the landscape, more than having the landscape a kind of setting for the architecture. Vegetable growing, flower gardens, areas for folk-dancing, or for self-determined informal activities, even trees for shade.

I'm not saying that Church's landscape designs were without social value, I'd really have to do some looking back into the past to properly evaluate these projects, but they seemed to be rather sterile and "modern" designs that didn't invite much participation challenge or sense of responsibility on the part of the tenants, in terms of child care and supervision, needs for the elderly, and perhaps, the very real need for relief from asphalt and buildings with green growing materials--say, redwood groves, for example--that the people wouldn't otherwise be able to get to, not having either the transportation or possibly motivation.

A comparison with Ruth Asawa comes to mind, in the way she has taught art in Mission High and other San Francisco schools, i.e., using forms and materials and methods that grow out of children's capacities and maximize their participation. Bread dough becomes sculpture and accumulately, hundreds of child sculptors produce a great work of civic art.

So what would have been there? Maybe with this approach there might have been more children or adults, who would have wanted to become botanists, horticulturalists, conservationists, inspired by seeing growing things grow. We might also have had some 40-year old groves of redwoods, or towering Monterey pines that would physically and visually enhance the city as a whole in a permanent way.

Violich: Perhaps, the economies of the time pushed Church toward sweeping asphalt areas where vandalism could be kept to a minimum and kids could roller skate safely, but I really feel there was an area for pioneering in re the social uses of the landscape, that did not come out of this work, and was left to others in the 1950s and 1960s.

Nevertheless, Tommy Church certainly did do his share of pioneering, simply in demonstrating the value of team work between architect and landscape architect in public housing.

Riess: I have in my notes a comment that Thomas Church hooked rugs during the Depression, so you (Violich) did too? What is that all about?

Violich: Tommy Church and the hooked rugs during the Depression. Well, my memory is not too sharp on this, nor did I have first hand contact with him in this endeavor. My understanding was that during the Depression--that would have been when I was still in college (1929-34)--Tommy turned to making hooked rugs, using heavy yarns, or possibly cut strips of material, to take up the slack in the sagging income. I never saw any of these, and it would be interesting to see what kind of designs they were and what motivated them.

I do know that, having heard this, and having a mother who was very creative and on a spree of hooking colonial pattern rugs, I started an evening program of my own (as an alternate to my little theater work and week-end hiking in Marin). This was probably 1935-36, while working for the WPA San Francisco Recreation program, the very functional and restricted kinds of things I was doing during the daytime.

At night, I worked on stretched burlap on a frame with a device into which I would thread cut strips of woolens left from my mother's dressmaking business. (She had taking that up when my father had his stroke and went through bankruptcy in 1927.) Among my original designs, I had an abstraction of the floor plan of my room, redecorated by myself on finishing college. The design included the area of the bed, with other furniture including bookcase, flower on table, and even the outside pergola with flower box I had built for geraniums.

Another design was the abstraction of a giant Madrone tree, under whose muscular-like branches I would loll and dream in a Muir, Whitman, Thoreau-like fashion in Marin County on the slopes high above Ross. Its trunk was some six to eight ft. through up to five or six ft. in height and there, the tree sprayed out with at least eight huge branches, some two ft. or more in diameter. Great for climbing. Very sculptural and truly a botanical wonder.



Violich: To my dismay, years later I returned and found that they had cut a bridle path nearby, right through my retreat, and the initial cutters were already defacing the smooth red-brown trunks of my giant friend. Also, the Water District, lacking any conservation program, had allowed Lithocarpus (Tan Oak) to invade the vast domain under the overall spread of the tree (probably some 60 ft. or more). These saplings were going straight up, cutting out the light, and the giant limbs were dying off.

I still have the rug, stored away, and used for a time by my children who all love Madrones too.... Well, enough on hooked rugs.

Riess: Here's a 1954 quote from you in Space--the Landscape Architecture Department magazine.

"I believe the landscape architect has allowed his field to dwindle in scope and in scale from the great villas...or the city parks, park systems, and estates of Olmsted's time, to an emphasis on the garden and the details of abstract pattern and design... Since the war, the landscape architect has been chiefly a very competent exterior decorator."

How do various practitioners--mainly Church--rise above that last damning phrase?

Violich: I believe Church rises above the "competent exterior decorator" in, first of all, making his presence felt in a close working relationship with the architect, so that the site as a whole works as a unit. He was there during the design process, say in most of his work with Wurster, and actually influenced the design. Also, in terms of his work with upper income families, he did go a long ways to provide functional outdoor living places that changed life styles and met social need, albeit for a social level without major material need. In that sense, as well, he provided a fundamental justification for the landscape architect. Too bad he didn't have more opportunity to do the same in re the city planner and the urban design scale.

A good case in point that I should have referred in your first question about public housing projects is the Parkmerced development (Metropolitan Life) in San Francisco. I lived there three years, 1948 to 1951, and got to know the process well. In this case, the Eastern Architects (the plans were made in New York, and they showed the lack of orientation to San Francisco climatic conditions) worked without any landscape architect, though they had a very open sort of plan, large courtyards, for example, but with no idea of just what would go in them.

Somehow, Church made his presence known, and in due time became deeply involved, trying to adapt the plan to realistic landscape potentials. Possibly this was after the building was done, nearly so.

Violich: There he anticipated users' needs by developing outdoor living terraces overlooking the superblock interiors and very effectively chose planting types and patterns that completely altered the living experience in this otherwise institutional building complex. He really humanized it.

However, Metropolitan Life failed to continue his services in re supervision, and when we were living there I blocked a practice the gardeners had of trimming into "lolly-pops" the flowering plum, birch trees and even olives. I challenged one tree butcher one day to "leave my Olive Tree alone" and called the Manager, then Church himself. And within a few weeks there was a change of gardening supervisors, and with a few months a change in the whole character of Parkmerced, in that trees were allowed to mature normally to their natural character. I felt that in a case like that Tommy might have been more forceful in attempting staying on top of the long-term development, in keeping his professional presence known and felt. He might have used his prestige in a number of ways to re-inforce public policies through civic action. Not to draw comparisons, but something of the way that Halprin tends to operate today.

Riess: Where do you think the profession of landscape architecture would be now if it had not had Thomas Church in its history?

Violich: I believe the profession would be without a very important model of innovation in creating new forms in landscape architecture and without the essential demonstration of the value of close working relationship between the architect and the landscape architect, in the creative process. Without Church the profession could still be taking more of a back seat than it presently takes with relation to architecture. So many, many architects followed the example of Bill Wurster and made their associations with landscape architects, calling them in at early stages in the program development and design. Public work did the same, often requiring the team services of each profession.

The other point is innovation: younger people who followed Church were inspired by his combination of experimentation in form and first-rate craftsmanship and dared, perhaps in a smaller way, to do their own form of creativity, though in a responsible way. Books have appeared and the solid accumulative effect of his years of work are available to young people studying in our schools of landscape architecture. Would that they will work toward his high standards of quality.

In short, he demonstrated that a high style of landscape design is possible--just as others did for architecture--and perhaps he had a major effect in contributing to removing the inferiority complex that had prevailed when I was in school in the 1930s on the part of



Violich: students of landscape architecture vis a vis "the architect." But in a way I think you can also say that, having done this in a superior and elite-oriented way, it provided material for the more socially-oriented generation of the 1960s to rebel against, in favor of a style more intimately related to the community as a whole and people themselves.

Perhaps the community participation movement and user-evaluated landscape concept that is now of great interest in our schools and some segments of the community might not have been as vigorous as it is. Yet, in itself this movement could learn from the work of Church the lesson of dedication to a single or limited realm of activities and the value of doing thoroughly and consistently what it believes should be done.

\* \* \* \*

My apologies, if I meandered too far here and there from your questions, but my fingers flew readily over the keys and I couldn't, or maybe didn't, see any reason to stop them. In any case it was enjoyable and perhaps more rewarding than verbalizing and recording and editing. What do you think? F.V.

~~~~~



Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Harold Watkin

A LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR EVOKES STUDENT DAYS IN THE 1930s,  
AND DISCUSSES HIS OWN PROFESSION

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Harold Watkin

|                                                              |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1) 1613 Josephine Street                                     | 54 |
| 2) In Business with H.L. Vaughan                             | 56 |
| 3) Tommy Church: Lecturer, Designer, Businessman, Planner    | 57 |
| 4) Contrasting Contracting in the Public and Private Sectors | 61 |
| 5) Impressions of Tommy's Work                               | 63 |
| 6) Advising the Corps of Engineers                           | 66 |
| 7) Landscape Contractors and Unions                          | 68 |
| 8) Reminiscing, Vaughan and the Department                   | 70 |



Harold Watkin  
January 29, 1975  
Interview held at office of Watkin, Bortolussi, Contractors, Larkspur

1) 1613 Josephine Street

- Riess: How did you get into landscape contracting? I remember you said on the phone that you had a B.S. in pre-med from Ohio.
- Watkin: It was a good bit like I imagine it is for other people getting into the job which they finally end up doing. In my case, I was out of work, and when I came to California I lived in a building down on 1613 Josephine Street where a lot of landscapers had built their pad. It was started first by Sharon Farr--of the family that owned the Palace [Hotel]--and Sharon was a landscape man and he had the idea of getting the house there together with other landscapers, and it became kind of a house/hotel for landscape architects who drifted in and out.
- Riess: Students?
- Watkin: No, not students so much as graduate students.
- Riess: When was this?
- Watkin: He started that I believe in 1930 or 1931. Of course Punk [H. Leland Vaughan] then at that time was married and they [he and Adele] lived up in the hills in Berkeley. I knew Punk through his brother, Bobby Vaughan. He and I were in school together. As a matter of fact, Punk and my brother were in school together, same school in Aliance, Ohio, Mt. Union College.
- Riess: When you moved in the house on Josephine Street you had no intentions of going into landscaping?
- Watkin: Not at all.
- Riess: You were out of work and you had come to California to--

Watkin: Seek my fortune! We had a few dollars left, another chap and I, from publishing the school paper. We got to keep all the money we made over and above the cost of printing. We invested our money, so to speak, in a trip to California. Punk took us down to the pad at 1613 Josephine Street where we could live on \$25 a month for board and room.

Riess: Is that building still there?

Watkin: Yes, it is. It's a brown shingle house.

There was always one man who was out of work who did all the cooking and cleaning and the others paid their \$25. Mel Scott was living there and was chief cook and bottle-washer there for the time when I was paying my \$25. When I ran out of money I was about ready to go out on the bum, but Mel got a job at the Emporium and I took his job. I learned to cook. You had to damn well learn to cook; otherwise you were out.

Riess: There weren't any females?

Watkin: We finally got females in there but that broke up the house. The whole thing came apart at the seams. [Laughter] It disintegrated.

We used to have rent parties, things of that nature, sometimes made enough money for a whole month for everybody. This was during Prohibition days when you made your own whiskey. I don't know whether I should tell this or not--you can edit it--but Punk was able to get one of the exchange students, or maybe he wasn't called that at that time, from Egypt, and he was able to buy alcohol by the five-gallon can for a very low price, I think \$5 a gallon, so we'd buy it and give the exchange student half of it and take the other half. Two and a half gallons would make five gallons of booze. And that's what we used to sell, for 15¢ a shot, for our parties. It was pretty lethal!

Riess: Quite an organization.

Watkin: We had a good thing. Sharon brought all the furnishing from the Palace.

Riess: Old furniture?

Watkin: Stuff that had been reconditioned there in their shops but that they didn't put back up in their rooms. We would move all of the furniture into the backyard and make a night club out of the place.

Punk and Adele, his wife, came by quite often. We had another couple down the street, Johnny Reshoft, a landscape architect, and another chap whose name I've forgotten who was in the National Park Service at one time.

Riess: But the real moving spirit behind it was [Wm.] Sharon Farr?

Watkin: Yes. He was gone, however, by the time I got there.

This was called the Bohemian Days, instead of the Hippie Days. We used to have our big dinners where we paid off a lot of our social dinners and gave one big smash with wine and grappa, booze, things of this nature. A nice place to live.

Riess: Did anyone do the gardening?

Watkin: Oh yes, we all did, everybody did the gardening. I have some photographs at home that I will send you.

## 2) In Business with H.L. Vaughan

Watkin: Also during that time Punk would come by. Punk was working for Tommy [Church] at that time, on Tommy's jobs and I started to work for Tommy. Tommy's jobs were fairly well scattered, and Punk would supervise some of them. I was one of the laborers, I started in with pick and shovel.

Riess: Tommy was his own contractor then?

Watkin: Yes, in those days there were no landscape architects as such, with licenses. It wasn't until 1954 that they were licensed. Before 1954 Tommy, in order to get his jobs done the way he wanted them done, was doing his own contracting. A lot of people began their careers through Tommy at that time, both in construction, and of course as he became more and more known, many of them wanted to work in his office also. He never had a large office so it was very difficult to get work in there with him.

Riess: When Punk Vaughan was working for him, he was the man on the job--

Watkin: Punk would supervise jobs and would come by and check them from time to time. And of course he was teaching at the University then, also. When we were working together I got to know a bit more and more about it. Punk and I started in business together, and had a little business called Watkin & Co. We had a greenhouse and lathhouse. Adele, his wife, was with us. She was a landscape architect also--she was one of his students, before they were married. So we started our venture and got ourselves a dumptruck.

Riess: Was this unusual in the department, both to teach and to have a business?

Watkin: Oh, Professors Gregg and Shepherd did, too. I used to work for Shepherd. He'd contract out on jobs also and I'd do some work for him. I never did anything for Gregg. I think that he did plans mostly.

Riess: And the client purchased the plans?

Watkin: I don't know how he operated on that, or whether he'd hire contractors to do the work.

Punk and I were in business for about two years and I finally decided I didn't know enough about landscaping, so I went back to Cal for three years. I was in the class with [Robert] Royston and Paul Steinmetz, and Doug Baylis, and others.

### 3) Tommy Church: Lecturer, Designer, Businessman, Planner

Watkin: I met Tommy through Punk. I would see him also lecturing at school. And of course I ran into him constantly on the job.

Riess: Lecturing at school?

Watkin: He'd come in to lecture from time to time. I don't believe he had the impact on the students that Royston had when he came in to teach. It seemed to me that Royston, and Halprin, and several of the others that Punk brought in really had a tremendous influence on the direction of the school. (Bob was teaching there after he came back from the Navy.)

Riess: What was Tommy Church's impact?

Watkin: Well, almost everything then was small, private gardens; there was not much in the way of large public jobs, in parks, and commercial installations.

Riess: That he was doing, or that was being done?

Watkin: That was being done. There were some probably back East, things of this nature.

Tommy had moved away from the old axial treatment of the Beaux Arts school of design, and began to free up the gardens. He said once to me, "Lots of times I don't know whether I'm doing an abstract painting or a garden design." And of course when you look at them over all, a garden, if it works, if it looks good in plan, has a competence about it that you can tell will work. In many cases the



Watkin: elements in his garden might look somewhat like that [abstract painting] too. But it looked good. It looked like a drawing in itself and it all held together, in my mind.

Riess: All of the abstraction would be pulled together by the frame of the construction.

Watkin: Oh yes, he also brought detailing into gardens that was new and fresh. I just came from seeing one in Napa County last Sunday. We went up to look at a house back on a beautiful site in the Napa hills. And as soon as I entered the garden I knew it was a Church garden, and sure enough, it was. And he had a chap in his firm, Gerry [Germano] Milono, who did the structures for him, who had done a small house there. But the garden was pure Church.

Riess: Please describe more of what made it pure Church.

Watkin: Well, what calls that to mind was your mentioning the framework. He had a wide concrete wall, about 18" wide, going around the whole garden, and everything, house and all, was contained within it. It was like a strong frame on a picture.

And then the cleanness of construction, and the absence of a mishmash of plants--Tommy could use maybe one, two, or three plant varieties sometimes, and that was all he would use, but it was the sparing use of material in a garden such as that, which had a pool in it, a couple of trees and a change in elevation, and brick. This is where the transition between the garden itself--which some might call austere because of the lack of plants, but really was rich enough--the transition between the garden and the fields and trees into the surrounding countryside was perfect. It was done with masses of manzanita below the wall, very simple, but very, very effective.

And yet he'd do other gardens, such as we see in his book Gardens Are For People, that had no relation to that sort of treatment. They'd be full of plants, walks and walls, and water things of this nature. It was hard to see the two of them being done by the same person.

He was an excellent plant man. Tommy knew how to garden. He knew more about plants than most people do. He likes plants. There are an awful lot of landscape architects who treat a plant as something that has to be used in a garden. Tommy, when we'd come down for the planting [on a job] he'd come right in with us and plant. You learn to plant; I learned to plant and I learned what to look for and how to do it with him.

Riess: I wonder how he learned to do it all.



- Watkin: Tommy is an exceptional person. He had a grasp of things that is so quick. The same way with his wit. His give and take is very fast. He is a very stimulating person to be around.
- Riess: And he got on with the workmen.
- Watkin: Oh yeah, he was the perfect guy for doing that. I used to get bawled out by Punk sometimes for doing things which I should have been bawled out for. But Tommy would just ease it off, say, "Well, hell, it's something you've got to learn."
- Riess: When you were in construction for Punk?
- Watkin: Yes, learning construction. Also I knew nothing about design. When we were reading plans I didn't know anything about the plant nomenclature, anything of that nature. That was one of the reasons I went back to Cal. I had to take a lot of the other courses too that they insisted on, botany and things of this nature that I wasn't particularly interested in. I was treated as a graduate student, yet I was not a graduate student, I was simply taking another bachelor's course.
- Riess: You didn't get a degree.
- Watkin: No. Actually after watching Royston work and finding out then really what Tommy's great abilities were, I realized that I wouldn't be able to touch that sort of level in design. So I stayed with contracting and I am sure I made a lot better contractor than I would have made as a landscape architect. I can do design, and I've done some gardens, and I probably could have made a living out of it. But I make a much better living contracting. I enjoyed it, and I found out that I had some business ability, which helped a great deal.
- Of course so did Tommy. Tommy had business ability too, a lot of business ability, but that didn't seem to attract him. Otherwise, I am sure he could have set up offices all over the United States and controlled the whole affair if he had wanted to do it. It would have left little time for design. I assume that's the reason he kept his small office and had his hand in every job that went out. That takes a tremendous amount of character, I think, to resist going big for business' sake.
- Riess: Did you ever talk to him about it?
- Watkin: We had some, oh, kind of peripheral conversations about it. When I returned from the Army Tommy took me around to see some of the gardens he was doing here in Marin County and that's when he made the remark about getting to the point where he couldn't tell the difference between one of his designs and an abstract drawing.

Watkin: And also he remarked that he liked to control what he was doing himself. Like on the job at the Air Force [Academy] in Colorado--a sizable job, running into the millions--

Riess: He did that?

Watkin: They asked him to do it. When he went out to look at it, and saw that all the grades had been set, the huge cuts made and the building placed, he said, "What you really want is a planter, not a planner," and didn't take the job, which shows, well, I guess you would say panache. When you come right down to it, most people would have jumped at that and hurdled anything that was necessary.

Tommy understands what his job is, which is planning. And planting is just the icing on the cake.

Riess: If he had been called in earlier--

Watkin: If he had been called in on the placing of the buildings and the cuts and the things like that, then fine. They said, "We already sited the place."

Riess: That does sound like planning, yet when people talk about Church they distinguish him from the current landscape planners by pointing out that he is a garden person.

Watkin: What they don't understand is that Tommy understands that [planning] as well as they do, maybe even better. But that just wasn't his dish of tea. It means a large office. You can't go in and do a huge job where the fee might be 4 million dollars without a large office. You have got to have engineers, architects, a whole batch of draftsmen; you have got to have the whole ball of wax. Tommy would understand that as well as anybody else, maybe more so. They think of him as a small garden designer; well, that's just a small facet of Tommy's work.

Riess: You mean they think of him being "limited" to small gardens.

Watkin: Yes, in that sense, because planners now speak of 6,000 acres or 10,000 acres, or doing a whole riverfront. I'm sure that Tommy has been on consultation for things of that sort, but I also know that Tommy has turned over many jobs to other offices. I know he used to.

I suppose the kicks are in the small garden. To me it was a much more rewarding thing to do a small garden than it was to do a big garden, except that I can't make a living out of it that way, the living that I want.

## 4) Contrasting Contracting in the Public and Private Sectors

Riess: Do you always work with a designer?

Watkin: We don't do any designing ourselves. Most of our work is public work that we bid for. We have developed equipment to do this sort of work over the years, and have bought equipment for it. The development and use of equipment gives a creative impetus to contracting.

Riess: Your work must have given you a chance to see a range of ability in planning.

Watkin: We got deeper into the public sector because there is so much large work going on there--such as the California Department of Highways or the Department of Architecture. However, a lot of private offices are now talking in terms of million dollar contracts.

Riess: Do you find a qualitative difference [between the private offices and the public]?

Watkin: It's different in terms of specification and it's different in terms of supervision.

Riess: I'm assuming it's better in the private sector.

Watkin: No, it isn't, it's better in the public sector. The reason for it is that the specifications, for instance, have been refined and refined to the point where they are, I think, very, very good.

The private sector concentrates more on the design and in many cases it can be a lot more exciting than what is produced by the public sector. In fact many of the private architects refer frequently to the "California Standards" when doing their own.

Then the other point is supervision. The state, for instance, has enough money in their budget to have people on the job constantly, so that there will be a supervisor there you can go to for the answers to questions. There are times you may not agree with him, but at least one can get an answer on the spot and the work can go forward. Whereas on the private sector they send someone by maybe once a week. One should not have to wait for answers. It delays work and is costly.

If you're trying to do a good job and you are bidding against several people bidding on a job where they know they're not going to be supervised, there may be a wide gap. That can be too much for human nature. So, it's much better, if you have an efficient operation

Watkin: and you want to do a good job, to have one or two or three inspectors checking all the time. That's what the state does constantly, and that's what we like. That's what I find is one of the weak points in the private sector. Design, however, that's another matter.

Riess: Somebody like Tommy has to make sure he has good supervisors.

Watkin: He settled on just a few contractors. They knew what Tommy wanted, what kind of nails he wanted, and how he wanted them driven--as detailed as that. They knew what Tommy wanted and Tommy got it.

Floyd Gerow was with Tommy for many, many years, and is a very good contractor. But of course Floyd could only do so much work too. He couldn't handle all of those jobs. Tommy could give Floyd a sketch, and Floyd could put it in the way Tommy wanted it, after all those years. He is an excellent, excellent contractor.

Riess: He was taught by Tommy.

Watkin: Yes. I was taught by Tommy too. Just on the detailing of the work and how to finish it, and on bricklaying and things of this nature, what's a neat job and what's a sloppy job, and if you come to a point, as I say, where there's a change, or things are not working out on the plan, one could call him and discuss it, and he might say, "Well, put it in that way," or "Wait til I come out." But he relied a lot on his contractors and once he got one he liked and trusted he stayed.

We got away from doing jobs for Tommy simply because we got into the public sector for almost all of our work.

Riess: When was that?

Watkin: In 1946 when I got out of the Army, and I started back in business. We were doing some private jobs then, but we didn't do very many. We found out that it was a lot easier, on our nerves and everything else, to do public work. So we started up, using two old beaten-up automobiles and went on to develop the equipment we now have.

Riess: "A lot easier on your nerves!" if you could have been kept busy full-time by Tommy, would there have been any hassle in that?

Watkin: The hassle in working on a private job? It takes about five years to train a man to be a good foreman--and that's assuming that you've got a good man to begin with, what you would call a mechanic, who understands when a thing is right and when a thing is wrong (using a "mechanic" in that way, not a guy who works on an automobile). You start training him in landscaping, and when you get to the point where you are bidding on



Watkin: private jobs there are lots of times with an organization when you have to move from one architect to another in order to keep your crews going.

If you have a man and you have an investment like that, you just can't say, "Well, I'll see you two or three weeks from now when I've got a job for you." You have to keep hunting around to get enough jobs to keep him busy. And one architect may be busy at that time, one maybe not. Or one, like Tommy, may have a job down in Santa Cruz, or up in the mountains, wherever it is, which you couldn't go to. So, you are constantly hunting for jobs to do.

Well, at that time--you began to get other people coming in; there are always contractors coming into a field. And architects will take the lowest figure on a job. They wouldn't take one person's figure and keep him on saying, "He's a better man, I know him," because they are working with clients and the client wants the lower figure and it's up to the architect to get the thing done.

We finally came to the conclusion that it's just too hard to battle on a thing of this nature. We began to move over to the public sector, where agencies were putting in football fields, etc., and we developed a fairly easy way to do it with equipment. They would have big, broad areas, and you could tear into a thing like that and finish it off in a month.

Whereas in a private job, a \$4,000, \$5,000 job--which in those days would be a commendable-sized job--it would take several weeks to do that, with a small crew. (You couldn't put a big crew in.) It just seemed like too much of a hassle for us to buck this, and so with all of the public jobs coming up we slid into the other work and got away from private work.

Riess: So, for you it was a little like what it was for Tommy, that the bigger your office, the more jobs you have to keep rustling up.

Watkin: And you become a businessman.

##### 5) Impressions of Tommy's Work

Riess: About the clients and the contractors' bids, wouldn't Tommy have had a relationship with his clients where they would take his recommendation?

Watkin: Yes, he did, and he used that with Floyd. But I suppose there would be a limit to the number of people he would do that with.



Riess: What do you think his manner was with his clients? Did he woo them, so to speak?

Watkin: No, no, he was the same way with everything. Tommy was himself, anytime, the same whether you met him at a party or out on a job. He did insist on good work on a job, in no uncertain terms. But socially it was great to be with him in parties and things of this nature.

I certainly learned a tremendous amount from him and whenever anybody wants to know what my background is, I tell them, "I worked for Tommy Church"--even though we haven't seen each other much recently.

Riess: What do you think are the works that really made his reputation?

Watkin: I think when he was starting in, the new treatment of gardens. Instead of the old-fashioned garden that used to fit all right on the large estate, here were these small gardens, and small homes, apartments, places like that, where people weren't particularly good gardeners, and Tommy was making a tremendous thing for them at low cost.

Riess: Pasatiempo?

Watkin: Well, that was one of his first larger jobs, but to me that's not the real impact that he has. I think if you look at Gardens are for People you get the whole gamut of what he has done. He did so many. Some of them Punk and I worked on. Just take his photographs and look at them. I'm not qualified to say that "This garden is better than that."

Riess: I asked because when you said you mentioned being "trained by Tommy Church," I wondered what gardens you thought that evoked for people.

Watkin: I talked about that with Bob Royston a few times, and the one that came to Bob's mind quickly is the Jerd Sullivan garden, a very small garden in San Francisco.

Riess: What about evolving new forms and ideas for the gardens? Tommy doesn't seem, by all reports, to be someone in search of "What's new?"

Watkin: No, he doesn't. I suppose every artist has an imprint of his style that is going to carry along in any changes he makes. It's hard to disassociate a person from it.

Riess: A Picasso is a Picasso.

Watkin: Yes, yet if he does a garden of rock walls and this nature it's a far cry from a Jerd Sullivan garden, a far cry. Yet he had the ability to go either way.

Watkin: Of course Tommy's detailing was so good. Punk used to say, "Hell, I can do as good a job as Tommy can, except for the detail." Well that's true. On gardens you have to work out the circulation on it first. That's the basic structure, the bones, of it, and Punk could do that easily, but he couldn't do the detailing that Tommy can.

Riess: When a landscape architect works in an area he doesn't know, where he doesn't know what plant materials are likely to do well in an area, then it really comes down to form.

Watkin: Well, it always does come down to form. Tommy can use plants in the same sense that a garden structure is used, in the same sense as a tree, which becomes a structure, a volume, in the garden. Of course many landscape architects do the same.

Riess: I would think many people go into landscape architecture because of a good memory of a lovely garden, a green, "bosky" place.

Watkin: Exactly, they are plant oriented. And this is fine, this is not a bad thing. But usable gardens--to use the phrase, "the outdoor living room"--that is what California is oriented towards. People like to live outdoors. And so many of them don't want to be caught up in a large maintenance program. Tommy does either thing.

I think we are in a real change, as far as landscape contractors are concerned, and landscape architects. The jobs are getting in the multi-million dollar size now. My first highway job I think was \$150,000--the Sacramento by-pass--and that was the biggest job that the state had ever put out. And it was a colossal job, everybody thought, but now that's not even a fair-sized park job. Agencies are building big parks now and they are talking of five, six thousand acre parks too.

Bob Royston has a job moving a town, Bonneville, where they have to do a by-pass for another big dam structure by the Corps of Engineers, and their job is to handle something like eight or nine million yards of rock or fill, not have to haul it too very far, and still use it so it doesn't look like a big rock pile. Bob had to move the town and keep them happy and make a good town for them. That's a far cry from a backyard, isn't it?

## 6) Advising the Corps of Engineers

Watkin: I'm on one of Burton's [Congressman John Burton] committees here in Marin County now and we've been battling the takeover of existing creek channels by concrete channels for flood control projects. We've fought all the way from downstream all the way now up to the city of Ross. It still has been concreted. Well, finally we've gotten enough--

Riess: You mean you've fought and failed?

Watkin: Yes, it's been a rear guard action, but we've finally got some political help on it from Burton and the new supervisor, Barbara Boxer. Burton got an appropriation from Congress for a private study and we wanted to have a landscape architect on our side when we go to the Corps-- although we are working with the Corps since we are just an advisory group. Hopefully we are going to get a landscape architect to do the design on this creek.

Of course the less concrete, the more maintenance you're going to have, the more erosion. You're going to have to pay a little more every year to get a lot of this repaired as you go along. There is no argument that the Corps can build a concrete channel to take the water. What we are saying is even though we have to take the water, we don't want to destroy the creek in the process.

Riess: What is your group called?

Watkin: Well, Burton appointed us an advisory group to the Corps of Engineers on development of the Corte Madera Creek. The advisory committee was to work with the Corps of Engineers. Burton had gotten Congress to allocate money to the Corps to finance a study for alternate solutions other than the concrete channel.

Riess: Did Burton form the group because of the objections?

Watkin: Well, actually I got Barbara Boxer interested in it. Barbara was his manager in Marin County. Barbara got John and took him to Peter Valentine's home in Ross and showed him the creek. John got really enthused about it.

He came back for one of his meetings with his constituency and Barbara told me to go talk to him, so I talked to him, dogging his heels, as he was running down the street to get to his car to go to the next meeting. He said, "Put it on paper," so I put it on paper. He said okay, "Let's get going." He got the appropriation through for the study, \$250,000 and we were off and running.

Riess: What makes you think you can change the Corps of Engineers, ever?

Watkin: The Corps will turn, it will turn. The crux of it is, "What is the aesthetic cost?" They have to have a cost-benefit ratio for anything they do. They go to Congress and they say a project will cost so much, but the benefits are this. The benefit that they have always had before was that Joe Doaks who owns the five and ten cent store was flooded out and he lost so many dollars and Mrs. McGillicuddy had her front room inundated with five feet of water. Also included is the enhancement of real estate. They do this; that's the cost benefit. If all of this adds up to a favorable cost benefit the project can be funded.

So we had a long set-to the last time. We had a full meeting with Colonel [Henry] Flertzheim and his staff. And it just seemed to me that the only way you can get your point across is to put it on a personal basis, something that means something to him, not just show them a picture and say, "This is worth so much money," or a tree that is worth so much.

You have to put it on a broader scope, such as "What are the aesthetic values of living to a person?" So, you start out with clothes. For instance, everybody could have a black suit, medium, small, or large. You turn up the cuffs for fit. It does everything you need. It covers the body. You don't need a tie. You have some serviceable shoes. Your car can get you someplace or other, just a plain black car, the only kind made, interchangeable parts that last forever.

The food you eat--just boiled beef and cabbage and black bread can be a perfectly good diet, but instead you hang meat, just to have this as a special taste for your senses. The same with your house: four concrete walls and a light hanging down from the center, and a bench, that is all you need. But, all of the senses! Also each person pays, up to the limit of their financial ability, and their taste, to have these things. So this became a factual cost--putting it in those terms.

This can be a real big thing, because they can do the same thing to every channel in the country.

Riess: Use that aesthetic factor.

Watkin: Yes, and all they really have to do is keep the flood control effective, which they know they can do. They have unlimited ability to do that. It's just the fact that we've always been caught up on those horns, i.e.,



Watkin: it's always been done this way and why change. The other thing of course is that there can be less money involved in the construction of the ditch. However, there can be a lot more in the maintenance, which the community would have to take care of.

It's like a guy I had in here one time from an insurance company. We had just finished the Frank Lloyd Wright building out here [Marin Civic Center].

Riess: You did that?

Watkin: The landscaping, yes, but I mean the building was just finished. He came in and he said, "My God, all that money spent out there. That's a waste, just a waste. I can go over and get (and he named a builder in the city) who would have done the design for nothing and saved the county two or three million dollars."

I said to him, "Henry, how much did you pay for that homburg you have on?"

"About \$45."

I said, "You know, you can go and get a longshoreman's white hat and it'll do the same thing for two bucks!"

And he got the point. If it's valid in your private sector, it's valid in the public sector.

Riess: Would Thomas Church have taken on a battle like that?

Watkin: I think he would. But the climate is different right now, much different. It is different all through landscaping now. I imagine that if Tommy came into it right now and if landscaping was where it is now that he would be in larger things. I imagine so. It's just a different thing all together.

## 7) Landscape Contractors and Unions

Riess: I would be interested in hearing about the landscape contractor's current status. You mentioned a union?

Watkin: The landscape contractor does not have a union per se, a landscape contractor's union. Our unions are plumbers, carpenters, laborers, equipment operator, teamsters, cement masons. When you hire people



Watkin: you have to hire them out of those crafts. But there is no union that teaches landscaping--that has a landscape program--none of them. And none of them will take us into the union as a separate union because each union wants their own people; they don't want to give up any of their people.

For instance, the plumbers could say, "We'll take all the landscape people and put them in the plumbers union," like they do steamfitters. But the [equipment] operators said, "Oh, no, we want the operators working for landscapers in our union, not in the plumbers union." And the teamsters say the same, and the carpenters, they want control. So, as a result, we can't form our own union and no other union will take us in as a group.

It's a messy situation. You can't go to a union and hire a landscape man. All you get is a plumber, for instance, or an equipment operator. What you have to do is hunt around until you get somebody and he might be in the plumbers or he might be in equipment, and you make him a foreman and eventually he learns the other work. He becomes the foreman of the whole job. Most of the time they are equipment operators, because so much of the work is equipment operation.

Riess: Floyd Gerow was saying the same thing, that you couldn't apprentice someone.

Watkin: He has to belong to one of the unions. We've been battling it for 10 years, 15 years. We've been union, ever since we started in 1946. The unions to my mind are a great thing. But the way it's being used is a very very poor thing. These fringe benefits and things like that are very spotty in the sense of what the man is going to get paid later on in life. Especially for the laborer, the boomer, running around the country, he's in one local and then other, and there's no one central office to guarantee that he'll get his benefits back.

Riess: So some on your crews are better set up in terms of their unions than others?

Watkin: Well, all unions have really good fringe benefits. But it makes it very, very difficult for us, for instance, for reporting. Say we have a fellow who works in three different locals in one week, for instance. It's a dogfight to get that reported back to the union, to each one of the unions. We have stacks and stacks of paper for reporting the same man on different levels of wages, different kinds of fringe benefits. And all of them have to be paid--one fringe benefit will go to one source, one to another, even within the same union.

[Interruption]

Riess: He [Watkin's father] was a potter? [Resuming conversation about unions]

Watkin: Yes, my parents are potters, most of my family were. My mother worked in a pottery at one time too. It was a craft then, and whole families would move into a pottery and work.

The potters had a paper, "The Potters National Herald," as it was called, and across the top of it was the legend, "a man must be able to buy back his own product." My father was in the potters union. It was a captive union, of course, it wasn't a strong union. But nevertheless this is to my mind what has been the great thing for unionism in these last 30 years, that a man can buy back his own product.

From being unable to afford a house or anything like that--now everybody can afford a house or not right now, but they have been over the years able to buy the house and live in it during their lives. Maybe they get it paid off when they're 60 or 70, but in those days you couldn't buy a house until you were 60 or 70, by scrimping and scraping and hitting the boom and bust periods, and things of that nature. It was unionism and the right to strike that made it possible. Really it's one of the greatest things that has happened.

If we think that we have battles with the racial problems now, in those days it was a really fixed battle with guns for the right to work. If you talk to anybody who can remember the pitched battle they had over on the waterfront! They have a pock-marked Ferry Tower right now; you can go by and see that. That was a fight between the police and the guy who wanted to work, and not have to go down there and "shape up" every day, and be picked out by somebody who would let him work or wouldn't let him work. There is no comparison now.

But, like every human endeavor, they all [the unions] foul their nests, sooner or later, seemingly. It all swings away from the great accomplishments into just human cussedness.

#### 8) Reminiscing, Vaughan and the Department

Riess: Tommy wasn't around to be part of the Josephine Street crowd, was he?

Watkin: No, he was married to Betsy at that time. Tommy and Punk had a pad of their own just for about a year or so when he came out, because Punk of course came out to take Tommy's job at Cal after Tommy left.

- Watkin: I saw a lot of Punk and Adele; they really brought me up; I began to [laughing] mature after meeting them. Although Punk was only eight years older, still I think I learned about all the good things in life from them.
- Riess: What do you mean?
- Watkin: Oh, that it was more than just a meat and potatoes existence. Your eyes get opened. Then again, going to Cal and being around San Francisco, it's the difference between day and night to a small, religious-oriented college such as Mt. Union College. Mt. Union--you became a doctor, lawyer, or minister.
- Riess: Did your brother stay there?
- Watkin: He stayed there, but he went into ceramic engineering, went back to school for that kind of work. Punk went to Ohio State and took landscape there. And that's where he became a friend of Tommy's.
- Riess: How typical of the times was that Josephine Street living arrangement?
- Watkin: I really don't know. I remember in the '40s I went to a dinner one time--not dinner, a supper--with a bunch of college kids living together. And they had just gotten a barrel of dishes given to them, a big hogshead, and they were just unpacking it. When they unpacked it it was full of Haviland china. And they didn't know what it was--big soup tureens, platters, cups, saucers, a huge set.
- I guess I was too honest for my own good--I could have bought it probably for \$20 or so, and of course it was worth hundreds of dollars for that sort of a set--anyway, I told them what it was, and I told them not to use it, that for the cost of four or five of the dishes they could go down and buy all the dishes they could possibly use of just ordinary stuff. (I never saw them afterwards, but I hope they did.)
- Riess: Of course it would have been nice to live with the beauty.
- Watkin: But I don't think they understood it, these were "just a bunch of dishes." But with my background in potting--we had a set of Haviland china, and our other dishes were all a mish-mash of twenty different sets because my mother used china like she was handling bricks, but when we were having a dinner or something she'd get out the Haviland china and she was a nervous wreck at the end when she'd have to wash it. Ordinarily she'd break at least one or two dishes every night--teapots, things like that, would go crashing all the time because there was no limit to the supply. She'd never bought a dish in her life. Dad would just go down and scoop off whatever they were running through and bring them home.

Riess: Quite a picture!

Watkin: It was a picture, in retrospect.

Riess: What is the explanation for "Punk" Vaughan's name?

Watkin: His name was Hollyngsworth Leland Vaughan, H.L. Vaughan. When he was working one time in a brickyard, the Aliance Brickyard I guess it was called, they had a brick wheelbarrow that you packed bricks on, and they always had some punk kid in there to haul these bricks. "Hey, punk," you know, and for some reason it caught hold. Punk explained it to me one or two times; I've forgotten just exactly how it came about, but it came through that kind of a connotation, and it stayed with him all through the years.

Punk was a good man, a really great guy. We always did things together, in an outdoors sense, parties. I was always the Santa Claus for the children. And there was all of the fishing and hunting. We had our own camp; we bought forty acres up in Ukiah for \$187, with a cabin on it. And we always worked together on that property up the coast there.

Riess: Sounds like he would have been happier practicing than teaching.

Watkin: No, that was great with him. He liked that very much. That was a very integral part of him.

Riess: He liked the teaching.

Watkin: He liked the administration of it. Punk was a tremendous administrator. He's the guy who really put California landscape architecture where it is, by bringing these other people in. He built that from a cow college connotation to a real world-renowned department.

Riess: Bringing in Royston?

Watkin: And Church, all these people. Bob did a tremendous amount in that, but Bob of course was influenced by Tommy, very very much so. Everybody in that class, all would have given anything to have worked for Tommy. And of course Tommy took Bob simply because Bob was so outstanding. This [on the wall behind Mr. Watkin] is one of Bob's pictures. Sometimes we get a batch of people in for a painting party. I take my shop and we turn it all over [to this] and everybody can go at it, hammer and tongs, doing whatever they want. This one Bob did with a blow torch on a piece of plywood. Bob and I have always been very, very good friends.



Watkin: [Discussion of various paintings in office] That is a picture that Punk and Adele had, that Van Gogh copy, that I always liked so much. Punk gave it to me one day and I've kept it around me for all these years.

[Interruption]

Punk was really a good administrator and great with the students. In critique on plans and things of this nature he was very good. But as a lecturer in the classroom to my mind he was very, very poor. (I think Punk would be the first to say that too.) But he had a great sense of humor and a great feeling for people, for the honesty of a person. He really didn't like a phony.

Getting these people in [to teach] was his great accomplishment. Understand, he never even had a master's, let alone a doctorate. And yet he was an acting dean there for a long time in the School of Environmental Design. And he never published. Today if a person started in school like that he'd get no place. But just because of the force of his personality and his ability, he was never challenged. And he wasn't a person who played the social scholastic side either.

Riess: It doesn't sound like landscape architecture has been into that side. The department for a long time appeared quite separate from the rest of the University.

Watkin: Well, just trying to get the thing into focus of being a part of architecture was a job in itself.

Riess: Who wanted to?

Watkin: Punk, and people of this group. And of course the people in architecture who knew what Tommy was doing, and his direction.

But most of the time persons who called themselves landscape planners or designers were the people who drew the design and put in the garden. When Tommy came along there was a whole new dimension, and in Punk too. Landscape architecture was divorced from landscape construction; one from the other, the design and the construction, which it rightly should be. When the grandfather clause came in I can remember everybody jumping on board to be a landscape architect. Just because you'd picked up a plant sometime.

Riess: And didn't drop it immediately.

Watkin: [Laughing] Yes. But to my mind you were one or the other, and I was a contractor, and that's what I stayed at. My former partner took out a license in landscape architecture but I don't believe he has done a plan in his life. My feeling is, if you're going to be a contractor then be a contractor.



Riess: Actually in the matter of siting a building, that sounds more like the work of an architect than a landscape architect.

Watkin: Not necessarily, because the siting has to do with the surrounding area, how it relates to the outside.

An architect is always involved with the confines of the four sides, and hitherto they've always said, "Well, put some plants out there," and that's not really the thing. As the architects became more advanced on what landscape architecture was, then they began to turn it over to landscape architects. Tommy, being the person that he was, worked, of course, with Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons for many years; they were very close, hand in glove, because they understood Tommy's talents and they were devoted to him as well as to what he represented.

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Ruth Jaffe

A 1934 LANDSCAPE GRADUATE'S MEMORIES OF  
EARLY DAYS IN THE CHURCH OFFICE

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Ruth Jaffe

|                                              |    |
|----------------------------------------------|----|
| 1) Landscape Design, U.C. Class of 1934      | 75 |
| 2) The Office Apprenticeship                 | 78 |
| 3) "The Gang"                                | 81 |
| 4) Tommy's Work: "The Others Came After Him" | 83 |





Ruth Jaffe

October 26, 1977

Interview held at Ruth Jaffe's home, Berkeley

1) Landscape Design, U.C. Class of 1934

Riess: I want to know when you first thought about being a landscape architect.

Jaffe: Well, that's a good story. I went to Girls' High School when it was still Girls' High School and it was a rather famous school. There was a very swell art teacher by the name of Mr. McGlin--and just as an aside, Gerry Scott, when I saw her a couple of weeks ago, we got into conversation and we discovered that she went to Girls' High School and that both of us were sent over to see about being landscape architects by Tommy McGlin; we were sent over to Cal to go and look at the department and see if we liked it.

Riess: That's interesting. He must have conceived of it as a design profession, much more than horticultural.

Jaffe: I don't know. The way it happened with me, I was one of his students and we got along very well. He was a swell guy. There was a little plot of ground in front of the school on Geary Street that wasn't being used for anything. I was to do a project of some sort for Campfire Girls, so I asked if we couldn't put some flowers in there, and they allowed us to. So I did it. I guess I had a little help putting them actually in the ground.

I was going to go to commercial art school, to be a commercial artist. We, my mother and I, looked into that a little bit.

Riess: Were you financially well off enough in the Depression?

Jaffe: No, we weren't. My uncle put me through college.

Riess: I just wondered if you were looking for a really practical profession.

Jaffe: No, I was looking for something I would like to do. Tommy McGlin, with these things kind of working together I guess, said, 'Why don't you go over to the University of California and go and see the landscape

Jaffe: design department and see if you would like to do that." So I did. I went over there and I decided this is exactly what I wanted to do.

But I think that one thing that influenced me was a very nice young man who was a senior there and he was the president of the new landscape club that they had. He was an attractive guy and he was so nice and friendly--charming.

Riess: Were you interviewed by Gregg?

Jaffe: I don't think so, I didn't see Gregg or anyone like that. I just decided, yes, I think I would like to do this.

So then it turned out that we didn't have the money for me to go to college, and all those fine ideas started to float away, and my mother wrote to her brother and told him that I would like to go to college and he wrote back and said that he would send a check every month, there was just no question about that, so he put me through.

Riess: You were in the class of 1934.

Jaffe: Yes. It was one of "the" classes of landscape architecture. There was Corwin Mocine, Fran Violich and a guy named Ray Kusche and Art Hyde of the Hyde Nurseries in Watsonville. There were several women. There was a woman in our class by the name of Maino? Do you know the name Evelyn Maino?

Riess: No.

Jaffe: She's now a horticulturalist. She specializes in that side of things. She's written books on Pacific Coast trees and several books she has produced.

Riess: Mary Anthony.

Jaffe: Yes, and Juanita Coleman. And Mercer Boggs--he was from--why do you have a list of our class?

Riess: This scroll was given to John Gregg when he retired. It is the names of everyone who graduated under his years as chairman.

Jaffe: The thing I remember most about him is his black hair. He never got any grey. When he was an old man his hair was still black.

Riess: Dudley Trudgett?

Jaffe: Dudley Trudgett. Yes, he was the star of the class, I guess.

Riess: H.L. Vaughan was on the faculty by then, wasn't he?

Jaffe: We were his first class. The other person in our class was Adele Vaughan, and I can still see the drawings of the courtyard between the War Memorial Buildings and the Opera House, in fact, the whole landscaping around there [San Francisco Civic Center], especially that courtyard in the middle that Punk and Adele did. They did the Faculty Alumni House down here on the campus together.

Riess: When you entered as freshman you really didn't have any particular expectations of what landscape architecture was all about, I guess.

Jaffe: No, not really. It just seemed a pleasant thing to be in.

Riess: Did it quickly divide into the people who were concerned, social planning-oriented, and those who were not?

Jaffe: Actually, I don't know. I was very naive, very young, if not in years, just young in development. I had quite a protected life, I guess, though I was aware of the Depression, of course.

We went to hear the famous socialist, Norman Thomas, a very fine-looking man, when he came to speak. They wouldn't let him on the campus. He had to speak outside of Sather Gate. We were anxious to hear him. We were anxious to have people who were the progressive people come along into the political scene. But I think personally I was so involved with getting through school and working that I didn't have much time to do anything else.

Riess: How about an interest in the Bauhaus-type design that was filtering to the West Coast?

Jaffe: That's another thing. I had just come into all this and the whole thing was brand new to me. I wasn't aware of much of that, though I did tend toward the newer things.

Riess: Were you hearing about Tommy's work? Were you being shown Tommy's work as you went through school?

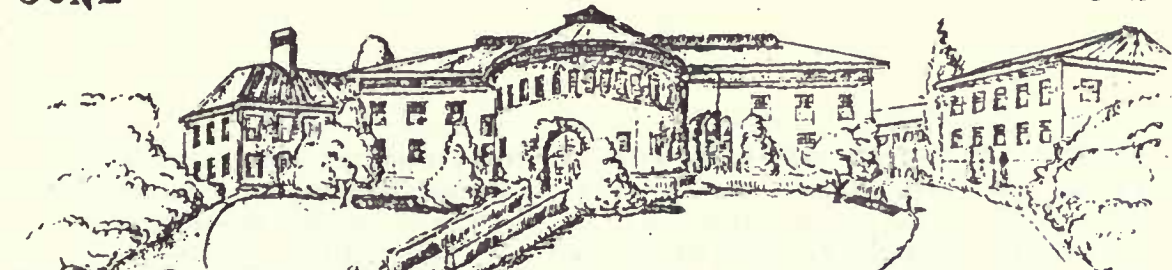
Jaffe: I knew about Tommy's work, yes, I think because Punk was very close to Tommy.

Riess: Does that mean that Tommy came and talked to the classes?

Jaffe: No, he didn't. The first time I saw Tommy--and this is one of the highlights of my life--was when we had in our own class a competition to design a gateway for the Oxford Street entrance to campus. This was a competitive problem, and we were to receive a prize, the winner to be announced at the year-end dinner and one of the judges was Tommy Church.







This Scroll is presented to

# JOHN W. GREGG

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, WHO ORGANIZED THE DIVISION OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AND SERVED AS ITS CHAIRMAN FOR THIRTY FOUR YEARS.

It is presented as a token of appreciation of the training and guidance received under his direction by the students and graduates of the Division whose names appear below.

- |                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1914<br>Mary W. Shephard                                                                      | Jesse Beach<br>Sophia R. Smith<br>Robert Shapiro                                                                                                                               | Lloyd Jorgensen<br>William D. Mill Jr.<br>Phil A. Shipley                                                                                                              | 1938<br>Milton Butler<br>Jane H. Michan                                                                                                                                        | 1944<br>Edna M. Horn                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Virginia E. Carpenter<br>Robert S. Cornwall                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1915<br>Doris Hutchins                                                                        | Diana Johnson<br>Robert A. Johnson                                                                                                                                             | 1934<br>Mary Anthony<br>Nancy R. Boggs                                                                                                                                 | Dorothy Murray<br>William J. Payne<br>Roy H. Taylor                                                                                                                            | 1945<br>Kathryn Ingle<br>Paul A. Jaffer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | James H. Couson<br>David L. Davis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 1916<br>Helen E. Cotton<br>Howard E. Coker                                                    | 1921<br>Harold K. Carter                                                                                                                                                       | 1934<br>Burdette Corneil<br>James K. Coleman<br>Arthur B. Hyde                                                                                                         | 1939<br>Richard Jung<br>William B. Leaking                                                                                                                                     | 1946<br>Kathryn W. Starnes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Kempe & DeWitt<br>Virginia S. Douglas                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 1918<br>Budd Smith<br>Opal J. Walter                                                          | 1928<br>Wilhelm Brumler<br>George Keen                                                                                                                                         | 1934<br>Ruth Jaffe<br>Ray O. Kuschke<br>Edgar Martin                                                                                                                   | 1940<br>John C. Bostic<br>George S. Jordan<br>Ralph Thurston Jones                                                                                                             | 1947<br>Robert R. Eckroch<br>Howard O. Betty                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Robert G. Collins<br>William R. Sant                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 1919<br>Elihu B. Brantzen<br>Cauld B. Kead                                                    | 1929<br>Arthur S. Benton<br>Virginia Myrtle<br>Richard Pittsiff<br>Donald von Rippe                                                                                            | 1930<br>Hazel K. Ostrom<br>Joseph Somerville<br>Ledy Sunderson<br>Ledy Schumacher<br>Dudley Judgell                                                                    | 1941<br>Douglas Bayler<br>John J. Boucher<br>Wayne W. Gray                                                                                                                     | 1947<br>Robert J. Eckroch<br>Howard O. Betty<br>Mary Jean Deaton<br>E. Mack Hallauer<br>Jul B. Hammerstein<br>Aron Hunt<br>William L. Korona<br>Marian Kemura                                                                                                                                               | Daniel A. Howick<br>Samuel J. Kanabo<br>Roy M. Matheson<br>David B. M. Cooker<br>Mary Susan Osborn<br>Jack Sakana-shi<br>Marlyn J. Johnson<br>Howard S. Jolley<br>David W. Van Pelt<br>Harvey Van Dymon<br>Theobald J. Warabe                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 1920<br>Ethel H. Campbell<br>Elizabeth H. Redfitt<br>Theodosia Fidd<br>Carl M. Wagner         | 1930<br>William J. Casani<br>William R. Sorenson<br>Helen Kopp<br>Sarkis M. Minian                                                                                             | 1935<br>Grace D. Brown<br>Clifford Conly<br>Surrell C. Cho<br>Evelyn Maine<br>Earl B. Ingram<br>Gwen Moore<br>Robert D. Duerber<br>R. Von Willes<br>Edward C. Williams | 1941<br>Douglas Bayler<br>John J. Boucher<br>Wayne W. Gray<br>Archie Smoyet<br>Sachuro Kanabata<br>Aaron Levine<br>R. Barton Allen Jr.<br>Jane A. Marshall<br>Harold J. Jaques | 1948<br>Eric Armstrong<br>Mera Brownson<br>Neil S. Garber<br>Frances H. Dean<br>Lore A. Downey<br>Fred L. Hector<br>Lillian A. Hunt<br>Jessie Johnson Jr.<br>John J. Knutson<br>Patricia Morrison<br>Rosemary K. Rappa<br>William J. Rousby<br>Wallace M. Russell<br>Claude M. Soudry<br>Leon M. Williamson | 1950<br>Thomas L. Aronous<br>Edwin L. Arnold<br>Joe Borshawski<br>Joe Hing You Chan<br>James M. Cowie Jr.<br>William H. January<br>Bernard L. Edmonds<br>Lyle Fredrickson<br>Robert Harpenter<br>Theodore A. Harpenter<br>E. H. E. Joiner<br>Glenn Justice<br>Helenie Zebie Ma<br>Eleanor Morrison<br>Raymond J. Miedel<br>Jack C. Stifford<br>Archie W. Stearn<br>Shigeru Tsuchiyama<br>Warren B. Turner<br>Paul R. Wussch<br>William Wisdropp |
| 1921<br>F. B. Kennedy<br>Herbert DeAngelis<br>Thomas Vint<br>Kirkana B. Widdowson             | 1931<br>Jerry Charlton<br>Mansfield Clifton<br>Robert Floyd<br>Wm. Sharon Jure<br>Robert C. Haddison<br>Charles H. Johnson<br>Reginald Miller<br>Frances Oswald<br>Chas. Payne | 1936<br>Abel A. Vaughan                                                                                                                                                | 1941<br>Douglas Bayler<br>John J. Boucher<br>Wayne W. Gray<br>Archie Smoyet<br>Sachuro Kanabata<br>Aaron Levine<br>R. Barton Allen Jr.<br>Jane A. Marshall<br>Harold J. Jaques | 1948<br>Eric Armstrong<br>Mera Brownson<br>Neil S. Garber<br>Frances H. Dean<br>Lore A. Downey<br>Fred L. Hector<br>Lillian A. Hunt<br>Jessie Johnson Jr.<br>John J. Knutson<br>Patricia Morrison<br>Rosemary K. Rappa<br>William J. Rousby<br>Wallace M. Russell<br>Claude M. Soudry<br>Leon M. Williamson | 1950<br>Thomas L. Aronous<br>Edwin L. Arnold<br>Joe Borshawski<br>Joe Hing You Chan<br>James M. Cowie Jr.<br>William H. January<br>Bernard L. Edmonds<br>Lyle Fredrickson<br>Robert Harpenter<br>Theodore A. Harpenter<br>E. H. E. Joiner<br>Glenn Justice<br>Helenie Zebie Ma<br>Eleanor Morrison<br>Raymond J. Miedel<br>Jack C. Stifford<br>Archie W. Stearn<br>Shigeru Tsuchiyama<br>Warren B. Turner<br>Paul R. Wussch<br>William Wisdropp |
| 1922<br>Victor Anderson<br>J. R. Hermon<br>Abelade Robinson<br>Harold Schreiber<br>Jane Telfe | 1931<br>Jerry Charlton<br>Mansfield Clifton<br>Robert Floyd<br>Wm. Sharon Jure<br>Robert C. Haddison<br>Charles H. Johnson<br>Reginald Miller<br>Frances Oswald<br>Chas. Payne | 1936<br>Abel A. Vaughan                                                                                                                                                | 1941<br>Douglas Bayler<br>John J. Boucher<br>Wayne W. Gray<br>Archie Smoyet<br>Sachuro Kanabata<br>Aaron Levine<br>R. Barton Allen Jr.<br>Jane A. Marshall<br>Harold J. Jaques | 1948<br>Eric Armstrong<br>Mera Brownson<br>Neil S. Garber<br>Frances H. Dean<br>Lore A. Downey<br>Fred L. Hector<br>Lillian A. Hunt<br>Jessie Johnson Jr.<br>John J. Knutson<br>Patricia Morrison<br>Rosemary K. Rappa<br>William J. Rousby<br>Wallace M. Russell<br>Claude M. Soudry<br>Leon M. Williamson | 1950<br>Thomas L. Aronous<br>Edwin L. Arnold<br>Joe Borshawski<br>Joe Hing You Chan<br>James M. Cowie Jr.<br>William H. January<br>Bernard L. Edmonds<br>Lyle Fredrickson<br>Robert Harpenter<br>Theodore A. Harpenter<br>E. H. E. Joiner<br>Glenn Justice<br>Helenie Zebie Ma<br>Eleanor Morrison<br>Raymond J. Miedel<br>Jack C. Stifford<br>Archie W. Stearn<br>Shigeru Tsuchiyama<br>Warren B. Turner<br>Paul R. Wussch<br>William Wisdropp |
| 1923<br>Willa C. E. Ormack<br>Thomas D. Church<br>Harry J. Newton                             | 1931<br>Jerry Charlton<br>Mansfield Clifton<br>Robert Floyd<br>Wm. Sharon Jure<br>Robert C. Haddison<br>Charles H. Johnson<br>Reginald Miller<br>Frances Oswald<br>Chas. Payne | 1936<br>Abel A. Vaughan                                                                                                                                                | 1941<br>Douglas Bayler<br>John J. Boucher<br>Wayne W. Gray<br>Archie Smoyet<br>Sachuro Kanabata<br>Aaron Levine<br>R. Barton Allen Jr.<br>Jane A. Marshall<br>Harold J. Jaques | 1948<br>Eric Armstrong<br>Mera Brownson<br>Neil S. Garber<br>Frances H. Dean<br>Lore A. Downey<br>Fred L. Hector<br>Lillian A. Hunt<br>Jessie Johnson Jr.<br>John J. Knutson<br>Patricia Morrison<br>Rosemary K. Rappa<br>William J. Rousby<br>Wallace M. Russell<br>Claude M. Soudry<br>Leon M. Williamson | 1950<br>Thomas L. Aronous<br>Edwin L. Arnold<br>Joe Borshawski<br>Joe Hing You Chan<br>James M. Cowie Jr.<br>William H. January<br>Bernard L. Edmonds<br>Lyle Fredrickson<br>Robert Harpenter<br>Theodore A. Harpenter<br>E. H. E. Joiner<br>Glenn Justice<br>Helenie Zebie Ma<br>Eleanor Morrison<br>Raymond J. Miedel<br>Jack C. Stifford<br>Archie W. Stearn<br>Shigeru Tsuchiyama<br>Warren B. Turner<br>Paul R. Wussch<br>William Wisdropp |
| 1924<br>Mary L. Powers                                                                        | 1931<br>Jerry Charlton<br>Mansfield Clifton<br>Robert Floyd<br>Wm. Sharon Jure<br>Robert C. Haddison<br>Charles H. Johnson<br>Reginald Miller<br>Frances Oswald<br>Chas. Payne | 1936<br>Abel A. Vaughan                                                                                                                                                | 1941<br>Douglas Bayler<br>John J. Boucher<br>Wayne W. Gray<br>Archie Smoyet<br>Sachuro Kanabata<br>Aaron Levine<br>R. Barton Allen Jr.<br>Jane A. Marshall<br>Harold J. Jaques | 1948<br>Eric Armstrong<br>Mera Brownson<br>Neil S. Garber<br>Frances H. Dean<br>Lore A. Downey<br>Fred L. Hector<br>Lillian A. Hunt<br>Jessie Johnson Jr.<br>John J. Knutson<br>Patricia Morrison<br>Rosemary K. Rappa<br>William J. Rousby<br>Wallace M. Russell<br>Claude M. Soudry<br>Leon M. Williamson | 1950<br>Thomas L. Aronous<br>Edwin L. Arnold<br>Joe Borshawski<br>Joe Hing You Chan<br>James M. Cowie Jr.<br>William H. January<br>Bernard L. Edmonds<br>Lyle Fredrickson<br>Robert Harpenter<br>Theodore A. Harpenter<br>E. H. E. Joiner<br>Glenn Justice<br>Helenie Zebie Ma<br>Eleanor Morrison<br>Raymond J. Miedel<br>Jack C. Stifford<br>Archie W. Stearn<br>Shigeru Tsuchiyama<br>Warren B. Turner<br>Paul R. Wussch<br>William Wisdropp |
| 1925<br>Katharine Pessely<br>Beatrice Williams                                                | 1931<br>Jerry Charlton<br>Mansfield Clifton<br>Robert Floyd<br>Wm. Sharon Jure<br>Robert C. Haddison<br>Charles H. Johnson<br>Reginald Miller<br>Frances Oswald<br>Chas. Payne | 1936<br>Abel A. Vaughan                                                                                                                                                | 1941<br>Douglas Bayler<br>John J. Boucher<br>Wayne W. Gray<br>Archie Smoyet<br>Sachuro Kanabata<br>Aaron Levine<br>R. Barton Allen Jr.<br>Jane A. Marshall<br>Harold J. Jaques | 1948<br>Eric Armstrong<br>Mera Brownson<br>Neil S. Garber<br>Frances H. Dean<br>Lore A. Downey<br>Fred L. Hector<br>Lillian A. Hunt<br>Jessie Johnson Jr.<br>John J. Knutson<br>Patricia Morrison<br>Rosemary K. Rappa<br>William J. Rousby<br>Wallace M. Russell<br>Claude M. Soudry<br>Leon M. Williamson | 1950<br>Thomas L. Aronous<br>Edwin L. Arnold<br>Joe Borshawski<br>Joe Hing You Chan<br>James M. Cowie Jr.<br>William H. January<br>Bernard L. Edmonds<br>Lyle Fredrickson<br>Robert Harpenter<br>Theodore A. Harpenter<br>E. H. E. Joiner<br>Glenn Justice<br>Helenie Zebie Ma<br>Eleanor Morrison<br>Raymond J. Miedel<br>Jack C. Stifford<br>Archie W. Stearn<br>Shigeru Tsuchiyama<br>Warren B. Turner<br>Paul R. Wussch<br>William Wisdropp |
| 1926<br>Fred Barlow Jr.<br>Arthur Colkhead                                                    | 1931<br>Jerry Charlton<br>Mansfield Clifton<br>Robert Floyd<br>Wm. Sharon Jure<br>Robert C. Haddison<br>Charles H. Johnson<br>Reginald Miller<br>Frances Oswald<br>Chas. Payne | 1936<br>Abel A. Vaughan                                                                                                                                                | 1941<br>Douglas Bayler<br>John J. Boucher<br>Wayne W. Gray<br>Archie Smoyet<br>Sachuro Kanabata<br>Aaron Levine<br>R. Barton Allen Jr.<br>Jane A. Marshall<br>Harold J. Jaques | 1948<br>Eric Armstrong<br>Mera Brownson<br>Neil S. Garber<br>Frances H. Dean<br>Lore A. Downey<br>Fred L. Hector<br>Lillian A. Hunt<br>Jessie Johnson Jr.<br>John J. Knutson<br>Patricia Morrison<br>Rosemary K. Rappa<br>William J. Rousby<br>Wallace M. Russell<br>Claude M. Soudry<br>Leon M. Williamson | 1950<br>Thomas L. Aronous<br>Edwin L. Arnold<br>Joe Borshawski<br>Joe Hing You Chan<br>James M. Cowie Jr.<br>William H. January<br>Bernard L. Edmonds<br>Lyle Fredrickson<br>Robert Harpenter<br>Theodore A. Harpenter<br>E. H. E. Joiner<br>Glenn Justice<br>Helenie Zebie Ma<br>Eleanor Morrison<br>Raymond J. Miedel<br>Jack C. Stifford<br>Archie W. Stearn<br>Shigeru Tsuchiyama<br>Warren B. Turner<br>Paul R. Wussch<br>William Wisdropp |



Jaffe: The big plates that were made for the competition were hung in the rotunda in Ag Hall. There was a stairway that went from the first floor down to the ground floor and if you stood on the stairs, you could look through the windows and see the first three drawings. Well, we'd take turns, going down to see as the judges judged these.

Riess: They moved them around?

Jaffe: They moved them and then they would number them one, two, three, and they'd keep changing them back and forth.

Now, in this class were Fran Violich and Dudley Trudgett, two really top men. Dudley was, I think to everyone's mind, the really top guy.\* There was Dudley, first place, Fran, second place, it just was very close. But then I went and peeked over into the window and saw my drawing up there in this first group. Well, I got kind of nervous! I think I was afraid to go back to look at it.

We all sat at our tables on our high stools, and it must have been 11:00 at night, or so, and in through the door came the judges, Tommy first. Tommy walked over and he stood there in front of me at my desk and he said, "Congratulations."

"What about?" I was wondering.

He said, "You've won the contest. You're first place."

It was beyond all of my dreams, that I would be first place.

He said, "Now, when you get out, if you feel as though you'd like to come and work in my office I would be happy to have you." That was the beginning of what happened later. When I got out I certainly went over to Tommy's office.

## 2) The Office Apprenticeship

Jaffe: I was the first one in the office, and I worked as an apprentice. It was Depression, and I got--I wouldn't need them now--but at that time I got cigarettes and carfare as my pay. [Laughter] But just being there--he's so charming, so charming and unassuming.

---

\*Actually I haven't seen Dudley Trudgett's work and I wish I could. He's in Santa Barbara. I hear that he really is a master. I hear that students come and sit around his feet. R.J.

Jaffe: I just did drafting, rather simple drafting. Once in awhile he'd let me have a crack at designing some small bits and I did one small garden in San Francisco that he felt would be all right and he used it there.

Riess: What kinds of jobs was he doing?

Jaffe: He was just being recognized as the best man by the rich people, society, the Peninsula group. They were the people who could afford to do what he could design for them.

For instance, while I was there Alma Spreckels was a client for her Woodside place and I remember that one of the things that impressed me when Tommy did the fine vegetable garden--there was a vegetable garden and there were the staples and the whole bit--but for the vegetable garden alone (and in these days it was something) just the two by four curbing that went on either side of the asphalt walks cost \$1,700. I was very impressed by this--the cost--and then the whole thing.

One day Alma Spreckels was supposed to come to the office to look at some drawings and I thought, "My goodness, what will we do." I thought we should at least offer her a cup of tea, so I went to a very nice Italian hardware store close by and I bought some pretty Italian cups. I think we had a kettle. We had one of these round, wood stoves to warm up the office, and a Chinese basket full of wood. I would build a fire when I got there in the morning and we heated the water on there in the kettle.

So I got the tea and the cups and maybe even some little cakes. And Alma Spreckels comes in. I said, "Would you have a cup of tea?"

"No thank you." [Laughter] And that was the end of my tea party! I never did use my fancy cups and tea and everything.

Tommy worked with Wurster and they worked together; Bill got a job, Tommy got a job. He did all of Bill's work and also he did some of Gardner Dailey's work. I don't think he did so many of Gardner's because Gardner was his own landscape architect, he was trained as a landscape architect himself, and he was almost a better landscape architect I think--not really--than an architect. But he was one of those guys who did everything, like the English.

Riess: It sounds like in the beginning, before you got to the office, Tommy was doing everything too. But Tommy didn't have to do detailed drawings because Floyd would just know how to put the garden in anyway?

Jaffe: Yes, he worked very closely with Floyd.

I don't suppose we ever detailed the walks or anything. Tommy would have to do some detailing on his fancy walks and steps and stuff, little houses, little structures and everything. But I imagine that they did a lot in the field by just going out and working together. I unfortunately didn't get in to watching the construction very much and that was a great loss.

That's one thing--I'll maybe bring this out. I think this would still be of some interest. When I was going to school the boys would always have summer jobs. A lot of them were putting themselves through college. They would have summer jobs in construction, going out into the field, working. Women never did that and I never knew how to lay a brick or that kind of thing, how to pour concrete, or how to make concrete. All that stuff. It was a great hole in training, in learning experience, in this business.

There should be--and I think there is now, and I think actually that Gerry Scott did a lot for this--there should be in the training of any building business, summer field courses actually instructing. I think there is that now on the Blake gardens. And other places, I guess. But they just cannot teach any of this stuff and learn it without doing it and at least seeing it done. You just can't do that. So it took quite a long time then, after school. The learning process for this business is a long time--it just goes on forever. But even to learn how to actually do things takes quite a while.

Riess: So did that get filled in for you in your apprentice period at all?

Jaffe: No, it didn't. When I was in Tommy's office he should have taken me out more and showed me how to inlay bricks and this and that which he didn't do.

Riess: But you probably didn't even think to ask at that point.

Jaffe: That's right. He would have been delighted. It just never occurred to me that what I really should be doing is watching how they build these things.

Something popped into my mind that's another interesting thing. It doesn't have anything to do with Tommy except as just a group of people in the area. Corwin Mocine and I were very close in school. In fact, Corwin and Fran and I were very close--sort of pals.

Riess: That's what Fran said. He said the three of you were the only ones that had "heard the whistle blowing."

Jaffe: Corwin and I went to see the President of the University, who was Mr. Sproul, and we said we had this idea of having a department which would be called a fine arts department, and this department would have architecture, landscape architecture, and the arts. Well, that's now what the School of Urban Design is, I guess, sort of.

Anyway, we went to Mr. Sproul, Corwin and I, and said we felt that's what should be and he said, "Yes, I think so too." Actually I guess maybe we were trying to push forward into new horizons.

Riess: It sounds like you had a yearning to be closer at the very least to the architecture.

Jaffe: Well, not so much that we yearned to be closer to the architecture, but that we yearned that the architects be close to us. [Laughter] Landscaping has always been sort of the stepchild, especially with the engineers, and for years we've been trying to have a closer relationship and rapport with the other building professions, and especially the engineers, because architects and landscapers get along pretty well really but the engineers we have never been able to get along with. It's unusual to find an engineer who is working toward the same thing that you're trying to achieve.

Everything was secondary to getting this highway through or this bridge built or this culvert put in, and not just the environment was secondary, but the design itself was. They had little aesthetic sensitivity.

### 3) "The Gang"

Riess: How long were you in Tommy's office?

Jaffe: Two or three years, somewhere in that area. When I was there there was another woman who came, Marie Harbeck, and she was one of the most delightful, capable people that I have ever met. Just charming. I think she went to Oregon to school, which was one of the fine landscape schools even then. We were there at the same time because I remember working at the board with her and she was one of these people that your minds kind of come together. Hardly before you can put the pencil down on the paper we were both thinking, would it be good to do this? "Yes," we would say, and it would just kind of flow out on to the paper. I never had that experience or rapport since.



Jaffe: She was with Tommy after I left and then she went east and worked for New York Regional Planning and she married a man back there and moved to Texas. He was also a landscape architect and they did some beautiful work, especially campus work. Beautiful.

Riess: Do you know how she approached Tommy for a job?

Jaffe: I don't remember about how she came into the office.

Riess: Why do you think he was just hiring women then?

Jaffe: I think one thing, I think the men in those days kind of started off on their own.

Riess: Who was Scully? [Elsie Sculthorp]

Jaffe: I don't know how she knew about Tommy, but she wrote to Tommy from wherever she was in the east and asked if she could come and work for him. Tommy was to be back in that area on a job and he went to see her. So he said, "Yes, come out." She was in the office for several years--I don't know how long.

Riess: Was she there when you were there?

Jaffe: That's the thing I can't remember. I knew her very well and we used to have lunch or dinner and do stuff together.

Then she had to go home because she got cataracts in both eyes and she never came back again.

Riess: She was older?

Jaffe: She was older than I was. I don't know if she was older than Tommy or not.

Riess: Did she do any drafting at all?

Jaffe: She didn't do any table work. She was a secretary and a very nice lady. She was sort of a friend. [In that office] we were very much like a family.

The next person I remember in the office was Royston. Royston and I worked there together a little while and we were doing the planting plans for the Potrero Housing Project. Also, we worked on Sunnydale.



Jaffe: I wasn't there at the time Halprin was in Tommy's office. But I watched him work once and I remember thinking he had a frugal streak in him because he was sitting there at the table working, and you know the way you hold a piece of tracing paper in one hand and you sketch out some stuff and then you tear that off and throw it away and start to do the whole thing over again? Well, Halprin would draw something and then he would erase it and start over again and he would not use a new piece of paper.

As a group of people, Marie, Tommy, Royston and the gang, we not only worked in his office but we were very good friends.

Riess: Socializing afterwards?

Jaffe: We were just good friends. We would socialize a little bit. We'd always go out as a group at lunchtimes to one of the places on Columbus where we used to get these wonderful meals for 50¢.

We were also very close with the Vaughans. Everybody seemed to be very close friends at that time. Everything was always pleasant and friendly and warm and fine. How does the song go? "There never was heard a discouraging word." The landscapers were a bit clannish I think. In fact, there was a lot of intermarriage. [Laughter] I guess they just sort of got along well together. It's always been that way. It still is.

#### 4) Tommy's Work: "The Others Came After Him"

Riess: Fran Violich says that not until Garrett came on to the scene did Tommy begin to shift from clipped boxwood to more contemporary forms.\*

Jaffe: I don't know that Garrett was that influential on Tommy. All people influence one another certainly. It's like a big stew pot. Everything goes into a big stew pot.

Riess: Garrett was included in the stew pot?

Jaffe: No, the stew pot is ideas. All ideas get mixing around and you pick out things that fit into your own concepts; you develop your own concepts from a whole wide area, all of Europe and the Orient--which Tommy knew--all that is going on around you if you look and watch. So, as far as Garrett particularly influencing Tommy's work, as part of the whole general influx of ideas I suppose that he picked up things here and there. But I don't know but what the same thing might have happened if Garrett was not doing work at the same time.

---

\*See footnote, p. 32.

Jaffe: I think that Tommy eased up in his rectilinear style, and got into the wonderful free and moving forms when working in the larger areas out and around the Peninsula a great deal.

You can't work in rolling landscape in that kind of earth forms without working into it. It plays on what you're doing, you play on what it's doing. What influenced Tommy's design a great deal, I would think, is where he was working.

He developed, it seems to me, more within himself. Well, of course, these outside things were influencing him. But he had such a marvelous feel about what was appropriate and what was nice and attractive. He wasn't afraid to make things wonderfully pretty and attractive, whereas some of these younger fellas who came along, I think, purposely didn't want to be caught doing anything that was not "strong," and "meaningful."

It looks swell on a piece of paper, wonderful designs and patterns like a poster, some of them, and they purposely did this to get away from this very "nice, easy, attractive" way of doing things--sentimentalism. Some of the things they did at first seemed to be intent on making a good-looking pattern.

Not that these designers weren't fine even then, they were always fine. They were the outstanding men in the field from the very beginning. But, for instance, now I don't think Royston would be afraid at all to make something look just as pretty as he possibly could. That word "pretty"--I can't think of anything particularly better than that at the moment. But just easy and comfortable and attractive. I think that they thought that Tommy was too romantic. They wanted to get away from that. They were the new school, the innovators and they were perfectly right at the time. They wanted to do something real swell, make a strong statement.

Riess: And you always must do something new, I guess.

Jaffe: Yes, sure, why not. That's what you're supposed to do. You're young and you're bright and that's what you're supposed to do, something new or different, strong, interesting, jazzy, really "bang up."

Riess: Whereas Tommy's philosophy, "gardens are for people," is significant.

Jaffe: Yes, that's right. You're perfectly right. He had no fear of making things really beautiful. He had such a feeling for things. He is a great artist. I would call him a landscape artist. He was really great in his artistry. He knew instinctively what would look good.

Jaffe: That's why I think the people on the Peninsula and around who had the money took to him. In the first place, he was a very charming man. Whomever he met was his friend right from the beginning and all these great families, they adored him. He would go down there and the first thing wouldn't be, "Well, what are we going to do here, Tom?" Not at all.

"Oh, Tommy, it's so nice to see you. Come, sit down. We'll have a cup of coffee" or this and that. That was the first thing, just to talk to him, see him.

Then the topic turned to work. But they were all happy to see him. He was a very well-liked man, a very well-loved man. It all came out from him onto the ground. I think he was just that kind of spirit. He could never do a harsh thing or forced thing. His designs were never forced. They flowed out of him onto the ground and when they got onto the ground, they flowed all over the ground. It was just a joy, to make things joyous.

Riess: He sounds easy to work with for the clients, too.

Jaffe: Oh, yes, to get Tommy to do it in the first place, that was a plum, and as the years went by he wouldn't take anything. He didn't have time. So people would be hoping that they could get a Tommy Church garden. He was great, a very wonderful fellow.

Riess: Did he have thoughts he shared on his working?

Jaffe: I don't know what went on inside his mind and how he came to do what he did. I think actually his book brings out his technical skills and know-how. For instance, his approach to steps: Steps are very difficult to do, very difficult to know just how they should look, but also how they should be built and then building them. I do remember a great many of the pictures in the book show steps. His skill at steps really brings out some of his really great technical skill, his skill at conceiving how things should look and putting them down on a drawing and then in being able to build it. You can design a wonderfully pretty picture, but to have it put on the ground is very hard to do. But he knew how to build these things.

Another thing that made him so good is he knew just what would be exactly right for that spot and how they'd go up and down and all over the place and how to build all these things just right. Then his sense of scale and proportion--all of those things are the fundamental, technical parts of the business, and he knew all about that. He didn't ever talk about it very much but it all comes out in his book.

Jaffe: These great simple, wonderful solutions. He in his own way had his own great strengths and style. His were most powerful designs. It was the place first--he studied the place and then he would put the design into the place and that is what is so skillful about him.

He would do it in a way that you would think it just grew out of it. But it didn't just grow out. It was his knowing and feeling what to do with each situation that he had to work with, and you'll find a lot of people don't work with that so closely. That's a difference from say one end of the pole to the other end of the pole between Tommy Church and an engineer. Along the way people will get together and do a pretty decent job, but Tommy was the quintessence of this kind of thing, the way he worked with the ground.

He was quick. He could look at a place and he would just have the feel of that place and he could go into the field and design the job right there on the site. Like the Japanese, he just had that feeling of the tree--"Not there, not there, right here." And it would be exact. He would know all of these things.

He would do a lot of study in the field and come back and work it out on paper. He did beautiful drawings, if you've seen them. They weren't terribly fancy, but they were beautiful.

He was so skillful with that pencil. The last time that I saw Tommy as he was, as I knew him, not really from the early days but not too long ago, was when I was with the San Francisco City Planning Department.

In the last few years I reviewed everything that came into the office as far as landscaping went. One of the jobs that came in was Mason's garage down there on Jefferson Street for the Cannery building. We had a good firm of landscape architects on it, a very good firm. We worked very nicely together. Tommy was in on this job. As a favor to Mason he said he'd sit in on the discussions for the landscaping, which he did.

The street floor has shops all around and we wanted to dress it up as much as we could. There wasn't a lot of room to do things in this space and then there were some knotty little problems--what will we do right here, what will we do right there? So we were all sitting around this meeting--the architects, the landscape architects, the owners, everybody, me--stewing. What will we do about this?

Tommy's sitting there, not saying a word. Then he takes out a piece of paper and his pencil and he goes, boom-boom-boom [makes quick sketching gestures with her hands] and he had it all worked out like



Jaffe: that. He says, "Why not do something like this?" And that was the answer, no question about it. Just like that.

His hands were so facile with the pencil. Just "boom-boom-boom," a pretty little picture and the tree.

Somebody said, "My, you sure draw trees fast!" He said, "Well, I've been doing it a long time." [Laughter]

[Looking at Gardens Are For People] That's my name, my name's first, and then Marie. Doug Baylis--I forgot he was there. Royston, Osmundson, and Halprin. That's the kind of man Tommy was. I was only there as an apprentice for two or three years and look--he mentions all of us in there. That's the way he was.

Tommy's training was a very fine training. In the first place, he went to a fine school and he did travel a lot and was influenced, as everyone is, by the Italian gardens and the English gardens, the Villa Lante and the Villa Gamberia--the great, great Italian gardens. That all comes down into this source of creative sources. It has to come somewhere. You have to feed it before it can give back and there are all of these things he worked with.

But he knew how to use them. It all came out of him in an individual way. I think he's unique and I don't think you can go around and see much to match the gardens that came out of Tommy, I mean the same kind of stylish things. If you do, Tommy's came first. He was the innovator of the small urban gardens designed in this area and the larger gardens, too. The others came after him.





Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Theodore Bernardi, Donn Emmons, and Roger Sturtevant

TWO ARCHITECTS AND A PHOTOGRAPHER RECALL THE HARD WORK AND  
THE GOOD TIMES WITH CHURCH AND WURSTER, 1930s, 1940s

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess

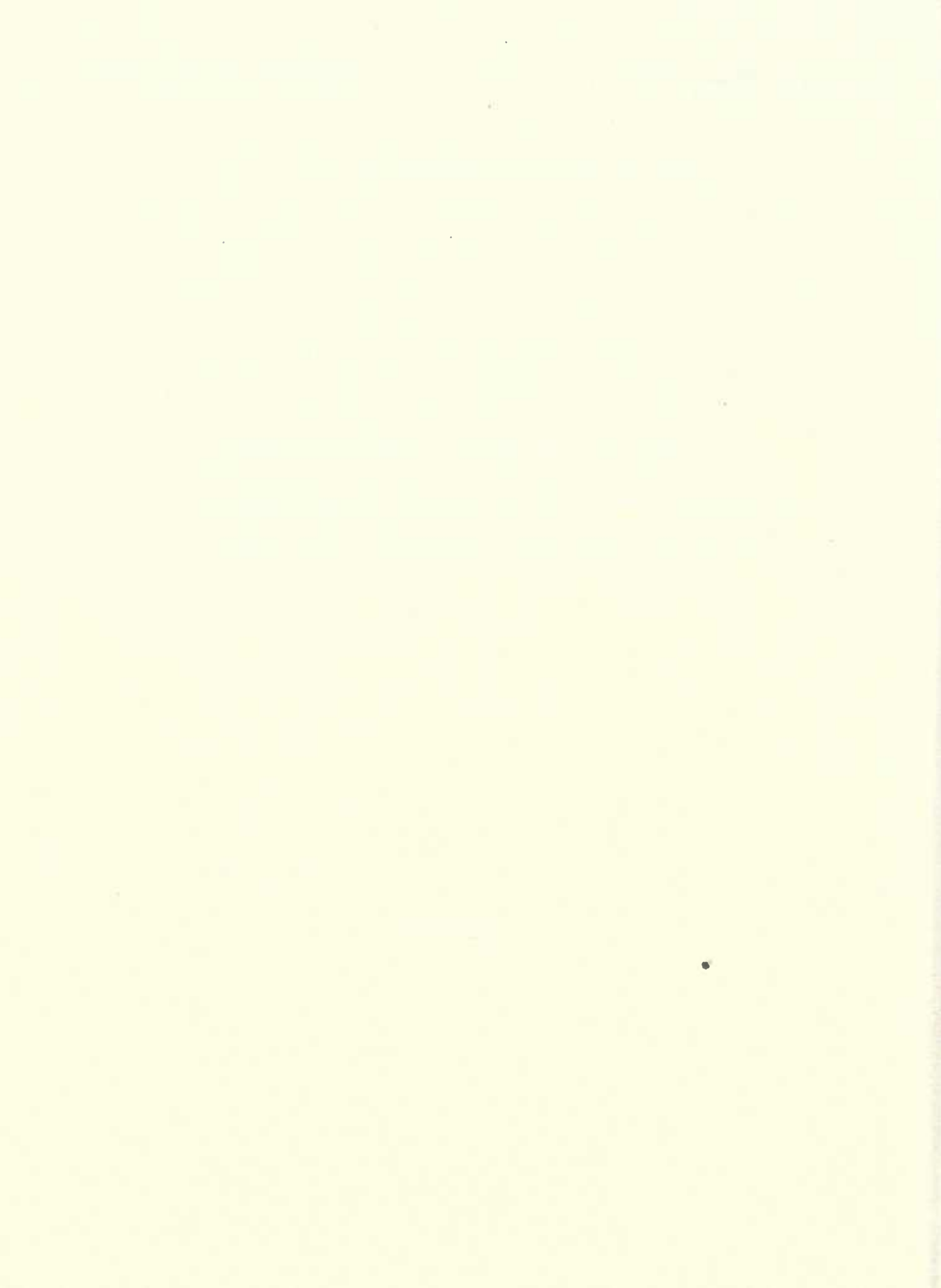


TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Theodore Bernardi, Donn Emmons, Roger Sturtevant

|                                            |     |
|--------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) Hard Work and Camaraderie, The Thirties | 88  |
| 2) Stories, and Photographs                | 104 |

Theodore Bernardi, Donn Emmons, Roger Sturtevant  
 April 19, 1977  
 Interview held at Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons Office, San Francisco

1) Hard Work and Camaraderie, The Thirties

Sturtevant: Actually I've been thinking about it, and there's darn little I know about Tommy. However there are general things which I wish to say. You see these [indicating Bernardi and Emmons] were kids [in 1929]. I was here long before. They were carrying on in school.

Bernardi: What year did you start working with Wurster?

Sturtevant: Pasatiempo.

Bernardi: What year was that?

Sturtevant: When it started. I don't know. [1929] You weren't in the office; Floyd [Comstock] was in the office.

Riess: How did you get associated with Wurster and Church at Pasatiempo?

Sturtevant: It was Tommy who started me. Tommy was working for a landscape architect who had really a bad name for the time, Floyd Mick. The name Mick meant nothing but a very bad Irishman in those days; it was an epithet.

How in the devil Tommy ever heard about me, I don't know, but Tommy called and wanted me to photograph some things for Mick. And we were to go out to these gardens in Piedmont, in the lush days of cow manure and lots of water. So he told me to meet him at this little old house, down some stairs, in a very obscure street in Oakland. He and Punk [H.L.] Vaughan, I think, lived there at the time. I knew nothing about either of them.

I went down these stairs, and the front door was open--it was a lovely day like today--and there was no sign of anybody. I don't think there was a bell. I called, or something. And from way



Sturtevant: down at the end of the hall appeared this stark naked little figure, all wet--looking like a bantam rooster--and he said, "Oh, come on in." [Laughter]

It seems that the night before had been his bachelor party, before he was to get married to Betsy, and that'll give the date! That was my introduction to Tommy Church. He got some coffee down him and we went out and photographed the gardens by Mick.

Riess: Gardens he designed?

Sturtevant: I don't know, they were under Mick's name, and I can't remember them. I don't think I even have the negatives anymore.

Then very very shortly after that he went to Pasatiempo.

Bernardi: When did Wurster first get the job there at Pasatiempo?

Sturtevant: Don't you have your own records?

Bernardi: I didn't look at the records, so I can't tell you, but I recollect Bill saying that he gave Tommy his first job, at Pasatiempo.

Sturtevant: Well, Tommy gave me my first job with Bill, I think. And if Bill did Marion Hollins' house he must have worked down there pretty early.

Bernardi: Of course he did, and Marion Hollins was the leading light there.

Sturtevant: She was the Hannes Schroll of Pasatiempo.\* [Laughter]

That reminds me of a very amusing story of photographing Tommy's house. They had already moved back to San Francisco. I think they just went down there weekends and he did work down there. He wanted me to photograph his house, but I arrived the day after the gardeners had pulled up one planting bed which was right in the driveway, right, smack, where it had to be photographed.

Well, I had an assistant with me, so we replanted the garden by going out into the field and cutting the blossoms off the mustard and the wild radishes and various other weeds [laughing], so here's Tommy Church's garden planted with weeds.

---

\*[Hannes Schroll, a skier, was a big figure in the development of Sugar Bowl. R.S.]

- Riess: Did he want that garden published, as an example of his best work?
- Sturtevant: Oh, no, no. In fact, that may have been like the shoemaker's children. That's the way it is. What did Bill live in for many years? Never anything of his own.
- Bernardi: He [Bill Wurster] never built anything [for himself] until he built the house at Seadrift [Stinson Beach].
- Emmons: When I came up here he was living in an 8 x 10 rented room in Henry and Kit Hays's house at the end of Vallejo Street.
- Bernardi: Of course he spent about 14 hours a day in the office or on the job in the field, 365 days a year.
- Sturtevant: He didn't need much.
- Riess: That's what they say about Church, too. Always working.
- Bernardi: Well, if we're talking about both of them--Bill used to say, "I'm taking the day off. It's Christmas, and I'm going to my sister's." Well, the morning in Stockton he spent with clients! And then he went to dinner. And then he probably came back and worked in the office.
- Riess: Sounds like you can't be married and be that kind of a practitioner.
- Emmons: Catherine worked him over pretty well.
- Sturtevant: Oh, he had changed after that. She was professional too and they kind of combined things and she changed his direction somewhat. But she was a work addict too in a sense.
- Riess: They [Church and Wurster] didn't have to work that hard to keep their place at the top, did they?
- Emmons: Bill had no other real interest except his work.
- Sturtevant: You're talking about different kinds of people from that time. That's what I was going to bring up.
- Bernardi: You have to do that kind of thing to keep on top of your job if you're interested in the job as they were. There's always the personal service and it was a personal decision and nobody else could make it.

Emmons: As I look back on it, he [Wurster] would be doing 40 houses a year, custom-built houses, with a husband and a wife to deal with. And he'd keep all these people in the air and keep them happy and I don't think anybody could do that and anything else.

Sturtevant: There are two things that come up here, and one of them--well, I think both--will apply to Tommy. There was an enormous efficiency with time. I mean, Bill's clients were his friends. Everybody was on a first-name basis, including me, because he would always talk about me on a first-name basis. And several times people would tell me that they didn't know how Bill did it.

Bill would say, "I will be in Woodside, at your place, at 10:10, on Tuesday." And at 10:10 Bill would arrive. All of the pertinent questions were discussed and answered and at 10:25, on the dot, Bill left to go to another job. And he left in a sense of utter leisure. How he did it I don't know. He always got done what he wanted to do, and everybody was happy. He had this marvelous facility.

I went out one day in the mid part of Tommy's career with Tommy, starting at some ungodly hour of the morning for me, like 7. And it was the same thing: Tommy had this great long list of places that he had to go to, some under construction, some not even under construction, some old gardens.

Bernardi: Tom controlled it somewhat--at least in later years, and I don't know how he did it in earlier years--but in later years you'd come to him and say you wanted a garden and he'd say, "I'll see you next March." Or, "I'll see you in September when I get back from Europe." Just like that. And I would say that in every case where he said that, they [client] waited. There may have been some cases where they refused and went on to somebody else, but every case where I ran into that--I remember two or three times that happened--they waited.

Emmons: When I came up here and went to work for Bill in 1938, he took me out on weekends to show me all his past work, and he'd say, "I'll pick you up at 8:00 in the morning." And I'd look out at ten minutes to 8 and he'd be sitting in his car!

Riess: I should imagine the clients would feel inspired to be similarly efficient.

Sturtevant: One woman who told me this in particular said that there was no sense of being rushed, no sense of it being other than a friendly call, yet all essential things were taken care of.

Emmons: Bill's letters to his clients were absolutely beautiful, and usually they were only two sentences or so, but so beautifully stated that it just did the job.

Sturtevant: To get back to Tommy, another scatological story--

Having gotten up so early in the morning I had God knows how many gallons of coffee and orange juice before we took off, and I said, after about five miles, "Tommy, would you stop at the next--"

"We can't."

"Well, I think there's a service station over there."

"We don't have the time."

Well, my time was running out, and finally, when I thought I was going to die, very close to noontime, we went to the great John Francis Neylan's garden and he said, "Down below there there is a tree." [Laughter]

Emmons: Tommy was very even-tempered, and Bill was not exactly the same. And Tommy was very easy to get along with, he was very flexible when you were working with him, no difficulties at all. But if a client pushed too hard and became too difficult, he just quit. He did that several times on jobs we had; he just walked away from it.

Bernardi: He was working on the Termini garden, and I don't know what made him quit there. I don't think it was pressure, but I think he was just like a rat leaving a sinking ship. He quit about a month before the thing blew up, and we [Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons] had lawsuits that lasted for years. He got paid.

Sturtevant: He was clairvoyant.

Bernardi: I think the demands they made--she wanted a certain kind of a fountain and this and that and he cooperated as long as he could stand it and then he decided it was not the job for him.

Riess: What kind of pressures and demands do become intolerable? Or is it the people?

Emmons: Well, I think it was the fact that he felt the job wasn't going anywhere, that he wasn't accomplishing anything. I don't think it was any difficulty due to personalities, anything like that.

Bernardi: Sometimes the people--I guess he could work out a schedule, but on the other hand he didn't want to be pushed around and I guess Mrs. Giffen--I guess he quit, or in a sense she fired him because he sent June [Meehan] down a couple of times and Mrs. Giffin didn't think that was correct to send June down, so she dismissed them.

Sturtevant: By the way, I hope you've interviewed June. And I hope you could get her to let loose and not be formal, because she really was the life of party, so to speak, when she worked there. She was really great fun. But people are very apt to get too formal.

There are two things we talked about and we didn't quite finish them. One of the things was that when these [Bernardi and Emmons] were lads, and I was just a little older lad, and Bill was young, and we were all starting working, the Crash came along, and there was a totally different attitude and atmosphere and I don't know how many times I've tried to include this to explain that we had no "isms," we were all working to live and to let live, in a way. We were all trying to pull ourselves out of the Depression, all trying to find a way to go, and there was a camaraderie that I think only comes from natural disasters. The "isms" came later, with the second generation who had been Bill's draftsmen, Gardner Dailey's draftsmen, and so on, almost in mid-career, not the younger ones, and they went into all sorts of things, like Telesis and all the "isms."

We worked, and we made no great chi chi about it. Bill used to say, "Give me my team." And this was before you [Bernardi and Emmons] were around. "My team" was Floyd, Beth Armstrong to do the decorations, Tommy Church to do the gardens, and Roger to do the photographs.

Bernardi: Sam Terry to do the heating. [Laughter]

Riess: Well, you were brought up pre-Depression. Maybe you knew life could be something other than scraping.

Sturtevant: I can't remember my life ever being much besides scraping.

Bernardi: What year were you born?

Sturtevant: 1903.

Bernardi: Well, you keep talking about lads. I was born in 1903 also.

Sturtevant: Well, you're six months younger, you're a lad.

Riess: Speaking of the team, do you think Tommy and Bill ever thought of a partnership?



- Emmons: I don't think either one of them ever considered that. Larry Halprin worked for Tommy and he felt Tommy ought to make him a partner and Tommy couldn't have any part of it, so Larry went off by himself.
- Riess: Well, they were really a team at Pasatiempo.
- Emmons: People didn't have partners in those days.
- Sturtevant: One didn't have to be.
- Bernardi: That isn't such a natural coalition, because if the landscape architect is good enough to be a partner, he's going to be an architect and doing everything.
- Emmons: A landscape architect in that period could do 20 jobs to the architect's one. A garden didn't take all the time and effort that the house did.
- Sturtevant: Not only that, there's a natural enmity between landscape people and architects, or there can be.
- Emmons: And now what's happened is that the things overlap. We compete with Larry Halprin for the same job.
- Sturtevant: That's right, that's right. That's what there was all the way along, but it wasn't quite so recognized because you had people like Tommy who were sympathetic.
- Emmons: But the landscape architects aren't doing gardens anymore.
- Bernardi: Some of them started doing too much architecture in gardens years ago. It became so there was hardly any garden anymore. Tommy invented the idea that landscape gardening was not necessarily plants, at least out West. Still his gardens look more like gardens than some of the later concoctions.
- Sturtevant: His flow from inside to out was natural.
- Emmon: On the west coast, at least in the Bay Area, landscaped gardens usually cost about 10 to 15 percent of the cost of the house. On the east coast they just stuck a couple of bushes beside the front door and that was it. And the reason for the difference, and the thing that made landscape architects possible, was that there was paving and windscreens and fences and all kinds of other stuff.
- Sturtevant: One thing that made it felicitous was the fact that a lot of people had lost their money and were living in more modest circumstances and they discovered what joy it was to live inside and out and to

Sturtevant: eat inside and out, and to cook their own food. And this was part of the Depression. When those monied people who had lost the excess, the ones who used to go to Europe all the time, had to stay home, then they began to enjoy home. You had a patio outside, you had a place to eat outside and it was enough.

There's something I'd like to bring up, which is very poignant, very poignant, the summation of Bill's statement of his "team." What was the name of the people down in Ladera, with the beautifully proportioned redwood or teak home, a later house of Bill's? They had brought from St. Louis a chandelier that was in the hall. I knew that Tommy had done the garden, and it was an old standard-- or with historical reference--garden of Tommy Church's, without being anything but simple and natural. It was there.

Well, there was something about the house. The people had been upper middle-class, well-to-do, from the East, and they had come West and they had brought some of their things, and this was an informal kind of way--yet also very formal and very elegant--to live. And there was something about the house, something about the furniture. It was obviously their furniture.

I said, "Did you have a decorator?"

And she said, "Yes, Beth Armstrong. This was her last job, Beth's, and I always felt guilty. She came down and she was moving chairs around and everything, and then she died a week later of a heart attack."

Anyway, I didn't quite finish what I was doing there and I had to go back the next day, and I left this house with a funny feeling of being partly in a dream. Here was "the team" again, and it had all the qualities, the simple, straight-forward, but elegant qualities. (That name was something with an "ough" in it. I'll find it in the negative files someday.) I told Mrs. (ough?) how strange I had felt all evening. She said, "I cried." [Roush? D.E.]

Emmons: These houses were built for young people generally speaking, people young in the sense that they were out of school and had their first child.

Riess: In the thirties?

Emmons: This house that he's talking about was done in the fifties, I think.

Sturtevant: I would say late fifties. But the houses that Donn is talking about would be in the thirties, pre-World War II.

- Emmons: And they were kept very simple and you could built a house for \$3, \$4 a square foot. And you know what a porcelain socket is? All light fixtures in some of the houses were porcelain sockets. And the one at the front door was painted and the holes were puttied to make it fancy.
- Riess: But the clients had money.
- Emmons: Most of them were sons of families that had some money, even though the houses cost maybe 15, 20, 25 thousand.
- Sturtevant: Oh, that was an enormously expensive house.
- Emmons: He did one house in Mill Valley where the construction cost was \$3500.
- Bernardi: I think the cheapest house done was the one in Richmond with concrete blocks. I think that was \$2600 including the architect's fee.
- Sturtevant: That was a house. No landscape architect there; they had a bunch of eucalyptus trees.
- Emmons: When it was photographed they hung up Indian rugs at the windows.
- Bernardi: I imagine if that house was selling today it would be 50 or 75 thousand. It's right on the waterfront, and that land is probably worth that much.
- Emmons: Bill did a house in the early thirties, a 10,000 square foot house, and I think it cost \$25,000. A lot of fancy detail. And the guy came in one day and he wanted to check the replacement cost for fire insurance, and I think we came up with a cost of \$400,000. [Laughter] A real shock!
- Bernardi: Whether people have lost their money or are making it, I don't know of any job we ever had where money wasn't a consideration. If it was \$3500 or a million dollars in both cases we would redo the plans to make it cheaper, though the final cost was equal to the cost they rejected.
- Riess: It sounds like Church and Wurster had the only clients who could afford to build during the Depression.
- Sturtevant: Their clients weren't necessarily that wealthy.
- Emmons: A lot of them were. I was completely surprised when I came up here. I had worked in Los Angeles on movie stars' houses where everything had to show, and up here people didn't want anything to show!

Sturtevant: Many of these people, who were second generation or third generation, did not have much income at that time. They wisely held on to some basic stocks and so on and their income went up later. But I know of quite a few people where they'd had gardeners and servants and so on and left those houses and had houses where they could do their own cooking and maybe get along with one maid or something. And they found out that their food which they learned to cook themselves was much better. I think that gourmet food for the general population came as part of the Depression.

Emmons: But the whole climate was to understate things, at least in northern California, which was just right for Bill. He was here at the right time doing the right things.

Bernardi: You know, speaking about attitudes, and ways of working, Tommy had, I thought, a great way with clients. As long as they went along with him he stayed with them. In one house the clients had a landscape architect they weren't satisfied with: he submitted a scheme and a price and they said, "Too much money." I was doing the architecture, the remodelling of the house for them, and when they wanted Tommy, I said I'd try to get him, and that's when Tommy said, "Wait till"--whenever it was--"and I'll come." He went to see them and they got along fine and they worked out a scheme and the scheme involved taking a swimming pool that was there and plowing it up, plus other terraces and stairs and so on, and putting a new swimming pool in with a different shape. (I thought the old swimming pool was hideous too.)

He worked out the scheme for them and somehow he got them to say, "Yes, go ahead." He took that literally and before he had the working drawings finished he had brought a bulldozer in and bulldozed the whole thing out. [Laughter] Swimming pool and all, which made it irrevocable.

Emmons: You have to remember that Tommy in those days was unique in that virtually all of the other landscape architects were still doing Renaissance gardens.

Riess: Who were the others?

Emmons: There was one around here--I can't think of his name--who was Tommy's competitor.

Bernardi: I don't think of anybody being his competitor until he brought up his own tribe of competitors.



Sturtevant: It was very strange because you see there was this war in later times, vying not between the architects so much as clients, and the general public, trying to pit Dailey, Wurster, and what's-his-name in Oakland.

Bernardi: Didn't Tommy actually do some gardens for Gardner Dailey?

Sturtevant: Yes. It was Dailey, Wurster, and Confer--and Confer was not in the league, ever, but he was considered by the public to be in the league and they were always trying to make war.

Riess: What was the war?

Sturtevant: That one was better than the other.

Like the two women from Modesto, wasn't it, who came up here and they were social rivals and didn't they draw straws? Mrs. Turner, who came to Bill, and the other went to Dailey.

Bernardi: [John] Funk did the other one's house. [Incorrect--this was a third famous house, the Heckendorf house, a pet of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. R.S.]

Riess: Were the architects engaged in the war, or just the clients?

All: Oh, no, no, no.

Sturtevant: It was outside. These women started jockeying and fighting for social position and so on and which one was the best and who had the best house and so on. The epitome was these two women coming up, and I think they came up together, and one went to Wurster and one went to Dailey, and they both had beautiful houses, before one of them got a fancy decorator down there.

Emmons: I came up here from southern California, and I was a young man with only a couple of years experience, didn't know anything. I went to see Gardner Dailey and he gave me the keys to his new Lincoln and said, "Here's a map of my houses in Woodside and when you come back come to my house for dinner." It's impossible to think of that situation happening now, that an architect would give his car to some strange kid that he'd never seen before.

Riess: Church said at an evening meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects: "I started my practice in 1930. The practice of landscape architecture was quite different then than it is today. You were a plantsman. If an architect or a client called you in on



Riess: a job it was to know what kind of a tree to plant in a certain position. If you were to arrive on the job and say, 'I think the driveway's in the wrong place' you could get fired right then."\*

Do you think he was really reflecting what landscape architects were limited to by the architect?

Bernardi: He was speaking about what some people are like, but the ones who came to him I would say were, well, the people who came to him accepted the way he wanted to do it. You could say that about houses too, that people who felt that way [just wanting plant advice] probably went to a contractor rather than an architect.

Emmons: When Tommy was working with an architect he was very flexible. He didn't make any arbitrary demands on what should happen.

Riess: In fact I thought the situation was that clients often called Tommy first, and he would recommend the architect.

Sturtevant: There were circumstances like that.

I think what he was saying then was that there were those people, but that people who came to Wurster and him were very much interested in what they [Wurster and Church] had to say about where the driveway went.

But in 1930 he would be taking jobs from people who didn't have an architect. He would be taking any job, as we all were doing, I was doing. I was doing other things in 1930 besides [photographing] architecture. As time went on the people would come to him and respect him and change things, even if it was a custom house.

Riess: He goes on to say, "Now today the profession has gotten to a position where architects welcome landscape architects. The client is very apt to call the landscape architect at the same time he calls the architect. That was a big advance. Architects like Wurster and Gardner Dailey would say to the clients, 'Have you talked to your landscape architects?' or 'Have you talked to Tommy Church yet?' That was very flattering."

Bernardi: Tommy has had jobs where he saved a lot of [architectural] disasters by making a good garden in front or in back of it.

---

\*February 9, 1971. Transcript courtesy of Michael Laurie.

- Riess: Were you photographing the gardens? Or the houses?
- Sturtevant: Infrequently my commission was to do the gardens, and I was lousy at it. The gardens were incidental, as I think they should be, to the architecture, and I was primarily there to do the architecture, and I was [laughing] always pushed to do the architecture before the gardens were any higher up than two inches. It was cruel.
- Emmons: A lot of houses, when we had lots of water, if you went there two or three years later you couldn't find the house.
- Sturtevant: I had Butler Sturtevant take me through this development in--
- Emmons: Butler Sturtevant, he was a landscape architect.
- Sturtevant: He was later too. [Referring to question of whether he was a competitor of Church's.]
- Emmons: He was going full blast when I came up.
- Bernardi: The only landscape architect I can think of that was practicing when he was professor over at Berkeley was--
- Sturtevant: Are you thinking of Vaughan.
- Emmons: I was thinking of Butler Sturtevant.
- Riess: As the only competition at the time?
- Emmons: Did he work around here very much?
- Sturtevant: I remember when he came on the scene. I was the only Sturtevant [in the phone book] so people would call me and start in talking and it would be five minutes before I could explain.
- Bernardi: Tommy was great at rescuing projects, and one of the projects I think he rescued was not the highrises, but the lowrises, of the Parkmerced housing out here where he took those inner courts and he did something which I don't think the architect ever planned, but he did those little gardens out in front of each place, with fences.
- Sturtevant: It's interesting the difference in attitudes in the East [apropos of the fact that the Parkmerced architect was from the East]. When I had the show in 1940-something at the Architectural League, the gal reviewer from the New York Times interviewed me and she went over every picture and she said, "Now, what did you take out of the room?"

Sturtevant: "I didn't take out anything." "Well, what did you move?"

"Oh, I guess I moved this vase over to there and this chair I moved a little this way to see the fireplace."

But they would not believe the simplicity with which we lived out here, with which our clients lived.

Emmons: The difference in landscaping was probably that in the East landscape projects would be 10 percent of what it would be out here.

Riess: Ten percent of 10 percent, so about one percent?

Emmons: Yes.

Riess: Do you recall the point where Wurster abandoned the practice and headed East?

Emmons: Well, as I remember he had this all planned when he was in school. He was going to get the Gregory house [1959 Greenwood Terrace, Berkeley] sometime in his life. He had the whole thing worked out. He was going to go to Europe for a year, work for so many years, then get an education. He just had a very orderly approach.

Riess: But had he exhausted the possibilities in residential design in some way?

Bernardi: Oh, no. Though I don't know, if there hadn't been a war a lot of things might have been different. But there was a war and everything stopped. He had done his last war housing. And nobody was building private houses--if they wanted to they couldn't. They weren't allowed to. And at that point he had finished the Vallejo housing and he had gotten a Neiman Fellowship at Harvard and went back to Harvard, as he said, to read for a year. And then he was going to do a dissertation and get a Ph.D., I guess. [Laughing]

Sturtevant: Even though he never got an M.A.

Bernardi: He and I formed a partnership in 1944, over the phone more or less, and he was going to come back here, but when he came back here and we set up the office he told me that there was a possibility that instead of getting a Ph.D. he was going to get a job as chairman at M.I.T. [Laughter] But we decided we'd keep on going anyhow, and he would go back there and I would run the office here. And we did that and he did get the job. And then Donn came. I asked Donn whether he wanted a job, and he said, "No," he wanted to be a partner. So I said "Okay." [Laughter]

- Bernardi: But Bill never quit doing houses and he never turned them down and he didn't turn them down when he came back. He was always doing houses. One thing that he said was that having an office here, being connected here, he was never going to have an office in Boston, or Cambridge, and he was never going to do any architectural jobs privately there. He had consulting jobs there that he was involved with at M.I.T. But he was doing them for M.I.T. as part of his routine.
- Emmons: His first love was doing houses, and this never changed. In fact when we began to get bigger commercial jobs and things in the office he was much less interested.
- Bernardi: Well, when we did the Golden Gateway he was very much involved in it. Everybody was involved with it, but he kept very close touch with it. But at the same time he was doing a kitchen or a little house for somebody and you'd watch him with that client and you'd think he didn't have any other job in the world.
- Sturtevant: This is something that may be repetitive, but way back in the beginning of the conversation we talked of the climate of working in the thirties. Money was needed. That Bill managed to save money and accumulate something was part of his nature. I worked, we all worked, for too little, but everyone, Gardner Dailey, Tommy, all the rest of us, worked to produce something that satisfied our souls so to speak. And our clients. I always worked for my clients. Any picture I ever took was for my client, to help promote my client, to help visualize what my client tried to do. And this kind of sincerity was contagious. So that you will find this in the work of all of us in this group. And later, of course, as demands got--well, life [earlier] was simple, things were cheap in those days, we were used to doing without, God knows, and I'm still doing without, and we were happy in our poverty,
- But this is an essential that I don't think people realize. And do you agree with me [addressing Bernardi and Emmons] about those times? That it wasn't money that we worked for primarily?
- Riess: And it is money that people work for primarily now?
- Sturtevant: Most people do.
- Bernardi: I don't think so. I think you find all kinds of business.
- Sturtevant: Most people do. And I think in our mutual professions now many people work for ostentation. To advertise themselves.



- Emmons: It's a very tough time now to be an architect, very difficult. Almost as difficult as it was then.
- Bernardi: Speaking of Wurster, I knew when I was in school that Wurster was a--well, right after I got out of school I knew he was doing things. From watching things, looking at magazines to see what was published, I could see that there was a man that was doing what I admired. I thought I would like to go to work for Wurster. The people who were around were Wurster, or Pflueger. I worked for Pflueger three or four years after I got out of college. Pflueger and Wurster were the only people I ever did any design for, though I had worked at 19 different jobs by the time I got to Wurster after nine years.
- Emmons: I came up here specifically to get a job with Bill because he was the only one who seemed to be doing anything significant. I walked in the office and Bill said, "Theodore, do we need any more draftsmen?" And he said, "Hell, no." [Laughter]
- Riess: And his significant work for you? The Gregory Farmhouse?
- Emmons: And Pasatiempo. Every house he did was published, you see, so it was in all the architectural magazines.
- Sturtevant: The strangest thing--the first great impact on any of the Eastern editors was the caddy house at Pasatiempo.
- Bernardi: He got a lot of publicity because at that time, was it House Beautiful, or one of those magazines, which was giving away what in those days were enormous prizes, \$1000 for a prize-winning completed house.
- Riess: Did Wurster and Church get into any real battles over work they cooperated on?
- Bernardi: This job I mentioned where we plowed up the swimming pool, it was a recent job. I was working on it. Wurster had done the original houses, and that was the first job I ever worked on in the office. Then 20 or 30 years later I remodeled it for the new clients. And Wurster went down there and looked at the little pool house that Tommy had done along with the pool and he said, "A landscape architect should never do architecture." And this was something that Wurster would say frequently, looking at Tommy's architecture.
- Emmons: Tommy was very easy and relaxed in working on jobs, but Bill had great respect for what he was saying. I don't think there was any friction.



Bernardi: No more than between me and Wurster or Donn and Wurster. I would argue with him about things that I didn't like, and sometimes I'd win. [Bernardi leaves]

Emmons: Bill had two punch lines that he'd use. He'd say, "Well, go ahead and do it that way, but you won't like it." Or the other one was, "If you have to do it that way, take my name off." [Laughter] I can remember arguing with him before I was a partner.

## 2) Stories, and Photographs

Riess: It appears that the automatic association between Church and Wurster ended when Bill went East.

Emmons: Not really. When Bill came back he still used Tommy. Except that there were other landscape architects then. Larry Halprin. I know on Ghirardelli Square we had to choose between Tommy and Larry and Bill finally said, "Well, Larry's really more your contemporary. Let's use him. And that's more or less how that came about." But nobody topped Tommy as far as doing custom-built houses.

And Tommy, as I understand it, was never interested in bigger projects anyhow; in fact I think he said so.

Sturtevant: I'd like to get back to this argument question. Everybody argued with Bill sometimes, and Bill would argue very didactically and very shrilly. I've walked out of the office on California Street I think at least three times, and I've thought, "I'll never work for him again."

He would say, "You do this and you do this and you do this." Slam! At seven o'clock the next morning the telephone would ring and Bill would say, "Roger, I'm sorry I blew my top. Do it your way; you're always right."

Now, if he had that grace with me, he must have had the same grace with other people whose work he believed in. And I would say perhaps he had the same with Tommy. And in the office he had you [Emmons] to argue back and forth with continually. But this is one of the great things of my life, this man, who was a great man, and a great man in his profession, who was appreciative, who realized that I had a knowledge that he didn't quite have and said so.

Emmons: Let me tell you about Roger. When he'd go out to photograph a job, unlike a lot of photographers you gave him no directions. He knew what he was doing, and could appreciate the qualities of the house. But if there was a certain detail that he didn't like, the chimney or something, it just never got into the photograph. [Laughter]

Sturtevant: Well, I tell you, I always tried. And the worse the architect was, the more untalented, the harder I worked. I never worked harder than for architects who I thought were inferior. When I was proposed for the [A.I.A.] Fine Arts Award, I said, "Photography's not a fine art, it's a craft."\*

Gardner Dailey took me out to lunch and we had a horrible argument, and Gardner said, "Look, Roger, you go out and photograph a job of mine which I know very well, and you come back with an aspect that I didn't know was there. And it's quite beautiful. Therefore you have created something. Therefore you are entitled." So, I've been very fortunate in having clients say such flattering things to me. Maybe fortunate enough that I didn't let it go too far to my head.

There was such a curious difference between he [Bill Wurster] and Gardner, Gardner being so refined and yet absolutely pure aesthetically, Bill having force.

Emmons: Bill was gentle and tough at the same time.

Sturtevant: But it also was beautiful. It was an interesting thing. John Lyon Reid one time said to me, "How do you think I could get jobs like Gardner Dailey?" And I said, "Learn to dance the minuet." [Laughing]

Emmons: They did get their jobs through social connections.

Sturtevant: And Bill was dearly beloved by all of these people, many old California people. It was a very fortunate thing where he grew up. And then that fierce woman in Berkeley took him up, the lion-huntress, what was her name? Elizabeth Ellis. She never latched onto me because I was too little a lion.

Emmons: Catherine was a little horrified when she found the circle that Bill traveled in. [Laughter]

---

\*[At this time the A.I.A. only had a Fine Arts Award. This award did go that year to another photographer. It was then realized that Architectural Photography was a special thing and an award in Architectural Photography was started by the A.I.A. I received the first such. R.S.]

Riess: How come no one caught Bill before Catherine did?

Sturtevant: He wasn't interested. He didn't have time.

Riess: Now, before you leave, let's complete the telling of the story of your first job for Church. He got dressed--you went to photograph a garden.

Sturtevant: All I can remember is a lush retaining wall, with flowers dripping over it like mad.

[Conversation between Emmons and Sturtevant about availability at Oakland Museum of prints of Roger Sturtevant's photographs of the work of Thomas D. Church and William W. Wurster, and others.]

Emmons: They'll have somebody who can make prints?

Sturtevant: I will recommend someone, for the time being.

They have somebody to make prints, but the trouble is that the prints can be of such bad quality, because they're all young photographers who think that prints should be black and white. With great drama. And I think that prints should go all the way through, so that you can read the qualities of the woods and what was in the shadows and what was in the highlights and so on. I'm very old fashioned and stodgy and so on.

Riess: Don't they have a master print from you?

Sturtevant: My dear girl! I've been going through and throwing away duplicate prints and they are all seconds, and I'm keeping the best of the seconds, but they don't cover all the jobs, and if they did, the Oakland Museum would have to move out. After all, this is 50-some years.

Emmons: Send us any prints of our stuff you don't want.

Sturtevant: I've got two boxes, this high, all the negatives of Pasatiempo. It's the most ghastly thing to go through these things, Donn. Because I've had a whole career before architecture and they are going to take some of that. They [Oakland Museum] don't have a couch. If they had a couch then I could lie down and I think I'd be comfortable. It's like being psychoanalysed. Going through these things [while Oakland Museum tapes] I can think of all of my love life and the tragic things and my habits, and fighting circumstances to do a job, and the nights I worked all night. It's just ghastly to go through 50 years of it!

Riess: Are you telling them all that stuff?

Sturtevant: Well, mostly they've been taping me about Imogen Cunningham and Dorothea Lange. You see, I knew all these people, and though I was 10 or 20 years younger, for some reason I was always accepted as a peer. And I was always irreverent. Dorothea got very reverent about herself as time went on, you see, so I'm kind of debunking her.

Emmons: Did you know Steichen?

Sturtevant: No, he was always in the East.

Emmons: I worked with him in the Navy.

Riess: You weren't actively a photographer of the work of landscape architects?

Sturtevant: No, because I was not good at it. I was never really good at landscape gardens, or at fashion. Before then I did fashion photographs and I felt I never made it.

Gardens should depend upon color, and the juxtaposition or sympathy of one color to another, because the form is not too apparent. Well, in black and white you lost that, and without form it is very hard to give the feeling. You see, I was not liked and am still not liked by all the purist photographers because my object in photographing was to try to reproduce as near as possible the visual impact.

Riess: Rather than what?

Sturtevant: Well, most of them want to, like Ansel Adams has to do the photographic thing where he has to do everything as if he's looking through a microscope. And you don't see through a microscope. I wanted things to shimmer if they shimmered, or I've let them go out of focus if they do as you see them. This is very, very difficult to do with a garden. With architecture you can get that along with the sense it makes as a structural form, as a gracious-living form, as the relationship of one form to another. And the garden will come into this if it's well-done. It then becomes the embroidery around a structural form which is definable.

Riess: So that's the way it enters into your work?

Sturtevant: That's the way it has been in my career. You will find some of my pictures where there will be long evidence of the gardens. You will find it in the pictures I did of the Golden Gateway,



- Sturtevant: where the planting was of extreme importance to the relationships and to the sense of environment. Because I think there, at the Golden Gateway--and thank God I had time to tell Bill some of these things--he sort of had structures, particularly the little houses, reminiscent of all of the ethnic cultures, the French type of thing, the European-Mediterranean type of thing, the Berkeley, with the pergola. Who did the landscaping there?
- Riess: I think it was Halprin. [In fact it was Sasaki-Walker Associates. S.R.]
- Sturtevant: Well, if it was Halprin it was awfully simple for him.
- Riess: Simple's good, isn't it?
- Sturtevant: Of course. But Halprin's apt to be a little too far out, as far as I'm concerned. I think his choice, for instance, at the Ghirardelli Square was probably better because he was fancy and he did go further out because it was a kind of a gala place. Whereas most of the things that Tommy did were places for quiet contemplation and use, and complementary to something, the people or the setting or something else, rather than being an exciting form and design on their own.
- Incidentally, going way, way back, do you know much about Tommy's mother?
- Riess: No.
- Sturtevant: She had a radio program and they did readings, plays, or something. And she was "the English teacher." She was totally proper, and precise.
- Emmons: Wasn't Tommy's father married six or seven times? I remember Tommy saying, one day, "My father always said, 'I married them.'" [Laughter]
- Sturtevant: Tommy's mother, in this didactic powerful way, insisted on calling him Dolliver. And that poor kid went through grammar school and high school being called Dolliver. Some years ago, maybe 15 years ago, I was photographing the Steve Bechtel house in Piedmont. No one was there, even the maid was out, and the front doorbell began ringing like crazy, and I looked out the window and there was Tommy Church, come to call on them and take a look at the garden. He did a quite beautiful job--that's right, that's a Dailey job. I looked out the window and I said, "Thomas Dolliver Church, what are you doing here?" And he nearly fainted. Nobody remembered that name for years.



- Riess: Did Tommy tell you about her calling him Dolliver?
- Sturtevant: Oh, no, one knows people who knew him in school, things like that. You get together and talk. It was all very sympathetic to Tommy, sympathetic but amused to imagine being called Dolliver.
- Riess: I thought Tommy might have told you when you talked with him.
- Sturtevant: Oh, Tommy had pretty much his own life, and I was very busy and had practically no social life. Forty years ago I bought my place in the country [Glen Ellen] and from then on I was gone, if possible, every Friday night until Monday noon. Parties were on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.
- Riess: When you saw him did you have a personal relationship?
- Sturtevant: We were all easy together.
- Riess: Some people feel they don't know him well.
- Sturtevant: Well, Donn and I discussed that before you came in. And I said, "I don't really know too much about Tommy." And he said, "Well, I don't either really." But as it came out we didn't need to to associate because we had this basic sympathy within our work, and our work, with all of us, was almost like a religion. It was a fine period. The richnesses and rewards were great. And the respect that we could get as practitioners of art--it was very good.

The interesting thing is--I don't know whether Tommy realized it--but I didn't know, about myself, and Bill didn't know, about himself, that we were important. We were important in the East. It's the most fascinating thing. Bill had no idea of his importance. I knew, because people would write me letters. I didn't know I was of importance, but Bill was.

This is a terribly funny story about Bill, and I don't know how many times it's been told--but Bill went East to be a judge for some architectural show back there, which was a great concession on their part to get a Western architect, and I had a letter from George Sanderson, long since dead, who was on one of the magazines, who told me about his [Bill's] impact in New York. (If I only had this letter.) It was like dynamite. His commendation on the Gold Medal [from A.I.A.] gives a sense of it.

Bill said, "Roger, I go, and we have to stand up and vote on all of these things, and then this architect would say, 'Would you come to my office?' and we'd go, and walk five blocks, and it was

Sturtevant: so hot. And all of the draftsmen would be there. And you know, you would think I was somebody important. They would listen to my every word as though it was a sermon.

"And then the next night there would be a reception. I had to go back to the hotel every night and I would soak my feet. And then the next day I had to get up and do the same thing and then the next night my feet were worse. And finally it got to be time for me to get the plane to come home, and I could hardly walk.

"So I went to my doctor. I said, 'My feet are killing me.' He said, 'Take off your shoes and socks,' and he looked at them and he said, 'Well, what did you do for them?'"

He said, "I soaked them in water as hot as I could stand it, every night."

The doctor said, "You damned fool, you burned your feet!"

Emmons: I'm going to have to leave soon too.

Riess: Before you go could you talk about Bill and Tommy's work together on the Center at Stanford.

Emmons: Bill was hired to remodel the existing Victorian house into classrooms for the Center for Advanced Study at Stanford, or into spaces for Fellows. So he got together with Tommy. It was a difficult site, like this [gestures] with a Victorian house plunked on it. And Tommy showed how by building retaining walls and stone walls around this big palm tree that was the center of the old turn-around for carriages, you could flatten enough space to do a relaxed one-story thing. That decision was made and they tore down the house and started over again. This was done on a fantastic time schedule; it was in April when Bill got the job, and they were in it with flowers and ashtrays by September when classes started.

Riess: Did Stanford bring them both in together?

Emmons: I don't remember. Well, we were not working for Stanford, we were working for the Ford Foundation.

Riess: What part of the success of the look of the Center is due to the landscape architect's work, do you think?

Emmons: They're really one-story shacks, as simple as anything could possibly be, with gable roofs. Built around a garden. That's it.

Riess: All the awards the place has gotten, go to the architect.

Emmons: That's customary, partly. The buildings are significant in that they are that simple, and the whole environment is so pleasant that the people that go there as Fellows hate to leave and go back to Liverpool, England, or wherever they came from. It has a nice quality, due to its simplicity and due to its garden. I think Walter Gropius is quoted as saying, "These are the best buildings in the United States." That's second-hand, and I'm not sure whether it's accurate. But it was a very successful project, and the chairman of the building committee of the Ford Foundation was [Frank] Stanton, who was president of C.B.S. [Emmons leaves.]

[Discussion of how Wurster remained so modest.]

Sturtevant: That's a very interesting question. That's very, very hard for me to answer. As I said, earlier, there was this business of the public finally taking over, the upper middle-class women of The Women type, championing one or the other of the architects. Yet in the profession Wurster was badly hated by the traditional architects.

You see, this was a transitional period. He was badly hated by some of the public who were traditionally-minded when his houses were introduced into their environment. So, it was not all roses. And again, within our peer group we kind of took that for granted, that we were doing our very best. But I don't think we knew how good it was. (At least I didn't.) So, I would say that this was a natural thing to Bill, and while he had gotten some praise here, he had also gotten some pretty vicious attacks.

When I went East and had this show in 1944 at the Architectural League, where they made me an honorary member, though why I don't know, Doug Haskell wrote the most glowing press release about me. Fortunately it was never published. It was almost embarrassing. In it he said, "This modest Californian..." Well, photographers are like musicians, they're not really artists or creative, so they have to make up, most of them make up for it, with egos. That's never bothered me too much. As I say, my interest was in trying to do the best for my client. But this "modest" thing, you see-- it came back to me when you said that: this I think was part of our naturalness here, of doing what came naturally to us at that time.

Riess: What you are saying of Wurster you would say of Church?

- Sturtevant: Yes, and I would say about Beth Armstrong, the decorator. It was almost impossible not to feel that the owners had not decorated the house with their own stuff. But yet there was something, a certain style. But this is what she was doing. She was using the person as the background, and then furnishing. The same thing with Tommy. Bill didn't understand me one time. I came back laughing. I'd gone to this house where he'd wanted me to go, and this little woman came to the door, a little bit plump and a touch dowdy and very forthright, and she looked just like the house. I said, "Bill, sometime I really should do portraits of full figures of all the owners of the houses with the houses." Bill was doing the houses, and I would say Tommy was doing the gardens, very often the same way.
- Riess: If the client were angular and uptight, the garden would be too?
- Sturtevant: I would say that it could be. A reflection of the owner, and ways of living, and personal taste. But the sympathy, the basic understanding, I think, more often than not was with the client's personality and actual look.
- Riess: Are you in any way saying that the rewards for all of you were in the relationship with the client? That critical approval was not sought?
- Sturtevant: It wasn't of primary importance.
- Riess: But you must have needed some kind of feedback?
- Sturtevant: The doing of the difficult thing, the rendering of the difficult thing to please the client, and to have the client say [of the photographs] "They're good," that's all I really needed. I pleased myself. And it was hard work. There's not one picture I didn't suffer and sweat over, not one.
- Riess: The awards--you don't need them to tell you that you are good?
- Sturtevant: Well, I never thought I was very good. I always thought I was second-rate. And it didn't matter, because I was doing the best I could, and trying each time to do better. For 50 years. It's only now that I am able to look back at things that I haven't seen for a long time, and I look at them with fresh eyes, things I had totally forgotten. One photograph [part of a recent show at the Oakland Museum] was of a blank old brick wall that went around a corner. I'd forgotten that. I thought, "Wasn't I clever to have done it, and seen it!"

Sturtevant:

But I'd like to wind up with a couple more little tidbits about Tommy. Tommy was the first, and come to think of it, the only horticulturist I ever heard say a kind word about the ubiquitous Eucalyptus. With him at one of his early large gardens I spied a very large and beautiful shaped Eucalyptus in a quite profusely flowered area. I gasped. "Tommy, a Eucalyptus in a garden?" He nonchalantly answered, "Oh sure, they're all right if you use plenty of water around them."

And there is Bill Wurster's favorite story. Bill and Tommy had taken the upper two floors of an old ramshackle building which was then close to the fringes of nothing at all for prestige in San Francisco. On his first day of occupancy alone among the desks and chairs and filing cabinets he had acquired, he panickingly wondered oh what have I done? and all the other anxieties we set up for ourselves when we decided to face the world solo. And then at last the new phone rang. Tommy answered with anticipation and said, "Hello" only to hear a thick San Francisco North Beach Italiano male voice say, "Is datsa you, Joe?"





Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Harriet Henderson

A HILLSBOROUGH CLIENT RECALLS TWO GARDENS, 1934, 1954

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Harriet Henderson

|                                                      |     |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) First House by Wurster, Garden by Church          | 114 |
| 2) Second House: Siting, Design, and Color Decisions | 119 |
| 3) The New Garden and the Center Court               | 123 |
| 4) Some Comments on William Wurster's Involvement    | 128 |
| 5) Problem Solving: Creative Compromises             | 130 |
| 6) Client Contribution and Involvement               | 133 |

Harriet Henderson

June 8, 1976

Interview held at Mrs. Henderson's home, Hillsborough

1) First House by Wurster, Garden by Church

Riess: In 1934 you had a house designed by William Wurster, with a garden by Thomas Church. And then again in 1954, a new house and garden by the same two men. When did you first meet Thomas Church?

Henderson: We met Bill Wurster first, in 1931 or 1932. He was living in Berkeley and he was a friend of Mrs. Ellis, who was a great friend of my mother-in-law, and he came over and had dinner with us and we liked him. We were given a lot by Mr. Smith, Mr. Henderson's grandfather, and first Bill Wurster planned a house for us that was just beautiful, a Monterey Colonial-type house, but it was too big for our purse and so we put it aside for a while.

And then he came back one day with a house and he said, "Here's a house you can build, and you've just got to build it." (It was then the depth of the Depression, you see, 1933, and 1934. Things were very low.) It was a smaller house, more or less French Chateau type, done in 12" board siding, not ship lath but flat boards fitted together and painted white and with a shingle roof, in a sort of Chateau style.

Everybody was glad to have a job. I think the contractor was losing money himself just to keep people busy. So we built that house.

Riess: Wurster did this second design on his own initiative?

Henderson: He just drew up the house and said, "Here, you can have this." For instance it had one big room, which was a combination living room-dining room, and he said, "You can add on later. I won't make the plans now because they never work. You can add on when you need to."

Riess: Was he that forceful?



Henderson: Yes, but very agreeable. Never in all the times did we ever have a disagreement. Now and then I'd say something and he would say, "Well, I don't like that. It's not 'simple and direct.'" "Simple and direct," those were his main words in those days. And he was simple and direct and his ideas were always right. I never had any argument with him on anything like that.

I said I thought we should make plans ahead for how we were going to add on and he said, "No, you couldn't do that, it never works out," that we should do it the way we were going to use it now and then see later. Which is exactly what happened; we did add on.

At that time we had just spent everything on the house and had no thought of doing anything with the garden, but they had a contest--I don't know who sponsored it, but various groups of architects got together and put in models of their work in some small exhibition hall in San Francisco, I don't know where.

But this team--Bill Wurster did a small model of our house, his office did, a very attractive little thing, like a small doll-house. Tommy Church did a garden for it. Bob Howard did some murals on the wall inside, and his wife, Addie Kent Howard, did some little sculptures in the garden, lions rampant. It was an adorable show. I think they won the prize--I'm not sure about that. But it convinced us that we should have Tommy do the garden. We also had Bob Howard do the murals, and I wish we had bought the lions rampant from Addie Howard, but somebody else bought those. (They were just little models, but she had real ones that she made up.)

Riess: So that means that Tommy had nothing to do with siting the first house.

Henderson: No, he didn't. He put the plants in.

He was given a pie-shaped lot, with the house at the big end of the pie shape, and by planting heavily on the side towards the street, he equalled the planting on the other side, which was oaks, and a creek, and made it look as though it were just a long, straight vista down--you didn't feel that it was kind of one-sided. He did a very good job on it, formal outline, but there's always enough informality about trees and plants.

Riess: Had it been more or less planted before he worked on it?

Henderson: Not at all. It had been completely vacant, somebody's pasture--which helped the soil a bit. No, he planted it completely from scratch. We left a place that might have a pool at some time, and

Henderson: made it into a croquet court. It was never a pool in our day, but I think it is now.

It worked out very very well. We were very happy.

Riess: You used the design he had done for the model exactly?

Henderson: More or less.

Riess: So that you would say on the first house there hadn't been that kind of relationship of working out plans with the owner and architect?

Henderson: No. He had to work with what was there.

Riess: That house has a sunken part in the lawn?

Henderson: Yes, a little sunken part in the front, and that's the thing that Tommy did. There was an oak tree in the middle of the lawn--what would be the lawn--that wasn't very tall, so he made a sloping lawn into it with a paved floor and steps going out the other side, so that it was lower and made the tree seem higher and gave a sort of center to the garden, and also meant that the lawn didn't have to come up to the tree where a lawn doesn't grow very well anyway. So the oak tree was planted in a space in the middle with ivy growing around it and the sunken sort of court was on three sides of the oak tree, mostly on the front side. It was a very nice place to put tables for Sunday lunch, when it wasn't too windy.

That was completely his idea to give some interest to the center of the garden, and also some height to the tree. At the time we had it paved with something that they used then; they were apricot pits, actually. It was kind of a nice color, and it was very inexpensive. And later our friends, with plans from Tommy, bricked over the inside of it.

And there were little parterres in the brick there of boxwood, to give some interest.

Riess: Was Tommy "up and coming" when you first met him?

Henderson: No, I think he was not very well known. I think he had worked with a man named Floyd Mick and done a job in Hillsborough in association with him, but I think maybe we were his first whole job, in Hillsborough. There may have been another small one, someplace, that he had done something on. But in general he wasn't very well known, and most people I knew had the idea that either their architect could do their gardens too, or they could do them themselves. They didn't need anybody.

Henderson: When we first met Tommy he had worked with Marion Hollins at Pasatiempo, where he and Betsy had a small house. He was very good looking. One of my friends, when she met him, said he looked like the then Prince of Wales (later Duke of Windsor). He had an infectious enthusiasm. He could look at an area, get the idea for its solution, and put it down in a charming pencil sketch. Beauty, attractiveness, were his aims in a garden, but he never lost sight of the practical side and was very conscious of the livableness of the spaces.

He and Betsy moved to San Francisco just after he came to us first, and they lived in a very small apartment in San Francisco. I remember going there for dinner, and the kitchen was in a closet and Betsy would open the closet and produce a wonderful dinner, with souffles for dessert--she's a gourmet cook. They lived very attractively but very simply because he was just starting and he hadn't made the reputation that he did later. He was charming to work with and of course he was on the job, as so was Bill Wurster, all the time, because they didn't have that many other jobs, which made it lots of fun to do the job because of all these attractive people.

And Tommy had a wonderful assistant named Floyd Gerow and he stayed on for a while and took care of our garden until we got somebody sort of permanently.

Riess: And then when people saw your garden they said, "Who did this?" and his reputation was established?

Henderson: Well, he became well known right away. I wouldn't say that ours was the only one that got him started. I know he went to other jobs too. I think that at the same time Bill Wurster was building a house in Carolands that the Logans live in now. We've been there and I think he [Tommy] did their garden. They [the jobs] came along pretty fast after that, and pretty soon he was going to Europe and everything.

Riess: And the Depression was ending.

Henderson: Yes, it was on the upswing of the Depression so there were more people having gardens. But still an awful lot of people didn't bother to have anybody; they just did it themselves and I think they were usually sorry for it. And then it became so that most people, at least around here, who were planning a house, no matter who was their architect they'd have Tommy come first to see how the house should be placed. He's very good at placing the houses, orienting them--wind, sun, shade, general views and things. He worked with Wurster on that.

Riess: And that wouldn't necessarily be followed then by his doing the garden?

Henderson: I think it generally was followed by his doing the garden. He had different ways of doing it. He would place the house and give them a plan and then go away and let them implement the plan themselves. Or he would give them a plan and do it himself.

He did our plan and did the overseeing of the garden himself in that house, and in this house too. By the time he did this house he had an assistant who was here a lot more than he was.

Riess: When you did the earlier house, was there a question then, in the thirties, of "style," or a modern house perhaps.

Henderson: Well, we talked about it some. The one house that he did first-- well, I just happen to admire Monterey Colonial very much and he'd done that and it was a two-story house and it was just beautiful, not too big. I wish I still had the plans, and could have somebody else build that one. It just fitted the lot, and it was wonderful.

Then he just drew up this other one and it was so charming that we didn't change it. It's hard to say just what a modern house would be. Ours didn't have as much glass as a modern house would have. It had double-hung windows, which was an old-fashioned thing, but worked very well for us. It was a two-story house, not very high ceilings. But he was so good at designing rooms, he knew proportion so well, that our living room had a beam ceiling, a really low ceiling, something like nine and a half feet, and yet it never seemed low. He had built up in the beams in a way--anyway, it always seemed a very gracious room, a nice size, and when we later added on a dining room and other rooms it worked very well, became one living room.

Riess: Built up the beams?

Henderson: Each beam was made of three separate, narrow beams. The ones on each side were half the width and somewhat less deep. The effect was light and graceful.

Riess: Richard Peters, who gave a lecture on Wurster, spoke of his development of outdoor spaces that worked like rooms.

Henderson: This veranda [where interview is taking place] or whatever you call it, was entirely his idea. We told him, when we wanted a new house, that we wanted a little house, very simple, that we could take care of ourselves. We wanted the garden to be just a little enclosed



Henderson: place, like a Spanish garden. (Well, not exactly a Spanish garden because that's open to the sides, and here it's glassed in.) He drew this house, and he drew this [veranda] and said, "This will be great for your outdoor living, and you won't have to pull porch furniture in all the time in winter," and it has been absolutely marvelous. We have it all year long and if we have a nice day in December we can sit out here just as well as any other time of the year. We use it a lot.

Riess: Was there a room that had this function in the other house?

Henderson: No. We had two grape arbors, off the living room and off the dining room, that we used more or less the same. They had shade. But they weren't enclosed. As he said, we had to take the porch furniture in in the winter. But it was a wide brick terrace, on the garden side, with two arbors over it, so in many ways it was the same thing for outdoor living, but not as permanent. This [veranda] being so high gives you the feeling of being outdoors, of not having a roof over your head. And the plants that need a little sun will grow out here because we have the skylights.

## 2) Second House: Siting, Design, and Color Decisions

Riess: In the 20 years between the first and second houses they had become much more of whatever their personality was. I'd be interested in the differences between them as young men and as mature professionals; and in differences in them as a team.

Henderson: The only difference I can think of in working with Bill and Tommy almost 20 years later was that each had a second-in-command whom he put in charge of the job. And for the second house we had the completely accepted teamwork: Bill planned the house, and Tommy planned its placement on the lot, and the garden and driveway around it. They worked together very harmoniously.

Riess: You always knew you wanted them to do the second house?

Henderson: Yes, we went right to Wurster and said, "We want you to build us a new house." And he wasn't sure we ought to leave the house we had, but anyway he agreed.

But we went to Tommy first to help us pick out the lot. We had a choice of lots up here. The club was moving into the Crocker property and building two golf holes right in back of us here, as you saw, and we looked at the property on the other side, first, which was lovely, but it sort of slants up.



Henderson: Tommy took a look and said, "This is lovely, but if you build here you'll have to do the most tremendous drainage job, because you're at the foot of a mountain, and unless there are other houses around here to share it with you, it'll be like building a castle on the Rhine, practically. You'il have to build it up high and have all kinds of drainage, and the side hill will be very difficult."

Then he looked over here at this lot which we hadn't thought of, because it was solid with trees. And he said, "There's a knoll; you can put the house on the top and the drainage goes off." (You wouldn't think we had a drainage problem here in this dry year, but we do. On this flat lot we have drainage all over to take the water off any place where it might sit around.)

So, he picked this, and then we had to take the trees down and then he oriented the house in the placing of it, and worked on where the driveway would come around, because on a side hill like this we had to have the garage lower down. So you cannot drive to the front door and then on to the garage. You come to the front door, or else you go to the delivery and garage entrance on the other side. It was a problem working it out, but it has worked out in living here. When we come home we drive into the garage and come in through the downstairs entrance, which is very handy. It doesn't bother us. And guests come to the front door.

Then when they came to actually building the house--though we had sketched out a house--it was Bill who decided on the house and on the orientation of the rooms. We would have put the living rooms (the living room and dining room) on the front side, and the bedrooms on the garden side, but Bill switched that around and put the dining room and the living room on the ends where they are surrounded by garden; and the bedrooms, the master bedroom and the guestrooms, are on the side towards the entranceway, so that when you come in with packages or a coat or anything, you leave them right there in the bedroom and then come on to the living and dining room. It worked out very, very well.

Riess: How were those decisions made with him? Conferences?

Henderson: Yes, but it was more that he knew how it was going to be, and about the size of the house. He'd present a plan and we'd go over that plan a little. For instance, when he drew this out, he had a row of steps going the whole way along here [along the veranda] and when Tommy came into it he said he didn't want those. He broke them up this way [referring to current arrangement of steps up to the pool]. There were various changes like that. But Bill drew just a sketch, but that was the way he envisioned this--going out and then rising up a bit.

Henderson: And then I told them to put the pool right there. They didn't want that. That was going to be the garden. They said you should have the pool someplace else where people don't see it all the time, because it's not decorative. I said, "If you have it up high people don't see down into it, and it becomes a reflecting pool." And it has worked out that way.

Well, they said, "All right, you can have a pool there if you don't have a diving board, or any steps, metal steps, that show. It mustn't look like a pool." And then we have this nice dark green color, and there are cement steps at this end, which don't show very much. And it becomes a reflecting pool and lights up at night. And it's very, very handy for us since we don't have a lot of noisy children around that we would want to have farther away. We can just go out and go swimming and then come back in over the pavement here, and the terrazzo floor in there, and it doesn't matter if you drip on it. [Laughter]

Riess: And it certainly is a good color.

Henderson: That's the Tommy exclusive color [laughing] practically. He said, "I want it to look like a natural pool in the woods," not a bright turquoise pool that stands out. So there is a good deal of green in the plaster in the walls of it. I think that nowadays people are making them even darker in some places. And the tile around the side, you see, is just a dark grey, doesn't show at all, just a sort of shadow that makes the water look deeper.

Riess: You say "they." I'm surprised that Wurster would have had something to say about the steps.

Henderson: Well, he did. His plan included this [veranda] and some steps out there. I think he felt that that was part of the courtyard feeling he was creating here.

But then Tommy took over and he thought of that kind of terrazzo on the steps and the paving around there that's made with a light-colored sand. It's very nice to walk on, never gets too hot, and it's not scratchy. It was made like this terrazzo [underfoot]; it's mixed and laid in a certain way, with dividers in between. But not polished, like the indoor terrazzo.

It does crack sometimes, and we have to have it repaired. We have a kind of finish, like a varnish, put on it every three or four years, and it preserves it. It isn't shiny and it keeps it from getting dried out and cracking.

Riess: When there were disagreements between Wurster and Church, how did it work out?

Henderson: If it were in the realm of the house, Bill would win out; if it were in the realm of the garden, Tommy would. Well, for instance the color. I said I wanted a yellow house. They all said, "That's wonderful, we love yellow houses." (Actually I will admit now that I was thinking of the New England yellow with the green shutters, but they were thinking of something a little more, as you can see.)

There are various ranges of yellow. Bill came down with about six samples of yellow and we discarded some, and I remember coming down to one or two, and comparing them to pencils, going to see a house in town that was this color, and then finally I took two samples with me--I was going to Europe on a short trip--and I got to Austria and Northern Italy and I found all the houses were yellow over there. You don't think of it. Schönbrunn is two shades of yellow. And the Italian houses are often yellow. We think of them being pink, but there are lots of them that are yellow.

I came back, and I was still undecided, but Bill said, "This is the one you should have," and it was quite bright. And Tommy said, "I think you should have the softer color," but Bill was very firm and he got his way and his is just fine. It's all right.

It was so bright that I was worried with anything I planted that it would clash. And I was very careful not to have pink chestnuts, for instance. I thought they'd look wrong. I got the white chestnuts. But pink would have been fine. It's a color that could stand any color against it. It's all right. And of course that was no serious disagreement, it was just a matter of ideas.

Riess: It is worth thinking about, because not many clients, architects, and landscape architects can work repeatedly so harmoniously.

Henderson: Well, I guess that's probably true. Bill was very, very nice to work with, and though he had become famous, at the time you'd think we were doing him the greatest favor when we asked him to do another house. He said, "Oh, I'm so pleased that a client comes back and wants me to do another house." He acted very unspoiled and very very nice about it.

In the meantime he had done the ski resort that we were interested in at Sugar Bowl, and a little Tyrolean house up there that we later bought, and he was one of the architects on the Bank of American Building where my husband's office is now, so we've really been surrounded by Wurster work for a long time, and very pleased with all of it.

Riess: Tommy Church has said, "The owner must be heard. To create a pattern within which the owner must live by the rules set by the designer is frustration, if not disaster." And Wurster said he worked well with "people who knew how they wanted to live." Both presuppose a lot of self-knowledge on the clients' part.

Henderson: And on the other hand, they in some things know better than you do what you want, I guess, because we asked for a very small house and we've got kind of a big one, as you can see. But it's not a difficult house to keep. In a bigger house you've got more room to put things and in this one there are fewer corners to collect dust. We have more of a garden than we meant to here, though Tommy did keep saying, "Now don't try to plant this whole place."

But they were marvelous to work with. We ended up being best friends, and I would call them in on any sort of problem if there were one.

### 3) The New Garden and the Center Court

Riess: Does this garden repeat elements from the 1934 house? Things you wanted?

Henderson: Well, it really doesn't very much. That was a garden with a good many clipped hedges. We had a little clipped boxwood knot garden across from the front door, and the lawn was enclosed in a yew hedge, the first part of the lawn, and a pittisporum hedge the second part, so that whatever was growing behind there wouldn't show.

It was completely a green garden from the house, and any planting, except for flowering trees, you didn't see, unless you walked through the garden, beyond the hedge. The border was hidden by the hedge. Whereas here your garden is just right here. You don't have to step out into it even. We've got the rose garden over there and the border shows from here and then the vacant lot behind is cut off by the olive trees. Except that it's all facing south, and the terrace faces south, there isn't much similarity to it.

In the other you saw from one room with a hedge around it into another with a hedge around it. Here you see that stonework and steps leading on [back of garden].

Riess: I'm trying to identify the consistent elements in a Thomas Church garden.



Henderson: Well, there is the fact that from the terrace you look out and there is a center paved place--in that case it was the paved place with the tree on top of it and bits of lawn on both sides.

Actually the best view of this house is from the top of the steps at the head of the pool. The pool has a fountain at the head of it that plays--I haven't got it on now because I thought it would make too much noise for you.

Riess: I see all the sculpture. Was placement of that done by you?

Henderson: My main interest in life is the art world. [Laughter] There is sculpture of all sorts out there. There are the little cast cement dogs. There is the Barbara Hepworth at the end. And the reclining lady on the side came from a man named John Pappas, from Athens. It's a bronze that was cast in Florence. And the thing that looks like a totem pole is by a man from Oregon named Melvin Schuler. It's really redwood, covered with fine bronze sheeting put on with lots of little nails. A very interesting sort of surface.

Riess: So that was one of the reasons for building this house, to incorporate these things?

Henderson: In a way, though I hadn't really thought of much in the way of sculpture at the time.

We have a Chinese Kwon Yin over there that was in the other garden. She's the only thing that we had. But I did want a few more walls to hang pictures on. The other house was more or less cut up, so we didn't have as much room. And they were much smaller rooms. We've got quite a bit of wall space in the rooms here.

Riess: So that was a requirement you had?

Henderson: No, I didn't specially ask for that, no. He knew that I wanted it. But we wanted a simpler house, in a way. And as soon as you have a one-story house you have higher ceilings and obviously you have more wall space. And we asked for a center court and we had the walls around that entirely free, except for the light fixtures, to hang odd-sized pictures.

Riess: Did Tommy have to see Wurster's design before he knew what kind of a garden to do? In that way, is the garden an extension of the house?

Henderson: I think so. And he did the center court, too, you see, which is right in the middle of the house.



Henderson: At the time he said, "I'm not much of a center court man. I haven't had much experience." But I know since then he's done a perfectly lovely one at the Hoover Gallery in San Francisco, which he did over for somebody else. I think he did very well with this one.

He was so quick at knowing what should be done, in a way. We hashed over various ideas--pavement in there, brick in there, one thing and another, and nothing seemed quite right till we got the idea of putting gravel in there and terrazzo around the side, which are really the same in character but one is the polished inside, and the rough is outside. And then a little planting.

The center fountain--he knew of somebody in Florence who made fountains and he picked out one and sent for it. We approved the picture but we didn't have a lot to choose from. He just said, "Here's a beautiful fountain for you," and it came and we put it in.

And then he designed the quatrefoil concrete pool around the outside of it. I wish we had made it a little deeper but I didn't know that then and neither did he. But we can't have goldfish unless it's deep enough so that they can keep sort of cool down there. On the other hand it would have taken more water to fill and clean it.

Riess: Wouldn't goldfish have been fun!

Henderson: Well, I tried goldfish, and it got too hot in there. I put in icecubes and everything but I couldn't save the poor things. But that's rather a minor thing.

Riess: Did Tommy stay here on the job with this garden?

Henderson: He had an assistant who was here, and Tommy came frequently too, and oversaw the job.

Riess: Was the planting indicated in the garden design?

Henderson: Kind of roughly. The rose gardens for instance were laid out in the squares.

He went with me to the wholesale nursery and we just picked out this and this and this and they came down with all this planting and put it around.

Riess: How about the chestnuts?

Henderson: Well, that idea came over from the garden before. We had had a row of four chestnuts in front of the house and loved them.

We used these Washington thorns that are over here at the side; he had those planted inside the yew hedge around the first court, the first lawn, of the other garden. They are lovely in the fall: they have red berries and red leaves. And in the spring they have little white flowers. They are not as showy as the other hawthornes, but they have lovely, graceful leaves. Those are reminiscent of the old place.

And he had olives planted along the street to echo the oaks that were along the creek, so we put olives in the background here.

Riess: You aren't saying you brought the trees over.

Henderson: Oh, no, no. Only one very small, then, magnolia, which is right behind that chestnut, and crowded in there now, because it grew up. It is the *Magnolia campbelli* with the big pink blossoms. But it is crowded there; I should have put it much further out.

Riess: You should have?

Henderson: That's something I planted. I brought it along and planted it. Tommy placed the big trees, the chestnuts, and he placed the hawthornes, and he placed the evergreen pears behind them. And I suggested why not olives in the background, and citrus up there, which he liked--although some of the citrus got frozen so that we don't have as many citrus as we started out with. But we have some. And persimmons. We had nice persimmon trees at the old place. And they have very nice fall coloring. We have one on either side at the top of the steps.

And those two big boxwood balls came from the old garden only by accident because our gardener was a friend of the gardener of the people who bought the house and he found that they weren't going to use those and they were throwing them out, so he arrived with them up here and said, "Here they are. What do you want to do with them?"

The things that came along later I had to plant and I made some mistakes. Probably Tommy did too. Tommy always said, "When you build a garden you'll be waiting for the first ten years for things to grow up, and then in the next ten years you'll be taking things out because they grow too big." We have had to take some things out that were getting too big. And usually, though you cry to see a tree come out, you are so glad to see it gone.

Riess: How big were the chestnuts when they went in?

Henderson: Oh, ten feet or so. We've been here for sixteen years. But they were pretty from the time they began to blossom first.

The biggest thing that he brought in was the cypress tree in the center court which he saw in Los Angeles someplace, and he had it boxed and sent up here and it arrived by truck, and was sitting out while the house was being started. Then they moved it in, as the house was being built. We could never put a tree that big in the center court unless you moved it in and built the house around it. We had to persuade the contractor to not forget to water it. And it got watered enough and lived through the summer.

Riess: Fun to think of him spotting a tree he liked.

Henderson: That's right. And he spotted the trees by the front door, too. They, I believe, came out of something like the Japanese tea garden or some San Francisco institution. He brought them from Egger's [Nursery], I think, in Ross, and they were quite good sized when they came; they were beautiful Japanese maples. And they are on either side of the front door. I have to have a Japanese gentleman come and trim them every year, because they have to be trimmed just right. A Japanese maple tree can be ruined if it isn't trimmed properly.

This garden is done to be as simple as possible. It looks like a lot to you, but you know, we have one gardener, and his helper, one half-day a week, and that's all the professional help that we have here. Then I run out and garden and trim off the dead roses and do a little around, but it's done to be as simple as possible, almost no trimmed hedges. There is always a certain amount of spraying in any garden and some digging and watering. We have pipes around for automatic sprinklers, but they have to be turned on, they are not on a clock system. But it is planned for the minimum of care. The lawn has to be cut.

Riess: How much care did the other garden take?

Henderson: I've forgotten. I think I had one gardener three days a week. We had the boxwood hedges, and we didn't have electric clippers. Of course you can do those in the winter, when you aren't doing watering. And a lawn isn't that difficult to keep going--just keep the weeds out and aerate it and so forth.

I think we could use somebody more and have some parts of it more polished, in the background. I think this summer I may have to get somebody for another half of a half day, just for watering.

Riess: Well, the cascading plants over the rocks--you might soon lose sight of the rocks.

Henderson: I have taken masses away, myself--you can see a bucket out there where I trimmed that on Sunday. It's rosemary and it's grown so prolifically up there, yet I can't bear to take it off entirely. But I hate to hide the wall. It was done by somebody that Tommy found. I think his name was George Washington Brown, and he was very skilful with the rocks.

I will cut the jasmine down more over there when it has finished blooming because it's covering the rocks too much there, and I can take any amount more off the rosemary and it will grow back again.

Yet I'm grateful for things that want to grow. There are so many things you have a hard time with--can't stand the drought, or the rabbits eat them.

I didn't ask Tommy much about the plants in the terrace up there. He placed the oranges, and as I say some of those got hurt by the frost.

There are two calamondins up at the top of the steps, a citrus with a very small fruit, sour like a lime, but with quite a bit of juice for its size, a very regular-looking tree, with leaves smaller than most citrus. I had two, matched, but the one on the left side got too much or too little water--you never know which it was with things like that--and it just died.

Riess: That little assymetry is fine.

Henderson: I don't mind it. The basis is symmetrical, and we do have those two big trees. And then if something happens to that big chestnut--well, we may find that that's all right too, because it's awfully big for the garden.

#### 4) Some Comments on William Wurster's Involvement

Riess: Did Wurster, having done the house, care about what you did with the interiors?

Henderson: Well, he was interested. I remember asking him--I had some big, framed Audubon prints, some of the big folio ones, and I said, "Wouldn't they be nice in the court?" And he said, "No, too



Henderson: stereotyped." You know, I think he always was right in what he said, so I never did hang them all out there. I put one out there, maybe.

And he wanted these two rooms to be twins, the living room and the dining room, and he wanted to have the same curtains in both and have them be quite a bit alike, because the walls are both of that teakwood. And we didn't go along with that; we put print in one and plain in another. But we've come back now to put plain in the living room [laughing] so in a way we've come back to more or less what he wanted. But they don't strike me as really such twin rooms.

I can't think of anything else in the house that he was firm about. He wanted not too much furniture in the center court; he didn't want it cluttered up, and he was quite right.

When we decided there was too much sun on the west side of the house in the late afternoon he designed some very nice shutters to go on the windows, as an afterthought that he put on. I just said, "I want shutters," and this is what came. I trusted his judgment. They are like awnings, awnings made of shutter material so that they can be open or shut if you want the air. They are very high windows and the top part either had to have blinds on it or shutters of some sort. So we got the outdoor shutters. The sun here is so strong that we keep the curtains pulled against it a lot of the time.

Riess: You speak of Wurster as so firm. But able to see your point on the pool. I guess they didn't let their egos get too involved.

Henderson: Oh no, not a bit. I think that from their superior experience, maybe, that they would often correct something. When I would suggest something, maybe they had had hundreds of clients suggest that and they knew it wouldn't work out. And they'd say, "I think in the long run you wouldn't like that so well. This would work out better." I think they were not hardboiled and didactic about anything. They would just say what they thought.

Tommy with plants is really very elastic though. He will give advice.



## 5) Problem Solving: Creative Compromises

Riess: I was interested, in walking around your garden with you, to hear how many garden decisions you had made.

Henderson: Well, the outline was all Tommy's. But then you still have quite a few things to do yourself. So that I think it's a mistake to think that you shouldn't have a formal outline to a garden that somebody else has planned, because you still have plenty of chance to show your own ideas and personality--too much in a way. Well, in planting the roses: we planted a kind of yellow one in those center beds, and I didn't like them, took them out, and went to the nursery and they said, "Why don't you try this Sarabande, it's a wonderful one." Now we have those two blocks of red and they are always in bloom and if the roses behind aren't doing too well you don't notice them.

Riess: Did Tommy come by much after he finished here?

Henderson: He came by, yes, and he sends people. We have a landscape gardening class from the University of Idaho who come every other year. Then there is a class from, I think, Santa Cruz. It's a Professor Snyder, from Idaho--or maybe it's Oregon--but he is terribly nice. One or two groups come every year, and they are usually studying Tommy's work and they go from one garden to another, young students; they take pictures and walk around--terribly nice and polite and considerate and I'm delighted to have them.

Riess: What do you think are the hallmarks of the Thomas Church garden?

Henderson: His use of levels is very important. He used to do it with redwood siding. You would find his gardens had little low walls, so that there would be a level of lawn and then a level of something above it, and it would be divided by a low wall which had a purpose in the general design and also gave design to the garden.

Here he has used the concrete around the lawn over there and the terrazzo on the steps going up here, and then the stone wall--you see how many materials there are here--to give different levels, not just a general sloppy slope, but a definite pattern.

And then within that pattern you have slopes--like the lawn goes down there and then up here, but that doesn't matter, it's a detail in an organized whole. It gives a restful feeling to a garden if you know why everything's there [laughing], that everything has more or less its place; within the place you can have quite a lot of free growing, but it's got a little boundary to it and a reason for it. I think that's one of his trademarks.

Henderson: I think maybe it is characteristic that he goes in for forms and lets the flowers be the decoration; they are what you see, but if they weren't placed in a plan, then you'd have a sort of hodge podge. And it is true also, I think, that with limited space you get more of a feeling of space if things are planned rather than everything just dumped. And with the interest, and the different levels, you get more of a feeling of space than if you just had a piece of lawn out here.

Another thing he thought up: on the edge of all of his lawns there may be a wall, or some sort of a border, maybe a hedge, but he'll have a row of bricks around the edge (in our case it's not bricks, it's gravel), some place where one wheel of the lawnmower can run, so that you don't have to have that complicated edging business if you don't want to, though lots of people do it anyway. But you can run the lawnmower along and have one wheel on the edging, brick or gravel, and it takes care of the edging, and it doesn't show. That line of gravel along there means you don't have to clip next to the terrazzo, or whatever, and it helps the drainage too.

Riess: So, he learned how to solve problems along the way.

Henderson: Well, they both [Wurster and Church] did. They start with taste, and an eye, and then they have experience. For instance, in this house, our first thought in looking at the plans was that as you come in that court and you have a great big wall here, well I said, "Shouldn't there be a window through that, to look out?" And Bill Wurster said, "No, you'll see enough through the doors. You've got to have walls to contain the court." And he was so right. It would have been just awful to have a window there. (For one thing, I need the space to hang pictures on.) I think people tend to have too much glass in houses sometimes, and then you have to cover them with a curtain.

You've no idea the kinds of little problems that come up. These domes [skylights]--how are they to be kept clean? Well, see how they are kept clean? The little birds go up and eat the bugs off them. Any little bugs or cobwebs the birds clear away. And then there was the question of whether they should be clear or opaque, and eventually, after stewing around, we had them clear; and it doesn't make any difference at all. The sun comes in. You can look up and see the sky.

Bill was very good about how things should be lighted. This [veranda area] is lighted just with washes of light down these big walls. There are lamps that we can use for this side. We didn't use them enough, and one blew down. I moved them because we don't

Henderson: sit out here to read that much. The lights [in the court] inside are very carefully planned to reflect up to the ceiling; you don't see the lights; they're no spot lights around the court, or in it.

[Interruption. Resume with question about the 1934 and the present houses.]

Henderson: I suppose the thing that had changed for Tommy in here, and maybe it had to do with the plan, was that he didn't use any redwood walls the way he did in the old place. He used entirely brick or concrete here.

Riess: Do you remember discussing that with him?

Henderson: Not at all. I just remember his saying we had to have something to make the levels here and he said he thought the stonework would be nice.

That grey wall I guess was Bill's idea, because that was incorporated in the front driveway and he designed the balustrade around there and the wall going down and the wall on the side of it. They are done of concrete that they hose off so that the stones that are in the concrete show through--like an exposed aggregate but it's done very simply.

They forgot to do it in one place, the contractor forgot, and I said, "Bill, this doesn't look like what you told me, this looks like ordinary cement."

He came out and said, "This is all wrong." The contractor had to sandblast it to make it come out the way he wanted it. And after that they put it on and then washed it off with a kind of acid. On things like that he was very good at representing the client with the contractor and making them live up to the plan.

On the pool--it was going slowly and the man who was doing the wall got there first and had his wall built. He thought the wall should be so high and he built it along there, but he didn't know about the steps going up, about the height, so he had to add on to that whole stone wall to make it high enough to give the effect that Tommy wanted above the steps. (Actually I thought it looked quite nice without the steps.)

Riess: I guess a lot of people, having something built, just go away and let it happen.

Henderson: Well, that may be a good thing to do in a way. Yet not many of us do anything very creative, and building a house and putting in a garden is as near as we come to creating something. You work with him, and you give little ideas, and he flatters you into thinking that he's taking your ideas, but really [laughing] he's the one who's saying what it'll be in the end. But then you see it come out, built, and made. It's very satisfying--annoying at times if things aren't turning out the way you think, or they make mistakes.

It's nice to have a contractor that you like too, who works well with the architect, and I think Bill has always been able to get along very well with the contracting firm. He's firm about it, but always very reasonable, and tries to make his plans very clear so they won't make mistakes.

#### 6) Client Contribution and Involvement

Riess: Did you and your husband work with the architects, or was it mostly you?

Henderson: My husband too when he could. Any important decision we would ask him, though he always tells me that I did him out of a library, but I maintained that with two of us we can have one room that we live in and I don't have to keep another room. [Laughing] So many people have a small library that they spend a great deal of time in, and then have a big room for parties, maybe. I said, "Oh, Bill, we don't want that. We don't have that many parties. We'll just use our best room all the time." And the books are there, and so is the bar, the whole thing, all in one room.

He [Mr. Henderson] came into any important decisions, if he was interested. But I was more on the job, more able to be here while the men were working. And there are a lot of housekeeping details too.

After two gardens I was fairly experienced with what grows and what doesn't. We had a shady garden at the other place, never room for roses, so that was one thing I really wanted here, and I have had a lot of fun with the roses.

Riess: Tommy wouldn't say, "Oh, no, not roses"?

Henderson: No, as long as they were not right in front, because roses, when they are trimmed in winter, and have no leaves on them, are not the most decorative things in the world. In the winter they are just bare over there--but there is a certain design to their bed.



Riess: These pots [urns, light sand color, about 3 1/2 ft. high] are stunning. Were they designed for the garden?

Henderson: No, they were in the Crocker estate, which is now the Burlingame Country Club, and when they put their golf course around the main house they didn't need those pots, which I suppose used to line the drive, or were someplace in the garden, so they were all lumped together and for sale, and I bought all nine of them. At first I thought they were too big, I couldn't use them, but then I thought I'd take them anyway. They turned out to be just perfect for here. These two bay trees were by the front door in the old house and we brought them up in the pots they were in, which were too small, and now they grow quite well in the new pots.

Tommy helped to place the pots, and when the moving people came with these great things, well, "What should we do with them?" But they just matched here and we put them this way, and I think we only had to shift the ones out here once. I think they were certainly a happy find.

Riess: How available was Tommy once the garden was done?

Henderson: Tommy's very, very nice if you want anything more. He did come down last year. I had a piece of sculpture that I couldn't find a place for and he came and suggested where it should be. Then my husband said he wanted a little Japanese garden, just a little trickle of water someplace, and he [Tommy] found the place where it could have been done, but we never put that in, and I returned the sculpture.

Riess: I guess you hesitate to presume on him.

Henderson: Oh, he came on a business visit, not just social, and I paid him for the visit because I was asking him professional advice, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

If it was just something simple, like--oh, I had seen some terracotta figures of shepherds and shepherdesses that I thought I might like for the garden and he looked at the pictures and said, oh no, they were all wrong. So, I could get his point of view on something like that, particularly since it was not right in his field. And really I didn't want to spoil his good garden by putting in something he wouldn't especially like.



Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Lucy H. Butler

A PASATIEMPO CLIENT RECREATES THE SCENE

IN 1935: CHURCH AND WURSTER

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Lucy H. Butler

|                                                |     |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) Pasatiempo: Marion Hollins and Bill Wurster | 135 |
| 2) Thomas Church's Plans and Plantings         | 139 |



Lucy H. Butler

June 27, 1977

Interview held at Mrs. Butler's home, San Francisco

1) Pasatiempo: Marion Hollins and Bill Wurster

Butler: My family had a place at Capitola for years. Oh, even 1910 and earlier than what we'd had a summer place there. We'd been in that area and loved it. Marion Hollins was a close friend, and that's how we happened to finally leave the beach. We had been at the Aptos beach for years in little cottages. The boys were about 8 and 10 I guess, and we decided that we were outgrowing the beach. Then Marion Hollins talked us into buying property up at Pasatiempo which she was developing then.\* That was in 1933. We built the house in 1935.

Riess: How did she get connected with that property? I'm terribly interested in the background of that?

Butler: Marion had worked for Sam Morse of the Del Monte Properties Company selling property over at Pebble Beach when it was first opened. Later she and some other people became involved in the discovery of oil in Kettleman Hills at that time. With the money she made from the oil she bought this old ranch, 600 acres of the ranch, what is now called Pasatiempo, and she subdivided it and then had one of the best golf architects lay out the golf course.

In any case, we were all interested in golf, so it was a question of moving up there.

---

[\*There's going to be quite an article coming out soon in Billie Jean King's magazine, Womansport, about Marion Hollins and all of the things that she was interested in. The woman who is writing this article is Betty Hicks, also a former national woman champion, like Marion Hollins. Betty is now teaching the Women's Golf Team at San Jose State College. L.H.B.]



- Butler: Marion had engaged Bill Wurster at that time to do some houses at Pasatiempo for her.
- Riess: Now that was interesting that she had, because he was young and a fledgling relatively, wasn't he?
- Butler: Yes, she was wonderful that way because she picked up, you might say, Bill Wurster and Tommy Church at the point of the Depression when nobody was building. Bill said, "I can build inexpensive houses," and he did. You wouldn't believe our house cost only \$7,000 to build.
- Riess: Isn't that amazing! How much did you work with Bill Wurster on this? Or did he just "do" you a house?
- Butler: No, we told him we wanted a weekend house and we'd seen a house that we thought we liked. He drew us two plans. One was like a house that was actually there at Pasatiempo. He drew two plans for us. And we looked at them and we said, no, that wasn't what we want. So he said, "Well, let me think about it."
- He came back a month later. He called one evening, and he said, "I've got just what you want." He came to our house. My husband and I sat down and here was this house plan--absolutely nothing like what we thought we wanted and it turned out that it was what we wanted.
- [Looking at pictures] I'll show you some of the inside. Now this is the outside of the big front porch which opens into the court. The house was built around an oak tree.
- Riess: When you bought the property there was an oak tree on it?
- Butler: Yes. The oak tree was there.
- Riess: How did you expect to deal with the oak tree?
- Butler: The oak tree was perfectly beautiful. We thought the oak tree should be on one corner of the house. It was Bill's idea to put the house around the tree when he finally came up with the last plan.
- Riess: So Bill had everything to do with the siting of the house?
- Butler: Yes, and the idea that it was to be around the oak tree. We had thought of a two story house with an oak tree in kind of one corner someplace.
- Riess: Had you known the Gregory house in Santa Cruz?

Butler: Oh, yes, and I had known the Gregorys for years. That was really one reason we wanted Bill as our architect. When their house took the prize, a national prize, that was the kind of house we decided that we wanted something like it. So it was natural to have Bill.

Riess: When one bought a lot at Pasatiempo, there was the chance to have Bill, or was it necessary to have Bill?

Butler: No, it was not necessary. Marion was financing a lot of these houses, I'm sure because she wanted certain people there. So there were a number of houses that she built at the time. Dr. [Alistair] MacKenzie, who laid out the golf course, and also laid out Cypress Point course, had a house there while he was developing the golf course. So I feel that Marion was behind a lot of these houses that she built. She built one as an office. She built one as a caddy house. But they were built by Bill, at least it's his architecture that did it.

Riess: But did she have to approve the designs?

Butler: That I don't know, about anybody else's house. If you get people to come and really work for you and promote the thing, like Bill Wurster and Tommy, she wanted, I think, especially to have Tommy living on the place to see how it was being developed.

Now Bill Wurster did not do the clubhouse. It was built in the late thirties, and the Pasatiempo Club finally has been able to buy it back recently from private owners. There were so many financial troubles at Pasatiempo. Marion Hollins died broke, lost everything, because it was the wrong time to promote something like that. And her own house, a lovely house, was even sold by the bank. Tommy did the garden for the clubhouse at Pasatiempo and Clarence Tantau was the architect for the clubhouse.

When my sons were little, Tommy's crew was getting behind on this garden for this big opening we were going to have at the clubhouse. So he [Tommy] got Vincent and Lewis, who were 8 and 10 at the time, to come up and work for him that day. They hauled flowerpots around and wheelbarrows and milk for the workmen and all, and he paid them wages. They were so excited, the first checks they'd ever earned. When the checks came back, Tommy sent them to me. The boys still have them. Their first paychecks. But it was a nice thing for Tommy to do. Of course, he knew the kids well by that time.

Riess: It was just a weekend crowd down there.

Butler: Well, Marion lived there. The Ed Gallweys had a house; theirs was weekend, too. The Lawrence Scotts had a house. These were all Bill Wurster houses I'm talking about. The Scotts lived in Hillsborough

Butler: and used to go down there for weekends. I would say at that time there were a lot of just weekend places, summer places.

Riess: But very substantial.

Butler: Yes. But they didn't cost much in those days. When you think that you could build a house for--the Gallwey house cost \$5,000. Bill told me he thought Marion's house was terribly expensive. At the time he was building it I think it was \$40,000 or something. You couldn't replace it for anything now. As I say, ours cost \$7,000, a little bit more with the garden and things afterwards. It's hard to believe it now.

Riess: And what was Tommy's fee?

Butler: There was no actual fee as I remember. Just the total cost--labor, plants, gravel, lumber, etc., billed to us.

Riess: Dick Peters, who writes about Bill Wurster, is very interested in how Wurster developed that outdoor living room-court kind of thing that's really so beautifully exemplified in your place.

Butler: Yes, and also up at the Gregory's. They've got the regular court there, too. Their court is kind of two-sided, and then the water tower, but it's all fenced in, so you go in through the large gates into a court.

I think it was just Bill's idea of early California. Of course, he white-washed the outsides. I remember my father having a perfect fit at putting white-wash on a house. Eventually, of course, it wore off and then was scraped off. But it gave the early California feeling:

Riess: Did it have an extraordinary look at the time? Would people sort of be amazed?

Butler: The house seemed different to people when they came to see it. Because they weren't used to that type of a house.

Riess: And yet it seems so perfect.

Butler: Well, it was, but at the time that it was built it did seem different. The Gregory's house was different. The ones that Bill Wurster was doing and Tommy going along with it, they were all different.

Riess: Not far out in any way?

Butler: No, not a bit. It was going back to early California with covered passageways and geraniums and just the old time things that they had in and around adobe houses.

## 2) Thomas Church's Plans and Plantings

Butler: [Looking at pictures] Now this is from the front door. There's the oak tree. And then the entrance; there are big barn doors through which you enter the court.

Riess: The court is Bill's design? Or is that Tommy then?

Butler: No, the house was Bill's with the doors. Then the court and the paths and everything was Tommy's.

Tommy thought that as you come in these big barn doors, you drive up--and there's a flat place that he laid out, a parking area as you come up the driveway--and you park your car, and then this great big gate opens out, barn doors sort of, and there's a wall to each side of the house, connected with the doors, and you step into the court. He just stood there and he said, "Now where do people want to go?" In other words, "Where do you put the paths?"

We said, "They want to go up to the front door." So you walk down to the front door that way. "Then you want to go to the bedrooms," so you go around here. Eventually he had paths around the tree, going in different directions.

When he got to doing the planting beds in the court, it was funny. He looked at one of the paths. He said, "That's got to be moved." He said, "Those boys are going to run through the flower beds." In other words, "We'll move it so they can't. Or we'll make a place for them to run when they come in the gate, and they're going to their room, and they'll run right through the flower bed unless I make another path where they can go off there." Which showed how marvelous he was about children to begin with.

Riess: Was the house structure up by the time he was working.

Butler: Yes, he saw the plans, of course, when Bill was working on them and when it was done. He may have seen it during construction. I don't remember.

Riess: Did he make any notes on the plans then, or give any input at that time?

Butler: I have a plan that he drew but it didn't turn out exactly that way. The court yes, mostly, but the part around the house he did really right on the spot.



Butler: Then one of the things he did was to trim up the beautiful oaks that were all around the canyon side of the house. We've lost some of these oaks unfortunately and the big tree in the court through too much water, although Tommy had drains put in every direction and catch basins. As he said, "Oak trees just don't like human beings around them."

Riess: I suppose that's happened all over the development.

Butler: Yes, almost everybody at Pasatiempo has lost a tree or trees.

There were solid oak trees on our place right down to the ground where the deer used to sleep. He stood there with two men working. I said, "Tommy, you know, the canyon goes down there. If we can clear that out, I can look across"--to what is now the University of California at Santa Cruz, over the hills. He stood there with two men like little monkeys in the tree cutting and shaping everything. I think that's one of the marvelous things that he could do. He did the same thing on the front lawn looking into the canyon from the front porch here to these trees that were all solid, too. He just cut and cut until he had all of them shaped. He and I just stood on the terrace while he directed. I marveled at him. I think he was always proud of doing this, and the trees, because he put this picture in the book.

When we bought the property, before we did anything, even about the house, we had the center tree all braced and trimmed and taken care of by a tree man to be sure that it was going to be all right. It was filled in like an old tooth with cement, and braced with cables.

I think that one of the great things that Tommy could do was to take a tree and just make it into something totally different.

Riess: Were Bill and Tommy actually together at the time when they were working?

Butler: They were certainly working together all the time. I don't know whether I would think that Bill Wurster really was responsible for having Tommy do so many of his houses or suggesting it. I don't know how it came about with us. Whether we just knew Tommy and he was there, we saw what he was doing and wanted it, or if it was a combination of Bill saying, "Well, Tommy will do a great job for you."

Riess: Do you remember who installed it, who the contractor was?

Butler: Yes, Darrow Palmer. In Santa Cruz he did most of the houses at Pasatiempo. And his son-in-law is still working down there.



Riess: Was he the contractor for the houses and the gardens, or just the gardens?

Butler: Tommy's men did the actual work on the garden. Whoever it was, Tommy had the same man for years. He did, for instance, all the garden paths, all of the wooden path edges, and all the brickwork. Tommy had his own crew. That was not done by Darrow Palmer, the contractor, who built the house.

Riess: And he was the contractor for the house?

Butler: Actually I think Palmer was the contractor for practically all the houses there.\* And I think for the Gregory house up in Scott's Valley, too. I remember Bill Wurster saying, "If I turn the plans over to Darrow Palmer, I never would have to go near it and see the house until it was finished." He had so much confidence in him.

Riess: I'm really interested in who made what decisions, particularly at that period in his early practice, whether they were joint decisions of Tommy's and Bill's or what.

Butler: No, I would think at that point it was probably Tommy's and mine. Bill had done the house. Tommy had seen all the plans and everything. Then he and I worked out what would work out for a family for a weekend place with two boys, 8 and 10 then, who are now 50 and 51. He worked out what their need was. All these paths, for instance, were made so the kids could ride their bicycles around the place.

Riess: So it was designed for living, rather than any kind of style. He wasn't saying, "Let's have it look like a rustic something or other."

Butler: It was to fit the family.

Riess: Tommy selected the foundation planting and all of that?

Butler: Yes, and for instance, for the service yard off the kitchen I think I suggested the grape stakes, the old ones, and we just bought them from people up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. He made a fence around that service yard so we could lock the dogs in or lock the children in. That was planted with oleanders that cover the back of the fence.

Riess: He took an interest in the flower beds and all of that?

Butler: He said, "Now, here you want flower beds, with not much care," because we weren't going to be there except weekends. And he gave us things that were more seasonal, like lots of geranium pots all around the porch posts and covered passage ways. And shrubs that took as little

---

\*Virgil Huff was the contractor for the early buildings at Pasatiempo, including the caddy house, and he was also the contractor for the Gregory Farmhouse. [Daniel Gregory]

Butler: care as possible. Actually, it turns out that as things grew bigger and bigger there was a good deal of work, but his idea was, and also mine, that we wouldn't have too much garden care.

Later he did what we call the vegetable boxes. Down behind the service yard, in the big open space that was there, he built six boxes, raised boxes, with paths all around. Each boy was supposed to have three boxes to raise vegetables himself. [Laughs] And berry vines, there were two berry vines in long boxes. Then he put in what he called a family orchard; most of the trees are gone now. [Looking at pictures]

There's one side. This was when it was first put in. This hedge here, Tommy took pieces of it from his own house at Pasatiempo and put it in mine. I don't even know what the name of it is.

Riess: Is that boxwood hedge?

Butler: No, it's more of a privet. He was so funny. He went up to his own house and he just pulled up a big clump and he came down and began sticking pieces in, and he said, "I don't know what it is." He put in some other white bulb clumps, too, that we had for years until the gophers ate them.

I kept saying, "Tommy, what are they?"

He said, "I don't know what they are." But he had some at his house. He just dug up a clump and brought it down to my place. Other than that, he went to the nursery.

Like the oleanders; he figured oleanders didn't need much water and they were good all over California for growing, so he put them behind the service yard. It was practical, as well as nice. But he'd say, "What do you think" or "What colors don't you like?"

Riess: That's amusing that a landscape architect would say about the stuff, "Well, I don't know what it is." [Laughs]

Butler: Yes, but it's been there now, what? since 1935? and we still don't know what it's called, but it's some kind of a privet, I think.

Riess: Some of the things that Tommy's known for are his solutions to the problems of edging so that it becomes possible to mow without having to clip also. I wondered if you recalled--

Butler: No, because we still clip. [Laughs] I think that my daughter-in-law told me that now they've had to let the lawn go on account of the lack of water this year. But no, we've been clipping hedges, etc. The idea

Butler: was to keep the field empty and the woods around the house rough. You just had enough planting around to make it seem civilized. Then you go right into the rough field and into the trees. The feature, of course, was really the court. So that when you walked in, here was this magnificent oak tree and the planted court. And the rest of it was natural with pots, and the shaped oak trees.

Riess: Did Tommy sketch the design on a little piece of paper or did he actually draw a plan.

Butler: No, I have a regular plan that he did. I have it some place. I can't put my hand on it right now, but it's not exactly the way it turned out.

He did a plan, because he'd say, "Well, what would you do? Here's the floor plan of the house and the rest of it." So he sketched it out. When he got down to actually doing it, he did a lot of it right on the spot.

Riess: Changed it right on the spot from his original plans.

Did he do any outdoor seating or benches?

Butler: No.

Riess: Or walls you could sit on or against?

Butler: No, not the way he does it now. There were no decks. What we had were the brick terrace, and then the paths with the gravel. But it was a fine gravel, fairly firm so the boys could ride bicycles on the path, around the court. Then the service yard was macadam, like the driveway. And he had drains, wonderful catch-basins I guess you call them, all through the court, and tile all down underneath. The water in the wintertime would rain into one; from that it drained into the other. From that it slanted out into the canyon. He was trying to save the oak tree so that water wouldn't sit in there too much where the house had been built around it.

Riess: Was there much alteration of the terrain?

Butler: [Looking at pictures] There's one wall, the only cement piece of work really other than the garage floor that was in the house. It ran across here. The oak tree was here and you came in and the house was around it. They had to put about a 3 ft. high cement retaining wall along there. That was one reason that he felt the water in the court wouldn't drain as well, because it had to hit this cement wall that was under the wall where the outdoor porch was. It was a foundation

Butler: thing that they needed. But in front of the wall he put all these drains so that the water wouldn't get backed up against the cement wall.

But that was the only part, and the front. We had to move a little dirt around to put the lawn on the front part. But as far as the actual court, there was just a sort of a natural slope in there. We wanted the house on level ground if possible. We picked as level a place as we could. As a matter of fact, I don't think he did the road part, I mean the actual construction of the road himself. But he laid out the road. And that had to be cut out, the driveway, and then made level. But more or less it was really very little moving of dirt. We moved in dirt for the vegetable boxes and berry racks.

Riess: I like that picture, the one that he chose for the book. [Gardens are for People, pp. 3, 48]

Butler: Well, it showed that he liked trees and had an interest in trees and their shape. When he put that picture in the book, I was surprised, because it wasn't what I thought he might pick out, but it shows what he was thinking about--trees. He says something in the book about the trees:

"Look carefully at your trees to be sure you have developed all they have to give you. Their beauty is not in foilage alone, but in their shape in branching and in the relation of their structure to their foilage. It is pleasant and very exciting to look up into a tree and through a tree as well as at it."

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Miriam Pierce

A PIEDMONT CLIENT RECALLS TWO GARDENS, 1937, 1962

By Correspondence With  
Suzanne B. Riess





TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Mrs. Frank H. Pierce

Correspondence with Mrs. Frank H. Pierce

May 26, 1977

145

June 14, 1977

147



Mrs. Frank H. Pierce  
The Park Lane #710  
200 Glenwood Circle  
Monterey, California 93940

May 26, 1977

Ms. Suzanne Riess  
The Bancroft Library  
Berkeley, California

Dear Ms. Riess:

Our mutual friend Ann Adams was correct that my husband, Dr. Frank Pierce, and I were the proud possessors of a delightful garden by Tom Church--as a matter of fact, we had two but since my husband's death a year ago, and the sale of our home in February, I no longer own either one.

I am heartily in favor of your project, and happy to be of any help at this point.

The first garden Tom designed for us was at 41 Alvarado Road, Berkeley, and the date, I believe, 1937-38--if the date is highly important. I may be able to unearth records.

This house, at 41 Alvarado Road, is now owned by a young lawyer and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton C. Bunch, Jr., phone 843-0191. I saw Mrs. Bunch, whom I know only slightly, a year or so ago, and she told me that they had wanted to up-date the garden, and, to that end, had contacted Tom Church. The idea appealed to him, and I understand he was planning changes for them. They are very proud of the garden, and I would think might be cooperative in letting you see it.

Meanwhile, soon after we finished the garden on Alvarado Road, my parents, Dr. and Mrs. S.C. Buck, built a home at 112 Ross Circle in Oakland, and we asked "Punk" Vaughan to place the house on the lot, and he and his wife--Adele?--designed the garden--Vaughan had been second-in-command during the construction of our garden on Alvarado Road.

In 1965, we decided to move to the convenient one-story house on Ross Circle, which my parents had left to us, and completely remodel it, and put in a new garden. Our friends laughed when we said we planned to have Tom Church do the garden--too small a job, etc.--and did not know that Tom and Betsy Church had become dental patients of my husband's, as well as friends.

Largely because of the way we had kept our garden on Alvarado Road, just as he had planned it, Tom agreed to design the garden on Ross Circle for us-- a comparatively small garden, very expensive to produce with all the brick work, but most satisfactory.

In February of this year, I sold this house at 112 Ross Circle, Oakland 94618 to Donald and Astrid Giovanetti, phone 652-8873.

I am sure they would be pleased to have you see the garden. I left some of the blue-prints with them, but could produce more if you want them.

You may keep the two clippings I am sending, and if I can be of any further assistance, please call me at 408-372-3487, or if you are in the area, call upon me at my present address:

The Park Lane #710  
200 Glenwood Circle  
Monterey, Calif. 93940

I have heard that Tom Church has been very ill, and would be most pleased if you could tell me.

Sincerely,

Miriam B. Pierce



Mon., Nov. 10, 1969

San Francisco Chronicle 23

WHO'S WHO

Frances Moffat

## How the Stylish Gardens Grow

"WE CAN thank Tommy for this," is the remark hundreds of Bay Area hostesses are likely to make when guests admire their gardens.

For nearly 40 years landscape architect Thomas Church has designed residential gardens, each with an individual style suited to the owners.

Now Mr. Church has wrapped up his philosophy about gardens in a handsomely-illustrated book, "Your Private World: A Study of Intimate Gardens."

The publication (by Chronicle Books) was celebrated last Thursday at a champagne party at Brentano's, where the only threat to the happy mingling of old and new customers was the possibility Mr. Church might get writer's cramp as he autographed copies of his book.

"I'm afraid I'll run out of things to say," he said, presiding at a large table while salesgirls were busy with orders.

However, he managed to write a personal message to each customer, because Tommy Church has always had great empathy with his clients.

"I never think in terms of what I'd like their garden to be," he said. "It's a matter of what they want and what they can handle."

Nothing distresses him more than revisiting a garden he has designed some years after it was installed and discovering that it had been neglected.

At the book party there were new clients, such as the junior James B. Blacks, who have commissioned Mr. Church to do the garden in the house they recently built in Pacific Heights.

"We'll be in the next book," said Grace Black, waiting for her autographed copy.

Many at the parties were clients, such as Dr. and Mrs. Frank Pierce, who had Mr. Church do the garden for their big home when children were growing up, then asked him back when they sold that house and moved to a smaller place.

The William Knapps had him do their gardens in the City and at Pebble Beach, and the Bruce Dohrmanns took the prize as the most consistent customers.

"He did our garden in 1932 at our old place on Beach street," said Phyllis Dohrmann. "He even suggested we give a painting party to get the fence painted."

Tommy Church laughed at the memory and said the Dohrmanns were among his first customers. Later he did the garden and swimming pool area for their Russian Hill home and their country home in Sonoma county.

Mr. Church's book is not only for the rich and social. Although it is illustrated with such handsome pool areas as the one at the Hillsborough home of Mr. and Mrs. Christian de Guigne III, there are suggestions for children's play areas and down-to-earth ideas about storing tools and do-it-yourself garden upkeep.

Enjoying her husband's success was his wife, who claims she had nothing to do with his career.

The Churches live in a delightful old home on Hyde street, where the garden, according to the book, was "designed for Mrs. Thomas Church."

Espaliered trees and ivy trained on wire in a diamond pattern show the perfection of Mr. Church's at-home gardening.

"Pruning is what I like best," he said. "I actually have a client in South Carolina, who sends for me once a year to cut her boxwood and another one in Connecticut who has me trim her dogwood."

He wouldn't mention the fees he receives for such transcontinental services, but it's a long way from the depression years when he started out selling his idea that a garden should be a year-round living environment.

There have been many trends in gardening during the years but Mr. Church sums this up in the book:

"The only trend we can see is a trend away from trends."

Arthur Court was at the book party with news of the latest trend — large mineral sculptures are being installed in gardens these days.

Mr. Court with his Jackson Square shop started the fad for decorative minerals here, and just recently Mimi London, Michael Taylor and Bob Pogats went into the business.



Second Letter, June 14, 1977

[Mrs. Pierce penned answers to questions mailed to her that the interviewer has reduced to interview form]

Riess: Was the garden Thomas Church did for you at Alvarado Road experimental or new in anyway at the time?

Pierce: No, actually the house was English and the lot went steeply down-hill. It was a matter of putting a lot under the house, with a formal garden. The Massio Brothers did the front garden on Alvarado Road, an old Italian family, and it stayed in beautiful condition. The back garden was done by some American contractor, and the brickwork was in bad shape when we sold the house, partly because the bricks were set in sand. We thought Tom was not using this method by the time we built the garden on Ross Circle.

When I decided to sell the house there, Coldwell-Banker always advertised a "garden by Thomas D. Church" and said it was as important as if they were advertising a house by Maybeck or Julia Morgan.

Riess: It is interesting that Mr. Church's reputation was such in 1965 that your friends would have thought he would not do a small residential garden. Had he refused to do work for anyone that you recall?

Pierce: Yes, I think he had refused a friend. Friends though he was too busy, but also wouldn't care to do so small a job. And that was when he was doing work for the University of California.

Riess: Did your husband trade services with Tommy?

Pierce: No, I would say definitely no. I think Dr. Pierce heard of Tom Church through patients down the Peninsula who had gardens he had created. I'm not positive who this might be, maybe the Witters or Schillings.

Riess: Can you describe how Tommy tackled the job at Ross Circle?

Pierce: Tommy came over and looked at the property at 112 Ross Circle, took pictures of it, and then sent a couple of his young men to survey it. His associate, June Meehan, was in charge, and the work was done by Roger Fisher, Landscape Contractor.



Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

June Campbell

AN ASSOCIATE DETAILS THE CHURCH OFFICE WORKINGS, 1940s-1960s

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess





TABLE OF CONTENTS -- June Meehan Campbell

|                                                                     |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) Education. Gregg and Vaughan at U.C.                             | 148 |
| 2) Thomas Church and <u>Sunset</u> , Late 1930s                     | 152 |
| 3) June Meehan at The Fair, Bill Mott's Office, and Hired by Church | 154 |
| 4) Getting Jobs. Distant Clients                                    | 156 |
| 5) Office: Size, Associates, Quality                                | 158 |
| 6) The Artist's Eye                                                 | 161 |
| 7) The Boys in the Office. Experience, Influence                    | 162 |
| 8) Working with Architects                                          | 164 |
| 9) Office: Finances, Coffee Hour                                    | 166 |
| 10) Choosing Materials, Experimenting                               | 167 |
| 11) Parkmerced and Landscape Contracting                            | 169 |
| 12) When Thomas Church Went Away, and Returned                      | 172 |
| 13) More Big Jobs: How They Came to Church                          | 174 |
| 14) Good Client Relationships                                       | 176 |
| 15) More About the Church Style of Working                          | 177 |
| 16) Answers to Added Questions, December 1977                       | 181 |

June Meehan Campbell

March 24, 1976

Interview held at Church office, 402 Jackson Street, San Francisco

Present at interview: June Meehan Campbell, Suzanne Riess, Betsy Church, Grace Hall, PamAnela Messenger

1) Education. Gregg and Vaughan at U.C.

Riess: How did you come into landscape architecture?

Campbell: As a child I liked flowers, and when I was in about tenth grade my mother kept asking me what I was going to be: she'd say, "Now, be a librarian." "No, I don't want to be a librarian." "Well, then, be a P.E. teacher." "No, I don't want to be that." All of a sudden I grasped at the pansies [laughing] because somewhere I had heard about landscape architecture.

Riess: From an advisor at school?

Campbell: There weren't advisors, no. I think I just heard that there were people that designed gardens, and I doubt the word "landscape architect" was mentioned.

But Mother thought, "Oh, that's fine." And she scurried around and found out that such a course wasn't being taught anyplace in the state but at Berkeley. Mother thought that would be fine, for me to come to Berkeley.

I went to a junior college for a year first and our English theme was to write on "Our Chosen Profession." So I went and did a lot of research on it and that's when I really found out what landscape architecture involved, and the flowers kept fading further and further into the background and along came things like engineering and math, and more and more requirements, none of which I really thought I liked. But I thought I'd go north and try it anyway.

Riess: Who were the people that you would have heard of in the profession?

Campbell: I hadn't heard of any landscape architects, I really and truly hadn't. Ridiculous, isn't it?

Riess: Who was working in Southern California?

Campbell: Roland Hoyt was there, and I guess Lockwood deForest in Santa Barbara, and that wonderful woman, Florence Yock. Yock and Council were partners in Pasadena, South Pasadena.

Riess: But at the time these were not models for you.

Campbell: No, and I don't suppose anyone could have been more naive than I.

Riess: How about Thomas Church? Had you heard of him?

Campbell: No.

Riess: Then you came up to Berkeley.

Campbell: Yes. I arrived, and went over to Ag Hall, and I remember being assigned a table in the lab and thinking, "Oh, well, I won't be here very often. I'm sure I'll find other places that seem more attractive on the campus."

The classes were very small then--that was 1934--seven people in mine. Punk Vaughan was teaching, and Gregg, and Shepherd, those three, and that cute little Miss Kate Jones was around doing her little plants. She was a wonderful woman. It was a very closely-knit group of people because it was so small and relationships were very personal, I think.

Riess: I understand that Gregg and Vaughan were quite different. Did you respond more to what one had to offer than the other?

Campbell: Well, of course everybody loved Punk and it was easy to respond to him, although he often would seem sort of bored with some of the things he had to teach. Gregg was much more of a traditionalist and not very interesting. What a heavy black pencil he used for his crit! But I liked him and his eastern accent.

\*Church: He was always sort of casual. Wouldn't you say, too, that he was kind of the new type of professor?

Campbell: Yes, I would say he was almost at the beginning of it. Whereas Shepherd and Gregg were...

Church: A comical team!

---

\*Church is Mrs. Thomas D. Church. A separate interview with Mrs. Church will be found in Vol. II.

- Riess: Was Garrett Eckbo on the scene then?
- Campbell: Yes, Eckbo and Ed Williams were both in the department when I first came, and I don't know what it was, but for some reason it seemed that everything we said--there were three of us girls who started in together at the same time which was fairly unusual--Garrett and Ed would just go into gales of laughter every time we opened our mouths and it was so intimidating. They'd giggle at us over nothing.
- Garrett ran the little store in the lab and sold pencils and erasers and Baby Ruth bars. I lived on Baby Ruths--two or three a day, always. I guess I never got enough to eat at the boarding houses. [Laughter]
- Garrett and Ed were juniors, and the juniors and seniors were in the little corner room and the rest of us were all in the big drafting room.
- Riess: Were they doing innovative things?
- Campbell: I think probably as far as Garrett goes--I don't know this--that Harvard was the much greater influence on Garrett than was Cal. Of course I don't know what was going on in Garrett's mind, what he really was thinking about.
- Church: He used to come over a lot. I don't really remember...
- Campbell: I'm sure he admired Tommy, because as students Tommy would come and talk to us, and we became aware of his great design ability.
- Church: I know that Garrett used to come to dinner often. He was always very hungry in those days, and he would bring me, from his Norwegian uncle, marvelous goat cheese, which he thought was repulsive, but I just gobbled it up.
- Riess: Tommy did come and lecture?
- Campbell: Yes, Punk would have him, for instance, come over in the evening sometimes. There would be a program and he would bring over some current plans and would review and discuss them. They were always well-detailed renderings--pencil on tracing paper with color--neatly mounted (now old-fashioned). It was before you could just get a black-line and color it. They were really beautiful presentation drawings which took a great deal of time.
- Riess: Were you taken to see his work as part of the teaching?
- Campbell: Yes, I think so--some in the East Bay.



- Church: Frank Pierce's, I'll bet. He was one of the first people that employed Tommy in the East Bay, I think.\*
- Campbell: And remember the Nicholsons--she had the beautiful azaleas and dogwoods.
- Church: Herman Nichols was an old beau of mine a hundred years ago. (I can say that because I think he's under the sod and can't get up and deny it!)
- Campbell: I can't specifically remember the gardens from those days--only from later.
- Church: Piedmont.
- Campbell: Yes, the Piedmont gardens were no doubt the ones we were taken to see because it was easier for field trips.
- Riess: What kind of gardens were they?
- Campbell: Some of them had a sort of Spanish look. The use of decorative tiles and other materials were reminiscent of Spanish gardens because some of the houses were tile-roofed or stucco--California or whatever you want to call it--type houses. And board and batten, which also were Californian and very easy. The gardens, of course, reflected the architectural styles.
- Riess: Were these gardens done for established houses, or were they done with architects?
- Campbell: Probably both. I think he had begun to work with architects such as Tantau, Dailey, and Wurster. He was one of the first landscape architects to really work with architects in the planning stages.
- Church: Yes, the architects resisted that.
- Riess: When he came to talk to you students, did he have a message?
- Campbell: No, not a great message. I don't think he ever gets up and gives you a direct and obvious message. It's there to observe and to learn, but it is left up to the person. It's always sort of a soft sell. And I can think of other people who are a lot more forceful in trying to sell a philosophy or an idea but I don't think that's Tommy's way.

---

\*See pp. 145-147.

Campbell: The main thing is that as we would see the plans, and they were so beautiful, we would all think, "If we could just do that kind of thing!" Certainly any questions that we had were answered very honestly and completely, but I don't remember him up there with a "message" per se.

2) Thomas Church and Sunset, Late 1930s

Riess: At this time he was working with Sunset magazine?

Church: Yes.

Riess: And what was the motivation there? Not the message?

Campbell: It was the editors wanting to share what Tommy was doing and contributing to the profession. Really starting to present to people who loved gardens--and/or plant lovers--the idea that there was more to a garden than just a place in which to grow some plants. I think Sunset's Walter Doty was a very knowledgeable man.

Church: Yes, he was one of the first to get in touch with Tommy, and they published Tommy quite a while before other people.

Campbell: Look in the scrapbooks. I think you'll see some of the earliest things, 1937, 1938.

Church: Oh yes, our early years in San Francisco.

Campbell: And House Beautiful quite a bit later, I think, after the war.

Church: Then there was that man down in Southern California, in Los Angeles, who had a magazine called Architectural Digest.

Campbell: Mark Daniels. And then there was that other man, whose name starts with an E.

Church: John Entenza. And he wrote very well. Some of the things he wrote may be in the scrapbook.\* He was very perceptive. He and Tommy got on marvelously. They were very devoted. We used to see him when we were down there.

Campbell: He was certainly one that was interested in publishing Tommy's work.

Certainly as other landscape architects came along, Sunset was glad to have more than one landscape architect to represent because it just stimulated their readership.

---

\*A scrapbook of newspaper and magazine clippings kept by the Church office.

Church: Very decidedly. Sunset really is a remarkable magazine. The only trouble about it is that there is so much in it that you can't possibly assimilate it all. There is certainly something--two or three things [laughter]--for everybody.

Riess: I have the catalog from the 1938 show of landscape architecture at the San Francisco Museum of Art, and I marked two quite different designs by Thomas Church. I wondered what was happening in his design thinking then. There is this (p. 36) residence of Mr. and Mrs. Everett Griffin, and this (frontispiece) "Holiday" with William Wilson Wurster.

Church: Oh, isn't that pretty! I just adore that!

Riess: Well, this was the year after the 1937 trip when you met Aalto, and I was wondering whether the Griffin garden was something he was abandoning for the curves of this fantasy garden.

Campbell: He's never been finished with this [Griffin] sort of thing.

Somewhere there is a record of four different studies for the first Sullivan garden in San Francisco. Symmetry was abandoned and the "Holiday" garden is in very much the same spirit. This abstraction certainly is an indication of what was happening to everyone in design at that time. Abstraction had become a direction in which to go, another way to look at the same problem.

Riess: Royston referred to the art at that time, and for instance the jewelry of Margaret dePatta, as an example of the experimental direction of design.

Campbell: Oh, Betsy, your ring!

Church: I'm afraid it's gone. I haven't seen it lately.

Campbell: What was really fun in the early days of the office was when Tommy would buy Betsy's Christmas present; he would often bring it to the office for us to see and I remember Margaret dePatta's ring--it was just so beautiful--I'll never forget it.

But in art at that time--Margaret Peterson, an abstractionist, was teaching, and also John Haley.

Church: He was cute, wasn't he? [Laughter] Nostalgia! I became so nostalgic doing this I'm quite beside myself! When Dan Gregory was asking me all these questions, and I always thought I didn't have any memory, and I heard him telling somebody I had total recall, I was so stimulated

Church: by that! I didn't have any idea.\* Tommy said that he didn't remember any of these things that I remembered about the early days. But then, he looked forward, rather than backward. [Betsy Church leaves for another appointment.]

3) June Meehan at the Fair, Bill Mott's Office, and Hired by Church

Riess: When did you start working at the Church office?

Campbell: In 1940, in November. But first I worked for the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1938. They were hiring people and I was lucky to get a job. Mark Daniels, a landscape architect from Southern California, was in charge of some of the physical planning of the Fair. And Ruth Jaffe, who is still at the San Francisco Planning Commission--and who, by the way, also worked here at Tommy's office in 1938 and 1939--and Harry Sanders, who years later was head of planning at Stanford. We were all just out of school more or less and had these jobs doing drafting for the Fair. Jobs were very scarce in those days. That was really still the Depression time.

Then I got a job with William Penn Mott, Jr. He was in private practice in Berkeley. I worked for him for about a year and a half, I guess. And then work became so scarce that he couldn't keep help and had to cut down to just himself.

Then I went home for about three weeks to Southern California, and it was just awful to be there. I had become adjusted to the north, slowly, so I came back and was able to get a job at the Fair, in the Hall of Flowers. And I worked there until the Fair closed in 1940, September as I remember.

Then through Adele Vaughan I learned that the girl who had been working for Tommy, Marie Harbeck [Berger] had decided to go east to seek her fortune in New York, so Tommy needed somebody in the office.

Riess: Was she a landscape architect?

Campbell: Yes, from Oregon, and terrific, a wonderful person.

So Tommy I guess told the Vaughans that he was looking for somebody to take Marie's place, and through Adele Vaughan...

Riess: He wanted a woman.

---

\*Dan Gregory is an architectural historian in the College of Environmental Design, U.C.B. [S.R.]

Campbell: Yes, because I did office work too. He wanted somebody to do a little bit of everything in the office, so that's how I came here.

Riess: Did you have office skills?

Campbell: Oh, yes, and it was a way to get a job and get going.

Riess: Who else was in the office then?

Campbell: When I started Bob Royston was here, but not full time. Also George Martin, who's in Los Gatos now. He was the class of 1934 at Cal. He was mainly involved with construction and the supervision of outside work. He also did the paper work for the construction crew. He was here in San Francisco one day a week, usually on Fridays.

Riess: When you came were you given training by Tommy?

Campbell: Yes, definitely. Getting out of college didn't prepare me for working. And I had been used to working for Bill Mott and doing his office work as well as drafting--he also had just the one person. So it was a whole new way of working because Tommy's gardens were different.

Some of Bill Mott's work was private, but most of it was public. He was starting to do work for the Oakland Parks; he was doing the Westminster Amphitheatre. That had started out as a WPA project designed by Howard Gilkey and Bill had gone on and finished it. So that was the kind of work--entirely different.

Riess: What was this office like, by contrast? Was it warm and easy or imposing?

Campbell: This was the larger office\* but it too was comfortable--except in the wintertime when our only heat was from a coal-burning stove. Ask Ted Osmundson about the temperature before it warmed up.

But I was uneasy because I was so in awe of him and his fame, which in retrospect was really just beginning. I couldn't believe that this was where I was working. But he was patient.

And it was true--I suppose it still is--that people must work for you for a year or two before you feel they earn what they are getting or before they are really able to do what you want them to do. It doesn't just happen over night. And of course some people are faster bloomers than others.

Riess: What was he working on then?

---

\*At the time of the interviews the Church office space had been consolidated into a portion of the full floor that they had originally had. [S.R.]



Campbell: There were some private gardens, like the Ralph Davies garden and the Benjamin Keator garden that were under construction in that period. And then of course it wasn't very long before the war started. There had been some housing. Valencia gardens was done before I got here. Probably Bob Royston worked on Valencia. And Sunnyvale was also pre-war, and prior to when I came.

I would say actually that I had very little to contribute to anything for some time other than being helpful. I think anyone else could have been here and things would have gone just as well.

#### 4) Getting Jobs. Distant Clients

Riess: How did the jobs come in? I understand that Betsy was important in that regard.

Campbell: Tommy is the kind of person who has many friends, and many friends are also clients. Sometimes they were friends and then clients, sometimes clients and then friends. But it's hard to differentiate. Certainly I would say that any man in any profession--with a charming wife who is interested in people, and attractive--makes friends, and together they form associations which oftentimes result in these people becoming clients.

Riess: Which reminds me that David Streatfield mentioned Betsy having written an article in California Arts and Architecture about Pasatiempo, and I was surprised at that.

Campbell: She writes very well, and if only Betsy had sat herself down twenty years ago and really directed her talents, it is just amazing which might have happened. She is very gifted and she is so knowledgeable about so many things. But she is easily diverted.

Messenger: When that article was written Tommy was on the editorial board of California Arts and Architecture and had been writing lots of articles in the early thirties and through that connection Betsy's article got published. The article was about Wurster and Church, yet not written by him, which was nice.

Riess: Then later on clients just came in?

Campbell: Oh yes, especially after the forties, after there were more published works.

Campbell: The phone would ring and it would be someone in New York who had seen a published garden they liked that was in Texas. They would like to have something like it, and were interested in him and decided, why not call California? Clients came from many sources. I think the nicest kind of a client, almost, has been the client who had come back for a second or third garden, and then their children come. And the grandchildren maybe by now.

Riess: The second and third gardens are for new sites?

Campbell: Usually, because the family size changes so quickly. The average American family changes dwellings about every ten years. But some families add on a wing and remodel and every time the garden has to be redone to fit the new scheme.

Riess: How did he handle the long-distance jobs?

Campbell: Some gardens were done by mail (with many phone conversations) and others by one or more visits to the site. Regardless of the working arrangements, clients and/or architects were requested to send as much information as possible to the office prior to the first meeting. A base map at a workable scale would be made in the office from all the data supplied so that when he went to the job he had something that he could do an overlay on, start doing sketches right away.

Also, he could become familiar with the house, and the orientation. You couldn't always know about a prevailing wind or a particular view, or reasons why maybe the house seemed at the outset to be improperly sited--assuming it was--but you could begin to wonder, "Why is it like that?" so that when he got there he could find out why. If there were no specific reasons maybe it could easily be shifted or switched so that it got the right exposures for the rooms, or improved other situations such as grades. Or a tree, on a survey, doesn't mean much, but when you see it you can tell whether it's worth fighting for or featuring.

Then after the initial design consultation meeting--if he was only going to have one trip--they usually would go to the nursery and do plant-looking and get lists of possible plants to use. If he were in an area he wasn't familiar with, he would try very hard to find someone locally to advise him so that the plant materials specified were proper for the job assigned to them.

Riess: What could he do about the construction contracting?

Campbell: Very often the general contractor, through his subs, would do the paving, the driveway, parking areas, the pool. Or if there were a good pool contractor in the area, he would be there too.

Campbell: In other words, the client was asked to have as many people who were going to be involved with the execution of the work at the meetings as possible so that he got to talk to these people. Maybe there would be three or four people who were involved sitting around in conference. The next day, after having gone over the design concepts with the client, he might have some time on the site with the architect or the builder or the engineer, going over particular problems and checking on local materials available, finding out, for example, what kind of pebble concrete this particular man did. The idea was to review as many aspects as possible in ascertaining that the plan was going to have the best help possible to become a reality.

And it wouldn't matter whether a man called himself a landscape contractor or a general contractor, as long as one was assured that he was going to do the right work. Very often it was the general contractor doing the construction and then a nurseryman following with the soil preparation and the planting.

Riess: Sounds very efficient.

Campbell: I think it became perfected. After the first couple of jobs one begins to realize how to proceed. Doing gardens away from home base isn't all that different so long as the plans conform to local standard practices.

##### 5) Office: Size, Associates, Quality

Riess: How long were you in this office?

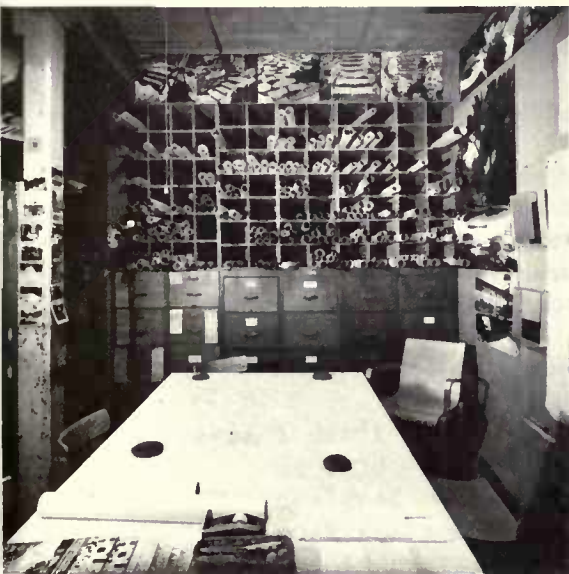
Campbell: From 1940 to 1967

Riess: You must have seen many changes.

Campbell: Yes. But it was always small, basically. On only very few occasions did we have over four people including the secretary. Some architects and landscape architects had greatly fluctuating numbers, hiring extra people to produce a project and then all of a sudden letting them go when it was finished. That rarely happened here. We used to see this expansion and contraction a lot with the architects upstairs. You'd know the boys very well and then all of a sudden it would be the day the axe was falling. That was the way they worked; they couldn't carry people they didn't have work for.



Office of Thomas Church







Campbell: But Tommy chose basically to be small so that he didn't have to do that; also he chose to be small, I think, in order to have much closer control over what went out under his name. Tommy said you had to make a choice, between being big--and in the East the landscape offices are very large-- [tape ends]

[Side Two] Large offices find it very hard for the principals to adequately check over the drawings before they are submitted. That can be terribly embarrassing and/or costly.

Riess: That reminds me that when I looked at the picture in Mr. Church's book illustrating the Donnell pool in Sonoma, it says Thomas Church Associates, and then "Lawrence Halprin, Garden," and "George Rockrise, Structure." How did it happen that this distinction would have been made, this special recognition of the others?

Campbell: I think actually that Larry and Tommy developed it together more or less and that was the reason that Tommy wanted Larry to have a credit for having done the work on that garden. George Rockrise did the poolhouse.

Riess: From Tommy's design, or from his own.

Campbell: I really am not certain, Suzanne. They might have all gone together to visit the site and he may have said, "Make some sketches," then reviewed them together and given his critique. Obviously if Tommy hadn't liked the direction anything was going it wouldn't have gone. So you can assume it was a cooperative effort, or at least it was a product that he wanted to come from the office.

Riess: It is said that that is his greatest work.

Messenger: A lot of professors turn to that and say that this was a turning point, this was a really significant garden, that there were a lot of new things tried in it that worked very well, the site, the sculpture. But Tommy, if you ask him for a list of his favorite gardens, that's not on it.

Riess: Maybe he didn't feel so involved in it.

Messenger: I don't think you could say that. I talked to Halprin yesterday. He said, "It's just like in my office if somebody pretty much designed something they couldn't say, 'I did it all myself.'" You work for somebody, the influence is so powerful, and that is always-- the overseer is really that person. Larry says that. He says, "Well, I did design it, but where do you separate your connection with the man you're working for?" Tommy never let go of what was happening.

Campbell: As far as being his greatest work, I certainly don't think it is either. I think the 1939 Fair garden and the 1940-42 gardens were much more innovative for their time. But working with Addie [Adaline Kent] was certainly Tommy's desire.

Messenger: Well, that was his idea. Larry wanted to put a big rock and Tommy said, "Let's get Addie to do it."

Campbell: Which changed the pool. That's what is always fun, to look at a garden afterwards and think how easily the direction could have been changed and how different the finished product would have looked.

Riess: How do you ever stop working on something then?

Campbell: Well, it's very hard to say, "This is it." So often you get the working drawing almost done and then you get a better idea. And that's why they have electric erasers. [Laughter] You can erase three or four days drawing in a half an hour! Always the idea is to upgrade.

Sometimes you look at something and all of a sudden with one more look it isn't quite right. Something has gone wrong. Some dimension is changed that affects the backbone of the thing. There is always a time to say enough is enough.

But it is that working for the best you can do, the best quality, that seems one of Tommy's greatest attributes. He could have done twice as many gardens, but not have always demanded that they be of the same quality. It takes a lot more time in drawing to get everything down; you don't leave it up to the contractor to do. You try to do everything you can in the way of grades; everything is documented on paper, and in the specifications too, so that there is just no doubt that this is what you want.

Riess: Did he put in more hours in the office in the early years?

Campbell: I don't remember Tommy ever not working long hours. He probably still does. Because he doesn't seem to know he's working. He's having such a good time doing it. He'd rather be at the drawing board than most places with most people.

## 6) The Artist's Eye

Riess: What were his diversions when you were there?

Campbell: Traveling, gardening, photography. History, he loved history, and stamps, stamp collecting.

He used to do all of his own darkroom work; he stopped doing that I would say in the fifties. But some of these really early photographs here (looking around walls and ceiling of the office) he did in his darkroom. His first camera was a wonderful Contax with a beautiful lens, but he lost that. He got another Contax but it didn't have as good a lens. I think he is pleased with his current Pentax. However that first one was just exceptional and he always bemoaned the fact that he had lost it.

Then it was wonderful because he could control what happened in the darkroom in the photographs, getting the darks and lights to come out the way he wanted, and cropping and printing them. These blowups of the step details [on wall] are things he did in his darkroom, and they are very hard to get a professional to do.

But he became better known, and the magazines that wanted to publish his work wanted to do their own photography because they had their own photographers. And by then he didn't have time to completely document the gardens either.

Riess: What are these photographs [large abstracts color prints on walls]?

Campbell: These Tommy took two years ago in Guatamala. They are of paintings on the walls of buildings. Then they are cropped, or taken at just the right angle, you see, and then enlarged. And this is the thing, Suzanne, of having the artist's eye. I imagine thousands of tourists have been in Guatamala and passed these walls of these buildings, yet never thought to document them in this way.

Riess: Would he refer to books of old gardens in working on designs?

Campbell: Occasionally. Not often. If he were trying to explain to a client what a ballustrade, for example, might be like...

Riess: Did he copy details?

Campbell: Not very often. I think mainly if you look at them they are not copies, but more or less express the essence of classicism, but not replicas. Except if you used an antique sculpture in a garden, it was authentic, that was for sure.

- Campbell: Or, and I understand they are gone now, on Pacific around the corner from here on the remodeled firehouse job he used caryatids that at one point he had found in Europe. They were in an arcade out in the back in the courtyard. So that was an old piece of art used in a modern garden.
- Riess: In the deGuigné garden there is an antique statue of Capricorn.
- Campbell: Yes, and I cannot remember if she had that or whether he found it for her. It certainly adds to the spirit of the garden. The marble base was made by a gravestone monument firm.
- Riess: The pool in the Boboli Gardens in Florence where there are more of the Medici Capricorns is in the endpaper illustration of Gardens are for People.
- Campbell: But what a disappointment when the publisher didn't use it in large scale as had been planned. We put photostats in our personal copies to compensate.

But back to antiques and the fun he had in finding something really knock-out in Europe. He would buy it, not always knowing for whom, but the time would come when it was just what a garden needed in the way of an accent or to give it a certain character. The fountain in the Henderson court comes to mind as do the maidens in the Erdman garden. I don't know how many gardens contain old street lamps imported from Copenhagen.

#### 7) The Boys in the Office. Experience, Influence

- Riess: If you didn't expand the office at times, you all must have had to gear yourselves up to work much harder at some times than others.
- Campbell: Yes, that's true. Maybe he'd hire one extra person. And very early-- I cannot remember for what job--there were about four or five additional fellows for a while. But more often the time schedule would be set up so that the office could handle it rather than take on a great crew.

During early 1940 and 1941 housing jobs started to be available. Private gardens were impossible to build because of the curtailment of materials and labor as the war gained momentum. So, there was either war housing, or nothing. Everyone worked on that. There were deadlines and lots of working nights and lots of working weekends and a great spirit of camaraderie. Then a job would get done and

Campbell: work would get back to normal until the next project came along. And then of course so often we'd kill ourselves to meet a deadline only to find that the plans would sit around in somebody's office for a month waiting to be presented.

Riess: But it was a short stay for the men who came through, often.

Campbell: I think it's natural. Certainly they all wanted experience and they wanted to work with Tommy and then they reached a point where they wanted to do what they wanted to do. I think it comes sooner or later to people, depending on their particular drive, and timing, their personalities.

All of the boys that left the office have, I believe, an extensive gratitude to Tommy for so many things that they learned while they were with him. I don't think any of them left unhappily; I think each wanted to go on to do his own work, to be his own man, which is the way it should be.

Riess: And in what way do you think they influenced Tommy, all these men who came through?

Campbell: I don't know. I'll think about that.

Riess: All the names, Osmundson, Baylis, Eckbo--

Campbell: Eckbo wasn't here.

Riess: I think he was here for a week or so.

Campbell: It was so little time, I didn't realize he was here. But then I hadn't realized, until Betsy was saying so today, that they had been especially friendly when Garrett was in school.

Messenger: I know Garrett thinks the world of Tommy.

Campbell: That's right. Their concepts are just so different. And if you are a strong person, as Tommy certainly is, and a strong man, which Garrett certainly is, and your approach is so different, it's ridiculous to think that you could be compatible in a work concept. Socially the rapport can be great, but it's very unusual that people could really be opposite and still cooperate and work together.



## 8) Working with Architects

Riess: Then, in working with strong architects, I refer to an article here by Wurster in the 1948 catalog from the San Francisco Museum of Art landscape architecture show, the article called "The Unity of Architecture and Landscape Architecture," and as I read through the tone is really that the architects are in charge.

Campbell: I think that one of the reasons Tommy has done so well in collaborating with architects is that he has a way of contributing a great deal without letting the other person think he's been superimposed on, or been had. They can still feel that they are in charge, although somehow many things have happened, all to the good, in the architecture, or in the site plan especially. But it's a matter of temperament, or not saying "I'm running the garden. You're running the house."

I think very often an architect, the first time he worked with Tommy, had some misgivings, especially if it were the client who said, "I want my landscape architect to look at the lot" or "I want my landscape architect to be in on the house plan." They have sometimes started out feeling that this was going to be a great locking of horns and been surprised at how easily the thing went, mainly just because Tommy is diplomatic and smart enough to be able to handle such situations nicely.

He just has a way of knowing what you can say and what you can't say and in a way that does not let the other person lose face, which is what everyone is wanting in life, isn't it, to keep face for himself?

Riess: Unless that came easily, it would take an awful lot of time and energy.

Campbell: Yes. Actually problems have arisen because the architects feel equally qualified on the site problems and our professions are so inter-related. But of course landscape architects interlap with city planners, engineers, horticulturalists and others. You have to wear many hats, or you decide which hat you're going to wear and which kind of practice you're going to have. I remember Bill Wurster advising that whenever one strayed over the professional lines, the trespasser had better be sure he did a bang-up job--mediocracy is the sin.

Riess: When George Rockrise was in the office was the intention to do more architecture, total building and site?

Campbell: To some extent but mainly to have the garden structures, such as pool houses, remodeled garages, etcetera, well-designed and integrated with the garden drawings. George did do the Fahrney house over in Marin County and the office did the garden. It worked out very well but it became easier all around for George to open up his own office as an architect instead of Tommy being involved in architecture.

And then Gerry Milono also worked for Tommy for a while--I think he and George overlapped--and did some very delightful things. But there again, as soon as Gerry could work it out financially he wanted to open his office, which he did. And he is still upstairs. He and Tommy have always had a great relationship. The gazebo Gerry did for the Kelly garden in Santa Rosa (he also designed the house) has always been one of my favorites.

I think Tommy has the reputation and I think it's justly deserved and true that he's one of the first landscape architects who had successful collaborations in the Bay Area with architects, especially with Gardner Dailey and Bill Wurster. They were really a wonderful combination, whichever architect; together with Tommy they did great things.

Riess: And you're saying his temperament made this possible.

Campbell: I think so, not to negate his designing abilities at all, but I think it was because of the temperament he had and the rapport that existed between these particular men that the thing got off the ground. And I suppose in different parts of the country other landscape architects and architects were beginning to get on well; I suppose down south (Southern California) some of them were.

Riess: Then what changes did you see over those 27 years?

Campbell: Architects became more knowledgeable about landscape architects. Clients became more knowledgeable about what they needed and who could give it to them and even how to ask for it. So that the profession is entirely different now, and it's not nearly as hard for a young landscape architect to start out. At least he doesn't have to sell his profession; he might have to sell himself, but not both himself and his profession, as I think Tommy did.

## 9) Office: Finances, Coffee Hour

Riess: Was Tommy a good businessman?

Campbell: Yes, and that's another reason he was successful, because usually he was able to present costs and budgets to a client realistically, which is better than someone who is just a dreamer, or a non-businessman, who will be very vague about financial arrangements until all of a sudden the bills start coming in and it all falls to pieces. That can happen. That is very often, particularly with architects, the reason why there will be two (in an office) and one will be the designer and the other will be the businessman, and the two together make a marvelous partnership.

But there again, as far as Tommy's concerned, the two were more or less in the same person. He was able to get down to business in a nice way. It just makes so much sense if you don't leave it off in "never-never land" and then suddenly the bell is tolling, the cash-register is ringing.

Riess: Who would figure the costs?

Campbell: Tommy and the person who was handling the job. Very often we would establish a budget prior to complete design studies. Always we prepared preliminary estimates along with the schemes for approval before going into working drawings. We would make more complete estimates from the working drawings if needed. All in all we did a very meticulous job and with the contingency it was remarkable how closely we could estimate.

One thing that was very nice in the office was the ten o'clock coffee hour. We had it whether there were guests or not, but it was a marvelous time for guests to be invited: a stranger, a visiting architect, or landscape architect, or planner, or an artist friend from out of town, a foreign visitor--so many wonderful people!

So many would call and want to meet Tommy, want to see him, so that if it were set up for ten o'clock it wouldn't break into the working day otherwise and we could gather round the table and have coffee and if it were a fascinating session it could go on until noon, with everyone contributing, or hearing what was happening. This wasn't every day, but it was a very easy way.

Or there would be students who were about to graduate and they would want to know how to seek their fortune in the world, what to do. They were always most welcome to come over to us and if we could be of any help, with advice, or finding a job, we would be glad to.

Riess: Tommy gave advice?

Campbell: I remember one fellow came in: should he go ahead and get a master's or take a job he was offered and quit going to school? I think the boy, on Tommy's advice, did open up his own office instead of getting a master's, and I think he's still practicing.

But even though you can't always advise people--there's just so much advice that can be given--I think it was always very nice to let students feel that you were interested enough to try to be helpful. I don't think that happens in other offices, that the time is made to be helpful.

Riess: That changes the picture of the office to something more slowed-down and easy-going.

Campbell: I think the office was that way more or less. Of course there was plenty of work to get out and there were times, on some of these housing projects and the first book where we were working day and night for a couple of weeks and many weekends. It was always fun all going out very late at night to have T-bone steaks at New Joe's--tired but happy times. [Pam-Anela Messenger leaves]

#### 10) Choosing Materials, Experimenting

Riess: Would you be able to point at things that Tommy would rather now that he had not designed, that he would dislike now, turn his back on.

Campbell: You know, I don't think so. I think he's always looking forward and not looking back, but I don't think he's done any jobs he was really ashamed of or that haven't held up quite well. I think he's had favorite jobs, especially one thing is a job that has had beautiful maintenance, that really shines, and the same job, if it had gone into stupid hands, would not look well, would not be something of which to be proud.

You have such a gratefulness in your heart for an intelligent client who has either the time and the energy to take care of a garden, or who can hire it done and knows how to get good help.

But I don't think he would look back, as maybe painters look back, and think, "How could I ever have done that?" I don't think Tommy looks back regretfully on any early gardens, because they all hold up.



- Riess: He didn't reach out for new forms and discard the old?
- Campbell: I don't think he tried to be an innovator for the sake of being an innovator. There again, I think he's much too sure of himself to think about that.
- Riess: Experimenting?
- Campbell: Yes, I would say there was certainly experimenting, like when he used wood blocks and redwood rounds. Those were experiments and he found out in time that they didn't hold up, that they had a short life-span. At first he didn't realize how long, but in about ten years they began to rot. Then he learned if he wanted to use them because of their resiliency and color, it was made clear to the client who could elect to use them despite their life-span.

Then again, in presenting a garden study you present the various materials: concrete, the properties of brick, the differences between red rock paving and asphalt, and so on, so that the client has choices. That's often a budget question, how you achieve a certain fluidity and a certain development of a garden, but control the cost of it.

The first pebble concrete jobs were more or less experiments. Parkmerced has acres and was a wonderful proving ground. Of course now everyone pours it. Then using integral color: first there were stains, then came the idea of using integral color, then came getting the people who made the color to make better earthy colors, instead of quite so red or green. There was a very cooperative company in San Francisco, the Sovig Company, who made color topping and integral color. They would experiment with the color; they would bring in a sample--"No, that's a little too yellow, see what you can do to get it a little browner."

Then deciding, when a client wanted a pool to look very "woody," and not look like a swimming pool, what color could go into the plaster to get that effect after the water had been added. That turned out well, but it was rather frightening because before the water went in the color was sort of pea green. But with the reflections of the sky in the water the color changes and gives the pool the desired effect. Those are all experiments that came along.

- Riess: I think I've seen that he used corrugated plastic once.
- Campbell: Not plastic, but asbestos. And that was a good material, but quite expensive. He used it more than once. It made a very good fence: it had nice qualities and you could paint it any color and it held up beautifully. It's made by Johns-Manville.



Riess: But it's so unnatural, so machine-made looking.

Campbell: Well, I don't find that objectionable. You have to think about it in terms of how shadow falls on it--but basically because of cost we didn't use it more often. I think the first time he used it was in that experimental garden over at the Fair.

Other experiments were in kinds of header-boards, kinds of expansion joints, and then later on came the beautiful Mosai or terrazzo pavings. A couple of companies here in San Francisco began to get their costs down to where it became possible to afford it. The deGuigné garden has a beautiful Mosai job. It's much more elegant and fitting with the house and the design of the pool to have that material rather than pebble concrete which is not so elegant and refined. And of course the introduction and perfecting of gunite construction allowed an entirely new range of experiments in the shapes of swimming pools.

#### 11) Parkmerced and Landscape Contracting

Campbell: [Looking at a list of work done by Thomas Church] Parkmerced was interesting. That was done during the war. Parkmerced was under construction and it was given the go ahead because it got in under the wire as so-called housing--I think they intended that it could house military officers or personnel. So for two years we moved our office out there, to Parkmerced. During that period the office essentially was closed down, although there was an answering service, and when Tommy wasn't out at Parkmerced he was here (402 Jackson) doing a little garden design, but it was almost impossible to get things built during those two years.

At Parkmerced as the courtyards were being built, Tommy would go out and sketch what he wanted in the way of design, then we would do a very simple working drawing or sketch and go over it with the contractor.

Floyd Gerow was there, and Alec Cattini--we were all out in the field and our office was in a little construction shanty. Or sometimes the thing would be built just from Tommy drawing with a stick in the ground. The concrete would be poured. Then I'd have to get it back onto paper so we ended up with "as built" drawings for the owners to have. They were all done on big sheets of tracing cloth, in ink.

Campbell: There was a wonderful Cat driver, a man named Perry, and he began to really know what Floyd and Tommy were talking about, about grading, and getting the earth to flow just right.

That was really a marvelous two years, fun, and quite a breakthrough. Talk about educating contractors--well, actually it was through an architect [and a contractor] that Tommy was hired: the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company owned it, and it was through this wonderful old architect, Leonard Schultze, in New York, who knew Tommy from somewhere, or just maybe through reputation. He had the contractor, Starrett Bros. and Ekin, hire Tommy to get the gardens constructed, with all of the same help, same laborers, that were used constructing the buildings.

Riess: He could have just had the contractors push the earth around and had a nursery put in trees.

Campbell: That's a simplification of the problems involved but obviously Leonard Schultze didn't feel he wanted to design all those courtyards and figure out what to plant in California, even if he had used an eastern landscape architect for some of the work.

The thing was done in an accelerated manner to try to get it built as soon as possible, so the ground was broken and they started building without all the information they might have had, and the drawings were often incomplete. Sometimes they'd set the grade of the building at a certain elevation, but because of field changes or errors there might be these very embarrassing situations where the floor adjacent to another was four feet lower!

Tommy's problem was designing retaining walls and then deciding how to float the grade around them to make the two areas work together. And that's where we, and Floyd and Alec, learned a lot about header boards--how to swing them and just how far you can really bend them before they snap. And we certainly had wonderful latitude in design--in block after block with these courts.

Riess: If Leonard Schultze had just wanted to hire a landscape contracting outfit to do the job, could he have?

Campbell: No, and that's why at the very beginning, when Tommy first opened his office here and there were no landscape contractors, he had a crew of his own people who really understood garden construction. That's how he and Floyd Gerow became friends, because Floyd worked on that early crew as did Alec.

Campbell: But the early war housing was very stark--many units had just a little 2 x 4 pad of concrete outside the front door with funny little steps that went down. Then gradually as landscape architects were involved, the concrete or asphalt had a little bit of design to it--maybe one line was canted so that it didn't look so dull and was more useful.

Trees were used in wonderful patterns to undulate through a project to break up the rigidity of the units. Nurserymen might bid on putting in header boards to define a grass area as well as installing the lawn itself. Someone had to do this kind of construction and general contractors were often happy to turn much of it over to a competent sub.

Some of those men who had worked for nurseries and been in charge of crews involved in housing decided that they would go into landscape construction. And now there's a great industry in California of landscape contractors and all after the war. That's a long time ago, but in 30 years they have made great strides in their number, their quality of work and their organizations. They are well established with high standards.

Floyd started his business on the Peninsula specializing in private garden construction and developed a crew which almost achieved perfection in its workmanship. We were all so proud of him and his men--there was only one Gino.

And dear Alec started on his own in San Francisco, contributing greatly to Tommy's successful smaller city gardens. What love and loyalties these two gave to Tommy and he to them!

I think Tommy left Parkmerced early in 1946 and came back here. By then there was enough starting and gradually things were back to normal. Private practice became possible again.

Riess: Did Tommy compete for jobs, as architects enter competitions for a job?

Campbell: Yes, it seems to me we put a brochure together one time, the way architects do. Actually they would ask you to submit your qualifications and a resumé of your work, rather than enter a competition as such. Then an interview. Usually then you'd be hired either on recommendation or the preference of the architect or the owner. And if it were a group that didn't know you at all-- I guess a lot of it would just be based on the results of the interview and a review of the accomplished work folder submitted.

Riess: I wondered if the public work had come that way.

Campbell: [Looking at a list in a biographical sketch] Valencia was Wurster. North Beach Housing--Ernest Born was the architect. Park LaBrea was related to Parkmerced, the southern branch of that. That had a different landscape architect on the first part--Parkmerced was done in two increments, the lower two-story apartments and then the towers. The same thing happened in Los Angeles, and we did only the towers there.

It's interesting to see the difference between the two projects, because Parkmerced is very free-form and very easy and Park LaBrea--of course the site is much flatter, with few grade problems--is a much more geometric solution [for the apartments]. But at both the northern and southern sites the same apartment building layouts were used on entirely different topographies and in different climatic areas.

Riess: Would that flat topography have called forth a different solution for Church, do you think?

Campbell: No, because the curves were put in there really to free up the angularity of the pie-shaped blocks of the project.

## 12) When Thomas Church Went Away, and Returned

Campbell: The Panama Hotel job came through Ed Stone. That was a very exciting project because it was one of the first big hotel blocks. Ed was completely in New York at that time and this was all done through his New York office. Tommy and Betsy went to Panama then. He loved the plant materials there and we all learned the metric scale.

Riess: You were left in charge here.

Campbell: Yes, and the boys.

Riess: And you could go on with projects.

Campbell: Oh yes, we all had things to do. We had these great job lists.

Periodically things got so hectic we wouldn't know what was happening so we would just take five and sit down. Tommy would boom out, "June," and everybody would come and sit down and we would review all the jobs, and would report on them.



Campbell: "Well, how's such and such coming?"

"We're waiting for this, or that."

Then the master job list would be up-dated. Maybe there would be 100 names, which didn't mean we were working on 100 things all at once, but we each had a lot. We were listed with our job responsibilities--Larry, George, Gerry, Jack, June, Casey, Jerry Henderson or Walt--depending on who worked here at the time. The lists were used whether he was gone or here--it didn't matter. But always before he was going away we would get nervous and sit down and do a list.

Things would go on while he was away, and then there'd be a million things waiting on his return, of course. But work didn't all come to a screeching halt when he would go.

Then when he came back everybody would pounce on him.

"Well, just give me a little while to get my desk cleared."

Then he'd spend time with each of us. Maybe you'd have five jobs that you wanted to go over with him, but there might not be time for more than two because Jack had his five, and Casey's table was next. So it would maybe take a week for all of this to be reviewed and gone over. Then it would settle back down. There would always be priorities.

There would be things that really couldn't wait. Others could. And then Tommy would have to go down the Peninsula of course to see what was going on in the field, to see what had happened. That would be especially true when he was gone on a European trip, or when he was in Rome for that three months teaching at the American Academy.

Riess: Sounds like a lot of things were going on.

Campbell: Well, but you see, a job would come in, and maybe after the basic plot plan was set nothing would happen for three months, or longer, because the architect was finishing his working drawings and certain things we would have offered were being incorporated in them. Once the architect finished his drawings, they went out to bid. Then he might have to revise the plans if the bids were too high, which often happened.

So sometimes we would have a name on a list for six months or even longer before doing anything about it other than that first analysis. But you didn't dare lose track of that name, it had to have a pigeonhole.



- Riess: Would this go on at the ten o'clock meetings?
- Campbell: More often late in the day. The ten o'clock was apt to be when the guests or visitors came.
- Riess: He would come to your table?
- Campbell: Yes, because that was where we had our things laid out, piled high with different drawings, and some would need just a little bit of direction, "yes," he liked it, or "no," he didn't, or "let's try it again." Sometimes it could be answered very quickly; sometimes he didn't like anything that had happened on it, and we would have to start over.

### 13) More Big Jobs: How They Came to Church

- Riess: Then after Panama.
- Campbell: General Motors, and that came through Eero Saarinen, a great architect and a great admirer of Tommy's. They had great rapport. Betsy could probably tell you how they met, maybe through Alvar Aalto, who would have known Eliel Saarinen and Eero Saarinen.

You see, there was this whole group of people in the East that Tommy knew from Harvard. I think Gilmore Clark was one, a big landscape architect in New York. He'd meet architects and landscape architects and there again, friends became business associates, just as friends became clients.

United Geophysical Company I'm not sure of.

Des Moines Art Center. That came through the architect.

Caterpillar Tractor Company. Tommy knew some of the Caterpillar people--very nice, delightful people.

And then Sunset magazine, of course, that was a long friendship. Cliff May was the architect, and Cliff is a great admirer of Tommy's and they certainly have had a very happy relationship on private jobs, many of them in Southern California.

Sunset Community Center was a grade school, high school, and so on, way out in the avenues, and that was Wurster's.

The American Embassy was through the architect.

|                                                                            |      |       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| Potrero Housing Project, San Francisco                                     | 400  | units |
| Sunnydale Housing Project " "                                              | 800  | "     |
| Valencia Gardens " "                                                       | 230  | "     |
| North Beach Housing " "                                                    | 250  | "     |
| South Vallejo Defense Housing , Vallejo,<br>California                     | 1600 | "     |
| North Vallejo Defense Housing                                              | 300  | "     |
| Park Merced, San Francisco                                                 |      |       |
| Parklabrea, Los Angeles, California                                        |      |       |
| Hotel El Panama, Panama City                                               |      |       |
| General Motors Research Center, Detroit, Mich.                             |      |       |
| United Geophysical Company, Inc., Pasadena, Calif.                         |      |       |
| Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa                                    |      |       |
| Caterpillar Tractor Company - York, Penna., Decatur,<br>& Peoria, Illinois |      |       |
| Sunset Community Center, San Francisco                                     |      |       |
| Sunset Magazine, Menlo Park, California                                    |      |       |
| Capuchino High School, San Bruno, California                               |      |       |
| Woodner Apartments, Washington, D.C.                                       |      |       |
| American Embassy, Havana, Cuba                                             |      |       |
| Two apartment houses, Paris, France                                        |      |       |
| Continuing Education Center, Athens, Georgia                               |      |       |
| Stanford University Medical Center, Palo Alto, Calif.                      |      |       |
| Wascana Centre Master Plan Saskatchewan, Canada                            |      |       |
| Master Plan, Mudd College, Claremont, Calif.                               |      |       |
| Stuart Company, Pasadena, California                                       |      |       |
| Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn.                                              |      |       |
| Master Plan, University of California, Berkeley, Calif.                    |      |       |
| Master Plan, Santa Cruz Campus, University of Calif.                       |      |       |
| Master Plan, Stanford University                                           |      |       |
| Consulting Landscape Architect, Thatcher School,<br>Ojai, California       |      |       |
| Master Plan, Birnam Wood Golf Club, Santa Barbara,<br>California           |      |       |

PRIVATE WORK

California  
 Texas  
 Yemassee, South Carolina  
 Columbus, Georgia  
 Dobbs Ferry, New York  
 Fisher's Island, New York  
 New York City  
 Portland, Oregon  
 Yakima, Washington  
 Seattle, Washington  
 Kansas City, Missouri  
 Lafayette, Indiana  
 Peoria, Indiana  
 Colorado Springs, Colorado  
 Grand Junction, Colorado  
 Scottsdale, Arizona  
 El Salvador, C.A.  
 Great Neck, L.I.  
 Litchfield, Connecticut  
 Birmingham, Alabama  
 Naples, Florida  
 Hobe Sound, Florida  
 Salt Lake City, Utah  
 Ogden, Utah  
 Sioux City, Iowa  
 Norfolk, Virginia  
 Washington, D.C.  
 Philadelphia, Penna.  
 Kalamazoo, Michigan  
 Memphis, Tenn.  
 Honolulu, Hawaii  
 Fargo, North Dakota  
 Wilmington, Delaware  
 Baltimore, Maryland  
 Wasau, Wisconsin  
 Minneapolis, Minnesota  
 New Orleans, Louisiana  
 Wichita, Kansas



Campbell: The Apartments in Paris was housing for the embassy people.  
Continuing Education, in Georgia, was through the architect.  
Stanford Medical Center is Ed Stone.

Wascana Center Master Plan, maybe that was Yamasaki.

Riess: When you say "through the architect," was the situation that when the client chose the architect he would ask the architect to bring in his own landscape architect?

Campbell: Lots of times an architect would get permission to put your name on as the landscape architect if he was getting together a package to present to a company. I think that could very well have been what happened in some of these cases, that they would call and say, "If I get the General Motors job--I'm submitting brochures--would you be interested in working on it?" Then you either say "yes" or "no" depending on your schedule, and whether you wanted to do it.

And also, to be factual about it, even if you want to do it but your work load is such that you are too committed, it would be rather foolish to accept and then let the fellow down, because there too you would be in a spot.

Nevertheless the inclination is to say "yes" and work it out somehow. You just wouldn't want to turn down an architect with whom you have a fine relationship. You like to work with him. You help one another.

Tommy has been asked many times by people, "Can you recommend an architect?" And as in other professions, he would often give several names and tell them to go see how they liked the work and one another--always to be sure that they felt they related to the architect.

Once they have worked with landscape architects and see how much more smoothly the project can go (unless they have established what they think is a great landscape staff of their own), architects are really glad to share some of the headaches with someone who is concerned with land problems. It leaves them free to do the building.

It's always this point: where does the building stop and where does the garden start? It's true in any building--the stairs that go in and out of the building, to whom do they belong? It has to be agreed by both sides so the thing is all right.

Campbell: Then the Master Plan of Mudd College: well, Henry Mudd was a client; Tommy had done their garden and they of course thought the world of Tommy and his work. Undoubtably as soon as Henry Mudd was faced with another problem involving land--this was a college founded in memory of his father--the first person he thought of was Tommy. It could very well be in this case that Tommy gave Henry suggestions for choosing the architect.

#### 14) Good Client Relationships

Riess: Other landscape architects say they have never been able to have such an amazing number of good, long relationships with clients as Tommy has.

Campbell: Well, it's just because--well, one thing is that he always listened to what the client had to say, when the client was saying what he wanted and what he needed, and he empathizes with them, tries to figure out if they really need this. "Is this really what they mean?"

Very often in the first meeting with clients they'll give you a program, but later it develops that it isn't really what they meant because it's so hard for us to communicate one to another. You have to kind of lead them sometimes, and help them really see what they need. Or, "Is this just something they want because it's current?"

A case in point would be a swimming pool: you want to know how much swimming they do. "Oh, well, they don't, but everybody has swimming pools." And then, "Really, think about it. Do you want the responsibility, do you want the confusion, and all the problems that it is going to give you?" You help them see themselves and their program in a different light.

Then being able to arbitrate: if a husband says he wants brick and his wife says, "I can't stand red," saying "Well, there's a buff brick." Keep the thing going smoothly--drawing the people out from the very beginning. If they say they can't stand such and such (even though you think this is really what they ought to have), not creating a crisis but saying, "That's just fine." Sometimes when it is done they have ended up having what they said they didn't want because they didn't really mean it the way it could have been taken, you see.



Campbell: These traits have made the client relationships such a success. And not being pompous at all, being simple. He comes along, lugging a battered brief-case, often wearing boots with either khakis or jeans. Bandannas are his favorite and his fashion sense tells him they go equally well with jeans as with evening clothes--and somehow, for him, they do. People find this quite charming. "Why he's just like an old shoe," they feel, and the relationship is off to a great start. He's easy to talk to, they are ready to be guided and off they go!

But if they get, on the other hand, a feeling--which some people transmit although it may not be true--that the designer thinks he knows it all and is being forceful in what he wants, it scares them; they feel bullied or overridden and not at ease.

That's the trick, I think, putting people at ease, so that they really are free and feel that what they said has had an influence on what happens.

It's all of those things, plus the physical manifestation, that then start the design process going, because you design differently for each person.

One set of conditions--the same house, the same architect--but two different kinds of clients would get entirely different gardens. It's that knack of knowing which is going to be right for a particular couple. Many times when they don't know themselves.

It's a feeling you get. It's fascinating.

Riess: And lots of personalities involved, I should think.

Campbell: Yes, and temperaments. All kinds. Being able to know then when to joke, when to be serious. It's just a great art. It's handling people in a very fine way.

#### 15) More About the Church Style of Working

Riess: You were out in the field with Tommy?

Campbell: I was often along on the first meeting which is always the most exciting--seeing the problems either on the job site or at the house reviewing the plans. You saw clients look at Tommy, gradually begin to warm up, become friendly--a meeting of the minds. By the time

Campbell: the session was ended they usually had a sketch showing the direction the garden might go. And very often they were "Tommy" and "Susie" by then and friendly in a nice easy way.

He always loves the impact of that first encounter. You have the challenge of meeting, becoming acquainted and making friends; also you have the challenge of the design problem. And the basic solution often is a very quick one.

Sometimes a problem is impossible--people did have problems that were just so dreadful that you couldn't just say, "It will be like this"--but when it was something that came easily it was really great.

Riess: And when he got to the site, the place, the land, didn't that just dominate the solution?

Campbell: What you do very often is first make a complete tour of the site, and then you say, "Well, all right, now tell us what you think you want."

Riess: But wouldn't he just see some potential in the land?

Campbell: Yes, but if what he saw had nothing to do with what these people either wanted or what he thought was right for them, he had to be flexible--there is almost always more than one way to go. That was another quality, his flexibility. This trait is fortunate for him because the prima donna has trouble. He gets disappointed, and embittered.

Riess: His great vision--

Campbell: --has created wonderful settings for people but only because his schemes were accepted. If you can't sell clients on the idea that the solution is right, they are not going to accept it. That's all a part of the mystique.

Riess: Can it be learned?

Campbell: Possibly, but it is a unique quality. Definitely. I do think that all the people who worked in the office learned from watching the give and take--being part of these conversations and part of these experiences--and observing the light touch. Tommy has a terrific sense of humor and you certainly need that. You get somebody pretty heavy and it's not easy going with some very spoiled ladies or some very pompous men. But there are also perfectly marvelous people, darling people that you just love.

Riess: Maybe some who thought they could just buy whatever they wanted.

Campbell: Well, more demand attention or have everything done faster than normal. But I don't think they ever thought they could just "buy" Tommy. That wouldn't make sense.

[Looking at list again] Mayo Clinic. That may have been Saarinen.

Stanford. We did various jobs on the Stanford Campus with Spencer and Ambrose, before the master plan came along. And of course by then Tommy knew the president, the business manager, and others at Stanford. We worked with several architects at Stanford.

Riess: Each building was getting its own landscape architect.

Campbell: Of course. Some of our site design would have been incorporated into the architects' working drawings and become part of the general bid. There would be time for the planting plan and specs to be done while the building was under construction. There are many different ways the thing can go.

No matter who the client is, a university, a chairman of a board, a county, you always had a budget. Lots of these things, such as master plans, had to wait until the budget was adequate.

Then Thatcher School. And Birnam Wood. The principals were former clients.

But the nicest thing you can say--and I don't think you can say this with a lot of practitioners--is that almost all clients the next time they had any outside problems would come back to Tommy because they had been pleased. That's why it's so important to end up nicely with a client, but it takes a bit of doing because sometimes it isn't all just sweetness and light. There are problems, and you just have to work them out and end up having everything happy, as near as possible.

Also the quality of keeping in touch with a garden, because of course many times it's 10 or 15 years later or even longer before the trees come to mature to give the effect that was planned. But Tommy is always interested in going back to look at the garden and in being current with what's happened.

And when he went to visit, if something seemed wrong, the pruning wasn't being done right, he'd be very glad to say, "Well, that's not what I had in mind; try to do it this way." If he had

Campbell: more time he would do more and more of that, going back often. And every now and then certain clients would call and ask him to come look at the garden to see if it were being properly maintained.

And his birthdays were always fun: sometimes he just wouldn't come to the office until ten or noon and it would turn out he had been pruning someplace. His birthday present to himself every year was to go out and prune a tree in one of his gardens.

Very often he would go through a garden and see that a certain tree needed thinning and he would say, "Someday I'll come by and prune that for you." Then on April 27th he would remember, "So and so's tree needs help." He'd take off and go down and have a really good time. Or he'd say, "Well, I'm not going to tell you where I'm going to prune today. I'm just going to go and do it." He loved it and it was so special to take time out of a busy schedule to do something like that. You can imagine how pleased the clients were.

Riess: He must have been diplomatic with gardeners, too.

Campbell: There again it was the same thing of asking their advice, always letting them feel that they are a part of it. Because they are, and if they don't like you, hoo! They can ignore instructions!

[Interruption]

Riess: You were saying the office used to close over Christmas?

Campbell: During the holidays no one's much involved with worrying about their gardens--present or future--and we always felt that it was time for the office to have a good cleaning. If there were to be remodeling it often happened at that time.

So the week before Christmas and between Christmas and New Years and even over into the next week or two would be the time when, if the walls had to be painted, we'd paint them, or if the windows needed washing--for years the windows weren't washed and then suddenly he decided it was all right to start having them washed. I don't know how many years it was that they went unwashed in the beginning, just a funny notion.

But it was a good time: everyone wore old clothes, we all pitched in and worked real hard. We repaired whatever was needed and got all straightened out again for the new year.

The office has been more ways than you can imagine, more partitions moved and changed. At least four or five different ways to where you wouldn't recognize the same space. This conference room was smaller, half as large. This arrangement now is nicer for presentations. I think the last major overhaul was probably about in 1965.



Campbell: I do note that my old space is changed. My drawing board, back table and files are gone and the secretary and her desk are in their place. Somehow it always surprises me as though perhaps I really had never been here.

16) Answers to Added Questions, December 1977

Campbell: In your May 28th letter you asked for more about the influences on Tommy. I believe the greatest influences on Tommy's design were the traditional European gardens and the modern movement in all art forms in the thirties.

Starting with his first wonderful year of scholarship travel, just out of Harvard, Europe spoke to Tommy's heart. He refreshed his spirit by returning again and again. Abstraction added new dimensions to his classical background and these two design philosophies give and take throughout his career--not unlike many painters' work.

Parkmerced was a perfect opportunity to pursue abstract design and he had a great time. He was free to experiment with the relationship between design elements--straight lines versus curves, and so on. The courts were little design vignettes. Though there were no specific clients, he thought of how the tenants would use the courts and intended that the designs invite them into the gardens. He loved the freedom to deviate in the field from the design sketches made earlier. Changing a grass form or a plant grouping when a refinement occurred to him was exciting. Improvisation is as much fun for the designer as for the musician.

Riess to Campbell, June 16, 1977. Streatfield questions.

Riess: These three questions are posed by David Streatfield, and I would like to put them to you:

To what extent did Church delegate design responsibility to assistants in the period 1939-1948?

Campbell: I think the delegation of authority to others increased in proportion to the volume of work handled by the office. In the years prior to 1948, the amount of work was not as great as in later years and he had more time to be in the field during construction where many design



Campbell: decisions took place. (This may not be as complete an answer as anticipated. I do feel that availability of his time seems to have been a determining factor in the amount of responsibility he delegated to others.)

Riess: After the departure of Halprin and Rockrise, Church never hired highly creative assistants again. Was this a conscious decision?

Campbell: As I remember, Larry [Halprin] came with a recommendation--whose,\* I don't recall. He was young, fresh from the war, and very attractive in his naval officer's uniform. Our work load had increased, someone else was needed in the office, and Tommy liked Larry. I think that was the extent of Tommy's consideration of Larry's design capabilities. (Larry, on the other hand, knew of Tommy's reputation, was anxious to work with him, and to settle in San Francisco.) Tommy did soon find a great rapport with Larry just as he had earlier related to a young, eager, and capable Bob Royston.

George [Rockrise] was loaned to us by Ed Stone's office because he had been in Panama, knew Spanish, and could help coordinate our Panama Hotel drawings with Stone's. We all liked him and he wanted to join the San Francisco scene. But again, I don't think Tommy hired George because he felt he needed him as a great designer.

This is not in any way to negate Larry's or George's abilities; their work and reputations speak for themselves.

But to think that Tommy consciously didn't hire "highly creative" assistants after them indicates a lack of understanding. And I can't see Gerry Milono negated. He too is "highly creative" and should be more widely known than he is.

Riess: Were there circumstances which led to the return to a formal idiom in the sixties?

Campbell: I believe that Tommy's gardens generally reflected the spirit of the house. In particular, I think of some of Dailey's houses of the forties which were very free. Did domestic architecture return to more formality in the sixties? If so, this could be the "circumstance." Or maybe, the formality returned to Tommy as a design discipline? And of course, there's always the point of view that the abstract garden can be very formal as in Japan.

(Somewhere, I'd like to express my personal sorrow that Tommy has never visited Japan. He'd have loved the gardens. I often felt he must have been a Japanese garden designer in another incarnation. Unfortunately, the more I talked, the more enthusiastic Elizabeth Gordon became, the less he seemed inclined--maybe he's the victim of an over-sell and it's to be regretted.)

---

\*Halprins had met Wursters during latter's Cambridge sojourn. [ERC]

Riess to Campbell, November 8, 1976

Re Influences of Men in Office on Tommy

Riess: You point out, in the transcript, that often it takes one to two years to be useful in an office. Some of the men who came through the Church office were there only one year, or a bit more. Would you comment on how useful they were.

We didn't get into the question of what those men gave Tommy in the way of new ideas that he was left with after they departed and that influenced, thereby, his work.

Campbell: Bob and Larry had great design rapport with Tommy and they had great fun experimenting and pursuing ideas together over the drawing board. Both were given responsibility which they wanted and handled very well, Larry having more than Bob probably because he came to the office after the war and was older. Larry's sketches were a great asset in job presentations and always added a touch of humor.

Casey Kawamoto's working drawings were works of art. He could interpret Tommy's sketches and made out of town jobs easier because of this ability. He contributed greatly to the office.

Jack Stafford also was impressive in his uniform when he first came into the office asking advice. Tommy's recommendation to Floyd [Gerow], and Jack's subsequent years of field experience, proved to be a boon later on. Jack brought great construction expertise. Because of him (and Casey and Jerry Henderson) our working drawings and specifications became outstanding among the various offices. It cost more and more to turn out a set of plans because the detailing kept improving, but that, coupled with excellent supervision, often by Jack, paid off. We learned that great ideas must have equally great execution to be outstanding.

Walt Guthrie of course carried on with great ability and added his touch to the jobs. Both he and Jack assumed much responsibility and are capable and gifted men.

Summed up briefly, I think almost everyone who worked in the office contributed to its efficiency and success and made life easier for Tommy. Yet, in retrospect, I feel that he would have had a flourishing practice and have been a pacesetter without any of them. I can't think of any new ideas they imparted to him.

Re Frank Lloyd Wright

Riess: Tommy worked with Frank Lloyd Wright in Carmel in 1953 on the Clinton Walker house. What do you recall of that?

Campbell: As I remember, some client wanted to hire Frank Lloyd Wright. We wrote to him and his answer arrived: "My dear Church, why not? This is how we work our fellowship." (quote not verbatim) But Uncle Frank (as Leigh Stevens, another Wright-Church client, called him) had pretty firm ideas of his own on all aspects of a scheme and wasn't easy to work with. We were able in a job or two to get the parking areas off the 30/60 angle, enlarge them to function for the automobile, and to relate terraces and steps to the people rather than to the triangle.

Re Work Done Without Payment

Riess: I understand that Tommy did a certain amount of work free. Why, when, who?

Campbell: Why? Because the cause, whatever it was, seemed needy. Often they were pet projects of clients or architects.

Quickly to mind comes the Florence Crittenden Home (for unwed mothers). We felt they needed a pleasant atmosphere with all their problems and were glad to help design it.

Suzanne Eyre, a Woodside client, was devoted to helping establish The Priory, a boys school there. She cajoled Tommy into helping. One time, she invited Tommy, Jack and me to lunch. In the middle of an asphalt parking lot, she served a beautiful luncheon complete with umbrella and fine table linen--the ultimate in a French picnic. Afterwards we tackled the job and its problems.

Sketches for the Victorian Park at the foot of Hyde Street were made because he loved San Francisco and especially his own neighborhood.

There were others but these are typical. Also he would take a job on a reduced fee when he felt the person was sincere and desperately needed help. Some clients paid their fees off at \$25 a month and he admired their faithfulness.

Fond Memories

Campbell: When Larry and I were the only ones in the office, and Tommy would go away on a business trip, we'd celebrate his return. Off to Jack's restaurant for lunch to hear all about it and bring him up to date on the office. We tried to re-establish those happy times late in the sixties, by meeting once a month for lunch, but with Larry's large office and Tommy's schedule, the idea fell by the wayside after several months. It would have been good for them both to have kept more closely in touch--too bad.

\* \* \*

A birthday cake he baked for me from a recipe of Bonnie Stafford's called dump cake. Delicious. We always celebrated everyone's birthdays with ice cream and a candle-covered cake.

\* \* \*

Our whistle stop field trips when 30 or more gardens had a hit and run visit. Often we had guests along--Imogen Cunningham loved to come because of the plant materials. It was a way of keeping in touch with clients, learning of our mistakes and having fun together.

\* \* \*

The saying he quoted: "The power men have to annoy me, I give to them."

\* \* \*

Valentine's Day when he'd arrive late, laden down with Mother See's red satin heart-shaped boxes--candy for the secretary, for me, for the wives of all the boys and for Betsy.

\* \* \*

The Christmas parties--surely someone has told you of them. There never were nicer office parties and I'm sure all the office "family" through the years remembers them with the same nostalgia as I.





Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Floyd Gerow

A LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR VIEWS HIS WORK WITH CHURCH SINCE 1934

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Floyd Gerow

|                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) What is Landscaping?               | 186 |
| 2) Getting a Start with Thomas Church | 188 |
| 3) To be Successful in this Business  | 191 |
| 4) Walking in the Garden              | 194 |
| 5) Another Garden. The Client         | 197 |
| 6) Boulders                           | 198 |
| 7) Floyd and Tommy                    | 200 |
| 8) Pebbles                            | 202 |
| 9) A Good Designer at Work            | 203 |
| 10) The Unions, The Contractors       | 206 |
| 11) The Parkmerced Experience         | 209 |
| 12) Tommy's Style                     | 211 |

Floyd Gerow  
January 27, 1976  
Interview, walking through Peninsula gardens

1) What is Landscaping?

Gerow: Mr. Church had to orient this whole house. In fact, he was very instrumental in getting the architect that designed the house. They had one architect they didn't like and they got rid of him.

Riess: Who is the architect?

Gerow: You've got me there.

Riess: And whose house is this?

Gerow: I wish you wouldn't use names. Some people don't like it.

Riess: When was this house and garden done?

Gerow: About four or five years ago.

Riess: It's a wonderful site, isn't it?

Gerow: Well, it is. It goes actually way down this canyon to the far road on the other side down there. And down below is the most beautiful grove of redwood trees you've ever seen in your life. And the funny part of it is, the owner, since he was a kid, always wanted a tree house. He was tempted to build a tree house in these big redwoods down there. [Laughter]

You know it's been the hardest thing in the world for me to explain to anybody what is landscaping. All my friends say, "Oh, a landscape contractor, you deal with the birds and the bees and the pretty little flowers." But I never dealt in anything like that, I couldn't care less about that, I was a construction man. I built all these brick walls, all this road, all these things here, all the front entrance, all the brickwork that you see in here.

- Gerow: I am more like a general contractor, rather than a gardener. And when Church and I first started, if you mentioned the word landscape architect the building architects would laugh at you. You were downgraded. They wouldn't listen to you or anything else. Until Church finally grew to the point where he gained their respect, you see. And then they listened.
- Riess: Like Wurster, for instance.
- Gerow: Yes, I knew Bill Wurster well.
- Riess: Which others did you work with?
- Gerow: I worked mostly with Church.
- Riess: Which other architects?
- Gerow: Quite often Gardner Dailey, Bill Wurster, although I didn't work for them directly, but on buildings they designed. I went to work for Bill Wurster when I was about 18 years old, on jobs that he was doing. That was before I ever met Church.
- Riess: [On walk through garden] It's hard to picture this site before the house was here.
- Gerow: It was an old vineyard. Some fabulously wealthy person owned it and wanted to develop it one time, but they just didn't do it and it lay here for years. I think part of the provision when these people bought it was that they would not subdivide, they would keep it intact.
- Riess: How many acres?
- Gerow: About 40 acres.
- Riess: How influential was Thomas Church in the plan of the house?
- Gerow: He helped to select the architect, that's all.
- Riess: And the garden plan?
- Gerow: 100 percent.
- Riess: The people knew his reputation and--
- Gerow: And just turned it over to them. At one time Church wanted to do a big lawn. Well, the owners were very insistent that they didn't want even one blade of grass. So then he went this way (and of course this



Gerow: is a heck of a time of year to see it, with everything frozen). [The garden is a composition of plants and shrubs and trees and gravel and arbors.]

I did all this brick work and all these terraces. I built that arbor. That's quite an arbor.

Riess: This is quite formal, wouldn't you say, all this brick work?

Gerow: No, I would consider it informal. The garden is rocks and boulders and ground covers.

I always think of hedges, all clipped and precise, and parterres, you know, as formal.

Riess: You have probably seen Thomas Church through many changes in his ideas.

Gerow: Many phases. And when I first started I didn't know a petunia from a geranium, and I guess I always liked that sort of thing, but I knew nothing, and grew up with Church. And I've never seen him stagnate. So many architects do something that's good and it gets published and that sort of thing, well ten years later you can tell his hand on everything. But Church has always advanced, always, way, way beyond.

Riess: [Walking] This is a lovely area.

Gerow: And if you think that arbor wasn't a stinker to build.

Riess: Why was that?

Gerow: See those curves in those big beams? You try to find a saw that will do that.

Riess: That's very like Maybeck, that finish to the end of the beam.

Gerow: Yes. I've always admired Maybeck. There is a Maybeck house down here.

## 2) Getting a Start with Thomas Church

Riess: And did Church say to you, "Floyd, we need an arbor here." Or did he draw it all out?

Gerow: Oh, he always draws his plans.

Gerow: I get so mad at architects--I have a chip on my shoulder about that one--who draw plans that nobody can read. I had an occasion one time: a fellow down in Los Altos called me and he was very flattering, said, "You have a good reputation, I'd like to meet you." So I broke my neck getting down there to see him. And I asked him, I said, "Have you got a set of professional plans?"

"Oh, yes."

"May I see them?"

He brought them out, and I kept looking at them, and the more I looked the less I knew. He was working on a hillside. I'd see a line, I couldn't tell whether it was a fence or a retaining wall or what it was. It was so utterly confused it was pitiful.

Well, I liked the fellow and I was going to try to help him. So I told him, "Tomorrow I'll bring down my foreman." And there were some bricks showing. I said, "I'll bring out an expert brickmason. If you're here I'd like to see if we can settle things."

Well, these men I brought down: my foreman is a very brilliant man, and my brickmason is no fool, he's the one that did all this work. So he got out an easel and set up this plan and we looked and we looked and we argued, "What is this? Where does it go to?" And the crowning glory of the whole thing: down in the corner of the plan was a great gold seal with the guy's name on it and his state license.

We had to give up. We had to walk off the job. That man should be disbarred. If I hadn't been so busy I'd have called him and gotten him down to the job and I'd have tied him in knots. I understand that he's one of the biggest horse-a-patooties that ever walked. [Laughter]

Riess: But don't you think you were spoiled by working for one of the best?

Gerow: Yes. But we've got a few around here that are good. Jack Stafford. He worked in Mr. Church's office for years, and he worked for me before then and when he was going to college. I picked him up in the summertime and then he'd go back to school. He is my idea of a good designer. I'd recommend him highly. If Church passes on, if somebody's looking for a good architect, I'd recommend Jack very highly.

Riess: Do you think he got a lot of his training with Church?

Gerow: I know he did, but so did Larry Halprin. Larry Halprin went through the Church office. So did Royston. Doug Baylis.

Riess: When Tommy has someone in his office he gives a lot of attention to teaching them?

Gerow: Tommy likes to design. I've seen him design a whole job in a half an hour right on a site. He's got a pencil and he's sketching and sketching and sketching, and that's the main design. Then he turns it over to these draftsmen to make it work. They have to figure how high the retaining walls have to be, and what kind of footings, and how much steel in them, the engineering end of it.

Riess: But when Tommy started he had to do all that part of it.

Gerow: Oh yes.

Riess: It sounds like you've always known him. How do you know him?

Gerow: I was born and raised in Santa Cruz, and at one time he was down at Santa Cruz at Pasatiempo Golf Course when he was a young sprout. I was on his labor crew. He needed men and I was put on his crew. I didn't know anything. I could dig a ditch but that was about all I knew. Well, finally he finished up there and went back to San Francisco.

Well, I hated the boss I was working for. Oh, I hated that man with a deadly hatred. It was during the Depression, when work was hard to find. Well, one time I was in San Francisco. And I was a greenhorn, with hayseeds sticking out of my ears, and I was going down Van Ness Avenue and I didn't even know where I was. And out of the corner of my eye I spotted Church. I swung around, made a U-Turn, and I stopped him and asked him, "Is there any chance of a job around here? I'm looking for work."

Well he said, "Floyd, if you want to come up to the Peninsula I think I can guarantee you three days a week at \$4 a day." Twelve dollars.

I scratched my head and I thought, well, at that time I could get a workman's hotel for \$3 a week, and a meal ticket for \$5, that's \$8, and maybe a buck or two for laundry, \$9 or \$10. And [laughing] I can blow the rest!

Riess: That was 1933?

Gerow: 1934, probably in there. I came up to the Peninsula on the strength of that and because I hated the other guy so bad.

If I wasn't working for Church he'd farm me out to different people. Maybe somebody was going on vacation and needed a gardener so then I was a gardener when they were on vacation. I did everything.

Riess: But you didn't know petunias from pansies.

Gerow: Well, but I could hoe. [Laughter]

I evidently learned fast because I liked plants. I always remember something Mrs. Church said one time: the first time she ever saw me, I was stripped to the waist and had a flower behind my ear.

As I grew up and progressed I learned fast because I liked plants. If you'd show me a plant and let me handle it I'd never forget the name of it. One time I was sort of moaning about not having more education and that sort of thing. Tommy told me right out flat, he said, "You could go to college and teach those guys what to do."

### 3) To Be Successful in this Business

Gerow: Jack Stafford, when he was going to Cal, he was on some committee to get somebody to speak. And he tackled me. Well, heck, I'm not a public speaker. With my education and that sort of thing I should go over to Cal and speak?

They gave me a theme, something to talk about: what they, as landscape architects, could do to keep costs down.

And I thought, "My God, what a hopeless subject. I mean, labor's expensive, material's expensive. What can they do to keep things down?" I'd ride along and I'd mull it over in my mind, and pretty soon it began to make sense. I'd make notes. Finally I had to get down to my office and type it up. I showed it to Church. He looked at it and he said, "Floyd, Go get em!" [Laughter]

I went over there and I was absolutely petrified. My knees were shaking, behind the podium. And I started out to see if I could make somebody mad, because I was well-prepared to defend myself. Finally I calmed down and began to make sense. I enjoyed the evening like nobody's business.

Riess: What was going to make them mad?

Gerow: Well, there are so many plans that I have seen which you not only can't read, but they're idiotic. And every contractor, when he runs into that, will bid high. I've sent back I don't know how many plans. They come into my office for a big bid and I sit down and study em and I even go out to the site and take a look to see what gives. If those



Gerow: plans didn't make sense to me I'd write them a very polite letter and send them back, and say, "Sorry, I'm too busy to perform, but thank you for the opportunity to bid."

Riess: Or you could bid yourself too high.

Gerow: Yes, I've done that.

There are too many incompetent draftsmen. They draw pretty pictures but the pictures don't say anything. Any construction man wants details: how high is the wall, how many layers of bricks, how much steel's in it, what kind of wood, what grade of wood. I think all the students could do better. I don't profess to teach design; I have my own ideas and I'm pretty shrewd at it, but I'm not a teacher. But when it comes to construction they could learn a lot.

Riess: They don't have a chance to, maybe.

Gerow: I don't think they have.

Riess: There are the summers. Do you have students who come work with you?

Gerow: They go and spade and grade or plant a lawn or something like that, but not actually build. Yet 90 percent of landscape work is building. I had an interview one time with a young, very naive writer from Sunset, who came and wanted to talk to me and I saw he was so naive that I decided to tease him a little bit. And I said, "Well, if everybody comes down from the city and knows nothing about gardening, and gets out to the country, if they're a faithful reader of Sunset they'll plant their flowers where Sunset says, in the shade, or the sun. They'll have an absolutely beautiful garden for three weeks, and then it'll fold up.

"The next year they'll decide you don't landscape with flowers, you landscape with plants. So then they plant again according to Sunset's directions, in the sun, or the shade, watching the height and everything else, and five years later they end up with the biggest mess you've ever seen."

And then I said, "If you're smart you'll have learned that you design with concrete and steel and wood and then plants."

Riess: That sounds like the Church trademark.

Gerow: Oh, you can't get Church to discuss plants, hardly. Until the whole thing is built. He wants to see the proportions and the things he's designed built. Then it's very easy to walk around with the plan and



Gerow: say, "Well, we can use this, that, and the other thing in this bed here." I've seen the time when I'd spend \$40 or \$50 thousand in construction and one day to plant. Anybody who gets the idea that the planting is the whole field of landscaping is way out of order.

The other thing that contributed to Church's success--when he first started of course as a naive young man without reputation it's pretty tough going--he always earned the respect of the workmen. I remember times when he was working with, say, a brickmason. Well, he knew how many courses were equal to how many inches and he talked the brickmason's language and he respected the mason. If the mason recommended this, that, and the other thing, Church would listen. Never the highhat, the big shot, you know, and he earned the respect of the men he worked with.

Then that same mason maybe a week later would get another job that needed a designer, and he'd go to the owner and say, "You need somebody to design this. It ought to be Mr. Church." Always respect. He never downgraded the workmen. If they suggested something, he listened.

Riess: How did he learn what he knew, about bricks, for instance?

Gerow: Just by watching and learning and listening and thinking.

So many so-called landscape architects, you can just tie them in knots if you say, "Well, what kind of a bond do you want here?" Or, "How many courses is this?" They haven't any idea what you're talking about.

Riess: Well, perhaps that title landscape architect is wrong. They should be called designers.

Gerow: But it is more than just a designer. It involves so many different crafts, and plants. I'm not downgrading plants.

One time many years ago House Beautiful sent a man out from New York. They were trying to bring in a new approach to landscape writing. And this fellow had absolutely no knowledge of landscape. His background was in the arts, Paris and Rome and whatnot. I was given the job of escorting him around the Peninsula for the day.

Well, we'd walk into these lavish estates and that sort of thing. And everytime he'd see one with a swimming pool if he hit the owner he'd ask them if it had a heater. "Oh, yes." Well, he was very cynical: "This so-called California outdoor living was for the Indians!" A typical New Yorker. At the end of the day he said, "You know, there's only one thing I can figure out. Everybody in California goes swimming to get warm." [Laughter]

Gerow: But he ended up in my backyard. I brought him a drink and he sat there, and boy, he came down to earth. Because that was something that he could afford.

Certain things in my garden, with his background in the arts--I had a fence that I had stained black. Over the years it had bleached out but there were highlights--the heavy grains stood out and the other grains were darker--and he said, "That is what Matisse meant when he said, 'There's a color within the color.'"

We sat there for hours and talked. I never did read what he wrote. I'd like to have read it.

#### 4) Walking in the Garden

Gerow: [Resuming ramble through the grounds] There's an old building over here that is absolutely charming--though it is about ready to fall down. Want to wander again?

Riess: What is the best time of year for this garden?

Gerow: Oh, late spring, I guess, when it warms up well.

Riess: That is a fine oak tree there.

Gerow: Yes, you can see why this house was built all around those. I had to measure between the two trees and run the center line right down through here and then lay out the whole house with strings to see how it all fit before it was ever built or anything was done.

Riess: You and Church came up and walked the site yourselves.

Gerow: Yes, he knew what he wanted, but he had to prove it would work.

[Talking about old house of former estate] I don't know how old this house is; it's about ready to fall down. At one time the owners wanted to rejuvenate it, but it just was prohibitive in the expense to bring it up to code.

Isn't that a charming old boxwood garden?

Riess: Mr. Church must have loved this place.

Gerow: He did, and if it had been feasible at all they would have rejuvenated the house.

Gerow: When you come in here in the spring there are all kinds of camellias and rhododendrons and azaleas through here and it's absolutely beautiful when it is in bloom in the spring.

Riess: And the garden is kept up?

Gerow: That old gardener, he clips the boxwood.

Ordinarily if you asked me if I liked a formal garden I'd say no. But I think this is charming. And in spring, with the sun filtering through the trees, and the camellias and azaleas in bloom!

Riess: [Returning to main garden] How would you sum up, or describe this kind of garden?

Gerow: Well, a garden without a lawn and without what most people think a garden consists of.

Riess: I see a compost pile there. Did Tommy believe in that?

Gerow: Oh, yes. Did you ever get down to the University of California in Santa Cruz and see the garden there?

Riess: Where they are doing the French Intensive method?

Gerow: Yes.

Riess: I never thought to ask how much Church subscribed to the matter of organic or inorganic, chemicals, etc.

Gerow: Well, we all have to give and take on that one. If you're for it, but you haven't got anything to use--

Riess: What does Church, or what do you, leave with the owner in the way of instruction for care of a new garden?

Gerow: Sometimes people say, "How often do I water that?" Well, whenever it needs it. I mean, how can you tell people? Suppose it rains, or doesn't.

Riess: For the most part he would assume there would be a gardener to worry about it?

Gerow: Yes. Some professional.

But one of the hardest things in the world to do is to get somebody to tell you what to take out. Not what to plant, what to take out.

Riess: The gardeners aren't trained?

Gerow: They can maintain, and water, and spray. But they have no sense of design and I don't know how you could expect them to.

Riess: How about their proximity to good gardens and plantings and construction?

Gerow: It doesn't rub off.

For many years--year ago--I would go out with the graduating students on their summer tours, and I'd escort them through the Peninsula and up and down here and it was always very amusing to me--you take a busload of kids, 25 or 30 of them or whatever. I'd try to analyse them as I went. Some of the gals were flirting with the boys. Some of the boys were looking at the girls' legs. And once in a while, two or three people would ask real sensible questions. I'd think, "There's somebody who's going to get someplace. But the rest are going to play."

I worked for a woman architect here one time. I knew her real well. I had a job for her, a contract, and a set of plans. And always on the bottom of her plans it said, "All header boards shall be inspected before installation." I had my men put the boards together and lay them on top of the ground. And we scaled out in the corner, 50 feet, 40 feet, and put them exactly where her plans said. I went down to her office and got her to come inspect.

"But, Floyd, I can't come up, I'm busy."

"You're going to come up," I said, "I've got a couple of carpenters out there costing me about \$20 an hour.

Well, I had the headers where her plan said but she said I was all wrong and I said I was all right. She spent about an hour moving them around. She didn't trust herself on paper.

Riess: How much time would Church spend on the site?

Gerow: If I was on the job, very little. We made a wonderful team because I can read his mind and I'd worked for him long enough that I knew exactly what he wanted. In fact I can take a job if it's just sketches and do it. If I saw a bug someplace I'd get on the telephone and say, "Tommy, you'd better take a look at the north corner. There's something wrong over there." He'd drag out the plans and say, "Jesus, Floyd, you're right."

Riess: And if the owner came out and questioned something?

Gerow: I'd tell them to go see Church.

Riess: And what about a major changing of mind on the owner's part?

Gerow: Oh, I never have been bothered that way. But Church has such a wonderful way of handling people. One time I was on a job. Some old dowager had called him. Oh, she was very proper and very stiff. She wanted some work done and he was talking to her and at the end of the conference he turned to her and he said, "Hey, what kind of a babe are you?"

And she shook her head and looked at him, you know, and she said, "What do you mean, Mr. Church?"

He said, "Well, I'm busy. I can't do anything for you for three months. And if you're going to be on the telephone calling me every hour, we might as well part friends right now." [Laughter] "What kind of a babe are you!"

But he could wrap people around his fingers without them knowing it. I've seen him do things--I've worked with him so many years that I can read his mind.

Riess: Is it the woman in the family who usually really is the client?

Gerow: Yes, I think so. All papa wants to do is keep mama quiet. [Laughter] Although I have seen men who were ardent gardeners.

##### 5) Another Garden. The Client

Gerow: [In the car, en route] This next fellow, when I first went to work for him, he'd had a nasty divorce or something and he was pretty cynical. He wanted a house and he wanted a swimming pool and maybe a little grass around the pool, but landscaping as such he couldn't care less for. And that was that.

But he had a mistress whom he finally married, and she's quite a gal--boy, I tell you--highly artistic, a tremendous gardener, very brilliant. When he married her she wanted the garden. The only place for a garden was an area that was nothing but pure clay and I spent \$48,000 on this thing. We had to dig big ditches, and put drain tile underneath them, and raise beds, and import topsoil. You name it.

Riess: When was this place done?



Gerow: About six or seven years ago.

This guy, I'm so fond of him. A real two-fisted guy. I worked for him cost-plus. I didn't have a contract. I used to send him a progress payment every once in a while, \$10 or \$15 thousand. And he'd come out and moan, "Floyd, what're you trying to do, break me?"

Riess: Tommy did the design though?

Gerow: Oh, yes.

Riess: In a way that's such a small part of it, and then you are left working away at the job.

Gerow: Oh, yes. Sometimes I'll be on a job for a month. And on the last job I'm going to show you I spent \$238,000.

Riess: If a client wanted omething--like that row of cypress that we just passed--and Mr. Church didn't approve, what would he do?

Gerow: He would just send back the retainer and say, "Sorry, you'd better hire somebody else."

Riess: Though first he would try to talk them out of it?

Gerow: Oh, yes, he's not abrupt. As a matter of fact, he's very malleable. So many architects: "I want this. It's going to be this way, by God." They won't give an inch. I've seen Church give many inches.

## 6) Boulders

Riess: [At the second house, on Family Farm Road] Did Tommy site this house too?

Gerow: Yes, as a matter of fact Tommy relocated this house. The architect had it in one place and Tommy didn't like and he shoved it downhill or uphill--I've forgotten which.

Riess: I'm struck by all the planting here.

Gerow: Oh, this gal is a gardener, she does terrific things.

See this wall in here? The area above here was nothing but weeds, and this is where it was all clay. You can't imagine the drain tile under there. Before we put the top soil in, the clay in the bottom of

Gerow: the beds was all vee-ed toward the drain tile, and rock put over the drain tile, and paper, and then we put in gopher-proofing. It's the ultimate in that sort of thing.

Riess: Look at this [hexagonal] tile! [patio flooring]

Gerow: That came from Ohio.

Riess: And the rocks? [looking at boulders and steps to upper lawn level]

Gerow: They came from Morgan Hill, a place down there where you could order any size rock you want, and you'd get it.

Riess: At what point would he have seen the rocks?

Gerow: Just when they dumped them on the ground. He'd pick them out and say, "This ought to go there."

Riess: He came to the site then.

Gerow: Oh, he'd have to. I can't do it.

As I remember, the truck would dump the rocks in the field. Then we had to get a fork lift to handle them. I think we worked from the upper level. We brought in a boom crane that could reach out and go down with a chain and get around the big rocks and lower them.

This garden kept growing. She wanted a vegetable garden first and Church began to design and it just kept growing. She got fascinated with rocks and then rocks came in.

I don't know what you'd call this--a Japanese rock garden, a formal garden or what?

Riess: But quite natural.

Gerow: You know, the greatest compliment that an architect can have is to have somebody say, "It looks like it's always been there." Despite the thousands of dollars and tons of dirt.

[Walking] I don't know why it is that every landscape architect thinks the ultimate thing for him to do is to design a fence that nobody else has ever done before in their life. A couple of times we've seen a few things that really smelled. [Laughing] Tommy'd say, "I'm going to let the young boys do that."

Riess: Was there a nurseryman that Tommy used particularly?

Gerow: We used to always buy from Pacific Nursery, in Colma. They had the best stock in the country. But we also bought from other nurseries if they had things we wanted.

Riess: How much would you say you were made responsible for carrying out the plan?

Gerow: Oh, he used to turn over to me 90 percent of the responsibility. I had the plan and was following the plan. Any question we would settle over the telephone; maybe once a week or once every two weeks he'd come down and look around. It was a wonderful working relationship.

Riess: And then with the nurseryman, was it the same?

Gerow: No, Tommy would go into the nursery and go through and choose what he wanted and mark it. And he was such a good client, they would make sure he got the best of everything.

As long as you've got a responsible contractor, though, you're all right. Though when Tommy was a young man he ran into some guy who was kind of tough, tried to push him around. This owner was insisting that Tommy get a bid from a man that Tommy didn't approve of. This guy got nasty. He said, "You're being paid 10 percent for supervision, why can't you handle this?" Tommy told him, "I can be here 8 hours a day, but still I've never known how to make a good contractor out of a poor one." And that was that. [Laughter]

## 7) Floyd and Tommy

Riess: [At the third house on the tour] You were saying, as we were walking around, that Mr. Church had related the retaining wall of fieldstone to the rocks across the canyon.

Gerow: He always tried to relate materials to something that was sympathetic, either to the owner of the house, or something that was nearby.

One time Tommy paid me a compliment that I considered one of the greatest compliments I've ever had. I used to always go out with him plenty because he liked my help and advice and that sort of thing. One time he was redoing his own home--and if there's anything an architect can't do, it's work for himself, they want the ultimate, and they are

Gerow: striving so hard for the ultimate--and he called me up and he said, "Floyd, for God's sake come up here and straighten me out, will you?"

I went up there. He had a tree that I objected to strenuously. I said, "Tommy, that tree ought to come out of there." He looked at me as though I was absolutely mad, you know. "This guy's nuts."

Well, finally I talked him into it and he took it down, and after he'd taken it down, it wasn't but a week later he says, "Floyd, I've never missed that tree. You have the greatest sense of space perspective of any man I've ever known." Which covers a multitude of sins. [Laughter]

Riess: That is high praise.

Gerow: I've always had that sense of proportion and that sort of thing.

Riess: Now, we are looking at this issue of House Beautiful that you brought for me to see. February 1953. When you bought this house [looking at Floyd Gerow's house illustrated in an article in the magazine], did you know that Tommy was going to do the work on your garden design?

Gerow: I knew he damn well better. [Laughing] He said I was the worst client he ever had. I was so highly critical, and I wanted everything, you know.

You take a big estate, it's awfully easy to get a service yard around the corner, garbage cans out of sight, but you take a little G.I. lot, you've got to have all those things in a very small area, and still keep it looking good. That'll stretch your imagination no end.

One time I had sort of an old dowager gal up in Hillsborough, and I don't know who her architect was--it wasn't Tommy. But as a contractor they [clients] used to come up to me and say, "My architect says this, my architect says that, who do you think?" (Well, if you're a smart contractor, don't criticize the architect.) I told her, "If you'd like to come down to my house I can show you some of these materials."

So we jumped into a big long Cadillac with a chauffeur and headed down the Peninsula. Well, we turned in the tract where I live, with kids and dogs, a typical G.I. tract, and her face got longer and longer. And I could read her mind: what in the name of God am I doing here? She got in front of the house and she recognized the little professional touch. And I wouldn't have taken her, but I knew the garden was just spotless.



Gerow: I took her in through the side gate and she stopped and it looked like she was going to get mad, just like you'd hit her in the face with a wet rag. "Why," she said, "this is better than mine will ever be!" Of course then I got the job.

## 8) Pebbles

Riess: Did you and Tommy go for new materials when you could?

Gerow: Yes, if they were feasible.

I ran into a woman architect one time, I was going to do a job for her, and I started reading her specifications. She wanted some pebble concrete poured, but the pebbles were supposed to be gathered in a creek in Almaden. I had visions of taking a crew of men to Almaden, with little buckets, running up and down the creek--and I needed half a ton of rocks--picking up a white and a red, and I thought, "Oh, my God," they talk about what architects can do to keep costs down! So I wouldn't go for that.

But I went into a material company where I traded for years and they had a carload that had just come in, and it was damp and I crawled up on the boxcar and I had a little bucket with me and I reached around and I took whites, blues, reds, greens. I took them down to her office, and showed them to her, asked her if they would do the job. "Oh, fine, Floyd, those are beautiful."

Well, I had to put a crew of men sitting in the boxcar with a sack between their legs, you know, to get a half a ton of rocks. When I got through and offered to pay for them the guy laughed at me and said, "After what you've been through I wouldn't think of charging you for those rocks." [Laughter]

I used them on the site and they were absolutely worthless. I mean, all the colors didn't show it all. They sort of blotted out with the fuzzing of the concrete. And we actually took and acid-washed them and did everything in the world, and it was just an absolute waste of money.

Riess: Why is this pebble concrete, where we are sitting, so good?

Gerow: It's just the natural pebble, and it's only been washed with water.

Riess: And hers were less interesting than this natural assortment?



Gerow: They were to me.

Riess: Are there any sort of special materials that you have found useful?

Gerow: Oh, we would stick to pretty standard materials. Once in a while an exotic brick. These white bricks, I think, came from Los Angeles. You won't find a white brickery up here.

Riess: I think architects are regularly being bombarded with salesmen for new materials.

Gerow: Well, Church gets catalogs, and people send him things, you know. But there aren't too many exotic materials. It's design, more than materials. I mean, this [area where sitting] would be all right if it was all brick.

I've always liked the way these concrete steps go in against the brick, especially at the upper level, way up on top there.

#### 9) A Good Designer at Work

Gerow: Every time I go up and down a poorly built set of stairs I think, "Church didn't do these." I had to take my wife to the hospital yesterday, and I went down a set of steps, and they had a great big high riser and a little tiny tred and you felt like you were going to fall on your face.

Riess: It was supposed to look good?

Gerow: Oh, it was just plain ignorance.

Riess: And not having a good designer.

Gerow: Well, a lot of people can't afford an architect, and they have to resort to little nurserymen who call themselves designers, or something like that. You see, unless you're state licensed you can't call yourself an architect, but a lot of these guys call themselves designers, and some are reasonably competent and they can do what you need, you know. You can't knock them all down because, well, not everybody can hire a professional.

And the garden should reflect the owner. I know that when Church meets somebody he's always very careful to listen to know what kind of a person they are. I can read his mind. He's analysing: is this person an ardent gardener? does he want a lot of maintenance? no maintenance at all?

Gerow: We've done gardens where there are no flowers, and no maintenance at all. One guy loved his horses and he didn't want a lawn, he didn't want flowers, he didn't want anything but a swimming pool with some paving around it and a corral for the horses.

Church would walk around with the client and get ideas. You could hear his mind clicking. And once in a while he'd do a sketch on the job, but most times he'd go back to the office and do what he thinks necessary, and then he'd call them in for a conference.

Riess: Wouldn't somebody, once they had called him for a consultation, be intimidated about saying they disagreed with his ideas?

Gerow: Oh, he's not one of these domineering guys. Not, "I'm Tommy Church and it's going to be this way or else."

I heard him say one time that the best that came out of any architect was when somebody would criticize what he had done. Because then he would scratch his head and say, "Maybe this guy's right, you know." And then start redesigning. It will force the best out of you.

Tommy and I were talking about design one time, teaching design. "How do you teach somebody design?" And Tommy said that design to him was the easiest thing in the world. All you had to do was fit the owner's needs to the land and the site, and sort of correlate it, make it look well. No great mystery at all.

Riess: And nice if you get in at the beginning, before the house is built, or did Tommy like the rescue missions as well?

Gerow: There are two things that are fun. One is to go into an old, rundown garden, the older the better, probably overplanted, with some diseased trees, and pick out the good and the bad, take an axe to the bad, get rid of them, and redesign around the good and come up with a terrific design around an old garden.

I've always wished that people, before they got a property, would call in Church, because I've seen him stop a couple of people. There was one woman, up in Hillsborough, and she was going to be an ardent swimmer, and she had a lot picked out and she was going to build a swimming pool over here and do this, that, and the other thing, and Church got to looking around. He had a compass and he took the compass and started in finding out where north and south was and he said, "Lady, you don't want this lot. You'll never get a bit of sunshine in that pool." She sold the lot.

Gerow: One time Tommy was sketching on the site, and the building architect was there. Well, I realized what he was doing; he was going over the architect's head. He was showing where the bedrooms ought to be, that the sun would come in here, and "We'll put a parking area in here," you know, and he was sketching away.

Then suddenly he got embarrassed because he realized what he was doing, you know. And he told the owner, he said, "There's your architect, he ought to be doing this." The architect said, "Oh, Church is much better at that. I'll take it from there."

Riess: You said earlier that you knew William Wurster as a kid. Where was that?

Gerow: He did a farmhouse up in the mountains behind Santa Cruz [Gregory Farmhouse] and I was working directly for the Gregorys. They wanted a sort of stone terrace outside, and they had all kinds of stone around and we went down in a field and gathered rocks and laid them in a stone terrace.

Riess: [Looking at Gardens are for People] I wonder if people came to Tommy with pictures of places that they wanted to have something "just like." And how he handled that.

Gerow: He ignored it entirely. He never said no, he just didn't do it, he'd go ahead and draft it the way he wanted to, and then call them in for a conference. And he had this way of presenting a sketch, and they'd say, "Oh, Mr. Church, why that's beautiful, I never thought of that." And he'd gone right over their heads and they hadn't gotten anything they had asked for. If they were very demanding and he didn't approve, he wouldn't work for them.

Most people, building a garden, they go through all the books they can find in a library, and read.

[Looking at book] There's an architect, Germano Milono. [Reminisces about a million dollar house by Milono.]

Riess: Your house--it would have been unusual for Tommy to do a G.I. tract house.

Gerow: He did a few, but he finally came to the conclusion the owner could do a better job than he could. On their own. And it wasn't worth his time or their money or anything else.

## 10) The Unions, The Contractors

Riess: You were talking a while back about the unions.

Gerow: Well, they are a tremendous advantage to the men in them. They get health and welfare, they get a pension. The thing that has always burned me up: I had four carpenters working for me. They draw \$1,000 apiece for vacation. Well, that's \$4,000 I put out for their vacation. Plus their health and welfare, plus a pension program. When they retire they get a beautiful pension, about \$400 a month. And I pay all those things. And I get nothing. Every man that ever worked for me is better off than I am. I live on Social Security and what little I have. I get nothing.

Riess: Well, on cost plus you should have added another plus.

Gerow: Oh, it's impossible to lose money on cost plus. But on the bids: I dropped \$4,000 on one bid in Hillsborough. It wasn't nobody's fault but my own: I underbid it. And the owners were filthy rich and nice and I couldn't complain. It was my own fault. The general public always thinks that every contractor always makes 10 percent and steals another 10.

Riess: But when you worked for Tommy, didn't you bill him?

Gerow: Yes, and that stops any argument. Tommy approves what you've done, it's done right, and he's inspected it--but if you're working direct for the owner you can get in a lot of trouble.

When I first started I was going to lick the world, and I had my name in the yellow classified in the telephone directory. I kept getting calls: "What do you charge to prune a rosebush?" "How much do you charge for a load of manure?" I had one woman call me and she wanted an arbor. Well, that sounded pretty good and I went to see her. She lived in a poor, broken-down house with about five dirty kids running around, and she needed an arbor all right, but she had no idea what it would cost. I told her, "The only hope for you is to buy your husband a hammer and a saw and let him build it. You can't afford me."

I finally told the telephone company, "Take my name out of the classified.

They said, "Don't you want work?"

"Not your kind."



Gerow: So many people go through the yellow classified. They're after bids. They want a bid from you and a bid from me and somebody else and they get about six bids and of course they pick the cheapest one, and it usually ends up they get the worst contractor. You get what you pay for. Some of these slick operators, they'll diddle you before you know what's happened to you.

Riess: Church's business was definitely luxury business.

Gerow: That's right, and that's the only kind I ever wanted to do.

Riess: I don't know how many young landscape architects would want a business like Church's.

Gerow: If I had a son and he was going to be a landscape architect, I would shoot him. I think it's the most hopeless game for a young man in the world.

Most young landscape architects today struggle to try to put bread on the table with little two-bit jobs, you know, or else they go into the forest service or into the government. But how many independent landscape architects do you find around the country just making a living as landscape architects? Either their wives are working, or they have a sideline.

Riess: And Church was really a one-man office.

Gerow: Well, he had plenty of people with him, usually about three draftsmen in the office, at least since the war. And it kept him on the hump to get work for them, you see.

Riess: So when you expand the business you spend more time bringing in the work.

Gerow: Oh, it is a pretty hopeless game.

Did you know Punk Vaughan? [H. Leland Vaughan] Boy, he was a character. He used to start a class out: he'd say, "If you think you're going to get rich in this profession, you'd better start doing something else right now."

[Speaking of training landscape architects] I see so many mistakes that young architects make, and some of them are serious. You might hire a young architect to design your place, and he draws sketches and you are very pleased with him--"Oh, boy, that's nice, I like that, fine, fine!" Well, comes to a contractor and you're going to get a bid, you do, and you are pleased with the bid. But before he can build he's got to go to the city hall and get a building permit, and he takes the set of plans down to the city hall and the guy says, "You can't do this here, you need a 15 foot set-back." And your whole plan is gone.



Riess: Isn't the point of licensing that they be aware of the business end of things? To be professional, to avoid those mistakes.

Gerow: But they all do. It would be so simple if they would make a preliminary sketch, not spend too much time, just a preliminary sketch of what they propose to do, and go down to city hall and say, "I'd like to do this. Is this legal?" And save the man hours of drafting, and save the owner disappointment, because he's fallen in love with what the guy did.

Riess: The students don't have contact with contractors until they need them?

Gerow: I don't think so. Oh, when I went out with the summer tours they would ask questions: how do you do this, how do you do that? I think it'd be good for the kids to go into a lumberyard and find out lumber grades and what you can buy and what it costs. The hardest thing for a young architect to do is make an estimate; he has no idea what those things cost.

It's too bad a contractor can't take some fellow who has talent and ambition and that sort of thing, take him under his wing, like an apprentice. The thing that's wrong with the whole setup in the United States, I think, is the old apprenticeship program. Because if I went out tomorrow morning to hire a kid, no matter how brilliant he was, I'd have to get the permission through the union, and I'd have to pay him union wages. Well, maybe he can't learn them. So I can't afford to hire him.

I had a kid come out from Harvard one time. Brilliant, no end. He was really brilliant. He wanted to work for experience. Well, I hired him, and that kid couldn't do anything. He had never had tools in his hand, a hammer or anything else. I had to let him go. It was hopeless.

Riess: You had to pay him union wages.

Gerow: Yes, and in order for a contractor to pay union wages, you've got to have some work, you have to be able to estimate that a man can move so much concrete and so many wheelbarrows of dirt a day and that sort of thing. If he can't cut the mustard you're going in the hole every day.

So many kids want to start at the top and work up, you know.

At one time we were asking ourselves, "What's legal? What can we do?" And we invited a man from the State Contractors License Board to come down to the Peninsula. Different guys called around to see if anything interesting [jobs] was going on. I had a job and he came down,

Gerow: looked around, looked at my plans--we had a brickmason working on brick, they were pouring concrete, I had carpenters working, and practically every craft in the world was going. He looked around and he said, "Who are you working for here?"

I said, "Mike Solinsky."

He started to laugh because he said Mrs. Solinsky was his sister. Anyway, he went back to the State Contractors License Board and they approved of: if a landscape architect puts it on paper, I can do it. Oh, I've had a couple of general contractors jump me, you know. "You guys can't do that kind of work. You're not legal."

Riess: Well, is the fight over now?

Gerow: No, they'll keep nibbling.

#### 11) The Parkmerced Experience

Gerow: One thing that misleads so many architects is to draw a planting plan. You never should draw a planting plan, or at least only draw a planting plan on a flat lot. When I worked for Tommy at Parkmerced we spent about three-quarters of a million dollars there, and he had drawn complete planting plans. Well, there were a lot of contours--apartments up here and down there and steps and rolling lawns. On a flat piece of paper you can say, a tree would be nice there, north is here, the sun is there, so a tree here. But you get out on the site and you find out that all these rolling planes that didn't show on paper throw everything off. This tree didn't show, this tree didn't hide the telephone pole, this tree hid something. You might as well scrap all your planting plans. You can't see on a flat piece of paper what you're doing.

Riess: Even if you did an elevation, side view?

Gerow: No, it wouldn't even pay for the effort of doing so. No, do your construction work first and then you can walk around with the owner, or yourself, or the contractor, and say, "Well, let's plant this here," and then put it on paper. That makes sense.

Riess: That Parkmerced job doesn't sound like Tommy's cup of tea.

Gerow: Well, it was during the war, war housing, you know, and the pressure was on. He had an office out there. He stayed out there most of the time, with draftsmen, and that sort of thing, and me.

What an experience for me! I knew my work, but I had never tackled big business before. I didn't know all the underlying things that were going on, you know. When they first hired me, there was nothing I could

Gerow: do. They were building streets and houses, and plastering, and that sort of thing, nothing about landscaping. I asked the superintendent, "What did you put me on the payroll for?" He said, "We think you can earn your keep by looking, walking, and thinking." So, I walked and I looked and I thought.

We had the only set of complete plans on the whole job. They were kept in a fireproof vault, and every time I would hit something that was questionable in my mind I would go back to the office and get a plan of the area and study it. I kept a notebook.

I'd walk into a court and look around and look at the plans and maybe make a mental estimate, that there was, oh, maybe 100 yards of dirt too much in here. I'd note that. Then sooner or later I'd hit one that was 100 yards short. And that really paid off when we started to move dirt, because I knew where I wanted it.

The labor crew was tough Irishmen from New York, and they were out to "get this four-eyed so and so," and I didn't know it. One guy was in full charge of all the trucks and tractors and other things. When it finally got to where I could do some work I'd go to him and say, "Can I have a tractor tomorrow?"

"Sorry, sorry, we've got to build roads."

I never would get the tractor.

Well, I began to catch some mistakes. One day I was going down the line, walking and looking and thinking, and there was a great big crane, and trucks were bringing dirt to this crane and the crane was picking it up and putting it over a retaining wall, tons of dirt. I didn't pay any attention, none of my business, and I kept on, but when I came back in the afternoon they were still doing it. I thought, "What's going on here?"

I went back and checked the plan.

"Don't dump the dirt here," I said, "it belongs down at the corner of so and so."

He stuck his head out of the cab and he said, "My boss told me never to take orders from you!" They were after me. And I was boiling mad. I told Tommy the story and he said, "There's the superintendent, he's in charge of the job."

Well, to make a long story short the superintendent sent out the word and lined up all the truck and tractor drivers he could find and he told them, "This is the only man on this job that knows. I don't know."

Gerow: This is the only man who knows where dirt goes and if he tells you to take it away, then you take it away. If he tells you to dump it, you dump it."

I straightened out the kid, but his boss had missed the lecture, and when the kid took the dirt where I told him his boss jumped him. He was hollering. But the kid stuck his head out the cab and said, "I just found out who's running this job and it's not you."

## 12) Tommy's Style

Riess: Did Church work well under pressure?

Gerow: Yes, it didn't bother him. When we were working at Parkmerced that was a hectic job. Things would be going wrong and I'd get excited and I'd say "Where's Tommy? Where's Tommy?" And then I'd find him drinking a cup of coffee. He couldn't care less!

Or even clients, they'd get all upset, but it didn't bother him in the least. "They'll get it when they get it." "It'll get done when it gets done."

Riess: He liked to get down to shirtsleeves, I hear.

Gerow: [Laughing] Oh, Tommy used to like to get down and plant once in a while. We were on a job one time. Tommy was over by the front gate, down on his hands and knees, and some nice little old woman came trotting along, and she said, "Oh, boys, I've been admiring this place all the time you've been working here. Who's the architect?"

"Tommy Church."

"Oh, Tommy, I know him so well." And there he was, right at her feet. He had a slight grin but he kept right on with his trowel. I guess he didn't want to embarrass her.

Riess: What do you think Tommy's favorite jobs were?

Gerow: Well, that would be hard to say.

You've seen pictures of that big job that he did up in Washington, that tremendous thing? That was the garden to end all gardens. Talk about luxury! That was beautiful. (Tommy's got some priceless photographs in his office. He did a few shows, you know, and he'd pay \$75 or \$100 for enlargements.)

Gerow: I constructed, or helped him, on all three of his own gardens. And when he first bought that house I thought he was crazy. The place was falling apart, the front door was hanging by the hinges, and the plaster was hanging from the ceiling, and I thought, "My God, this man has really blown his cork here."

Tommy Church, he was like a brother to me. We always worked so harmoniously together. And our thoughts were alike.



Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Robert Royston

A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT CONSIDERS CHANGES IN PRACTICES

SINCE HIS CHURCH APPRENTICESHIP

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Robert Royston

|                                                                |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) Landscape Architecture in the Late 1930s. Berkeley, Vaughan | 213 |
| 2) Theories and Practices, 1938, 1939                          | 216 |
| 3) Tommy and the Architects He Worked With                     | 220 |
| 4) Consulting, Contracting, Supervising                        | 222 |
| 5) Post-War, Expanded Church Office                            | 223 |
| 6) Tommy's Way of Working                                      | 225 |
| 7) The Test of Time                                            | 228 |
| 8) Thomas Church's Influence on the Profession                 | 231 |



Robert Royston

March 11, 1976

Interview held at Royston, Hanamoto, Beck & Abey office, Mill Valley

Present at Interview: Pam-Anela Messenger

1) Landscape Architecture in the Late 1930s. Berkeley, Vaughan

Royston: [Continuing conversation begun before taping about the landscape architecture profession]

I remember that when I was at the University there was some attempt on the part of Professor Gregg to give graduates problems in city planning, without any idea of the sociological implications. Now after 25 years we've come full circle to the point where again landscape architecture is being recognized as a very strong force in a new town for design. I think the strongest single force to set design or to set form to cities would be the landscape.

Tommy never got too involved with broad-scale projects. When I met him there were really three people on the horizon at that time: Garrett Eckbo and Dan Kiley, and [James] Rose.

Riess: Yes. What was the "Harvard Revolution"?

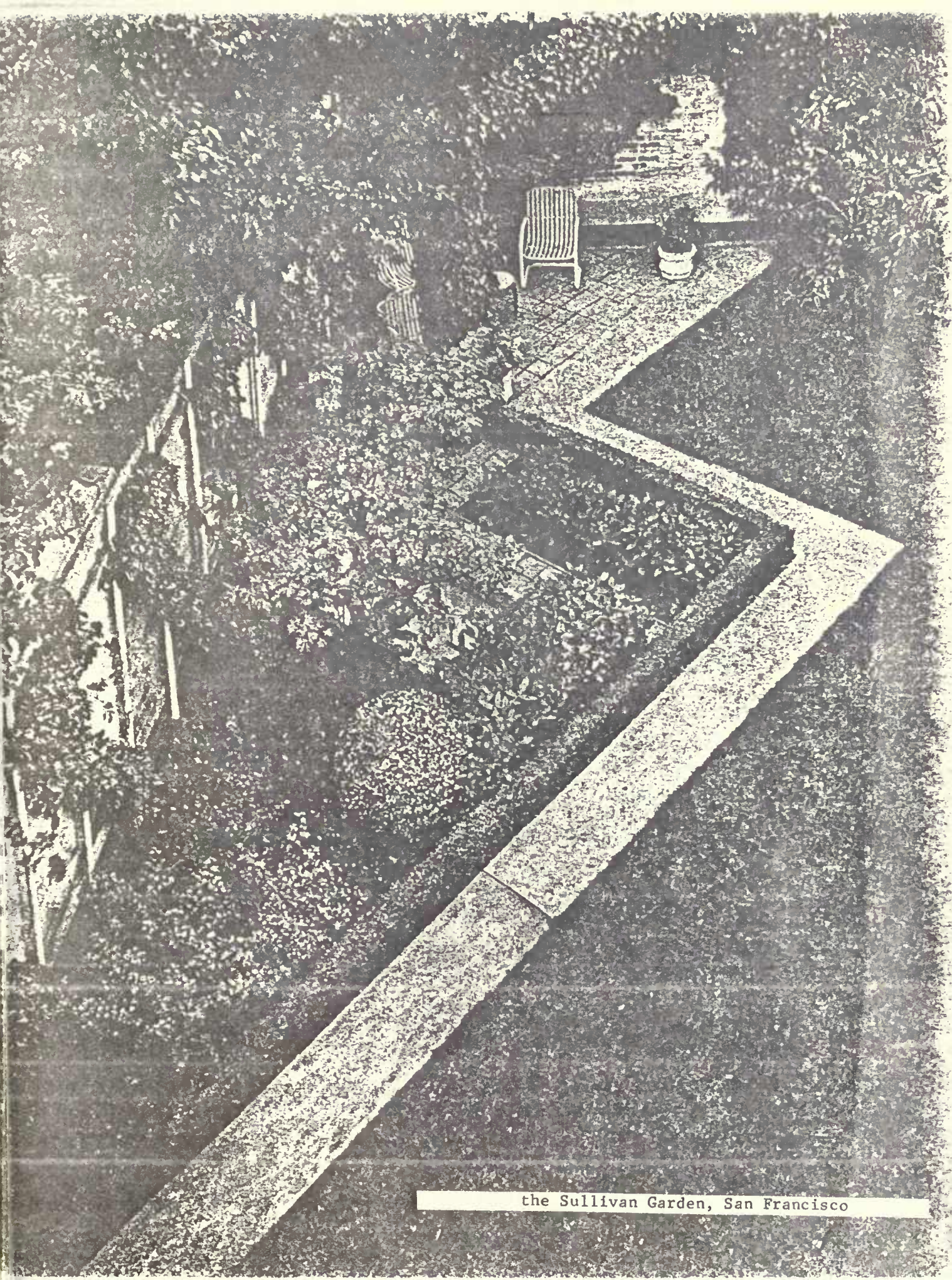
Royston: A series of articles were published in Pencil Points and to we who were then freshmen and sophomores, it was a kind of light on the horizon. There'd be an architect that would come through occasionally, or some article in Pencil Points, and you'd read it. So I knew about those three people.

I'd never heard of Church, but in my sophomore year there was an exhibit of his original renderings. He did everything with pencil, and they were really quite beautiful. I was very much into painting and architecture at that time and I felt that Church's work was a breakthrough, although it still tended to be quite Victorian. He had come from the axis, and the visual balance, to other kinds of space arrangements like the Sullivan garden and the asymmetrical design but I don't know how deeply serious he was about it. Anyway, he had enough playfulness in his mind and will to explore.









the Sullivan Garden, San Francisco



- Riess: I'm wondering about that Sullivan garden, whether he was forced to be so identified with it because everybody got so excited about it.
- Royston: That's what I'm saying. It didn't happen again for quite a while so it was kind of accidental, a lot of fun.
- Riess: I'm really surprised that you hadn't heard of him. I thought that maybe you could tell us that you had gone into the profession because of him.
- Royston: No. Not at all. When I saw his work, I knew what landscape architecture could be and two years later I was working for him.
- Riess: But he didn't come and lecture on campus?
- Royston: He never lectured at U.C. while I was there. He came over, as I recall, and showed slides one night in our senior year which was very effective. Very hard to get him to give a lecture.
- Riess: Because to give a lecture you had to have a theoretical view that you're talking from, or what?
- Royston: Well, I think so. And Tommy never did, he just let it all sort of hang out, and I really respected him for that. He was very easy to work for.
- Riess: So why did you go into landscape architecture?
- Royston: I was very interested in agriculture, and the outdoors. I liked to draw and I loved the theatre.

We were living on a ranch in Santa Clara Valley and one day I read through the U.C. catalogue, and I came across landscape design: outdoors, lots of drawing, everything seemed just what I wanted.

I visited Professor John Gregg's office. He was very gracious. (He didn't have many students.) It was a high-ceilinged room with the books around and a very nice, considerate old gentleman, and he asked me lots of questions about what I liked to do. I said I was very interested in the theatre and I was torn between the theatre and landscape architecture. But I loved to draw and paint and so on, and I liked the outdoors. And that's how it happened. So he opened all the doors.

- Riess: Shepherd, Vaughan, Jones and Gregg were there.

- Royston: Right. [Katherine] Jones was before my time. She taught plant material and used to come in occasionally. I guess she was a professor emeritus when I was there. But the other three were very much there. And [H. Leland] Vaughan really meant much more to me. I think he really led me toward Church. He knew Tommy. He wrote the letter [to Church] that said, "You really should have Bob" and made the combination. I started, as a junior [at the University of California] drawing in Tommy's office. He only had one other person there in his office, Marie Harbeck.
- Riess: Was there an interview that you had with Tommy first or was it all very casual?
- Royston: "Just start in." I assumed I would. He did too. I guess it was because of Leland Vaughan really. I suppose I was on trial. That was 1938.
- Messenger: And you were there two years?\*
- Royston: I was there until the war.
- Messenger: So who else was there besides Marie when you were there?
- Royston: Marie Harbeck and later on Leland Vaughan came over for a short time to help with the Metropolitan Life housing development [Parkmerced]
- Riess: You don't call him "Punk"?
- Royston: Punk, yes. We always called him Punk. I still remember Adele [Vaughan's first wife]. Adele was such a wonderful person. She influenced me also. She was doing some work at the University.

Vaughan had an office at U.C. at the end of the drafting room. If the door was open, you could go in there anytime. If the door was shut, you did not bother him.

It was really a very nice experience working for Punk as a student. Punk wasn't a teacher who was long on theory or with deep convictions on the natural evolution of design. His background was more from the Beaux Arts tradition, but also very solidly based on that "you'd not only got to think it, but you gotta be able to build it."

---

\*Pam-Anela Messenger, who was doing a master's dissertation on Thomas D. Church, was present at the interview.

Royston: He had a way of remaining silent, and it was his silence that taught me the most. He would come and look at my drawings and he just sort of grunted and that meant "keep going" or if he started to talk about it then he'd just take you a little bit further on something. Usually if he said nothing he was approving.

I weave Vaughan and Church together. Those two men meant everything to me. Garrett Eckbo didn't come along til quite a bit later.

Riess: How much contact did you have with the architecture department then, and modern architecture?

Royston: Tommy was working with all the modern architects at that time. Johnny Funk had just done the Heckendorf House in Modesto. The Schuckl Building by Wurster came along, the various houses. I was also working in the field in the summers. I was, as a student, a part of construction crew, working on Tommy's jobs.

## 2) Theories and Practices, 1938, 1939

Riess: But your design classes didn't relate to modern work?

Royston: No. We evolved that ourselves. And most influence came from the art department as far as I was concerned, not the architecture department.

Messenger: That's very good. That's my key I'm interested in. I saw a garden you did in the city once that looked like a Mondrian painting.

Royston: That's right.

Riess: Is that still to be seen?

Royston: Yes. I don't know what it would look like. I think it's probably still there. It was pleasant to be in but it was made to look down on also. It was an experiment. But there were others that were like that. There were a whole series that I did.

You can't really separate sculpture and painting in landscape architecture in the true sense anyway. (I might go to Vaughan for a crit on a garden and he'd just raise his eyebrows or something; I'd go to the art department occasionally with a garden plan.)



Riess: Who in the art department?

Royston: I think it was Margaret Peterson. She was quite a wonderful gal who was involved in abstract form. And Erle Loran, who could again make me work like mad. Both those people.

Riess: Would you argue that landscape architecture is close to painting and sculpture? And what would Tommy say?

Royston: I used to talk in those terms. I think that Tommy didn't really see it that way because he was a transitionist. He came from a knowledge of what the book said, derivative of the Renaissance. Whereas Punk leaned more to the Spanish, Moorish influence, the patio; Spain really turned Punk on. Tommy broke away; he had his own French curves and terminal elements.

Riess: Did he always, or was that after Finland in 1937?

Royston: Yes. That's after Finland. I think that's about the time that the change may have occurred. He never told me that. The Sullivan garden and these Victorian forms sort of began to emerge. We'd have some interesting discussions.

Riess: Well, that's what I was going to ask you. You make it sound much more theoretical and more the sort of thing an art student would talk about.

Royston: That's what it meant to me.

I was hoping to be a designer in Tommy's office. I was generally doing working drawings. I had met Garrett and we'd have these theoretical discussions on space.

And people like Kepes [Gyorgy] came along at Harvard with the Language of Vision, which really made so much sense to me. And Mies van der Rohe and the whole international school. To me they were talking about landscape architecture. I couldn't get Tommy to really read it that way. He would tolerate me and I'd sketch planes, masses and volumes out of what he was doing in order to try to abstract the garden so that we could really understand it. And he enjoyed it.

When I was in Tommy's office we put several exhibits together.

Riess: One was at Cargos where they had the Aalto furniture.

Royston: Yes. Serge Chermayeff did the exhibit. I assisted. He did the kind of basic layout. We could get into theory a little bit. Tommy would say, "Well, if Bob wants to explain it his way, okay, it doesn't hurt if he can relate it to art, fine."

Riess: There was no argument then. He didn't feel he was being challenged by this?

Royston: No. I think he surely felt he was being challenged at times, he felt a little pressure. But on the other hand he didn't feel that he was that far from what I was saying.

Messenger: Well, one of the things that I get out of it is that Garrett and Kiley and Rose were really experimental, "let's try this, on this plane"... And like the Mondrian kind of gardens you were doing, everything was really experimental, taking, as you say, sculpture and painting forms, and using them right on that plane, almost transferring the canvas to the ground plane. But Tommy just picked up notions, sort of changing views and things like that but never broke away, as you say, completely from the Beaux Art tradition. He broke away from the symmetry and the axial things, just to take it around the tree, but...

Royston: Yes, I'd say that's right. He would be delighted, as would Punk Vaughan, by saying, "I only used four plant materials on this garden." He saw them really as structure. Both he and Punk didn't mind too much clipping a tree once in a while. They were both really transitionists, Punk a little younger than Tommy, and very good friends.

There was one other person on the horizon at that time, who did very good gardens, a landscape architect, Ned Rucker. He did a good job.

Riess: Contemporary with Tommy?

Royston: Yes. We watched his work, also; whenever he did something we'd go see it.

Riess: I was wondering, when you went to work for Tommy in 1938, where else you might have gone. Was his the only office anyway?

Royston: There were others like Rucker; there was Helen Van Pelt practicing in Marin County. She was respected because she'd done a couple of gardens for Frank Lloyd Wright.

Riess: Who were your contemporaries from that class who were most sympathetic with what you were doing? Bostic, Gordon, Jones, etc.

Royston: I've lost track of them. There were only about five of us that were sort of working together. But the most creative person out of all those people would be John Bostic and I don't know what happened to him.

Riess: Were you and your classmates touched by Telesis?

Royston: I went to Telesis meetings because of Garrett. I don't think that there was anybody else in that class that was really oriented to Telesis.

Riess: And you didn't stay with it, did you? What was your feeling about it?

Royston: There were a lot of people who dedicated a lot of time; I gave some time, but not too much.

Riess: Yes. So it was a cause, in other words.

Royston: Yes, that's right. It was good because it really was a cause. It exposed the housing issue. Worked for the integration of the arts, crafts and professions.

Some of the best work Tommy was doing at that time was in public housing. I worked on the Valencia Housing project in the office and then went out and supervised the installation. There were sculptures of Benjamin Bufano's; all that was kind of "way out."

And the World's Fair, didn't that come along about 1939?

Riess: Yes.

Royston: I worked on Tommy's exhibits at the fair. That was a lot of fun.

The only action in landscape architecture was really in the small-scale garden. And the breakthrough that really came in Tommy's office was the Metropolitan Life Insurance [Parkmerced, San Francisco]. It wasn't necessarily the Radburn Plan and each of these blocks was not great architecture. They were two-story apartments (townhouses) and they suited San Francisco. In back was a garden court and in the front was the street.

Riess: Are you saying that this was his concept?

Royston: Very much so. The basic architectural concept, the pie-shaped blocks, was an evolvment in design that came from an old gentleman architect by the name of Schultze who worked for Metropolitan Life. He came out here and together they developed this concept. We'd design these courts and public spaces for moderate income, I guess middle income families.

Riess: How did that job come to him?

Royston: Probably because of Tommy's reputation. He was the best in the Bay Area. I'm sure the architect came to him.

Riess: He didn't have to augment his office staff tremendously to take it on?

Royston: Punk came over and Doug Baylis began to work at that time.

I think that most work that comes to a landscape architect comes from a job well done, and that job brings another one. And the question might be, "How do you get the first job to get started?" [Laughter] I just don't know. Somebody likes you or sees you or hears you talking or something and then you're given an assignment. Tommy never got involved, for example, in parks and recreation. It is the public gardens which really interested me.

### 3) Tommy and the Architects He Worked With

Royston: He also at that time had a strong relationship with Bill Wurster and Gardner Dailey, Bolton White, Hervey Clarke, all in the contemporary breakaway from tradition. I think for awhile they wouldn't do a house without Tommy doing the garden.

Messenger: That was Bill's [Wurster] feeling, at least. He'd just right away tell the client, "I think you should see Mr. Church." And they worked together so much.

Royston: Yes. And they worked beautifully together. Tommy broke away from some of the private garden work when he got into the design of Parkmerced. That success began to get him involved in the permanent housing, low-cost housing. Bill Wurster did the Valencia project. And Ernest Born did the North Beach project. The site work for each was Tommy's.

Riess: Did he welcome that kind of involvement with the big thing?

Royston: I think he did. He had a reputation for building a maintenance-free garden, just easy understandable spaces, well-built--they wouldn't fall down. All you had to do was keep the ivy clipped and the lawn clipped, and the trees. That was just what they wanted. The more money they had, the more interested they were in maintenance.

Riess: When you talk about Wurster and Born and so on as being "the breakaway" architects, in a way I should think then that they would have been interested in a breakaway landscape architect, like Eckbo, more than Church.



- Royston: They felt Tommy was really a modern landscape architect. Aside from the little details, Tommy's work did develop a kind of timeless quality. He always had a tremendous sympathy for large specimen plant materials as a sort of sculpture. He couldn't go wrong. He'd just get these great olive trees or pittisporums, beautifully formed, and that made the garden. His little recognizable details were subordinate to the spatial qualities.
- Riess: When you were there, for those couple of years, did he, when he had a new client, did he take you along?
- Royston: Sometimes, yes. Not too often.
- Riess: How did Tommy present himself at a conference with client, architect and landscape architect?
- Royston: I don't think he ever went deeply into theory about why he did something. He would describe what he had done very well, very clearly. Whether it was over a kitchen table or the conference room, it would be pretty much the same. He had a nice way with people. They liked what he did. They seemed to understand and I don't remember ever any frictions at all.

Tommy's clients became friends. I think that you can say. And they were repeat clients. I think also to a large extent there was a period in there where they would meet also at the same parties. But I'm not sure that Tommy was as enthusiastic as Betsy was about social entertainment.

Thomas D. Church and Bill Wurster were deeply dedicated to what they were doing. They really fought hard for what they believed in. I think that people like [Bill] Wurster, [Ernest] Born, [Gardner] Dailey, [Hervey Parke] Clark, [Francis] Lloyd, [Bolton] White were all very close to their work. And Tommy would probably follow their lead.

The friendship between the architect and the landscape architect was very strong and I cannot help feeling that a great deal of the success of the work came because of that relationship and the trust that the architect had in Tommy's ability. And that the garden form came as much from the architect as it did from the client, probably more so.

- Riess: From the architect, not the landscape architect.
- Royston: No, I meant the program to Tommy, as to what was best, came from the architect as much as it did from the client or from the architecture.



Royston: Tommy had a kind of a wonderful way of seeing the site. I think that he often helped the architect and I think that he often visited sites in later years with the architect before anything was done, and steered him in the right direction.

Messenger: Well, in a lot of cases with Wurster I know that sometimes Wurster would site the house and Tommy would come along and say, "Well, we could put it over here or turn it this way," and Wurster would say, "Oh, yes, you're right." And that happened a lot, I know, with Wurster.

#### 4) Consulting, Contracting, Supervising

Royston: I think that as far as I am concerned Tommy made a tremendous contribution to the profession, not really in the avant garde of design, but in the consistency of good work. He never was a let-down to the profession. He always seemed to have an ability to take on a larger project, but when it got too much, he would tend to break away from it. And he did not ever want the total responsibility for preparing those drawings.

Riess: It sounds like he knew how to get away from the pressure.

Royston: Exactly. He always had that figured out and I always admired it. About 12 years ago we met for lunch, and he said, "Last time I saw you, Bob, I thought I was going to last a lot longer than you." Because I was going so fast.

I was very close to Tommy; he meant a lot to me. And I had this tremendous conflict between Eckbo and Church and who to work for. When I was at sea [the Navy], I'd get an occasional letter. Of course Tommy would never write a letter. Punk wouldn't write a letter. And Garrett would write occasionally. So you have no idea what I went through there because I was waiting for some kind of offer from Tommy.

Riess: When you had left to go overseas, there was no arrangement about what would happen?

Royston: No.

And I imagine he continued on the housing during the war, a lot of housing work, because when I left him we had done at least 20 separate major temporary housing projects in the Bay Area. And you can still see them today. The houses are all gone, but the trees are there.

Royston: I remember the pleasure it was working in that scale. I remember one day he said, "Well, Bob, all they've given me is 100-scale." And I said, "I think I can do a planting plan in 100-scale." And I took speed ball pens--at that time we didn't have felt-tips or anything--and so I used those, and I just would make a dot where a tree was to be. And then key that clump to a plant list and then in order that there were no problems, after a certain contractor got the job, then Tommy would sell that contractor on the idea that I should oversee the work in the field as the foreman, so that I could make field adjustments to my own work. [Laughter] And I did that several times.

Once I had about 25 trucks working on top soil and digging holes in solid granite out there in the Russian section near 3rd Street. And it was a tremendous experience for me. Of course, Tommy would come and check once every two weeks or so, but he cut down on his supervision tremendously because I was out there getting paid by the contractor so he [Tommy] didn't have to pay me and he got this supervision done. [Laughter]

And as a matter of fact Tommy had a marvelous way of following through on a job that way and he had creative ways of doing it. He had his own contractor for a while. Just about every job that Tommy did was installed by some subsidiary in one way or another. He might not have money involved in it, but he certainly had his own reliable crew in the field. So that his drawings never really had to be as tight as they would be with competitive bidding.

Messenger: Did you work with Floyd Gerow very much?

Royston: Oh yes. I was one of his crewmen or of George Martin's crewmen in the summertime. George Martin was before Gerow.

##### 5) Post-War, Expanded Church Office

Riess: You were speaking of being in the trenches or at sea, thinking about what would happen when you returned. I heard that Tommy did want you to be a partner, in fact.

Royston: I didn't know that but my name was on the door when I got back. I didn't know what to do. I liked them both.

Messenger: Did you go with Garrett?

- Royston: Yes. Garrett was more in the avant-garde; it was called Eckbo, Royston, and Williams. That was the firm, 1945, which formed out of it. Tommy was disappointed.
- Riess: He had just assumed...
- Royston: He had just assumed, yes. If he'd come out strongly, then I would have moved to Tommy.
- Messenger: Did you think you would have more freedom in designing with Garrett? Is that part of the reason? Because Tommy, while he didn't inhibit anybody, but it is clear...
- Royston: Yes. Tommy was just more of a transitionist, but that wouldn't have held me back, and never did. While Garrett was very definitely one of my peers, contemporary, and we had discussed theory for many years by that time.
- Riess: So it sounds like the invitation was just louder and clearer from Garrett. You felt surer going in that direction.
- Royston: Yes, and it never really came strongly from Tommy.
- Riess: Milono was there after the war. It sounds like it was a real mob scene for awhile, actually.
- Messenger: Yes, because Halprin was there at the same time that Rockrise was there in the beginning. Halprin came after he had been in the service. It was post-war. Rockrise came because he had worked with Tommy on Ed Stone's Panama Hotel in Panama City and that's where they met. He came out here to work for Tommy because he wanted to be exposed to landscape architecture. And Milono was working with Wurster upstairs.
- Riess: Well, I wondered what it meant that there was this activity and then it peaked.
- Messenger: Well, he cut down. During the fifties, particularly, he suddenly realized, I think, that it could become a very big business and he didn't want that.
- Royston: I think you're right.
- Messenger: He wanted to be sure that he was still involved with everything. He didn't want to be an administrator ever. And so that's why he cut back in a way. But also you have to realize that during the time when there were all the sculptors and the artists and the architects

Messenger: getting together in Tommy's office--like this was mostly I guess when Jack Stafford was there and June Meehan a little later-- there was more time somehow in those days to sit around and talk about those things.

Royston: Yes. That was all after the war.

Messenger: Yes, and then later there just wasn't enough time and people's businesses got too busy. And then the whole thing changed.

Royston: That was really a wonderful period, before the war. There's a show on right now in the Oakland Museum by Margaret de Patta. Have you seen it?

Riess: Yes, I've seen it.

Royston: Well, I never heard of her until I was working in the office at Tommy's one day and Betsy came in and they were exclaiming about this ring. It was a de Patta ring; I'm sure she still has it. But it was a tremendous thing. I met Margaret shortly after that and after the war did a great deal of work with her, in their own garden, and traded garden drawings for jewelry. She was one of the experimentalists, as was Claire Falkenstein. That was a whole different group than the group that worked with Tommy. You know, sort of avant garde.

Riess: This was the San Francisco Art Institute crowd?

Royston: Yes, and the California Labor School, also. All the young radicals that were involved with the arts, crafts, architecture.

## 6) Tommy's Way of Working

Royston: Tommy never liked to get too involved with politics. He was a good, clear thinker. If the chips were really down, once in a while, he would write a letter, but not very often. He wrote one about three years ago objecting to something on the waterfront and I think it had a tremendous impact. He could have been very effective, but he just absolutely refused to get involved.

But then that allowed him to do what he wanted to do in the way he most wanted to do it, I guess. He enjoyed that drive down to the country and visiting the gardens. People got used to that routine. Half his time was out of the office, following up on his gardens and plants; he liked that, working with the clients and with Floyd Gerow.



- Riess: I also heard that he put in this sort of 16-hour day and he'd be there all weekend.
- Royston: That wasn't my experience. I think that's exaggerated. He'd come bounding up the steps about 8:30 in the morning and stoke up the old stove--we had a Franklin stove in the office, ran the pipes around to heat the place, that was our heating. Then I think we all sort of cleared out of there about 5:00. We'd come down Saturday morning. He liked to be down there then and I used to go down on Saturday morning. Maybe that was even a requirement, I don't know, but somehow we worked five and a half days, I think.
- Messenger: Well, Jack Stafford says that they put in a lot more hours when he was there and they worked very hard, and over-time, but they liked it. And Floyd Gerow says that he can remember times when Tommy would be there 'til late, go home, sleep three hours, and come back and do some more work, just to get these things out. But then I said, "Well, Floyd, you said there weren't any drawings." [Laughter]
- Royston: Tommy was always very enthusiastic about things, with a kind of a joy of life. For example, departing from the symmetrical pool-- I think Tommy really is as responsible as anybody for the popularity of the kidney. But it was a great thing. People liked it. [Laughter]
- Messenger: But there were so many pools after that shape that are so different.
- Riess: You talked about how Punk Vaughan directed you with grunts almost. When you were working for Tommy, how did he say whether he liked your work? Did he scribble notes or what did he do?
- Royston: He might make an overlay and interpret what he thought it should be. We really never had any conflicts. I think we probably would have had, if we'd continued.
- Riess: You were really an apprentice then?
- Royston: Yes, up until maybe the last year. I was really an apprentice for two years. I think I worked for Tommy up until about September of '42, so that would be the summer of '38, '39, '40 and '42.
- Messenger: You probably kept in touch with Tommy's work, though, over the years.
- Royston: Oh, yes, at least to some extent.

We did Thacher School in Southern California, which is something that came up about eight years ago. Tommy was our consultant. Tommy would get these projects. He'd have these inquiries and he



Royston: would recommend our office once in a while. It was too big a job for him; it was a master plan for the whole campus. But he said he would be a consultant and we listed him as a consultant. That's really what he wanted to do and he was well-paid for it. He enjoyed meeting the people and he'd come and look at the designs and give us his thoughts.

Riess: Do you remember him talking about influences on him, gardens that you know that he liked a lot?

Royston: Well, I'm sure that Tommy's trips to Europe and the old gardens and the old masters had a tremendous influence, as I would hope they would have on anyone who saw them.

I think somebody like Catherine Wurster had a lot of influence with him. That's what I meant, that his contemporaries did influence him.

Riess: How about keeping up through publications?

Royston: I think that Tommy was well known to the major architectural magazines, and the editors would visit him. I think that Architectural Record had a strong connection; I know that Arts and Architecture did. And of course Sunset magazine. House Beautiful obviously was very strong, maybe one of the strongest, because he did the book for them.

Riess: And exciting work was being done in other countries. Did Tommy have any interaction with the practitioners there? In Brazil, for instance?

Royston: I don't think so, not there.

Riess: Would he look up new landscape architects around the world?

Royston: Not as much as Punk Vaughan would, I don't think. I'm not sure, but I think that if you checked you would find that he visited the modern architects, not landscape architects.

After the war, there was a tremendous growth. There were good, capable landscape architects in Denmark and in Sweden and some in Germany. I'm sure Tommy maybe met them, but I know that Punk Vaughan did.

Messenger: I think when he was going to Europe, too, like when he went with Wurster, he went to the Exposition. He was into seeing the art movement and those kinds of thing. But he was also shopping around for things for the gardens; like when he'd go to Denmark he'd pick

Messenger: up some lamps or obelisks or something like that. He was shopping around, too, just seeing things, but not so much contacting people.

Royston: Yes, I think one of the delightful things that Tommy did that I often wish more of us could have done was that he would just descend upon a nursery. With a guiding planting plan he would just go to the nursery. That's a wonderful way to do it.

Riess: Is there some sort of formula to a Church garden?

Royston: "Did he have a formula?" I think really I would never say that about Tommy, but a lot of people did: "Tommy Church had a formula." Well, actually, if low-maintenance is a formula, yes he had that.

He'd aim at low-maintenance. Pathways had to go around the house, you had to have a complete circulation system, spatially it had to be observable, and usually there was a terrace next to the house. It was all curves that worked with each other quite well and it had a definite frame. There was seldom a deliberate mystery to space that pulled you into it. Large plant materials, but I don't really think that's a formula. I think it's just good, logical design.

I wish I could be of more help. All I can say is those were very rich years for me, I enjoyed them thoroughly.

Riess: That modernism was not happening within the school then.

Royston: No, it was not. But it was an exciting time.

## 7) The Test of Time

Riess: Were there ideas that Church discarded along the way, very definite ideas that he left behind and didn't return to?

Messenger: No.

Royston: Not really. What is it, a 40-year practice?

Riess: Yes, or more.

Royston: In thinking about the details, I'm not sure there was that much difference at any phase. It might be good for you, in those terms, to look through his book, which I will do also, but I always sensed

Royston: a kind of a consistency. I don't remember any major break, except something like the Sullivan garden, which would always happen occasionally. Or the exhibits for the World's Fair were like nothing he'd ever done before, getting into some kind of sculptural panels on a wall or the experiment with corrugated transite or something like that, those are the kinds of things he would experiment with. And then you might not see it come up again for quite a while.

Riess: I've been reading a fascinating book called Conversations with Architects.\* And often they say, "If I could do it again, I would have done it this way" or even that "I don't like that building now" for just vast numbers of reasons, and I wondered whether this happened with Church.

Royston: Not so much with Tommy, not so much with landscape architecture. If you've got a grasp on space and scale, those things don't change. The architects today may think they change, but unless people get smaller or get larger--which they are tending to do, I suppose, or at least their bottoms are getting wider.

I don't mind hearing somebody say, "I could do it differently." Obviously everybody at a time-think period is going to go back and reanalyze what he did and maybe would change this or that. But, generally, it was a good job when it was done if it's a good designer and an experienced person.

I wouldn't want to change some of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings or Sullivan's buildings. They're really quite elegant. I hope that a good architect would really have enough humility to realize that his work can really only be judged in its time.

Tommy's work, I think that you would feel the same way. "That's the way it should have been at the time that it was done" and today it wouldn't be the same problem, it wouldn't be the same house, nothing would be the same.

Riess: Actually, I think that dissatisfaction comes where the architect or the artist has to compromise and maybe there hasn't been that much compromise in Tommy's work.

Royston: I don't think there has been that much compromise in Tommy's work, very little I think. And I think that's very good.

And I suppose architects do have to compromise much more in general than landscape architects. There are fewer preconceptions with the garden and the garden is a wonderful place for experiment.

---

\*John W. Cook and Heinrich Klotz, Conversations With Architects, Praeger, New York, 1973.

Royston: [Speaking of followthrough in client personnel] Normally what happens--this happens to all people in creative fields--the city fathers, the bureaucracy, the client, changes. They know nothing of the past. The boom comes along and they start from scratch. It's just heartbreaking to see so many good ideas lost. And I think Tommy could avoid that.

I don't think there's ever been enough emphasis given to the fact that the public domain and the people that monitor the public space, when they change, the followthrough changes. There's no followthrough in cities. The great dreams of a person who might be a poet in charge of parks, and a well-loved man and so on, he leaves the scene, and the next person comes on, oriented in a different way, and says, "We're going to pave it all, the kids need baseball diamonds." The public is so busy on the side that they can't see that the whole destruction of the environment can take place just by a change in personnel. I don't know how you combat that.

Riess: Pam-Anela, do you have any more questions?

Messenger: Really more a comment. When you were asking about Tommy's "formula--" people have bugged me in a way about his style, comments like "Well, he has this style, or that style." And I think it's as Bob was saying, "He does not have a style, he has Style!" He deals with each one.

Royston: I once tried to sort that whole thing out. It's the difference between style and fashion, and personal handwriting--I think you know when you see a Tommy Church garden. Generally it's because of the detail. The spaces vary, but you will see a repetition in material and method of construction as well as form.

People in our society are oriented towards detail; they can't really see spaces. They actually feel good in the space, but they'll blame it and the recollection will be what they see in detail. You can look at the most beautiful parks today and if the same log structure is in a bad park and a good park (this is detail), people will say, "Oh, I saw a park just like that the other day." But they might be two entirely different experiences. They see detail, but they subconsciously respond to space, but they can't articulate it. It's been one of the things that's let the poor designer in because he can easily copy the detail.

To be a proper judge of Tommy's work you would take what's important and judge by that: is the garden in scale with the house? And you find that it is when Tommy does it and the spatial experiences all vary.



## 8) Thomas Church's Influence on the Profession

Riess: There is an article by Michael Laurie that has a quote in it that I found interesting. Let me read it: [from M. Laurie, "Thomas D. Church, Evolution of a New Theory of Garden Design," Landscape Design, Feb. 1973]

"The influence which Mr. Church's leadership in design innovation and the development of principles and techniques suited to the contemporary needs and physical advantages of California, was enormous. [sic] A new generation of landscape architects appeared after the War, many having served their early professional days in Mr. Church's office. Their initial showing at the 1948 exhibition, although indicating technical competence and an appreciation of the functions of a garden, lacked deep understanding of the garden as a total work of art, producing rather an agglomeration of limited artistic arrangements and details tending towards gimmickry in a burst of youthful exuberance. Such is the nature of a revolution, but the work of the master himself continued to show the greatness which was possible through simplicity and restraint and in time the beneficial influence of practical examples has been felt throughout the nation and the world."

Royston: I don't think that the insertion of the 1948 exhibit into that particular dissertation is necessary at all. I do not disagree with Mr. Laurie's statement that Tommy has had a strong influence, for all the reasons that I've given. He had a consistency; he was a traditionalist. But it doesn't hold up in the light that design went much farther than that. At the same time Tommy was working in a rather stable framework, balanced design, and not particularly experimental spatial arrangement, but damned good landscape architecture.

There was a kind of understanding of art that went far beyond what Tommy was doing. To ignore that is very sad and shows a complete lack of an understanding of what spatial experience is.

I think that it's one of those strange things that happen. There was a tremendous exuberance, obviously, in the Pencil Points articles for the idea of relating spaces and what you see, line, form, as a total art composition and sculpture within a frame that was purely fun and experiment. But it formed a very strong basis for the landscape that was to come in the parks, whether it was parks or land planning or anything else.



Royston: Tommy never got involved in anything controversial. He never got involved in the public gardens. And those public gardens that have been coming along for the past 30 years are going to far outlast any of those private gardens. The projects of major importance that Tommy was able to get involved with should be recorded. I think that the Metropolitan Life project is of major importance.

Riess: How about the Santa Cruz campus?

Royston: He had something to do with that and I think it is of major importance.

Messenger: Yes, but if you're talking about things that people want to change, he has said, "If we had looked at it better or more closely, we would have done it completely differently. We would have laid out the roads completely differently."

Royston: The roads destroyed it. It's not a peripheral system.

To sum it up I think that Tommy's been a very strong influence, had a very strong influence on my life, in the early days. I think that he's had a tremendous input to landscape architecture. I'm not sure that he isn't more right than some of us are today, butting our heads against society every day. Tommy wouldn't do that. But that's the only way I think you move. You've just no idea today the number of meetings it takes to communicate on any issue. Tommy said long ago, "The hell with it!"

His work would speak for itself in terms of the landscape on the small garden or the garden space and an occasional consultation into something of much more major magnitude, but that's really where the contribution is. I would really have liked to have seen him push on. He had the opportunity many, many times but that probably would have killed him. He's a very free spirit.

Messenger: Well, what exactly was the influence then, do you think? I understand his charisma and I feel it, too.

Royston: The garden, by doing it well, became the stepping stone. And if we hadn't had that good, strong statement by Tommy as a first step-- in other words, he brought respect to the profession of landscape architecture, he and Vaughan and a few others around the country that allowed all the profession to build.

Tommy was a part of the foundation and that was his value. He built into the minds of architects a respect for landscape architects that they were able to follow. They were accepted and then it grew from that point.

Royston: The same thing was happening, I believe, on the east coast. The Olmsted office has always been active and been doing a good job. And this was happening. But in the Bay Area I think that that would be safe to say.

Riess: That he held a parallel place to the Olmsted office in the east as a solid foundation?

Royston: Yes, except again they reached out, you see, into public gardens and public spaces. And had much more effect than Tommy ever could, because he wouldn't do it. I'm just saying that with Tommy, building this first step of attracting an audience of his contemporaries in architecture who respected him, helped open the door on the west coast to an acceptance of landscape architecture.

There are other areas that we've known about for a long time in the landscape profession that have never had any national acceptance until very recently that maybe Tommy had come along later, he would have picked up.

But he really didn't have the temperament for that. You've got to really love people en masse; you have to really work with them. And it's very hard. It's so much easier and so much more fun to have an individual client and a predetermined canvas.

Tommy knew the size of the scale that he could handle and stay personally involved. Beyond that he wasn't interested. And I'm not interested beyond that, either.

Messenger: Larry Halprin says the same thing as you, when you ask him what influence was Tommy, that he was a stepping-stone. And it's interesting because there are so many of you, the key firms in this area and in the country which happen to be here--a lot of the principles of those firms came from Tommy's office, spent some time there. Maybe you're all disciples in a bigger order of things. Tommy didn't want to do that, or couldn't do that in that scale. But the idea, or somehow the rapport, something, was carried through.

Royston: I think the main thing is that Tommy helped open the door to landscape architecture as an accepted profession by simply doing a good job, which I think can be the highest compliment.



Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Walter Doty

A SUNSET EDITOR ASSESSES THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN SINCE 1939

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess





TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Walter Doty

|                                               |     |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) 1939, The Breaking of the Box, and Telesis | 234 |
| 2) <u>Sunset</u> Magazine and Tommy           | 239 |
| 3) Keeping Up With California                 | 241 |
| 4) Thomas Church's Hallmarks and Followers    | 246 |

Walter Doty

April 19, 1977

Interview held in Mr. Doty's office adjoining his home in Los Altos  
Present at Interview: Michael McCaskey

1) 1939, The Breaking of the Box, and Telesis

Doty: The Bay Area was ready for Tommy and Tommy was ready for the Bay Area. There were more good clients probably waiting here for Tommy Church than if he had gone to Seattle or to Los Angeles--well, maybe Seattle would have been happy hunting grounds for him.

Riess: It was a particular kind of client that was waiting for Tommy?

Doty: It was the client that had a dream, that was willing to listen to a man who could give their dream structure and that man was Tommy Church with his charm and his elegance.

The association that he had with the leading architects also was tremendous in the early days.

Riess: Didn't that start down in Pasatiempo with Wurster in the twenties and early thirties?

Doty: Yes. I was in the advertising business in the thirties but in 1939 I was with Sunset.

Riess: When you were hired by L.W. Lane, did that mean that they were ready also for a whole new look at Sunset?

Doty: No, L.W. had more or less the Better Homes & Gardens attitude rather than my attitude [chuckles]. But he was perfectly willing to turn over the editorship, no criticism, no direction. The fact that I might pick up what he would consider "barns" or "chicken coops" was all right with him. He would criticize, but he would allow it.

Those were the days of the early Telesis, the early "breaking of the box." The great search that these people had at that time was tremendous. They changed "rooms" to "space."

Doty: Tommy represented freedom from "decorating" a house. Landscaping had meant gussying-up structures that weren't worth it. Tommy was a "behaviorial" landscaper, to use a modern term; gardens to live in were more important.

Those days there was a headiness, an extreme sort of feeling as if it were a crusade we were on, not just something new or different. It was a social movement--the breaking of the box.

These guys were not necessarily plantsmen, they were architects, in the sense that their landscapes were not "remedial" but creative. And I was tremendously involved, tremendously absorbed with this bunch of architects and landscape architects.

Riess: Like [Garrett] Eckbo?

Doty: Well, immediately it was with Tommy. It was Tommy and then [Doug] Baylis and then [Lawrence] Halprin and then [Robert] Royston was at work, [Ed] Williams was at work. All these people.

The early architects brought the landscape architects in right at the start. Wurster would not locate the house until Tommy came in. This was understood by a good client, that Tommy had to come in. He was the guy that placed the house, that oriented the house, that looked forward to all of the activity that would be around that house. That was different, too.

Riess: I guess there were a few women landscape designers who were more the horticulturalists.

Doty: They entered in in a funny sort of way: Tommy understood that following his austere answer others would come in and do the planting.

I think it was at some meeting of the Garden Club that Halprin and Tommy and I and Baylis were getting questions from the floor. Tommy told about revisiting a house that he landscaped. The head of the house was sweeping off the concrete and Tommy asked him how he liked the garden. He said, "Before you came, I was a gardener. Now I'm a janitor." [Laughs] Tommy told that on himself, this was the great thing of that guy. And if I were to ask a bunch of architects or landscape architects their favorite ground cover, Tommy would put "asphalt" down. [Laughs] I'd print it, too.

Halprin was always the purist. He'd refuse to deal with any of the ersatz material. He really believed that landscaping was an art form and he said so.



Sunset Magazine  
July 1940

## TELESIS

**tel'e-sis, n.** Progress intelligently planned and directed; the attainment of desired ends by the application of intelligent human efforts to the means.

**T**HIS MONTH we introduce to you a new organization called Telesis. Here, briefly, is its story, by its members:

"Cities and communities of the San Francisco Bay Region have grown to their present development entirely within the last 90 years. They are largely the result of exuberant vitality. There has been little planning; buildings have been inadequately designed; future development has been ignored. Because this condition exists in our region, we, who are young men in the related professions of architecture, city and regional planning, landscape architecture and industrial design, have come together and formed this group—Telesis."

Telesis is studying Western people and their environment—places for work, places for living, places for play—and practical ways in which poor conditions can be improved. Beginning July 25, some of this work will be shown in the South Gallery of the San Francisco Museum of Art.

*Sunset* asked Telesis to tackle, in its way, problems which confront *Sunset* readers. We present the results in the following 10-page section, "Space for Living."

*Good planning in community, home and garden gives more enjoyable and usable space for living. Paul T. Frankl believes that good interior decoration also means more space for living and named his recent book on creative interior decoration and design, "Space for Living." (Doubleday, Doran & Co., \$3.50)*



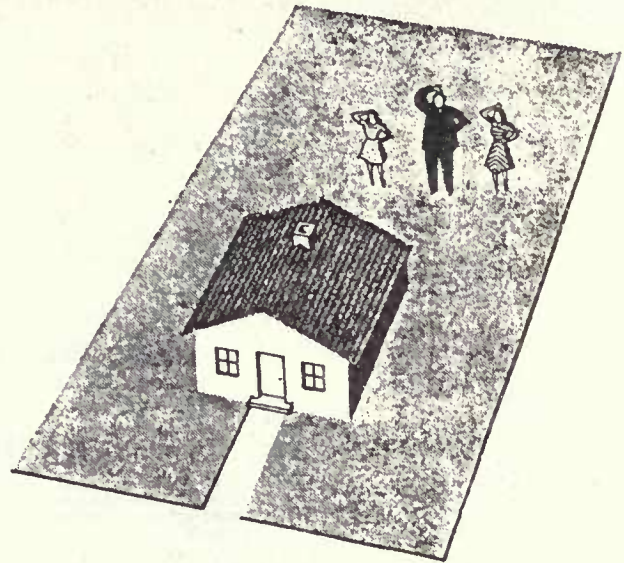
# SPACE FOR LIVING

235b

## Landscaping for Use

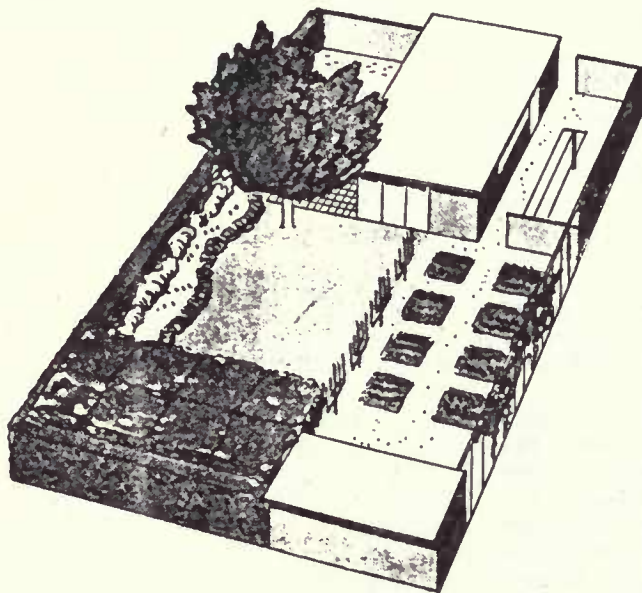
By Garrett Eckbo of Telexis

What is important in landscaping anyway? Foundation plants? flowers? trees? hedges? bird baths? That depends on three things: (1) Your individual problem—your house, your lot and you. (2) How much space you have and how you want to use it. (3) The materials needed to make this space pleasantly usable.



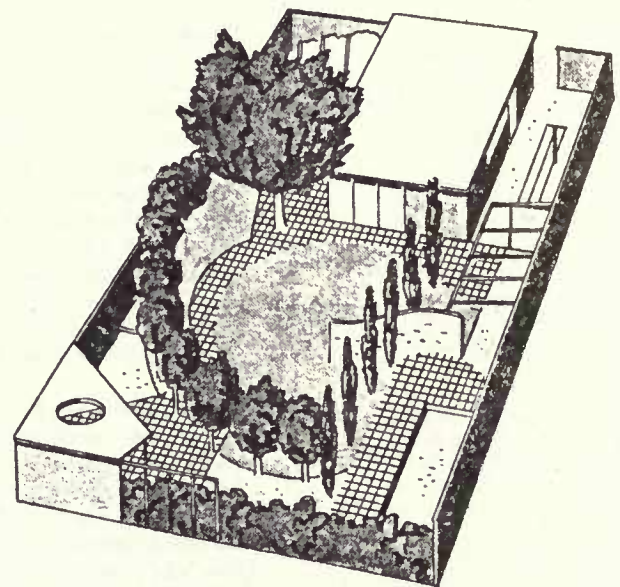
### FOR PLAY OR GARDENING

What to do with all this space? Are you an enthusiastic gardener or a lazy one? Do you want lots of flowers or is badminton more fun? How about swimming? and sun-bathing? Will the neighbors stare? Do the children and the dog need separate space? Do you have a view?



### GARDEN FOR GARDENERS

Here is a garden for the person who likes garden work. There is grass to cut; flowers and vegetables (in square beds, surrounded by gravel); trimmed hedges; trees espaliered (center) and pleached (lower left). This garden is cheap to install but expensive to maintain.



### ENJOYMENT WITHOUT WORK

A garden for the lazy gardener has a "lawn" of thyme or camomile. Sand and paving around house and pools; color from self-sufficient plants and structural elements. Unclipped hedges; trees au naturel. Pipe pergola (center right). Expensive to install, cheap to maintain.



# Choosing Your Neighborhood

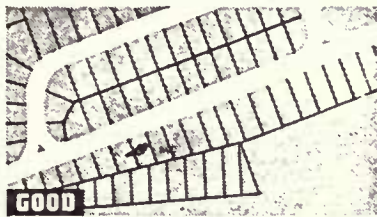
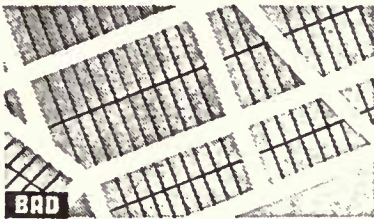
235c

By Francis J. Violich of Telesis

EVERYONE plans his home with utmost care and thought, but how many persons think of the design of the neighborhood in which they place their home? The economic stability of the investment in a home depends largely on the physical layout of lots and streets of the neighborhood.

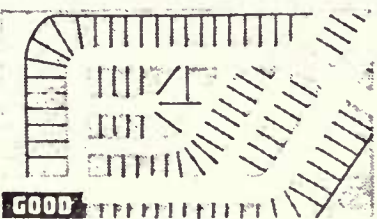
A careful buyer looks at residential areas that are now run down and sees that one reason for the deterioration is that certain standards of design have been lacking, whereas in others the neighborhood "is always good." The well-designed subdivision makes for a sound community and investment.

## 1 • SHAPE AND SIZE OF LOT



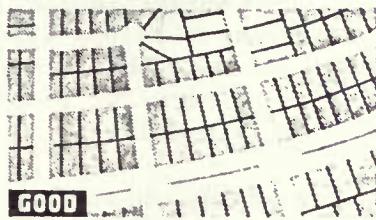
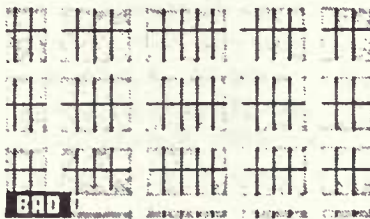
A long narrow lot is wasteful, difficult and costly to develop. For a medium-sized suburban lot, a proportion of 60 x 100 is better than 50 x 150. Avoid building on a small lot—6000 square feet as a minimum will give privacy but no more than enough outdoor living space.

## 2 • CHARACTER OF STREET



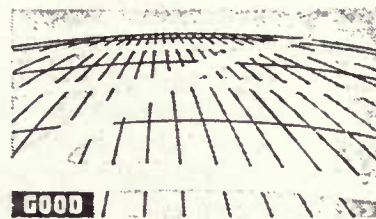
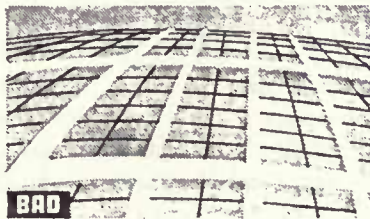
Is the lot on a quiet street? If it is you'll save in danger risks, maintenance costs, appearances and family health. Every street in the subdivision need not be a through street. Main thoroughfares should bound the area forming a superblock: interior streets should discourage through traffic. Your best bet is a street that goes nowhere.

## 3 • SHAPE OF BLOCK



Buy in a long block with a pedestrian way. This means fewer intersections, lower original utility costs, and a more harmonious arrangement of homes along the street.

## 4 • TOPOGRAPHY AND VIEW



The most difficult and costly lot to build on is the one that slopes across the width rather than from front to back. For safety, convenience and appearance, the street should follow the contours rather than rise straight up the hill. See that your view is protected by set-back restrictions.



Every neighborhood should have its own shopping center conveniently located within walking distance and with no more provision for store space than is needed. (Fifty feet of frontage per hundred persons is ample.) Schools and parks should be easily and safely reached.

## 6 • ZONING AND A MASTER PLAN



Are you choosing a neighborhood that is amply protected by a good zoning plan and ordinance so that the use of adjoining properties may never affect the value and livability of your home? Likewise, any new district should have a master plan providing for the safe and stable development of the community.

A master plan for the area should be already made or at least be under way by an active planning commission, either city or county, before you purchase. This master plan should include a growing plan, or general land-use plan, a recreation plan, and certainly a plan for future streets and highways. With a carefully prepared and executed plan for the growth of the community, the neighborhood in which you build will always be assured protection from deterioration and congestion.

It cannot be overemphasized that the selection of the neighborhood in which you build or buy be given careful consideration before a final decision.

Doty: Baylis was a "put the garden under control" guy, like Tommy, but with greater emphasis on control of space. He went so far as to employ the same patterns in the back yard as in the front. He was a practical, "how-to-do-it" guy. He was anxious to help the guys that didn't have a lot of money, a poor man's Tommy Church.

Riess: What you said about Tommy and the planting is interesting because some say that Church is more of a plant man than lots of his followers.

Doty: Well, he's come around to being a plant man more than he was in the early days. Church, in the early days, talked of the use of all the property that a person owned.\* There would be a drying yard, a place for vegetables and flowers, a place for the crowd after the game, and allowance for the fact that tricycles are going to be all over that paved area. This [use of space] probably engrossed him more in those days than plants by far, don't you think?

I've been with him when he would scribble on the back of the envelope for 25 bucks. And the landscape plan had to do with the arrangement of space more than anything else. It was a quick "paving goes here and there's room for planting alongside the garage, and let's cut the garage in half."

Riess: Those were fairly small jobs.

Doty: Yes, very small jobs and beautiful jobs.

I think, too--I'm wandering here--we were talking about the beauty of a plan itself on paper. You could look at any of Tommy's plans and they were just as beautiful as the result in landscaping. The client often knew this. I remember Mary Erkenbrack, the ceramacist, she did a set of dinner plates in which the landscape plan was the motif [laughs]. After the whole job was over, he sent the client a dozen of the plates.

But about Tommy and plants, Tommy went down to South America on a job once and I asked him if he knew anything about the plants of the area. He said, "I don't have to know anything about the plants. I just tell the nurseryman I want them so high and dark green." [Laughter]

Another time I remember Tommy talking to somebody, maybe to me, and saying, "You go down to picnic on an area and you love it and you envision the house you're going to build on the knoll. Then you build the house and you put it right smack on the knoll and your picnic area disappears."

---

\*p. 14, 15, Landscape Design, S.F. Museum of Art, 1948



Doty: That's so true, so simple, so real, so honest. This is what I admire so much about Tommy! He had a disarming frankness.

The era of Tommy that I remember most vividly was 1939-1943. Baylis was working for Tommy or was at least very closely associated with Tommy. Baylis would help me out as a new editor of the magazine. When I wanted a collection of steps, within a week I had all the steps from I guess every landscape architect in the business, plus Baylis' input. That would go for any detail that I'd want, whether it would be steps or retaining walls. We'd have two pages of steps, two pages of this, two pages of that, a fantastically wonderful world!

These guys were hungry. That was another thing. That Telesis group--I've forgotten the names of half of them--they were so eager to work, but there weren't enough clients in '39 that had the kind of money that could pay.

Riess: The Telesis group was just coming out of the Depression in a way. Tommy was a whole decade earlier than that, so don't you think he had a different attitude?

Doty: Maybe so. Tommy is ten years ahead of Telesis?

Riess: In terms of when he graduated. That was in 1924 and the Telesis people got out of school in the midst of the Depression.

Doty: But his work in San Francisco--well I reported Tommy before I did Telesis. We had a spread on the work of Telesis with all of the city planning that was just starting at that time.

Riess: I've always thought that Tommy was separate from Telesis.

Doty: No, he wasn't in the Telesis group. I don't mean that. He was working at the same time that Telesis came out and he knew all the people that were in Telesis.

Riess: And the Telesis people would have thought that his work was not relevant, perhaps, whereas theirs was full of relevance?

Doty: Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no. I don't think that's true at all.

Actually Tommy was in Sunset before my time. In 1942, we wrote "... we often talked with Thomas Church of San Francisco. Over the years, much of his work has been shown in Sunset. We liked it because it invariably illustrates a practical, simple answer to a widely experienced garden problem. You may remember his varied ways with wall-cross-trained vines, unusual redwood treatment, etc."





Sunset magazine - May, 1942

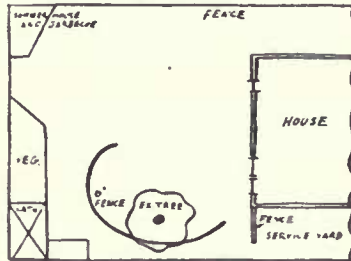
In our work to bring these new values into usable form for *Sunset* readers, we often talk with Thomas Church of San Francisco. Over the years, much of his work has been shown in *Sunset*. We like it because it invariably illustrates a practical, simple answer to a widely experienced garden problem. You may remember his varied ways with walls—cross-trained vines, unusual redwood treatment, etc. Obviously as a garden area becomes more restricted, the wall becomes not only an enclosure but a space for design, color, and texture, saving the ground area for simpler, broader treatment. The small space gardener who has ever attempted to use shrubs and small trees as a screening wall only to find about half of his garden space lost can see the simple wisdom of such walls.

Another characteristic of the Church garden is that it can be photographed almost as soon as it is in. The reason for this early appearance of completeness is generally found in the generous use of structural materials. Many times the design lines of the garden are so fixed in wood, stone, or brick that plant color and texture play a secondary role. The help such treatment brings to the lazy gardener is obvious.

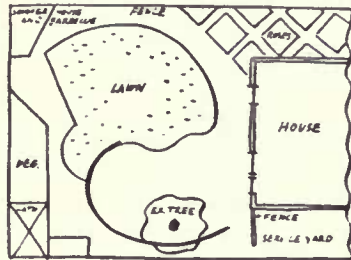
Anxious to bring this technique down to the simplicity of a diagram we asked

Mr. Church to solve a typical backyard problem for us. We present his solution here, fully aware that we are condensing into a few lines many volumes of theory.

Here is the problem. You find yourselves with a 50' x 50' backyard, a shade tree, and a fence. You must have a place to hang out the washing, a vegetable garden, lath house, potting and tool shed, rose garden, berried shrubs, vines, a barbecue, a few fruit trees, a place to sit, and not too big a lawn.



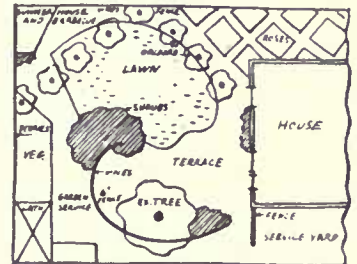
And here's the solution. First set aside the working areas. The lath house, tool shed, and vegetable garden are marked



off in one corner just as you would place a study unit in a large living room. Next we swing a six-foot fence in a crescent under the tree for our "sitting" room. The fence is used in the same way you would use a screen in a large many-purpose room. The sheltered barbecue is given a corner.

Next the lawn area is marked off just as you would place a rug in a room. The rose garden is given a patterned space. A cutting garden could be substituted.

Finally the fruit trees and the berried shrubs are brought into place, observing the same rules as those for placing furniture in a room as far as traffic and weight are concerned. The vines are handled like pictures or tapestries on the walls.



And there you have a well-furnished multiple-purpose outdoor room that doesn't require the services of a gardener and that will be as attractive in January as in June. A similar approach to a 25' garden or to a 75' x 100' garden results in equally satisfying solutions.

Doty: What I'm trying to show is that Tommy had the same viewpoint as the Telesis group but came before them. Specifically, Tommy had nothing to do with Telesis. He was a loner.

Riess: My sense is that Telesis was "making a better world" through city planning and through a better environment. And that wasn't Tommy's interest.

Doty: You're absolutely wrong. I think he was just as much concerned as any one in his own way. I think that although he didn't--well, Halprin vs. Tommy Church: Halprin was a kind of a guy that couldn't revisit the homes that he landscaped; he loved people but disliked persons; he never could go back the same way that Tommy can.

Halprin, from a design standpoint and certainly vocally, spread the word that Halprin sees things that other people don't see. I think that's true, but I found Church in those early days just as much of a Telesis mind as anyone else. He saw that you were trying to use every inch of space that you have, and gardens to live in can be just as important as community planning or city planning or anything else.

I think that the landscape architect was more responsible for the new way of living than the architect. I think that Tommy, for the breaking of the box, was probably as responsible as anyone with this whole new concept that people had.

I can remember days in which if you put the living room in the back instead of in the front, it was newsworthy. I think in Pasadena and somewhere else I photographed and ran a great article on this person who had found a way of life, he said, by putting the living room in the back, rather than facing the street.

Riess: Except California's always had the model of the Spanish atrium-oriented home.

Doty: That's why we got so interested in Cliff May, this history of the ranch house. In fact I got so crazy about the ranch houses that I thought this was the future house. If the builder could follow any pattern, he ought to follow that pattern of the ranch house.

Now you know what the tract builders tell me? (And this is what this whole thing comes around to, too, that people don't care whether their house are poorly oriented.) I say, "Well at least put the garage on the west side." (This is in the valley where you've got a lot of sun coming in there.) "You want to block that heat from traveling through the house."

Doty: The builders say, "The people themselves don't have that same preference that you have, my friend. I can sell them the south as well as the north side of the street or whatever. It doesn't make any difference. People will pick the house up because of some gimmicks that I'll give them rather than this orientation business."

2) Sunset Magazine and Tommy

Riess: Did Sunset really "cover" the gardens in a news sense?

Doty: Yes.

Riess: You would see your role as reporting on Tommy's gardens?

Doty: Yes, that's all.

Riess: I'd like to understand the distinction between the kind of work he was doing with House Beautiful, where he was writing a lot of articles, and what he was doing with Sunset.

Doty: This time I'm talking of is before House Beautiful discovered him really. [Chuckles] House Beautiful picked up Tommy Church later. We at Sunset were romping around in the beginning in an area that hadn't been discovered yet. Oh, long before Tommy was discovered by House Beautiful his work appeared in Sunset. Sunset and Tommy Church were of the same mold and same connection.

Riess: I wonder how his publication in these magazines affected his business?

Doty: Certainly his publication brought clients to him. That seems obvious. But I remember Tommy saying that his landscaping could be no better than his client. The tougher the client, the better the solution, generally. He hated--or didn't hate, but disliked, he couldn't understand, had no appreciation for--the client that came to him because he was Tommy Church and said, "I'm going to Europe. I'm not going to bother you. I'll be back in six months. I want you to make over the garden."

"I don't even know whether that guy plays badminton or not," he'd say.

I think all of the architects and all of the best clients spurred him on rather than getting him into a pattern. So many take their stuff, when they're established, out of the top drawer, and they repeat it and repeat it. I don't think this is true with Tom.

- Riess: Few landscape architects are as articulate, or at least published as much, as Church. He had so many articles in House Beautiful.
- Doty: Tommy is a many-faceted individual. He has more abilities in all kinds of directions than the average. He's more articulate than others in his time. But I don't think that the articles in House Beautiful are any more than a follow-up of Tommy's earlier work really. Pretty easy for him to look back at the photographs that he'd taken himself and put together what he voiced earlier.
- Riess: Didn't Sunset do its own photography?
- Doty: Well, if the illustration fit, we would use Tommy's photos. If you had to chase out to explain the place, you took your own photos. A heck of a lot of the photos that we showed, and especially in Atherton, as I remember, and the Sullivan garden in San Francisco, the Pasatiempo work, were Tommy's photos, often with no credit.
- Riess: I asked because I was looking at some old Sunsets yesterday in the library with those two-page spreads on paving, and they would state, "All photographs by Thomas Church." How much was that a living for him in those days? Did he need to be doing any of that?
- Doty: No. We didn't have any budget to amount to anything. We might kick a little bit of money Telesis way, but we never kicked very much money Tommy Church way. I think the total budget for extras was 500 bucks. [Chuckles]
- Riess: That seems awfully small. The magazine sure was full of advertisement.
- Doty: Not in those days. We had a 48-page magazine there during the war, and it was a 50-50 deal and then 40-60. That's just changing times, that's all. We're in a different world, right? We've grown up.
- Riess: When you were editor you had your hands full with all the editorial but it sounds like your baby, though, was the garden?
- Doty: I guess landscaping and architecture was the consuming interest. If I'd go to Seattle the architects and the landscape architects would be on my calling lists rather than the home ec or crafts or anything else that was in the magazine, or even travel. The magazine probably in those days reflects that over-interest in that particular field.

I'd always find room for architecture and how to build an adobe house and all that kind of stuff. Even when we were a 48-page magazine, I'd break the pattern of the early Sunset and this adobe section might go for eight pages. This was a pretty big deal for a 48-page magazine.



- Doty: I think this was the thing I did that turned Sunset from being a small magazine into being a bigger magazine, just breaking that tradition of trying to cover the waterfront when you couldn't.
- Riess: Phrases like "garden for living," and "outdoor living room," and "indoor-outdoor living," are those magazine phrases or did Tommy use them himself?
- Doty: Your question is whether he uses these words or did we put these words in his mouth, huh?
- Riess: Yes, kind of.
- Doty: Well, I remember a luncheon in which we talked about the use of the word "landscaping" and where he was in the picture and what words, actually what headlines, could we attach to this bloomin' thing. I think we were at that time erroneously, if I might say it, trying for another angle, but we didn't know what to call landscaping; landscaping was not the word. Tommy had a great deal to do with the way the thing was presented.

I was judged and always will be judged and appreciated by these other people because I respected them and they knew that the way I handled them was going to be all right. I would handle better than Better Homes. (Now I'm bragging a bit.) But there is a crass way to use these people. I was an interpreter with these people and they felt my interpretation, Sunset's interpretation, was superior to that of other magazines.

Liz Gordon was very friendly with all of my people out here that she stole. It was pretty heady for Cliff May and the rest of them to be picked up by House Beautiful. They knew what was going on, and that they could maybe improve the quality of their clientele by being printed in House Beautiful rather than in Sunset. But it was my job to make Sunset, at least to the sophisticate or to the understanding person, a little more real than these other "taste" magazines.

### 3) Keeping Up With California

- Doty: [Talking of population pressures in California] "Can you find it finally?" This is the big question in my mind, "Can you ever find it?" Can you ever escape it. It's going to catch up with you. You can't hide.



Doty: The greatest thing happened to dear old California. I guess these guys didn't know; I didn't know certainly. I wrote California Incorporated when I was in the agency business. "One out of ten return." "The chapter in your life entitled San Francisco." The whole theory was one out of ten would come back to live here so you were promoting travel. You were getting more people out here. We didn't know then that man destroys what he's after by his coming. This is the tragedy of this darn state, getting more people out here. Everyone that squats somewhere destroys California. The very thing they came out here for, they destroy. They just keep on. Dana Point vanishes.

Riess: Somebody like John Muir might have had an inkling of what was happening.

Doty: Yes, only escape though. The escapists are the ones that are reading him. He wandered up from San Jose and through here and it was nothing but a carpet of flowers on the hillside.

But we just shrug our shoulders, and say, "That's the way things go, huh?"

Riess: Did the magazine have that expansionist philosophy in 1939?

Doty: Yes.

Old man Lane was interested in this place down outside of Santa Cruz. He had a friend here in Los Altos, and I was living back in the hills, and we'd spend time together on the train going into San Francisco. I was in the advertising business. The train travel was a little different though in those days. Garden talk was much of the talk on Monday morning.

I don't know whether they thought of increase in population, but the Chamber of Commerce always thought that. The Chamber of Commerce philosophy is "the more people, the more jobs." Keeping Los Altos in any frame of what you came down to Los Altos for is pretty hard to hang on to. I came down to Los Altos because of the pepper trees and the orchards. Well, the orchards disappeared. I guess there are some pepper trees left.

Riess: So that's how you got to know Lane.

Doty: Yes.

Riess: And he wooed you away from the advertising business?

Doty: And into this.

## THIS IS OUR WEST



**O**UR WEST is many things; great things and little things which added together give us a different way of living.

Our West is a series of highways. Highways that stretch out to reach olives, peaches, sugar beets, grain; to find pears, flax, berries, apples, wheat; to challenge mountains; to explore forests; to wind alongside rivers; to climb past timberline into the snow; to hang a thousand feet above the ocean and sink to touch its sand.

Highways that wind across a patch-quilted valley floor, cut through an orchard of prunes, tunnel into a 10-mile lane of walnuts; turn, rise, and look upon the bay of San Francisco.

Though we work in offices, stores, factories, mills; though our address is a 10-story apartment house, we live on highways—for they bring life to us. Black, sleek pavements slicing through fields of lettuce, edging blue bays and acres of artichokes, sliding down avenues of palms and eucalyptus, looking down upon flat fields of beans and asparagus, crossing and re-crossing 200,000 acres of oranges; quickly from mountain to seashore, from desert to desert.

**W**E LIVE at pavement's end: on trails; in the quiet peace of high mountains; along fish-filled lakes and rivers; through the green jungles of salal and vine maple in Olympic forests; pausing at the edge of a creek to pick red huckleberries. We float a fly on the Skykomish, a tapered line on Sierra lakes, a dry fly on the Mackenzie. We drag a sinkered spinner over the rocks

of the Klamath, slowly reel in a deep-sunken fly on Lake Almanor.

Our West is many things. Yet, one thing is before us always—the fertile earth. We feel the slow deep-hidden rhythm of things growing. We see it pour forth in green growth, in flowers and in fruit. It is before us always. It travels with us on our highways. It returns with us into our homes and into our living, to absorb the tenseness—to quiet; to bring patience and contentment.

It is not the rhythm of stone and steel; of grinding gears and wheels, although they are everywhere. The nervous frenzy, the stretched-taut excitement of crowded people is not a part of it; for this is the West and its rhythm is of the earth—it is simple.

**Y**ET IT IS STRONG. It changes us, our thinking, our standards and values.

In the evening when the coals in the outdoor fireplace turn red and a wisp of blue smoke trails lazily through green branches, and dark green shadows pattern the fresh-trimmed lawn and there are but the small sounds of a late humming bird, or tired voices—then the basic rhythm of the West is our rhythm.

It flows through our hands when we bury them in the warm crumbly spring earth; in mixing soil for seed flats—two parts loam, one part peat, one part sand. It comes to us with the sight of the friendly wings of our own home; of red geraniums against an adobe wall; of old glass stained by the desert's sun; of a December rose; of our mountain cabin and the bunks we made.

This is our West!



Riess: So he must have more or less given you carte blanche then.

Doty: He was wonderful in this way. "Whatever my editor does, why it's all right with me. I'll stand up for him." He'd always back you up that way, although he might object.

Henrik Bull was the first A-frame. Lane couldn't see that at all; it was impractical. Well, it entranced me, but it turned him off. Yet at the same time he stayed out of my job.

The old man had such an imprint on this thing that it carried over with his sons after he died. He was so clear in his principles that once you followed that, you followed it. "What does this book have that you'll find in no other book?" This was the way this thing was founded. That is, it had to have exclusive material, it shouldn't duplicate anything, that that was the way to failure. "What is in this magazine, that's in no other magazine?" "What's in this book that's in no other book?"

And although he was a penny-pincher in the way of balancing the budget, and I mentioned 500 bucks, yet at the same time he might turn around and spend \$100,000 on his garden book, Western Gardening. He would pre-empt that field forever by spending a hell of a lot of money preparing that book.

Riess: That was smart.

Doty: It's smart. He's a devil, you know. He was so firm and so clear in his guidelines that it's almost impossible to--you can change people but that old magazine is going to go on because it's just set to go. There will always be somebody around that will be the "keeper of the flame." This is the way that magazine is put together right now and Jack Henning is the keeper of the flame. Well, Jack Henning is going to quiet down Joe Williamson. He's going to pick up this; he's going to live through editors going off this way or that way. He tries to bring them back on the track.

Riess: Isn't there some danger in always being in pursuit of what's new, though?

Doty: Gee, if you take the business of your own life, there must be something new that you're looking at every other day, huh? You get awful tired if you're doing the same things, so you get a new interest.

I can remember an old-timer down in Ojai, he probably couldn't do a darn thing. He wasn't in a wheelchair; he was sitting on the edge of the couch. He was about 80; he was older than I. He had great pleasure



Doty: in reading Sunset. Well, he was just reliving the lives of a thousand people. He was reading it as history more than he was as "how to." In the same way Jessamyn West is a good reader of Sunset; she reads it as a family journey.

We get trapped if you think of what's new as "tailgate" lunches or "tailgate" picnics that you see at Candlestick before a game. That's a fashionable sort of thing. You got to be careful that you don't equate new and fashion. (Although something new will become fashion.) It's almost a question of eager kids coming in to the magazine, and being hired not because they can write, though they want to write, but because they love western living. They have experience and have enthusiasm and they're apt to be ahead of their skill at writing. But you can provide that with your re-write desk and everything else. You'll always be new if you suck the blood of the younger generation constantly. [Laughter]

Riess: Yes, that's right. You can't have a lot of cynics working at Sunset though.

Doty: Pretty tough. It's a tough thing to stay young.

Riess: Actually I think for me one of the interesting things is that I often greet a Sunset article with enormous skepticism and find myself doing it, the following year. It really plants a seed.

Doty: Well, you have an audience out here that is different than the audience in the East. You have more innovators. The western tilt is real. Maybe it's adulterated. We become more mass-like all the time, but still in Los Altos and Mountain View and Sunnyvale we find we get a much higher reception, not necessarily income, but interest of life, willingness to take a chance. The experimenter is more numerous in the West than in the East. That may be provincial as the devil, and it won't hold always. But I'd rather edit Sunset in this area than I would in Ohio, wouldn't you?

The greatest argument I had, and I would always lose it, would be "Should you take anybody up the taste ladder?" That is, why in the hell do you deny the cactus or this or that that's bigger than a plate, if a guy wants something bigger than a plate. He may get tired of that big one, that big zinnia eventually. But let him climb his own way. For god's sake, don't talk about small zinnias as if only you had the word.

Every editor lives through an education in taste, but I don't think that they have any right to inflict the absence of those first steps on the individual. There is a job maybe for the tastemaker, but



Doty: it certainly isn't the job of Sunset. Sunset's job is to walk in the shoes of the reader. His aspirations and his desires and what he sees has got to be what you see. If you yank him off those first steps, you're cutting that guy's life short.

Riess: Yes, that's interesting. That makes sense.

Doty: That makes sense to me. Baylis and a lot of these architects thought that their training had elevated them and so they knew more. And they did. It wasn't the case of knowing more than the amateur. It wasn't a case of that, as much as an appreciation of this first step. And with Francis Dean and all the architects that I knew I always locked horns on this taste ladder business.

Liz Gordon of House Beautiful would pick up Cliff May. Now Cliff was coming along in his own way and was developing his own taste and it was not what maybe it should be, but accessories was the big thing as far as House Beautiful at that time. They just bought loads of accessories to photograph a "pacemaker" house, I think they call it, pacemaker or something like that.

Well, Cliff May then became a subject of House Beautiful, rather than a Cliff May individual. From then on I thought he was lost. Because I don't want to live a life, and I don't think anybody should live a life where I pick any magazine and say, "I've got to see this magazine before I can make up my mind to which color scheme I want."

Riess: Some of those thinkers wouldn't let people make their own mistakes.

Doty: Well, there was a lot of that, of course. There were wonderful talks of whether you were the Faustian man or the Einsteinian man. These guys were all breathing in that same sort of wonderful potent air. Neutra in Los Angeles was interested in small space at that time and "the illusion of space" was a great deal. The "efficiency" of any space-- that if you had a bedroom and it was only occupied six times a year, that was a waste of space, you better go out and put these people in a motel. This was all really spelled out.

I remember one Neutra house, I think in a location that was heavily zoned, and he had it worked out on a small space basis. They got ready to build it and they had to have 1200 square feet to fit the zoning. Here was a guy that was figured the "illusion of space" in 900 square feet and he had to have 1200 [laughs] in order to build it. He still had this illusion of space though. Boy this is pretty heady stuff, this illusion of space.

Doty: A lot of these guys figured out we should have a whole bunch of sky lights because, "We're sitting in a cave here. We're using electricity, God ought to give us light."

I think that Sunset always has this problem of a tastemaker that says, "You son-of-a-gun, you've gotta be independent of me." You know what I mean? [Laughs] When you've got followers, you're a tastemaker, but you're not a tastemaker. It's always been Sunset's philosophy to do it your own way, do your own thing, take this only as a principle, don't take it as a pattern to follow, improve upon it if you can, my friend.

You set out and you scouted for ideas that would stimulate and you would get them. "I saw so-and-so article and I think I got a better answer than you, you son-of-a-gun." And away you go. That could be in lath, it could be in any darn thing. I think that you could travel up and down this state, or the whole Pacific Coast with anything in mind, pergolas or lath shelters or anything, and you find one person in the town that's doing it and then he'd know somebody else. Pretty soon you'd have a whole feature. I think it's just that type of scouting that is invaluable. And Sunset kept it up. This is one thing they do well.

Riess: When I first came to California, somebody said to me, "Be sure to read Sunset; it's the New Yorker of California."

Doty: I think Jessamyn West made a comparison of the Better Homes and Sunset, in this way, that the Sunset photographer looks over the wall-to-wall carpeting to the eucalyptus outside. I think that's true: although the camera may take in the carpet and the interior, it's always looking outside.

#### 4) Thomas Church's Hallmarks and Followers

Riess: Can you always spot a Church or a Halprin garden? And how?

Doty: In the beginning, festuca glauca was Halprin, because he used festuca glauca in almost every job that he did. Tommy had this crisscross of star jasmine or ivy on the wall and when you'd see that, you knew it was Tommy Church. Or you'd see a double hedge, yellow below, green above or vice versa, that's a Tommy Church deal. Over at Belvedere right now you can pass a house, and you can see this. He's got I think another one in Modesto, double-hedged again. Tracerie is another pet of Tommy's.

Riess: How about the deck? Do you think that's strongly associated with him or with others?

Doty: Everybody built decks at a certain time there.

The surprising thing about a deck is how as soon as you open the sliding glass doors your indoor room was expanded. And Halprin demonstrated this beautifully in the original Sunset Western Landscaping book. Halprin had a deck job that is beautiful. It's a deck built off a small house. He just re-did the house by building a deck completely around it. The deck became bigger than the house itself.

I recall talking to a group of garden club women about what western living was all about and saying that on Sunday, at 11:00 a.m., a guy picks up the paper and goes down three steps and sits on his lawn. Same thing happens the next Sunday. Then it occurs to him that if he just puts a deck out there and a window from his house, he's got the best of both.

Riess: You knew and reported on Tommy, and later on on Halprin, and no doubt Royston, and you worked with Baylis. Can you comment on Tommy's relationship with these protegeés of his? What do you think they got from their apprenticeship with him, and what do you think he got from them?

Doty: Undoubtably all these guys influenced each other. It's hard to think of Church, Halprin, Eckbo, Williams, and the others without feeling that they all influenced each other particularly in terms of gardens to live in. The one key thought of them all was "do your own thing." On that they all agreed, though how they developed their ideas often differed.

This was the beginning of the new freedom from the old landscaping. It was a departure from remedial landscaping to "this is the way I want to live" landscaping. There was a great exhilaration, as I've mentioned earlier, in the minds of those who adapted the new versus the old. There was even a question as to whether it should still be called landscaping, whether that was the right word for it.

Riess: Can you give me some impressions of Tommy when you first met him?

Doty: I always think of Tommy as a yeasty individual.

Riess: Yeasty?

Doty: Yeasty, yes, not to be blown over by a little bit of wind. Tremendous sense of humor. When I followed Nichols I was accused of editing with a hoe and a rake. I'm sure that I was the furthest away from being the New Yorker type editor that you can imagine. Tommy was the same type of a guy and you like people that like you. He liked me and I liked him.

- Doty: I think that he laughed at the same things that I laugh at and he was just as dismayed at some of the things that dismayed me. We joined, you know?
- Riess: Did you lock horns over anything?
- Doty: I was afraid. I didn't lock horns with anybody. I was running scared. I was a refugee from advertising and I had a bunch of guys that thought I should now reform from being a crass individual into a polished individual.
- Riess: [Asked subsequent to the interview] From 1939 when you became a chronicler of the developing profession of landscape architect, have you seen changes that you would comment on?
- Doty: I think Tommy Church and Doug Baylis were the beginning of the revolution of today that says, "Do your own thing."

As for the architects, Harwell Hamilton Harris and Pietro Belluschi were two who were aware of the world around them and were asking the same questions many ask today.

Belluschi said, "I am unimpressed by the people who want to compare the automobile to the house; implying that just as the auto is a tool for transportation, so all the house should do is to efficiently and without waste cater to our physical needs. Yes, a house is a tool for living, but living is a complex thing. It encompasses not only many physical reactions, but also everything a man believes and fights for; his desires, his hopes, his love, his awareness. These things are as much a function of a house as is shelter; a really functional house cannot ignore them.

"Meanwhile, the intelligent client will continue to desire those things he has always wanted in a house--emotionally satisfying space, light, color, texture, and good construction. There will always be architects able to provide these elements, and in cooperation with such clients, a certain number of outstanding individual houses with result."

And Harris said, "How can the emotional pace of oxen exist in a world tuned to the airplane? Can one travel backward emotionally and forward technologically?"

And I think that that is still a good question today.

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Jean Wolff

A GARDEN AND FLOWER CARE EXPERT ANALYSES

HER THOMAS CHURCH GARDEN

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess





TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Jean Wolff

|                                             |     |
|---------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) Pasatiempo: The Butler Garden            | 249 |
| 2) Jean Wolff's Classes                     | 250 |
| 3) "A Joy to Work in a Tommy Church Garden" | 252 |
| 4) Out-of-Doors Rooms                       | 254 |
| 5) A Client-Planted Garden                  | 256 |
| 6) Styles, Influences                       | 258 |
| 7) Merryvale                                | 259 |
| 8) Giving People Beauty                     | 261 |



Jean Wolff

February 15, 1977

Interview held at her home, 241 Chestnut Street, San Francisco

1) Pasatiempo, The Butler Garden

Riess: How long have you known Thomas Church?

Wolff: I've known Tommy since the early thirties, I would say, when he was first starting out, and at that time he and Betsy lived down in Santa Cruz at a place called Pasatiempo. They had a little house there, and I was visiting a great friend of mine down there, Lucy Butler.

Tommy was asked to come and help her with her garden and as I was staying there I met Tommy for the first time. He looked so young, and so sort of naive, blonde, big blue eyes, he looked like such a child to me. I'd never really heard much about landscape architects, to tell you the truth, and I thought, heavens, this poor man, will he ever make good in this kind of a nebulous field? But I was enormously attracted to him: I thought oh, he's so charming--and Betsy of course was charming also.

Riess: In what state of completion was the Butler's house?

Wolff: It was one of Bill Wurster's first ones that he really, I think, made his great reputation on. His famous house in the early days was Mrs. Gregory's farmhouse in Santa Cruz. Well, Lucy's was built practically at that same time. It was in Bill's very simple stages of inexpensive houses. It cost around \$7500, which is incredible now to even think about. This was Bill's most creative stage. I never cared so much for his more elaborate houses; they really were not his metier, if that's what you say, but I loved those early ones, I thought they were very, very exciting. Lucy Butler's is a charming house. It is in Tommy's books. [Gardens are for People, pp. 3, 48]\*

---

\*Gardens are for People, Reinhold Publishing Co., New York, 1955

Riess: You said Tommy was going to "help" her with her garden. Was it so casual, or was he really hired?

Wolff: No, I think he was doing regular plans. But I can't say that I was in on that. I just happened to meet him when he was there one time talking with her about possible arrangements for the garden. The house was built on four sides around an enormous oak tree, and so Tommy was to do appropriate planting for this court. And that's really all the garden was. The rest of it was natural California hillside, Santa Cruz hillside, which needs no further touch.

Riess: So the connection there was Wurster recommending Tommy?

Wolff: Yes, I think Tommy being a neighbor, and a Bill Wurster house, it was inevitable that Tommy would be the right person to help.

So that was when I first met him. And then of course being interested in gardening I sort of perked up my ears and realized what a vast field this was.

## 2) Jean Wolff's Classes

Riess: Were you trained yourself in garden design?

Wolff: No, but kind of coming in the back door, I am a garden consultant now. I was in charge of the nursery and garden shop at Merryvale [3640 Buchanan Street, San Francisco] for 13 years. When I retired from that I thought that I would not do anything but just enjoy my own garden, but then gradually people would ask for a little advice here and there, and so I have garden classes.

And now I'm very complimented because I'm going to do Tommy's garden clean-up maintenance work for him tomorrow.

Riess: You're going right in there in your blue jeans and do it?\*

Wolff: Oh yes, and a man with me to do heavy hauling and cleanup and so forth.

Riess: But you will make the decisions?

Wolff: No, I'm sure Tommy will be there pointing a big finger at whatever he wants, and shaking his head if I do the wrong thing. Because he'll be the master, don't worry about that! [Laughter] I won't be making any great decisions. It's just fun to have him call me to do this and I couldn't be more complimented.

---

\*In fact, Jean Wolff does not wear blue jeans.



Riess: Have you ever done just this sort of thing for him?

Wolff: Yes, I've spent weekends with Tommy and Betsy at Santa Cruz and got the detail to clean up the geraniums.

Riess: There aren't many people really trained to make those decisions.

Wolff: Well, actually I'm just a dirt gardener, but finally it does become a kind of a skill. It's amazing. You don't realize that it has any such great category as that, but it does leave you appalled how few people know where to pick up anything or what to do, or relate it to the season of the year, or what that season demands as far as plant materials are concerned.

Riess: Do you teach your classes soils and drainage matters too?

Wolff: Yes.

I think it's come about quite nicely. We begin in the fall of the year, in September, and go to June, which is really the garden year. (The summer is enjoying the work of the year.) Each month we work at a different person's house who's in the class and in that way her problems are the lesson. Say it's in September, often it's cleanup, pruning, discarding, dividing, and making, in a way, plans for the next year by eliminating a lot that is finished. We do whatever that month more or less implies in relation to that person's problem.

At first--I seem to be talking more about myself than Tommy, but I'll make this very brief--at first when I was asked to teach I didn't know where to pick it up, I didn't know whether to begin with seeds or shrubs or trees, it's such a vast field, and where do you begin? Then I decided that the only way to begin was with each person's problem. People are really only interested in trying to make their own garden grow, and feel comfortable with it, and in getting a maximum of pleasure out of their own effort and if they can take care of their own intelligently, relate it to the seasons and the care of the plants through the year, they may have really a very good basic knowledge and appreciation of how to go on from there.

Riess: They are smart if they get to you at the beginning.

Wolff: I only take about 12 or 14 a year because otherwise each one does not have a lesson at her house. After I come back from the morning session I give her a rundown of what I think is good or bad or could be changed, and what could be done now and what could be done later. So she has a kind of a little master plan.

Riess: You are particularly aware of the problems of a city lot.

Wolff: Yes, and most of the gardens relate to the same problems and the same type of plant material because that is what does well in San Francisco, and that's simple, and nice. It's tedious to wear them out with too many things or to try and make it too comprehensive. And I think the most simple, basic rules for pruning, feeding, watering, spraying, the rotation of plants, are the important things to know.

### 3) "A Joy To Work in a Tommy Church Garden"

Riess: Have you found yourself in some old Thomas Church gardens that these people have bought?

Wolff: Yes, actually since Tommy has been sick I have been asked to help replant frequently. Like all things gardens get to be woody and old and things die and peoples' ideas change and the way they use a garden changes. Lots of times they don't realize how much they want to be in it, so they enlarge. Or they do just the opposite, they plant where maybe they sat before. Peoples' needs change so much.

It's always a joy to work in a Tommy Church garden because it's easy to plant. I don't do any designing, actually, because I've never been trained for that. But any garden that Tommy has done is always so beautifully designed that the planting is just a joy--it does itself. It's just a miracle to me. You go into other places that have been designed by others and they may be so contrived, or difficult, or people are trying to plant out a mistake, or do some ridiculous thing. But Tommy never makes mistakes; you're never planting out things that shouldn't be there.

Riess: When you say it almost "does itself," you mean it dictates the plant materials?

Wolf: Yes, because the design is so lovely that it seems to call naturally for the easy solution in plant material.

Riess: It would be possible to ruin it, wouldn't it? [Laughter]

Wolff: Structurally they're so perfect it would be hard to ruin a Tommy Church garden.

Riess: Now, since Pasatiempo, and up to 1951 when he did this garden, did you have an acquaintance with him?

Wolff: Oh, yes, we are very, very good friends, and saw each other frequently.

Riess: Had he done your house in Marin?

Wolff: No, because we did not have a landscape architect when we built over there. We built on a hillside and I thought that I was knowledgeable enough to be able to plant it. And so we did not have a landscape architect which, as I look back on it, was a mistake. This was in 1942.

In 1951 when we came here [Chestnut Street] I realized that if I could have a Tommy Church garden I would be one of the happiest people in the world. And I never cease to rejoice over the fact that I do have one because I think the design is marvelous. Considering it was this huge area, he divided it all up so that you feel cozy and intimate wherever you are, and yet you are not restricted and you're not lost, not empty. It is a constant joy.

The wonderful part about Tommy is that he not only gives you a lovely design in itself, he gives you also a totally different way of living. He gave people a new way of life that they never had before in San Francisco. I was born here and we had what we used to call a San Francisco "backyard," a dull place where nobody ever went--

Riess: A dog run!

Wolff: Exactly. And the planting was dull and wasn't changed year after year, and there was no particular feeling about relating to this. So Tommy I think created a whole new life style, not only for us here but everywhere.

Riess: You had watched his work over the years. Do you recall stages in his growth and design style that were interesting to you?

Wolff: No, I can't say. Being a busy person with family I don't think that I followed Tommy's career that closely, except just in the way of sheer enjoyment if I were ever to find myself in one of his gardens. But I don't think I really took his work so seriously then as I would now.

Riess: Would you always have known if you were in one of his gardens?

Wolff: I think so. I think they have a special quality.

He made the greatest contribution to all of our lives, in every way, on every level.

Riess: It always interests me to see how people smile in speaking of him.

Wolff: Well, he's such a modest, gentle sort of a person, never aggressive in putting forth his ideas. He takes out a pencil and does a few things and asks, "What are your ideas?" He'll laugh and say, "I haven't any

Wolff: ideas," but you know all the time that the wheels are whirling. He very tactfully tries to find out what is the way you want to live with something and then he adopts it so rightly from that point of view. So although there is a certain characteristic to Tommy's gardens, each one, I think, is very personally related.

Riess: And what is the certain characteristic? Materials?

Wolff: Design mostly. Sometimes a deck, which is very indicative, on account of these San Francisco hills, where the garden would fall away. Tommy was one of the first, you know, to inaugurate the idea of stepping out of the living room onto a deck instead of going down a flight of stairs (which no one ever does), and then being in a damp, north garden. He has made these wonderful decks, or wooden areas, to the south or the north, that have been the greatest addition to San Francisco living.

#### 4) Out-of-Doors Rooms

Wolff: We have a harsh climate, windy and cold. We didn't think of living out of doors until he created the out-of-doors room. In creating the out-of-doors room--just like this [patio and garden]--it became another room in the house. I'm out here constantly. And of course I'm very lucky with this exposure; not many exposures in San Francisco are as open, yet protected, as this. But still, if I had lived in my mother's time, we never would have had this.

Riess: Did Tommy design this garden with the architect, or after?

Wolff: It was after the place was built.

Riess: He had nothing to do with siting.

Wolff: No.

It was at the time of the Korean war, and everything was very touchy and difficult, and we built in a great hurry because there was a shortage and the question of getting certain materials, copper pipes and things like that. So we didn't really plan the way you would if you had lots of time and could go more thoughtfully into it. We had sold our house in Marin and were living somewhere temporarily and wanted to get this done as soon as possible, and as soon as it was we said, "Tommy, there's this ghastly great big area. What will we do? It's all your problem."



Riess: You hadn't a particular thing in mind.

Wolff: Nothing.

Riess: The idea of dividing the garden according to the three apartments was his?

Wolff: Yes, and I think it was a good idea, inasmuch as it gave him the reason for breaking it up, perhaps.

Riess: Did he ever use the expression "rooms" in talking about the garden spaces?

Wolf: No, he never really formalizes things, at least to me, that way. Maybe if he were talking to other clients. But knowing that I loved gardening so much and being out of doors, I think he just assumed that I would want "outdoor rooms." So I don't think we discussed it particularly in those terms.

When the garden was first done at the time the top people had a new baby, and the back area had a swing and a little sandbox, which was the way he thought of using that space. That way it didn't clutter up the rest of the garden. It was ideal. The little child could make all the mess and it wouldn't interfere with anything. But as time went on I found that it really wasn't the easiest way to have people in and out, and to have someone picking all my flowers and doing unhappy things.

It [having the gardens accessible only to Mrs. Wolff] has really worked out beautifully because the people that I have now wouldn't be interested in coming down. They love their privacy and they love their decks and they enjoy the garden from where they are. And I love it all my own!

I have a wonderful old gardener who has been with me for 25 years, ever since we've been here, Martin Yrigoyan, a Basque. We are great friends. He is one of the old, old-fashioned gardeners who really knows and enjoys and takes time and pains, and so the garden belongs to him too.



## 5) A Client-Planted Garden

Riess: Do you have a planting plan written down?

Wolff: Well, I really very seldom disturb the beds. They are permanently planted. The only way I indicate change of seasons is with the pots. I think that is a very easy way for people in San Francisco.

Riess: You weren't one of Tommy's clients who would have asked for low maintenance?

Wolff: No, actually he just did the design; I did the planting. I made lots of mistakes, actually.

Riess: He gave you a plan totally without planting indicated?

Wolff: Yes, well he always does that, nearly always. The planting plan is another thing. He gives you a design. And then if you want him to indicate the planting, he does. But sometimes he just gives a plan.

And, as I say, in the planting I made many, many mistakes, because that was 25 years ago and unfortunately I loved everything so much I had to have "one of everything," of which there is no more fatal mistake than that--buying one of everything! So a cat-and-dog thing. However, through the years it has softened and we've modified it and it doesn't look as amateurish as it did.

Riess: I am dumbfounded. To me the plants are vital to the structure, the heights of things, at the very least. You knew just how high your plants would grow?

Wolff: [Laughing] No. But as I say it's been modified. The magnolia is 25 years old. And the camellia hedge started out as espalliered camellias, which were difficult and scrawny and unattractive. Then finally one day I got so annoyed with the whole thing I said to Martin, "Just cut the camellias as you do any hedge." In fact, nothing could be better than a camellia hedge; it's the best thing; I recommend it now constantly, because it's such a pretty leaf, a pretty color, and it's so clean and green, a marvelous hedge. And when it blooms it blooms on the top and on the sides.

So, lots of nice things have happened, and some of the bad things we changed and modified.

Riess: Did Tommy also take care of getting the bid for the construction?

- Wolff: The contractor that did the house did the garden work, so it was easy. We were crazy about the contractor--his name is Cy Peletz and you see his signs still all over San Francisco. He just carried out from the plans where the beds were to go, and put the header-boards in, and the bulkheads.
- Riess: And how about the drainage?
- Wolff: Oh, well fortunately we built here in the winter, and there's a spring up there in the back, and there was a heavy winter rain and the water just stood here in this area all winter, which was a great indication of the spring, and also that this was mostly solid rock on which we built. We have a very intricate plumbing system: there is one big drain over there, and one big drain here, and there are weep holes in the concrete walls in the basement. Drainage was a great problem, and it was very costly.
- Riess: And that was all indicated on the plan?
- Wolff: Yes. Fortunately we were aware enough of this to get all the best advice possible on this drainage problem.
- Riess: When the contractor finished, had he put soil in?
- Wolff: Tommy had nothing to do with the garden, other than the plan and the plumbing and all of the mechanics.
- Riess: That left you at scratch!
- Wolff: But that didn't appall me, it really didn't. Fools rush in. We didn't have to get a tremendous amount of soil, because parts had been excavated, or leveled. And I had the fun of planting and working with Martin, day after day.
- Riess: And Tommy of course came to see the finished product?
- Wolff: Oh, yes, countless times, and he's had many, many pictures taken. I am in his books. So we've had great, great fun over the garden. Let me get his books. [Gardens are for People] He dedicated this, "If all my clients worked as hard and as well in their gardens as Jean does, I really would be famous." And then here in his latest book [Your Private World] he wrote, "The old dirt gardener now wants a swimming pool! Less gardening?? Oh well"-- [Laughter] He was referring there to my saying to him--not terribly seriously--that I was thinking of putting a small swimming pool in the garden for myself.
- Riess: That's an expression he applies to himself, too, isn't it? "Dirt gardener."

Wolff: I think so, but of course he is the great master, he isn't just a dirt gardener--which he is too--but he's the great master. I have no initials after my name, no claims to anything academically. I am a dirt gardener.

Riess: Did Tommy ever talk of styles when he was working with you?

Wolf: No, I can't recall that he ever did. He just knew that we wanted it for comfortable out-of-door living. I don't think he ever discussed styles. Do you think he usually does?

Riess: No, I guess not.

Wolff: I think he is the master designer. That is really the great interest for him. Planting is not interesting to him. Planting bores him to death, I think. It's not his best talent. I think he's very repetitious because he is not terribly concerned. It's very incidental. But he is terribly aware of design and his designs are magnificent--maybe in that sense he was influenced by, say, cubism. For instance, here he takes a long area and then he divides it up in angles, as you see.

## 6) Styles, Influences

Riess: Was he part of an art crowd that would have been discussing current movements and design trends?

Wolff: I do not know. I think that Tommy's been quite a loner, I would say, as far as being "led"--now I don't know this, really, I've only seen him very casually, you know, simply back and forth, dinners at their house, dinners here, days at Santa Cruz, things like that--so I don't really know what his more formal life and serious thinking was, but perhaps his great contacts with people were through gardens that he did. And those [clients] ended up by being his admiring and devoted friends. He is a very personal person that way; I don't feel that he has gone out into the community and embraced great community projects.

Riess: And then likewise you wouldn't associate him with any influential group, or influences?

Wolff: I wouldn't. Of course he had so many people working in his office that he really started a whole school of gardening. And all those people have fanned out, but nobody I think showed talent in any comparable way.

Riess: Yet they must have been strong influences on him. Anybody like Halprin must have left something of his thinking behind before he departed from the office. I would be interested in what Tommy would say he had learned from him.

Wolff: Yes. Tommy is so modest, he probably hardly would admit it, but he did launch, I think, a great school of landscape gardeners who were dedicated along these same lines. But I don't think any of them can touch him. I think all their work falls very short.

I went over the other day to see one of his gardens because the people [Stephen Bechtels] are moving, from Piedmont to an apartment in town. So I was asked to help them with their deck here.

Anyway, I went over to their garden and to see the containers that they had and movable plant material and things like that that they possibly could take with them. I thought this was one of the most beautiful gardens that I had ever seen. It was done about 20 years ago, I would say. It's a Gardner Dailey house, and magnificent. It's Gardner Dailey at his very best. I think that Gardner Dailey was quite all by himself too, (like Tommy) far more finished, really classical, you might say, than Bill Wurster. (I loved Bill Wurster's early houses but I thought he fell very short on the big ones; they were big, and clumsy, and awkward, and had no great style. But I think that Gardner Dailey's houses had great style.)

Riess: And Gardner Dailey often called in Tommy?

Wolff: Yes, and it was a beautiful combination, to me, an absolutely gorgeous combination!!!!

## 7) Merryvale

Riess: Would you tell the story of Merryvale?

Wolff: That happened because my husband had an unexpected illness, a severe heart attack, and I felt that perhaps I should be doing something while he was home, and at that crucial moment Margaret Macdonough came in and said that the woman who had helped her in Woodside, where they had the old Merryvale, did not want to come to the city--she lived in Los Altos--and would I consider helping them. This was really a very exciting thing for me, but I didn't realize how little I knew professionally until I had to pretend I was one. So, my knees knocked together for many a long day, I can tell you.

Riess: Merryvale was a showplace, as I remember.

Wolff: Yes. The antique shop was magnificent, and we really had a very interesting little nursery. It was a limited nursery but the things that we did specialize in were quite unique. We made a great feature



Wolff: of topiary. We had all sorts of espaliered plants, standards, bonsai, specimen plants of all kinds, as well as all sorts of accessories for the garden, which we could display beautifully in that big garden.

But the nice break that I had was that the architect Clifford Conally was asked at that time to build the garden house. As I'd been doing some work for Clifford previously, he was very helpful in laying out the garden and giving me ideas and stiffening my spine, at a time when I felt very insecure. He built the charming little garden house, where I was, and he planned all the beds, and all the irregularities in the garden which made lovely little display areas. It was most conducive to the arranging of plants and accessories.

Riess: Did you teach yourself the topiary?

Wolff: Yes, I did.

Riess: Did it begin here in this garden? [at her home]

Wolff: No, I had never done it until I got to Merryvale. So you can see why I had so much to learn. But it was a beautiful experience because I really could do anything I wanted, in a way. I was only limited by my own lack of imagination. Mrs. Macdonough generously let me have full rein.

Riess: You began a style, didn't you, with the standards and the topiary?

Wolff: Yes, I think we did really create a great trend for lots of nice little things. It was unique. I started just with myself but in the end we had a fulltime gardener, a fulltime delivery boy, for the shop and the nursery, and four women who helped me. We really had quite a big operation.

I stopped in 1971. George had died, then, in the meantime. I really worked terribly, terribly hard, because I used to go to the flower market two or three days a week at six, then rush home, change my clothes, get to Merryvale at nine, work all day, take care of George, come back, get dinner for him. I look back now and I really don't know how I lived through so many of those days!

Riess: I should think this garden would have demanded lots of your time.

Wolff: It did. I was watering early, and late, even by moonlight, to keep it going.

Riess: Your customers at Merryvale must have tapped your knowledge continuously.



Wolff: This was when I became aware of the need for teaching. I was so appalled. I thought that everybody more or less could understand the care of a simple plant. I think the American public is so shockingly ignorant--not as much now, of course. But people would come in and say, "I have a black thumb. I can't make anything grow." They almost seemed pleased that they couldn't do anything. "Please give me the fool-proof plant because I can't do anything." You know, this sort of an attitude. It was so discouraging.

Then they would buy something, and of course it wouldn't be a success, and they would come back furious, and I would say, "Where did you have the plant, and how often did you water it?" And they would say, "Well, I went East for ten days." The truth would come out. Then I'd say, "Well, take another plant, and do just as I say, and come back and tell me in a couple of weeks if you're more comfortable with this, if the plant is happy."

In this way I became dedicated to the idea that it would be wonderful to have classes for young people. But I really didn't do anything about it except that one little woman that I'd helped a great deal asked whether if she got up the class I would do it. This appealed to me!

#### 8) Giving People Beauty

Riess: These days fewer landscape architects are interested in doing residential gardens, I understand, and the trend in training is away from such work.

Wolff: Yes, I think one of Tommy's greatest values was that he saw the need for helping the individual to have a beautiful garden area. Most landscape architects, or other architects, want to pass over private dwellings as quickly as possible, because those are tedious. You have to struggle with housewives and all their little itchy-bitsy ideas, and changing-minds, and not knowing what they want. But Tommy was so patient and worked it out so well that he really gave people I think a culture that was so necessary in our lives as far as gardens are concerned.

Riess: Gave them a culture?

Wolff: A culture of gardening, the idea that gardens were beautiful living monuments of our lives.

Riess: Gave them back that culture.

Wolff: Yes, exactly, and he stayed there. He didn't want to go on to great institutional things. Most people do, I've noticed. You can name so many. Joe Esherick, any number of them. They want to be done with private housing as soon as possible.

Riess: That's interesting, that your insight into the trend is that it is so difficult to work with the individual.

Wolff: And that there's not great money in it. It's tedious. But if you do some big thing you have full sway and you're dealing with business people and it's cut and dried and it's simple and lucrative.

But Tommy has always remained faithful to this field. And I think he really created a great culture in this gardening world that we never had before.

Of course he did work for the University of California, and Stanford; and U.C. Santa Cruz is one of his great monuments. And he's done lots of work for Williamsburg and Winterthur, and things like that, but still he was, I think, dedicated to just this kind of thing, the small, the individual creations that really makes society tick.

Riess: He wrote a lot of articles for House Beautiful. He did a lot of educating.

Wolff: This is it. This is what I'm trying to say. And he stayed so faithful to that. He wasn't siphoned off into doing great big enormous hotels and resorts and things like that. It's his contribution to the "private world" which I think is really the great contribution. And I think he will live for that almost more than anything.

Riess: It's surprising that you met so many people aggressively ignorant about plants, what with Sunset.

Wolff: Of course now I've noticed that there is a great interest in house plants. Every house you go into is a forest, a jungle of house plants. But this is a recent thing.

I think it's the change of times, starting to be aware of the environment, the natural resources, conservation, all kinds of things now that are conditioning people along those lines. People are better informed than 20 years ago when I went to Merryvale. Every day you pick up the paper there's a dirt gardener giving advice on this and that which is a fairly recent thing too. People are awakening to the fact that our very survival depends on our awareness and appreciation of the environment, and the protection of it--which is a fairly recent thing too.

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Louis DeMonte

A UNIVERSITY ARCHITECT SUMMARIZES BERKELEY PLANNING, 1940-1973  
AND CHURCH'S CONTRIBUTION

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Louis DeMonte

|                                                      |     |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) The History of Planning on the Berkeley Campus    | 263 |
| 2) Master Planning: Wurster and Church and DeMonte   | 269 |
| 3) Committee Work with Architects                    | 271 |
| 4) Recognizing and Protecting Campus Potential       | 275 |
| 5) Regents, in Control                               | 278 |
| 6) Professionals in Academic Departments             | 279 |
| 7) Landscape Solutions on the Berkeley Campus        | 281 |
| 8) The Qualities Thomas Church Brought to the Campus | 284 |





Louis DeMonte

February 6, 1976

Interview held at his home, Rossmoor, Walnut Creek

1) The History of Planning on the Berkeley Campus

DeMonte: Arthur Brown was the Supervising Architect from 1938 to 1948 and had drawn up [in 1944] a modification of the [John Galen] Howard revision of the Emile Bénard plan. It was a very stilted, stylized plan with classical building forms carrying out the original design of the California, Boalt, Wheeler Library group of buildings. It was a paper plan which didn't recognize the magnificent natural features that we later realized were the essence of the campus and our planning heritage. If the campus were going to be fulfilled it would have to recognize those features and strengthen them.

So, this early Brown plan was primarily an assembly of buildings on certain axes, north and south, east and west, and had little of what the campus finally came to have in its real feeling of space, topography, and trees. This early plan in fact had no input from someone like Tommy Church or Larry Halprin. It was a limited architectural, classical kind of plan.

Riess: Brown was the first person to deal with planning since Howard?

DeMonte: Yes, Howard had taken the Bénard plan, and having been [himself] unsuccessful in the competition decided that now was his chance to put over his own ideas.

Riess: [George] Kelham came in as supervising architect after Howard. [1928-1937]

DeMonte: Kelham was the architect for a few buildings: Life Sciences Building and several engineering buildings. The Life Sciences Building was an obvious breaking away from both the scale and the architectural statement of the other buildings. Brown tried to pull it back together into the more classical scheme of things.

Riess: And then came the war.

DeMonte: Yes. I've forgotten just when the Brown plan stopped being used, but it was all we had right after the war. I remember we put up what now is Durant Hall, now Optometry. Then we started doing a group of buildings down on what used to be Hilgard Field, first of which was the Forestry Building.

Sometime during that stage it became apparent that Brown really had not the personal interest these new post-war projects needed to have in order to provide for the large expansion we could see ahead to solve all the other kind of workaday problems that had to be met. So there was a period there without any plan.

In that vacuum Bob Evans and I\* had to have some kind of an answer, and we began to make some suggestions to Brown. Soon we found ourselves spearheading the planning effort and Bob finally got recognition through Sproul [President Robert Gordon Sproul] and Corley [Controller James H. Corley] to put something together.

We had this tremendous building program: Corley would come back from Sacramento every year with so many building projects, it was unbelievable. Here was a once-in-a-lifetime, exciting opportunity for a couple of young guys to do something they had always wanted to do, and we just gave it all we had.

We were going to embark on a large dormitory project--by dormitory I mean a series of dormitories because we had built no housing after Stern Hall--and we realized we had a difficult decision to make. Either we were going to have the campus we wanted and were sure others did also, which meant we were going to have to move out into the City of Berkeley, or we put everything on the campus as it was at that time. If we didn't expand into the City we weren't going to have a campus, we were just going to have many more buildings than the campus could hold without losing our fine open spaces.

So, we did something which was unthinkable at the time. We went down and looked at all the City Assessor's maps to find out what properties there were south of the campus, how much they cost and what land we might have the audacity to suggest buying. We put together a plan, with some acknowledgement by the campus administration as we

---

\*Robert J. Evans, University Architect and Head, Statewide Office of Architecture, Engineering, and Planning; and Louis A. DeMonte, Campus Architect and Head, Office of Architects and Engineers.

DeMonte: went along--but I don't think any of them really realized what we finally were coming out with--the recommendation that we had to have 40 acres in the City of Berkeley.

Riess: They had considered putting dormitories on the campus?

DeMonte: Hell yes. I mean, the first thing we got was, "Look at all the land you have on the campus!" You see, at that time we didn't have anything up by the Mining Building, the Mining Building was out in the boonies, and there was nothing on the Hilgard Field, there was obviously nothing in the Glade, and there was nothing up where the art building and Wurster Hall are now. At that time when you came on the campus it looked like we had a lot of vacant land.

But we held tight and projected enrollments and space that we would need, and the amenities, and the open spaces that we wanted to preserve. There was just not enough land on the existing campus to do all that. Look at the impact of the dormitories on the south side of campus! Can you imagine stuffing them back on the campus?

Riess: You and Evans gave yourself the assignment.

DeMonte: We saw the need for a plan and took the initiative. Obviously somebody realized that something had to be done because the Regents would not approve a building project unless there was an approved site, and there was growing dissatisfaction with the Arthur Brown concept. Somewhere in all of that uncertainty an opening was created and we were given the opportunity. I think we made a solid case that the choice was between buying land and having a campus, or too many buildings crowded together with no campus open space.

Riess: Did you deal with Sproul directly?

DeMonte: Yes, in those days you could get to Sproul quite frequently. Corley we could see on a moment's notice. We knew they were interested in it because at that time Berkeley was the University; even though there was increasing attention given to UCLA, still Berkeley was where they had their hearts. And they were astute enough to realize that if you compared the Berkeley Campus to the Los Angeles Campus, Berkeley had by far the greatest potential, in terms of physical beauty.

Riess: How did the next steps occur?

DeMonte: When Evans and I came up with a plan that suggested acquiring all this land for new buildings, it became apparent that if this plan were to hang together, including the location of the dormitories, the relationship of the individual academic buildings to each other and to the Library, and reserving proper space for expansion, we'd have to have

DeMonte: input from the academic side. It was our suggestion to [Monroe] Deutsch, who was provost, that he appoint a committee to advise us on these matters, and that's how the Buildings and Campus Development Committee started. [Advisory to Long Range Development Plan, Fall 1953-Spring 1956]

Riess: That was the academic committee.

DeMonte: Right, and we sat in as ex-officio advisors, without vote, but presented all of the physical planning factors and recommendations.

The responsibility and opportunity for members of that committee to participate was really exciting to them--here was this place growing like a weed--it became attractive to people like Walter Horn and Fran Violich and a number of others who were either professionally oriented in this direction or had keen interest in it.

By the time Bill Wurster came on the campus we had a dynamic kind of planning procedure functioning. There were scheduled meetings and specific agenda and we had established that we were not going to be a rubber-stamp committee. They realized that these things were going to be there for a long, long time and that they were major commitments, not the least of which was the assurance that the open spaces would be respected.

Riess: "Commitment to open spaces." Did you actually have a consulting landscape architect? [Douglas] Baylis came in 1956.

DeMonte: Yes, and I think Larry Halprin was before Baylis. I think he was the first of them.

Riess: Did he meet regularly with the committee?

DeMonte: Yes, he would meet with them. Larry, incidentally, had previously been in Tommy's office.

Riess: It surprises me that Larry would have been on the committee, preceding Tommy.

DeMonte: Yes, Tommy was too busy at that time.

Riess: But the commitment to open space was on the part of the whole committee, rather than the concept of a consulting landscape architect?

DeMonte: Yes, all of us. That open space on the campus was just as important to Evans and me in doing what we wanted to do as it was for anybody else using whatever criteria. The Glade, the Eucalyptus Grove, and



DeMonte: the Faculty Glade were there. These were physical features that you simply had to respect, if in fact the buildings were going to be shown to their best advantage.

That innate sense of space was also keenly felt by Tommy Church, who made it possible for us to identify it in such a manner that nobody in his right mind would think of violating it. But you know, it starts as an instinctive, intuitive sense when you're planning a campus like ours--just as you would any other kind of group of buildings--that the spaces between the buildings are more important, at times, than the buildings themselves.

Riess: I guess you have to watch out for buildings so high you can't see beyond them.

DeMonte: Like Barrows Hall, and I can tell you a story about Barrows Hall which is probably an apology more than anything else, but there it is:

Barrows was one of those strange things. It was supposed to have been about two-thirds of that size and then they got a windfall of money because the department had justified through channels that they needed more space. Instead of being five stories high as we had planned it turned out to be eight stories, and instead of 200 feet long it turned out to be 300 feet long. What was to be a modest building, fitting more comfortably there with the rest of them, and certainly not blocking off the lower part of the Campanile, turned out to be too big for the site.

Riess: But at some point people must have known what a disaster it would be.

DeMonte: Most people don't realize the impact of a building until it is up. There was just no holding that one back with all the pressure of needs and approved funds behind it.

The Buildings and Campus Development Committee gave us the academic input, and it gave us a strong support base in the faculty, without which you don't accomplish much on that campus, as you know...

Then we also were beginning to have to justify utilization of space and space standards. We hired Donovan [E.] Smith, the first of our space planners. In fact, for a while there we probably were the leaders in the whole nation because we happened to be out there first getting the most money for projects. We had to develop our own techniques of having to answer Sacramento on need, utilization and space standards--I remember when we did Dwinelle Hall we had to meet on Saturday mornings because that was the only common time denominator for everybody. We'd meet Saturday after Saturday, trying to establish whether we ought to have large or small classrooms.

DeMonte: Contrary to the popular belief--people said, "We've got one Wheeler Hall and it's overloaded, and we need three Wheeler Halls"--it turned out we didn't need three Wheeler Halls. We needed a lot more intermediate and smaller classrooms. But the process of arriving at that, in terms of who assigned classrooms and how often they were used a week and how full they were each time they were used--we had to dig all the way. We found that the best classrooms were handed out to the professor with the most influence or who happened to be closest to them. We were living a nice casual life at that time; things began to be much more difficult as pressure for space grew.

The question was, how do we know what classrooms we need unless we know how we are using the ones we have? We fed our answers in through the faculty committee and gradually they accepted it, including eventually the principle that classrooms did not belong to a department, or to a faculty member, but that they were general assignment. That was no small thing to get accepted.

We looked to the Campus Planning Committee for broad support, but it was also necessary to know the detailed kinds of spaces we needed. Building committees for each building became a part of the whole planning situation. They determined the more precise kinds of rooms and sizes; what and how they were going to teach, the kind of research, and all the other questions of how the building would be used.

Riess: There must have been a lot of pressure, because it was all going on as you were talking about it.

DeMonte: [Laughing] If I hadn't been 35, or 40 years old, and running from place to place, having the time of my life, I never could have made it. But when you have an opportunity like that you don't think about how hard you are working. That's just the chance of a lifetime.

So, out of all that came a very effective group of participants and procedures to whom you were responsible in terms of "Why do you put it there?" or "Why do you need so much money?" The effectiveness of the process was now apparent, the support was broadening, and it became a very satisfying kind of experience.

## 2) Master Planning: Wurster and Church and DeMonte

DeMonte: Well, at this point, as we began to talk about going out into the City of Berkeley, I've forgotten what aspect of federal regulations was in effect at the time, but it had to do with Berkeley having to have a master plan. They were going through that process and they had a very able series of planners on their staff. In order for the City and the University jointly to take advantage of the federal monies, we had to come up with a formalized master plan.

And it was clear that we needed someone other than just architects to participate in this. So we prepared the first of those plans with Al [Albert] Wagner whom we hired in the Architects and Engineers office. We prepared a new version of that earlier plan that Evans and I had worked on, more carefully studied.

It had quite a bit of exposure to the City Council and the planning staff, and even to certain citizens' committees. It gradually became accepted, even though there were still mutterings about how much land was coming off the tax roll, our wanting to close some streets, the detrimental effect on the parking areas, and all the other little irritations that universities seem to generate in cities. In spite of all that, the two plans were recognized as being complimentary to each other, and representing the right direction for both the City and the University. That helped a great deal.

As we began to acquire land, the City was already aware of it. There came a very unfortunate series of circumstances though: our plan outran our resources. Owners became aware that their property was in the land acquisition plan and they'd come to us and say, "Since we're not going to be able to develop it, and you're going to buy it, we're ready to sell it," but we weren't ready to buy it, which put us in an impossible situation. You know, it was just so unfair to the property owner. Fortunately, it happened at the latter stages of the development. By that time we were pretty well along on our land acquisition.

At that point, in rough form, there were the campus plan and the techniques and procedures for keeping it viable so that it was not just a thing that would die by not being responsive to change.

And that's about the point where Bill Wurster came on the campus, and Baylis, as landscape architect.

Larry Halprin didn't last too long. Larry was a very dynamic sort of a person, and he just rubbed a few of the Regents the wrong way.

Riess: Did you have Regents on the committee? [Donald H.] McLaughlin?

DeMonte: Not at that point. McLaughlin came on the Campus Planning Committee later. I think when [Clark] Kerr came. Prior to that there were Deutsch and a series of other provosts.

The Campus Planning Committee was very strong and contributed a great deal.

Then Bill Wurster came on the scene and I must say he was very critical at first, but after having been through the whole thing and realizing that every plan is some sort of a compromise--if the big things are there and you're headed in the right direction it merits support--he turned around from being a severe critic to being one of our strongest supporters.

Riess: Was he critical of the overall scheme, or of the architectural look?

DeMonte: Both. It's a rare thing for any architect to immediately endorse or praise another architect's work. Somehow or other, until you're really a part of it and feel that way yourself, you just instinctively see all of its shortcomings and don't appreciate its strengths. I probably would have gone through the same thing: look at something and wonder why this is so and what about that. Well, after you've been through that process you realize it represents the best combination of all these many interdependent decisions.

Riess: When he was brought here as dean of the College of Architecture, was campus planning, or supervising architect, any part of his function?

DeMonte: No, he came as dean, but obviously having that resource there the Campus Planning Committee wanted to use him, and I guess he was part of the committee right away. And I remember those days very vividly. He and Walter Horn, and a number of others, 12 or 15 members, the full panel, would come to every meeting.

Riess: Saturday morning again?

DeMonte: No, this committee met monthly on a Thursday afternoon at two o'clock and went 'til six or seven.

Riess: Baylis was on that committee?

DeMonte: Yes, but he did not last very long in that position. Baylis had a lot of talents but one of them was not for large-scale planning at the scope of the campus. Also he did some work at the Music Building which many people did not like. In fact we went back and changed a good part of it. It was just not in the spirit of the Faculty Glade.



DeMonte: At any rate, the opening was there and at long last I guess somebody realized that Tommy was meant for this, and vice versa. So he came on board. Somewhere in that process that large Campus Planning Committee had done a lot of good work, fortunately; they had gotten into the plan, and into these open space statements, and into looking at Strawberry Canyon, back of the Stadium, and into looking at the rest of the land up there by the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory. These things were recognized as natural assets we had to use. And by "using" I mean in such a manner that we didn't violate them either.

In the 1962 plan, where we have Tommy Church's little freehand sketches, you'll see in the credits in the back the number of people who served on the Campus Planning Committee--and that's indicative of the tremendous participation on the part of very able people. [See pp. 40, 41 of the Long Range Development Plan, U.C.B., June 1962]

Riess: Here is the Liaison Subcommittee, which I guess worked with the City.

DeMonte: Yes, they served admirably in getting our plan coordinated with the City, ironing out those problems, and really making the dialog between the City and the University a meaningful one, where it wasn't always somebody accusing somebody else of having done things behind closed doors. We would have lunch meetings every two weeks and tell each other everything we were thinking about before it actually happened, get some kind of a reaction to it so we wouldn't catch each other off base.

Riess: The whole team was not all of one mind, though, was it?

DeMonte: Not at all, but Tommy and Bill and I, we empathized. We had sense enough to respect the input the Planning Committee could make. We planned physical things, but they had to be academically sound, and we had to rely on the committee: if the dean of Engineering said, "In 15 years, the ways things are going, my college is going to have to be three times as big as it is..." Well, if your plan was going to accommodate three times as much space, you simply had to make that commitment and not let anybody else intrude on it.

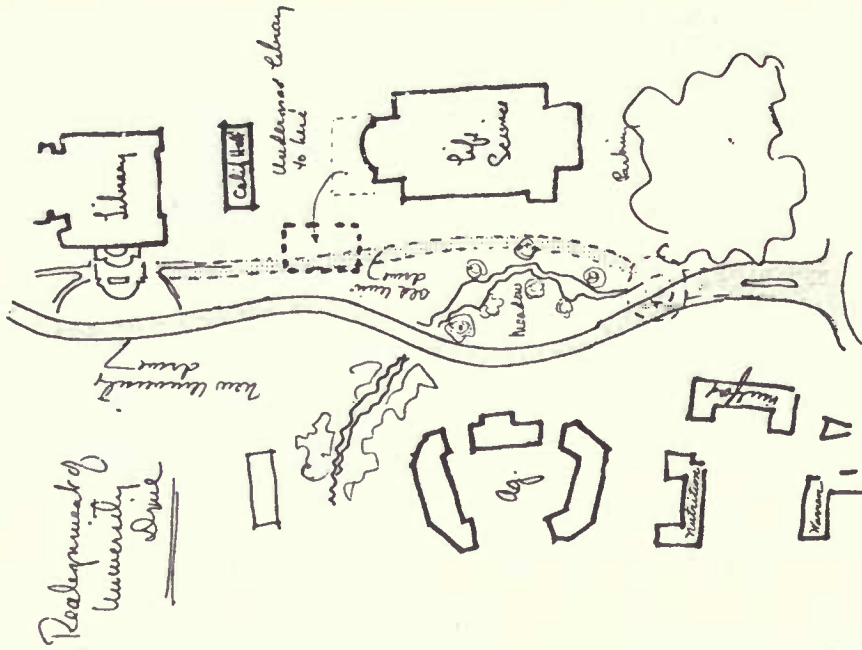
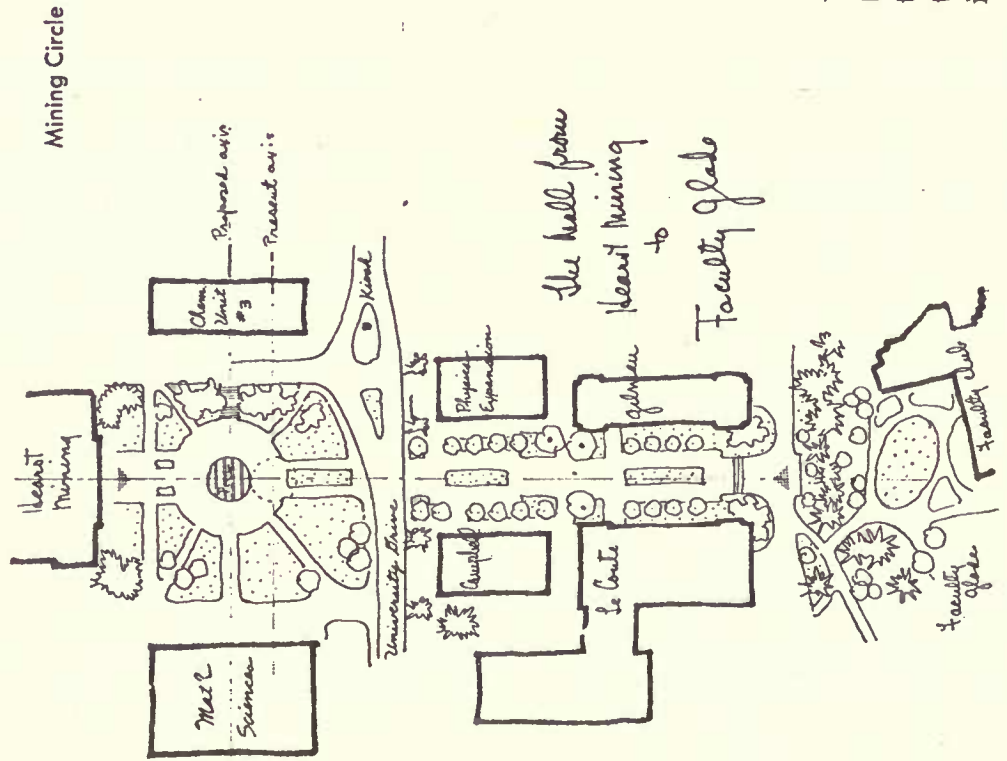
### 3) Committee Work with Architects

Riess: How about making aesthetic decisions?

DeMonte: The committee looked to us for that.

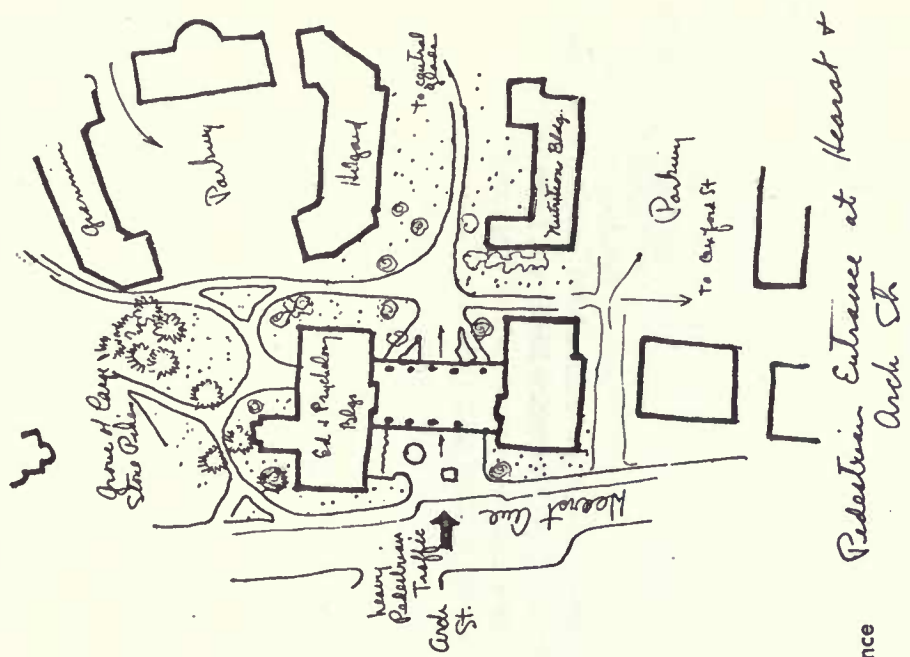


Significant open areas whose more formal, urban aspects will dominate include the Esplanade at Sather Tower, the Hearst Mining Circle (relocated slightly northward as on the sketch, below, from the Landscape Plan report), and its axial southerly extension, Dwinelle-Wheeler and the California Student Center Plazas, the University House Garden, and the West Crescent and Springer Gate.



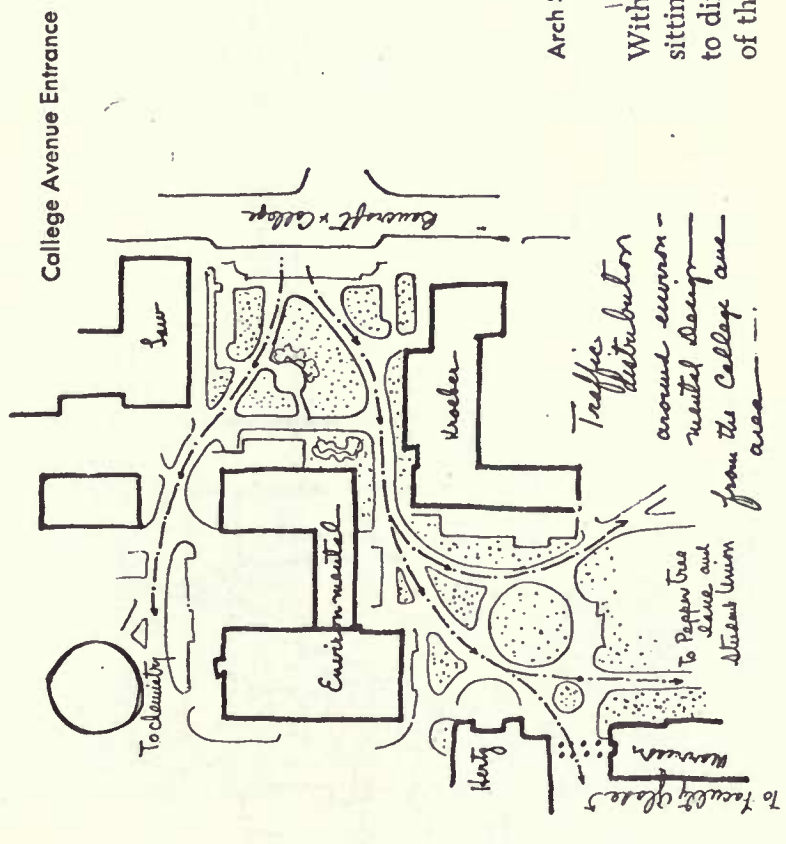
University Drive will be relocated to the north of its present location (as on the sketch, above, from the Landscape plan report), thus permitting proper views of the Life Sciences Building and the main Library building; a new pedestrian plaza will be built in front of the Library entrance.

The major campus entrances—Telegraph Avenue at Sather Gate, College Avenue Plaza, Euclid Avenue (North Gate), Springer Gate at the West Crescent, and the entrance on Hearst Avenue opposite Arch Street and spanned by the Education-Psychology Building—will be given special landscape treatment, for they are the main arrival points for persons approaching the Berkeley campus. (See typical sketches, below and to the right, from the Landscape Plan report.)



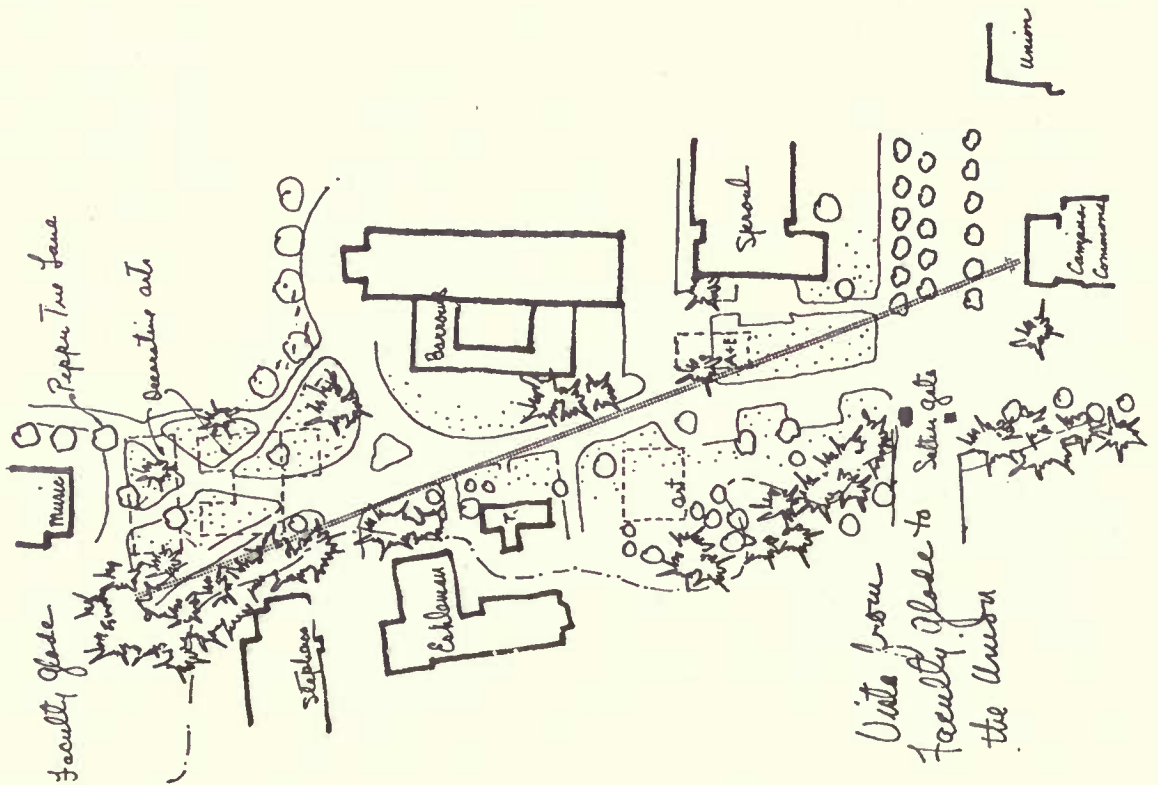
Arch Street Entrance

Pedestrian Entrance at Hearst & Arch St.



College Avenue Entrance

Within the central campus itself, pedestrian walks, glades, lawns, sitting areas, sculpture, and fountains will lend special personality to different parts of the campus, while at the same time the unity of the larger aspects of campus landscape will dominate.



Faculty Glade Extension

Where the campus has expanded into the urban pattern surrounding the traditional campus limits, particular attention will be paid to extending the visual qualities of campus landscape into these new areas. Thus the removal of overhead wires adjacent to and near the campus is regarded as most desirable. The residence halls on College Avenue and recent developments on the west side of Oxford Street, where street trees, spacious building approaches, and perimeter planting have been effected, exemplify this extension of campus landscape character; similar results can be expected as the campus building program proceeds.

As formerly undeveloped areas are utilized for campus purposes, as for example at the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory and in Strawberry Canyon, new stands of trees and added foliage will be incorporated on a systematic basis to soften the visual appearance of new developments from both within and without. The Gill Tract and the Richmond Field Station will have protective screen plantings at their perimeters, for reasons both of appearance and of insulation from nearby urban uses.

## A. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS

### I. CAMPUS PLANNING COMMITTEE

#### Members:

Glenn T. Seaborg, Chancellor (Chairman through January 1961)

Edward W. Strong, Chancellor (Chairman)

Orvin W. Campbell, Business and Finance Officer

Thomas D. Church, Consulting Landscape Architect

Louis A. DeMonte, Campus Architect and Head, Office of Architects and Engineers

Sanford S. Elberg, Chairman, Committee on Buildings and Campus Development Through November

Elmo R. Morgan, Vice President—Business

David W. Reed, Chairman, Committee on Buildings and Campus Development December 1961 and Subsequently

William W. Wurster, Consulting Architect and Dean, College of Environmental Design

#### Advisers:

Adrian A. Krage, Professor of Law and Vice Chancellor—Administration

Alden H. Miller, Professor of Zoology and Vice Chancellor—Academic Affairs

Donald H. McLaughlin, Member, Board of Regents

Robert J. Evans, University Architect and Head, Statewide Office of Architecture, Engineering, and Planning

#### Technical Staff:

Louis A. DeMonte, Campus Architect and Head, Office of Architects and Engineers

Charles R. Routsong, Planning Analyst, Office of Architects and Engineers  
Lindley R. Sale, Administrative Analyst, Office of the Chancellor

Charles D. Tefft, Associate Planner, Office of Architects and Engineers (Secretary June 1961 and subsequently)  
Albert R. Wagner, Associate Planner, Office of Architects and Engineers (Secretary through May 1961)

### 2. LIAISON SUBCOMMITTEE of the Campus Planning Committee

#### Members:

Richard L. Jennings, Professor of Law (Chairman)

Milton Chermín, Professor of Social Welfare and Dean, School of Social Welfare (Vice Chairman)

Orvin W. Campbell, Business and Finance Officer

Louis A. DeMonte, Campus Architect and Head, Office of Architects and Engineers

Gordon Hearn, Professor of Social Welfare (through December 1961)

Richard P. Hafner, Jr., Public Affairs Officer (January 1962 and subsequently)

Adrian A. Krage, Professor of Law and Vice Chancellor—Administration

Frank H. Miller, Assistant Business and Finance Officer

Charles D. Tefft, Associate Planner, Office of Architects and Engineers (June 1961 and subsequently)

Albert R. Wagner, Associate Planner, Office of Architects and Engineers (through May 1961)



## 3. ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON BUILDINGS AND CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT, ACADEMIC YEARS 1956-57 THROUGH 1961-62

|                                                  |                          |                             |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| C. W. Brown (56-59)<br>(Chairman 56-59)          | C. C. Gilliam (56-62)    | C. L. Nordly (57-61)        |
| S. S. Elberg, (56-57, 58-61)<br>(Chairman 59-61) | J. J. Gumperz (61-62)    | W. B. Quay (61-62)          |
| D. W. Reed (59-62)<br>(Chairman 61-62)           | W. D. Gwinn (58-59)      | T. L. Reller (61-62)        |
| M. S. Beeler (56-60)                             | W. C. Helmbold (59-60)   | D. A. Revzan (56-60)        |
| G. M. Briggs (61-62)                             | F. M. Henry (56-57)      | C. R. Routsong (56-62)      |
| L. A. Bromley (57-58)                            | J. F. Hopkins (57-58)    | L. R. Sale (59-62)          |
| E. H. Burness (58-62)                            | J. W. Hutchison (56-61)  | D. E. Savage (60-61)        |
| E. L. Burdick (56-57)                            | R. W. Jennings (56-62)   | R. F. Steidel (61-62)       |
| K. H. Cardwell (59-62)                           | P. F. Keim (56-57)       | C. D. Tefft (61-62)         |
| R. A. Cockrell (56-59)                           | R. F. Kerley (58-60)     | R. L. Thornton (58-62)      |
| S. F. Cook (57-60)                               | A. F. Kip (57-58)        | C. A. Tobias (59-61)        |
| R. Craig (59-62)                                 | H. J. Lagorio (57-58)    | F. E. Tregua (59-62)        |
| L. E. Davis (59-62)                              | J. J. Lynch (57-58)      | G. E. Troxell (57-61)       |
| W. G. Dauben (56-57)                             | L. Machlis (58-60)       | H. L. Vaughan (59-60)       |
| L. A. DeMonte (56-62)                            | S. J. Maisel (58-59)     | T. Vermeulen (60-62)        |
| E. R. Dempster (57-59)                           | R. W. Marston (58-59)    | M. J. Voigt (57-58)         |
| R. L. Doult (56-58)                              | J. L. Meriam (58-59)     | A. R. Wagner (59-61)        |
| W. B. Fretter (56-57)                            | M. A. Milczewski (58-60) | R. N. Walpole (60-61)       |
| C. F. Garland (56-58)                            | F. W. Miller (61-62)     | H. M. Worden (56-57, 60-62) |
|                                                  | W. W. Monahan (56-58)    | W. W. Wurster (56-57)       |
|                                                  | P. L. Morton (57-58)     | J. A. Zivnaska (59-62)      |
|                                                  | L. Nelson (56-57)        |                             |



## APPENDIX A: Membership of the Committee on Buildings and Campus Development

Listed here is the membership of the Administrative Committee on Buildings and Campus Development during the period when the *Long Range Development Plan for the Berkeley Campus* was under consideration by that Committee (Fall 1953 to Spring 1956).

C. W. Brown, Chairman

S. S. Elberg, Acting Chairman, Fall 1955

A. W. Baxter, Secretary

C. Aikin  
 E. W. Barankin  
 D. S. Berry  
 R. A. Cockrell  
 D. Coney (ex officio)  
 F. W. Cozens  
 W. B. Fretter  
 F. O. Harris  
 F. M. Henry  
 W. W. Horn  
 J. W. Hutchison (ex officio)  
 R. W. Jennings  
 P. F. Keim  
 T. J. Kent

*Student Members:*

Elizabeth (Waldie) Dempster  
 Tom Morrish  
 Hans Palmer  
 Bernice Pence  
 Roslyn H. Puterman  
 Bill Somerville

M. E. Krueger  
 E. G. Linsley  
 M. A. Milczewski  
 W. W. Monahan (ex officio)  
 R. H. Neddersen (ex officio)  
 L. Nelson  
 S. C. Pepper  
 R. E. Powell  
 D. A. Revzan  
 F. Violich  
 H. F. Weaver  
 H. E. White  
 H. M. Worden  
 W. W. Wurster (ex officio)

*Technical Advisers:*

L. B. Boyd  
 L. A. DeMonte  
 R. D. Miller  
 C. R. Routsong  
 A. R. Wagner

In addition, the following participated as members of the Subcommittees on Landscape and on Parking and Circulation:

K. Aschenbrenner  
 J. S. Bain  
 R. G. Bressler  
 K. H. Cardwell  
 A. A. Ehrenzweig  
 T. H. Goodspeed  
 A. Inouye  
 W. N. Kennedy  
 R. B. Litton

H. L. Mason  
 G. F. McGregor  
 W. I. Noble  
 A. E. Pritchard  
 C. D. Quire  
 H. S. Thomson  
 H. L. Vaughan  
 E. S. Vierz  
 F. E. Woodward

DeMonte: The aesthetic decisions we were primarily involved in were the location of buildings; the parts of the campus that were to be open and those that could accommodate buildings; the approximate size and mass of buildings so that they related to each other and to their neighbors and were not out of scale with the particular part of campus they were in.

For instance, the buildings around Faculty Glade had to have a certain kind of scale that would not necessarily be appropriate on Hilgard Field or up by Environmental Design. One would not put Environmental Design where the Music Building is. So, to that extent, we determined the criteria that were given to the individual architect when he was commissioned to do a project.

We would walk the campus with that architect, and Bill, Tommy, and I would just chat with him the way we are talking here now, saying, "This is the way we see it. We'd welcome your studying it and giving us your reactions. If you have some other ideas, we'll listen. It might even be better than we'd conceived of it. But lacking anything better, these are the things you're going to have to meet. We're not going to design your building, but your building is going to fit and make a certain part of the whole statement."

Riess: How was Tommy elected? By the committee?

DeMonte: It was a Regents appointment. It was not by the Chancellor of the Berkeley Campus.

When he came on the scene I think everyone felt the urgent need of having a man of that stature and ability to fill out the things which were not architecture as such, that is the spaces, the natural qualities of the campus, the manner in which those areas that were going to be more specifically developed should be developed, all the things which Tommy has demonstrated in his earlier work and was doing at Stanford and other campuses. He came with everyone seeking that kind of help, in a framework that made it possible for it to be effective. Tommy didn't come on the scene having to undo a number of bad things, let's say, where the spaces had already been destroyed or had not been appreciated, or where the campus was overcrowded.

All the potential was there, and fortunately he fit into it beautifully, sensed all this, and weaved it together as one would a fine tapestry. I had never worked with Tommy prior to that. I knew of him, of course, and Bill had worked with Tommy for years, they were contemporaries--I sensed here was a tremendous opportunity to bring another strong element into this whole thing. I not only came to respect his work but became very fond of him and respected his ideas very much. And I think it was mutual.

DeMonte: Tommy, Bill and I used to say, "No one of us alone could get any of these things done, but together they'll never lick us." Well, it's more than that, more than just "three people are ten times as strong as one." Compatible people bounce ideas off each other and when the others sense that it is a good idea, the confidence it gives you is immeasurable. Tommy was a key part of the team and planning was his greatest delight at that point.

As a matter of fact, it turned out that the architects appreciated this because the reverse side of this would be that they would flounder all over the place trying to find something to hang onto.

Riess: Was it [Joseph] Esherick who did the Environmental Design building?

DeMonte: Actually there were three architects, [Vernon] DeMars, Esherick, and [Donald] Olsen.

Riess: Well, what did you suggest to them?

DeMonte: We gave them the site. We gave them the program of room numbers and sizes and a statement of what the uses of the spaces were to be. We discussed with the architect and the faculty building committee what the building should be and how it worked. The mass of it is the architects' own statement. Vernon DeMars started the first of the studies, and they were much different in scale and rambled up the hill. It turned out that this design didn't work quite the way the college wanted--now when I say college, there were more differences of opinion in that one college than you find on most campuses.

Then Don Olsen had a crack at it, and in his typical pure style it was very handsome, elegant, stark and simple. That didn't quite go over either. There was a building committee made up of members of the faculty who were making these judgments.

And then Joe Esherick began to take the thing over and that design as you see it now has a lot of the Olsen massing plan elements, but all of the "style," the so called "brutal" architecture, was Joe's.

Riess: So, you and Wurster and Church would choose, first, an architect whose work was likely to be sympathetic to the problem.

DeMonte: We would draw up a panel that we would recommend, including our preferences for each particular job, the criterion being that architect whom we thought could do that particular building most sensitively. Taking into account of course that the Regents were going to make the final selection, it was fairly difficult to get a young, very able person in right off the bat. That accounts, I think, for some of the commissions.

DeMonte: The first meetings with the architect I think were probably the most instrumental in affecting the design.

Riess: I imagine that had to be handled delicately.

DeMonte: We all knew each other, and the architect knew that we were not going to usurp his responsibility for designing the building, and he knew that he could not do what we had already spent years in doing, and so it became a complimentary role.

Riess: How about siting the buildings? Did Tommy do that?

DeMonte: No, the Building and Campus Development Committee officially did, with Tommy, Bill and I having made the recommendation.

Riess: No, I mean orienting it, east, west, etc.

DeMonte: Well, I think that was something that each of us participated in. If it became a matter of where to locate the building primarily, that was a decision already made as part of the campus plan. As the studies began to emerge, in terms of whether certain parts of the building were more or less sensitive to the land, Tommy would step in and suggest there ought to be more space, or better relationships. But it was sort of a group effort. Obviously if Tommy felt some way about how the building related to the land, why we listened to that and respected it.

Tommy was part architect anyhow, just as I like to think of myself as being part landscape architect. You can't really be in one field or the other without realizing that they don't stand alone. And Bill, of course, roamed all over the thing. He [laughing], being on the academic side, could speak anywhere he wanted to and command respect of the faculty. The lines were not really that clear. We didn't ask Tommy what he thought about this. We all pitched in, and we recognized a good idea, fortunately, when we heard it. We buried the bad ones.

Riess: Did Tommy ever have to present ideas directly to the Regents? How did he do?

DeMonte: Tommy was just a warm, wonderful guy, and it only takes you about five minutes talking with Tommy to realize that there's no subterfuge, and that he feels what he says, whether it happened to be on a one-to-one basis, or with the building committee. Sometimes the building committee said, "We've got to have so much and we want it all here because we want to do something else over there." And we'd fall back on Tommy's saying, "That much building would just overwhelm Observatory Hill," or, "You can't put anything on Observatory Hill." (You'd be surprised at how many faculty committees wanted their buildings on Observatory Hill. And it's still there!)



Riess: And now there is a commitment to keeping it unbuilt.

DeMonte: Oh, they even considered building on it not very long ago. It wasn't going to be on the top of the hill, but on the base of the hill, and we realized that a hill is a hill and taking the base away would no longer keep it as a hill relating to the old glade.

Tommy was the kind of professional that professionals like to work with. The lay person, sensitive as these people were on the committee--and they really understood these things as well as we did--they'd have confidence in him. And when Tommy got before the Regents in his quiet, confident sort of way, backed by all this I've mentioned, he was a winner.

Riess: Of course his private practice might have included a Regent or two.

DeMonte: Exactly. His clientele were just drinking buddies with most of the Regents, so they already knew of his ability and he simply confirmed that in the manner in which he approached this thing and the sense he made, and the fact that he said what had to be said and no more and no less. This was the kind of rewarding experience you get when a good idea is carried on by real professionals.

#### 4) Recognizing and Protecting Campus Potential

Riess: Were there any times when his presence made all the difference in convincing the Regents of something?

DeMonte: I can't pinpoint any big, strong decision, but I do know that it would happen over and over again that people might challenge our open space principles for the sake of expediency, let's say, and Tommy would simply put that back where it belonged.

Riess: Expediency or cost?

DeMonte: Whatever. If it meant, perhaps, having to buy a million dollar parcel of land in order to retain our open space, Tommy could very quickly put that in perspective and did.

It turned out that by this time these things were so interlocked that the big decisions very often happened fairly early. If they're the right decisions you bolster them, build them up, strengthen them and then they become more and more clear. That is to say, the biggest decision about the Berkeley Campus was made by those very wise people



- DeMonte: who chose the site, either by accident or intent. That's how it all started, and the rest of us simply recognized its potential in one way or another.
- Riess: That's modest.
- DeMonte: But it's true.
- Riess: But the rest of you could have destroyed it.
- DeMonte: Well, our contribution is having recognized its qualities and protected and enhanced them.

I used to make the claim--I don't know if it's still true--that after I had been on the campus for 15 or 20 years there was more open than when I'd gone to school there. We tore down more of those rambling old shacks, like the old swimming pool, a lot of the old metal buildings, pre-World War II, and gave back more open space than we used as new building sites.

- Riess: It's amazing that the T-buildings [temporary buildings] haven't come down.
- DeMonte: I missed my bet that they would all be gone before I retired. When it was clear we had to have them to accommodate the surge of students after World War II, I was instrumental in putting them in the open spaces so that we would not compromise our long range plan for putting permanent buildings where we wanted them. That way as we removed the temporary buildings, the open spaces would emerge. In fact the availability of the open space would be the strongest pressure on removing them. And we had almost got them all down until we got to those last two or three. They'll come down. They are an eyesore to a handsome campus.
- Riess: The years without a plan were pretty bleak on the campus.
- DeMonte: Yes. Not enough people recognized that the clutter had to be removed if we were going to sense and enjoy the open spaces.
- Riess: In my reading of the long-range plan I saw reference to intending to plant wildflowers on the hillsides. Was that done?
- DeMonte: Yes, the Radiation Laboratory deserves the credit. The decision to start the Laboratory up there was made by one man. I recall Evans and I in our brash youth at one time had the audacity to suggest to Sproul that they ought to move the whole kit and caboodle down near the Bay to some of the industrial lands. Unfortunately they had that first cyclotron up there and we couldn't convince them.

DeMonte: Fortunately, the people who inherited that decision were aware that they had a responsibility and they did something that is not too easy; they got the federal government to agree to do some landscaping on those sites, and they planted a lot of trees and sprinkled all the hillsides with wildflowers--poppy, lupine, all kinds of nice things. None of which begin to obliterate all the scars that are there because of the buildings. But there again, as I said earlier, the big decisions are really the first ones. Having put that first building up there is what that Radiation Lab is all about.

So you ask yourself--sometimes that first step doesn't seem to be that important, but that's when you really have to zero in on it. And Tommy was great at that, he could see the implications of those things. He knew that if he allowed anybody to inch in a little on this thing the next step would be easier, and after about four or five of those [attempts at encroachment] you couldn't defend it.

Tommy also had a magnificent knack of sensing the richness of life, which is variety. Tommy was instrumental in reminding us that we are an urban campus, no two ways about it, you can't get that many people on that small a piece of land right next to a city and not have some urban quality. So he made it possible for us not to fight it but to enjoy it. And that whole Sather Gate scene is part of it. Tommy was astute enough to say: "Right in the middle of that whole thing I want an oasis," right down there by the creek.

And Tommy spent a great deal of time developing a continuous green belt along Strawberry Creek. And a lot of little "incidents." There is that place just off the Sather Gate bridge: have you seen that little outdoor sitting area? And there are more up there by Eshleman, by the Pelican Building, and on up through the Music Building and beyond.

Riess: Was the detailing done by Tommy on those areas?

DeMonte: Most of them. I did the little outdoor space there by the bridge on the back on an envelope, as a class gift. Somebody wanted to spend \$4000 or so. (We probably spent \$14,000, but they never knew it.)

But Tommy, as Supervising Landscape Architect, was commissioned then to do the detail landscape architecture for the individual buildings, so that's how he carried out most of his ideas. He did a number of them, seven, eight, maybe ten of those major buildings.

Riess: So the Church office had commissions?

DeMonte: That's correct. In campus landscape projects and in the landscape architecture for the individual buildings is how his ideas were put into effect.

#### 5) Regents, in Control

DeMonte: The Regents did not want the Supervising Architect for any of the campuses to be the architect for too many buildings. (On the other hand Tommy could have done all the landscape on the Berkeley campus at that time.)

Riess: Why?

DeMonte: Well, I think there was a little of the fear that they'd lose control somewhere. They wanted a Supervising Architect as an objective agent for the Regents, I guess.

Riess: I think an architect must be a formidable creature for a Regent.

DeMonte: Oh, they are frightened of them. [Laughter] Maybe for good cause. Of course the architects are frightened of Regents, too. [Laughter]

Riess: How did Regent McLaughlin fit into all this?

DeMonte: McLaughlin came in as a member of the Campus Planning Committee for the reason that every time we'd go to the Regents with a building design that had everybody's agreement as to location, architectural design, sitework, mass, all the other kind of things, McLaughlin wouldn't like it. He wouldn't like it for the simple reason that it didn't have a tile roof on it! And we had long since decided that tile roofs were mandatory on certain buildings, and the Music Building was one, but the Environmental Design Building was not one.

That didn't mean anything to McLaughlin, and he would just knock it down. We finally got to the point of saying, "Well, hell, there's no sense in going through all of this and striking out," which was terribly embarrassing because the architect thought he had the approval of the client having been through this morass of procedures and committees, and the Chancellor saying, "That's fine, I'll bring it to the Regents," and then it would get knocked down.

Kerr very astutely said, "The only way to lick him is to get him on the committee." But he then limited the committee to himself, McLaughlin, and Wurster.

DeMonte: Now where was Tommy Church in all this? He was advisory to the committee. Whatever it was, Tommy still was very significant in the planning process. The whole little gambit there was to have McLaughlin on the committee.

Riess: Did that solve the problem?

DeMonte: It worked pretty well. That is, we'd just keep working with him until he said okay, and then he would be our sponsor in the Regents meeting. The trouble used to be that the rest of the Regents would defer to McLaughlin; even though they thought otherwise, they just weren't going to take him on. So it became a kind of inhouse joke: "Here goes McLaughlin on the tile roof tirade again."

But to relate this to Tommy's participation, it was that he was a very strong part of that team, whether it was convincing McLaughlin that the building was right, or the committees, or the Chancellor. Without him we would have lacked a great deal in the qualities that these buildings and landscape have and I think in the total statement of the campus.

The best group effort is that in which you cannot identify the participation and contribution of any particular person. It doesn't matter whose idea it is, just so it ends up being the best thing that we can collectively do.

Riess: I would gather, from other people's comments, that the biggest ego to contend with in all of this would have been Wurster's.

DeMonte: It was, but Tommy was a contemporary of his [Wurster] and he wasn't going to be buffaloed by anybody, even Bill Wurster. I knew Bill enough at that point that he didn't try to bamboozle me. I remember when he used to try to shut off some of the faculty people who were disagreeing with him and he'd take on a very, very stiff kind of an air. But we were very much "old hat" together, Tommy, Bill and I.

## 6) Professionals in Academic Departments

Riess: Did you ask for, or get, any kind of input on all this open space planning from members of the landscape architecture department? Like Violich.

DeMonte: Fran Violich was on the Buildings and Campus Development Committee in those very constructive years when there was a lot of input. So he was heard and made a very significant contribution. When all participants



DeMonte: were heard, and decisions were made by peers who may not have taken all of your ideas, perhaps, but the best of the whole situation, you sort of have to live with those. Fran is a professional: he realizes that if it's the best decision then you support it.

There were times, flurries I guess, of landscape department chairmen wanting to get more participation in terms of doing what Tommy Church was doing, or doing more of the landscape for the individual buildings. The Regents, however, did not feel that the faculty should be doing as much professional work.

For a while there there was quite a bit of it: Bill did some and Joe Esherick did some, and Vernon deMars was doing some. There got to be the feeling that this was getting a little bit ingrown and it began to appear--maybe without reason--that the faculty was having too much to say about some of these things and the Regents were losing some of their hold on it. The word was out: they didn't want to use faculty people in the executive capacity; an advisory capacity on committees was fine.

Riess: It's interesting. I can imagine the landscape architecture department yearning to take over.

DeMonte: A difficult time was when Jack [Thomas J.] Kent first came on board. He came from the City of Berkeley staff. He would have welcomed the chance to come up with a whole master plan for the campus. And then who else? Another city planner came up and was on the faculty.

There was also a lot of pressure put on us by the Department of City and Regional Planning. I don't think we did it as a defensive measure but we had already sensed the need for more planning expertise and had hired Al Wagner on the A&E staff. He was a graduate in architecture but had his M.A. in city and regional planning. A very bright guy. So there we were, nose to nose, professional to professional, and they couldn't put us down as much as they wanted to.

Some of the studies Al Wagner made were as good as anything that had been turned out to that point professionally. The study on Strawberry Canyon and the study on the location of the Services Building were very important planning studies that were done in a fully professional manner, with all the analyses, the alternatives and the reasoning. And they stood up.

I think it was a series of these things which finally put down all this, "They can't do it, we'll take over," approach that we got. That's understandable. These cycles come and go. You get a new [city



DeMonte: and regional planning] chairman in, who doesn't know anything of the background, and he believes that "those bureaucrats down there don't know anything about what they are doing and they should be put aside." They'd come on pretty strong until they ran into the quality of what we were doing and the support work that Tommy Church, Bill, and some of the Campus Planning Committee would do, and the capability of Al Wagner, and that would blunt that effort to take over. But then they would only last for five years and you'd get another cycle of it. I'm sure this happens in any field.

## 7) Landscape Solutions on the Berkeley Campus

DeMonte: But here's where Tommy's obvious ability entered--an old-time pro who could talk to them in any terms that they wanted, whether it was long-range planning or the individual little space. All the magnificent experiences of the urban thing, as I spoke of it early, and the contrast between that and the English landscape that he was doing right through the glade, knitting all these things together so that it was subtle series of experiences that the campus offered you.

Tommy knew when to open up a vista and when to close it. That's no easy thing to do. He did a tremendous amount of good work around all the creeks. One of the extremely difficult problems we had was the overflowing of the creeks and floods on the campus, and that meant that we had to have flood control. And flood control is dams. How were we to prevent flooding the campus and the City of Berkeley without being the Corps of Engineers in miniature.

It took Tommy, with a certain kind of awareness of all these technical problems, and yet saying, "All right, you don't go overboard and prevent all flooding at the expense of everything that we've been trying to do." By a combination of erosion control on the banks, that were treated very naturally, and certain other kinds of astute techniques here and there, we struck a compromise between the Corps of Engineers solution and the "oh, hell, let it flood" attitude.

But it takes a man of Tommy's stature to convince people that you ought to strike a sensible medium, and a man of his ability to see that these things were done. Now if we had a 50-year storm we'd get our feet wet on campus some places, but it's not going to wash out anything or flood downtown Berkeley.

Riess: He certainly knows what he's doing.

DeMonte: Well, the Tommy Churches come around once in a lifetime, and I'm glad I was there when it happened.

Riess: Is it the training, or the man?

DeMonte: The man, first of all. Secondly the time in history in which he lived and had opportunities. Then he was able to get the best from people with whom he worked.

Riess: Landscape architects today often concern themselves more with walls and benches and paving. The landscaping around the Environmental Design Buildings, for example, is pretty harsh.

DeMonte: Well, the court to the east came as part of the building, an outdoor place for display and meetings. And the space on the south was a part of the building program too. And Joe didn't want softening around his buildings.

Riess: Joe didn't just leave the building for Tommy to finish off around the edges.

DeMonte: Some architects will stop at the building line. Joe had a very strong feeling about the stark quality of his buildings and he didn't want it blurred by a soft landscape.

Gardner Dailey, who did the Art Building, on the other hand, was almost a combination of Bill Wurster and Tommy Church. Gardner Dailey was a landscape architect in his own right, as well as a good architect. So he did his own landscape. He thought about it; that building [Kroeber Hall] was not finished until it got out in the landscape and sort of merged in with the rest of it. There is no line between his building and the entourage.

Riess: Such a difference in attitude.

DeMonte: Some architects care about what surrounds their buildings, and some don't. Some are capable of designing what surrounds their building, and some aren't.

But Tommy, in this particular building [Environmental Design] realized that the building was going to be bold and brutal and it would be completely out of place to do the kind of landscape that you could do around the Music Building, let's say.

Riess: He did five or six of the new buildings?

DeMonte: I think he did every building in that time he was there, Earth Sciences, Engineering, the Math Building, and much that had to do with realignment of roads.

Riess: Speaking of roads, rerouting the University Drive and placing the Undergraduate Library must have been a thorny problem.

DeMonte: Yes, it was. There was a big argument as to whether the library should be there, where it belongs as part of the central library complex, or not to have any building there because the Glade was untouchable. We went round on that for years, and only when it was agreed that the building should respect the site in every way was the decision made to put it there. I think the building is successful and respected the site primarily because it is more than half underground and was so designed that it touches the ground easily and permits you to enter it at several levels without a lot of hard architecture to get you from the ground into the building.

It's a very large building, but we saved every tree we could, and planted some more so that the site retained most of its original wooded character. No sense in our kidding ourselves that it disappears; it doesn't; it's a building, but it's not a building that's incongruous with that particular site.

You brought up something that I had forgotten. Tommy was very instrumental in closing off University Drive to through traffic. Although he actually did not design the road or the bridges, he contributed to all those things. It's redundant to say that if I had a worthwhile idea or some concern and communicated it to Tommy, he would look at it and think about it. If he agreed to it, it was on its way. So, whether he originated the idea, or whether he supported the idea, it could never have gotten done without him.

Riess: I should think the expense of rerouting would have been terrific.

DeMonte: The cost of rerouting it was part of the library project once we did decide to put the building there. But the closing to through traffic, which we thought was absolutely essential if in fact the Glade was going to be pedestrian-oriented, was the real Donnybrook. The City wanted to be able to drive its firetrucks from the West Gate up to the hospital and other buildings, such as Chemistry on the east side. The people up in the Rad Lab wanted to drive down through the campus to go home. There were 101 reasons why the road should not be closed off, and just one reason why it should be. That reason was that the Glade could be pedestrian-oriented only if the road were closed. I've forgotten how many surveys we made on that!

## 8) The Qualities Thomas Church Brought to the Campus

Riess: It sounds like Tommy stood for a traditional campus look, rather than innovations.

DeMonte: Tommy was responsible to the Regents. If the Regents didn't approve of what he was doing he wasn't going to be effective very long. Tommy represented to the Regents the assurance they were looking for that this campus, with fine old buildings in the traditional classical style, in this fine natural setting, would not be violated. He gave them this assurance with his personal attributes as a quiet, thoughtful person, his prominent satisfied clientele, and his ability to say the right thing at the right time.

If it were a brand new campus and someone wanted to do the most exciting contemporary campus in the world, they might have looked for somebody like Sasaki & Walker or a similar firm with large commissions. Tommy obviously enjoyed the kind of work he did. He did not go out looking for big jobs.

I remember we had a hard time convincing him to come, because he was already busy with private work, and at Stanford. I think he came only because Bill and I were there and he felt that he would not have to start from scratch, that the essence of the campus plan was there and that his contribution could be to clarify, strengthen, and to make his contribution. There is a tremendous amount of difference between starting from scratch and working with a going scheme. Incidentally he worked on the original plan for Santa Cruz with Warnecke. He took that on because he couldn't resist those 2,000 acres of magnificent redwoods, and he couldn't see anybody else going up there and screwing it all up, so [laughing] he figured that he'd better step in himself.

Riess: How often did he have to meet with you?

DeMonte: He would come to the Campus Planning Committee meeting with McLaughlin, Wurster, Kerr, about once a month, and he would contribute at that level. But we were conscious of the fact that time was a problem with him; he didn't want to devote more than he had to, so we would bring to him those things where, with a minimum of time, he could make his greatest contribution.

Riess: I've meant to ask about other small scale design elements on campus, the kiosks, light standards that are new. Were they A&E, or Thomas Church?



- DeMonte: They were the work of Tommy Church and under his guidance we may have developed specific items. Tommy realized that a big idea is meaningful only if it's carried out through the smallest detail. He didn't stop with the large vistas and the English gardens, but he came on down to the lighting fixtures and the benches and the little kiosks--he had done several down at Stanford and was kind enough simply to let us use them for the Berkeley Campus. All those pieces of street furniture were very much his contribution.
- Riess: How about choice of plantings?
- DeMonte: Fred [Frederick F.] Warnke, a landscape architect in the A&E office, is a very able plant man, and worked very closely with Tommy. Tommy would suggest the scale and type of planting and Fred would know exactly what he meant and worked it out with the executive landscape architect. If it were Tommy, as landscape architect, Fred would work with the people in his office to fit it with the campus. Fred was sort of the liaison person in getting it done. Tommy, however, called the turn on the planting.
- Riess: You have given a very complete picture of campus planning here, and I am very appreciative, both of the background information, and of how much you have added to the view of Thomas Church, and his effectiveness. Is there anything you would want to add?
- DeMonte: I might mention the pleasure that I got out of working with him as a professional. And that's what the pleasure of any profession is, when you can work with and learn from somebody whom you respect and admire. I just enjoyed being with him as a person and a professional. Everybody in my office felt the same way.
- Riess: You mentioned before the tape was on that Tommy "lived on planes."
- DeMonte: He had continuing commissions on the East Coast and I remember flying back with him from Dulles on several occasions. He would go to Europe frequently, just because he liked to go back and steep himself in all of those fine examples over there.
- Riess: What, besides the Tivoli Gardens?
- DeMonte: [Laughing] Well, take the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, and the Villa d'Este in Italy, and probably everything in between. Tommy could make you really ooh and aah over the way he could put plants, architecture, walls, water, shade and shadow and color together. Where else do you find it except in those places where people have learned how important the physical environment is to life?



Riess: They learned it well over there.

DeMonte: Oh, and we'll learn it. We apparently have to go through the process of first destroying a lot of our natural beauty before we realize its great value to our lives. Think about what happens to all of our rivers, lakefronts and waterfronts: First thing we do is we botch them up, and then we go back and try to restore them. I'm always optimistic. I'm sure it happened in Europe the same way. All the beautiful trees, lakefront promenades and parks we go over there to see were not there originally.

Riess: You are mellow! [Laughter]

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Germano Milono

AN ARCHITECT TRACES HIS PATH TO SAN FRANCISCO, AND  
LOOKS BACK AT THOMAS CHURCH'S INFLUENCE

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Germano Milono

|                                          |     |
|------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) 402 Jackson Street, 1946              | 287 |
| 2) A Job During the Depression           | 288 |
| 3) Timothy Pflueger                      | 290 |
| 4) On the Way to the F.S.A.              | 292 |
| 5) World War II, Japan                   | 294 |
| 6) "You Wonder Where You Start"          | 295 |
| 7) The Wurster Office, and Tommy Church  | 298 |
| 8) And Larry Halprin                     | 300 |
| 9) Markings: Curves and Lines            | 301 |
| 10) "A Very Private Guy"                 | 303 |
| 11) Working Together with Tommy          | 305 |
| 12) A Few Words about Frank Lloyd Wright | 308 |
| 13) Success Story                        | 309 |





Germano Milono

March 14, 1977

Interview held in his home, above his office, 1394 Masonic Avenue,  
San Francisco

1) 402 Jackson Street, 1946

Milono: I met Tommy I think right after the war. I knew of him before but I met him right after the war when I moved into that building [402 Jackson Street] in 1946 and went to work for Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons.

Riess: Had they and Tommy bought that building together?

Milono: No, they didn't buy it. They should have bought it. They talked about it many times.

I don't know just what year they [Wurster, Bernardi, and Emmons] came in there. I didn't pay attention to that. But they moved out I think about 1950. I moved before that. I worked for them for three years and then I moved downstairs to Tommy. I was put on loan to Tommy. Tommy had a job to do, the Laurel Hill cemetery, and he needed a draftsman, somebody that they felt qualified to handle some of that work.

Riess: Who else was in the office then?

Milono: At that time there was Larry Halprin, and George Rockrise had just come in and so the three of us [were there]. Larry had been a landscape architect I think from the East; and George Rockrise had worked for a couple of firms back East and he met Tommy in New York when Tommy had a talk with Ed Stone, and Tommy brought George out in a sense.

Riess: It was an expanding office when you moved in.

Milono: Yes, when I moved in George didn't have quite the background that I had, and Tommy felt he needed somebody.

Milono: Business was slow in Wurster's office. Every time he would come into town he would put me on to some job; I was his boy because I sat in front. Then Wurster came back from being back at MIT and business was so slow that they decided to let some people go and with me they suggested I try Tommy's office.

Riess: I should think that post-war there would be a boom.

Milono: I think that you have to understand that architecture was then and probably is still now and always will be not for the masses, but for people who can afford it. The architect, as a rule, not the specific guys that have some higher level where they can be hired for patching things together, but the average practitioner, he's a luxury in a sense. If there's any kind of drop in a market in our kind of economy, then they pick up the phone and they call the architect and say, "Hey, Joe, hold up on that project." And they are not so quick to pick up again because they're frightened of the economy. So there's a big lull.

For the past three years there has been a real bad stretch among the architects. I once looked up to see what the hell the score was with architects, and found that about 85 percent of the architects were unemployed during the Depression. That was when I was just getting out of college. Because there was a depression during the first part of my college years I wasn't aware of how it could have been. You came through a depression and saw this happening where you scrounge for a job.

## 2) A Job During the Depression

Milono: When I first came to San Francisco, in 1937, there were only a couple of offices open. After months of looking I was able to get a job as a designer--I say designer because I couldn't fit into any other category at that time.

Riess: Where were you trained?

Milono: I was trained at Carnegie Institute, in Pittsburgh. I came out here with the idea that, since there was no work in Pittsburgh, maybe I could ship out and [laughing] go to the Orient. I stopped in Portland and tried to get out of there, and then I came down to San Francisco. It wasn't too long after the great strike of '34, and I got involved doing floats for the longshoremen. That really was the beginning, when the labor movement was quite strong, strong where it had been nothing before.

Riess: Did you go on working for the longshoremen?

Milono: No, I went to work for Pflueger.

Riess: Oh, Timothy Pflueger? That's interesting.

Milono: That was the first job I got. I was desperate. I had no money--and still have no money. [Laughing] I had a letter of introduction to Arthur Brown from my professor at school. Brown said, "Gee, I haven't got any work." But he said, "Why don't you take this little note and go and see Pflueger." What I didn't realize was that Pflueger and Brown didn't get along. So Pflueger was not too pleased to see me.

Riess: Because of your introduction from Brown?

Milono: Yes, the kiss of death. But anyway I didn't know that, I was naive enough not to know that. I came back several days calling and the gal at the desk was a Miss Bud, I remember, and she would not let me get in. But I would come anyway. I would open the door and say, "I'm here again."

I had not yet seen Mr. Pflueger at this point. Finally I did get to see him. I was desperate, and as he was ushering me out I said, "Do you know I can do this and I can do that. I can do those things there, I can make models." I was desperate. He said, "Well, come back Thursday." So with that I went flying out of there, and came back on Thursday, and she had not heard of it, the gal at the front.

Riess: So then you had to start all over again?

Milono: No, I said, "I have a job here." And she said, "I didn't hear of it." I said, "Yes, I have a job." She got up, she went out of her office there, and I opened the door into the drafting room and I cornered the first guy and I said, "I have a job here. Where do you think I could sit?" [Laughter]

The chief draftsman--that was an office that was run by a chief draftsman, but he wasn't there, and it was the junior draftsman who told me to ask the janitor, who was a black man, who ran the elevator too at times, to get me a board from the basement. Then there was an engineer on the second floor that I went in to get a stool from.

I showed up with all this, put it down, and they moved some things around in the office, and lunchtime came and I went out and I bought a lightbulb and I made a cardboard light shield, and I plugged into somebody else's outlet, and at 1:30 or 2:00 Pflueger came in and he looked in and he saw me and he yelled at Nate Larsen, chief draftsman. "Nate, get in here, goddamnit!" I think he said.

Milono: Then he shut the door and then I heard him say, "Who the hell let that sonofabitch in here?" I didn't know what to do, I'm sitting there. So finally they decided, well, I'd already found a spot so they better see what I could do.

### 3) Timothy Pflueger

Riess: Do you have any insights into Pflueger's success?

Milono: He came from a very large family. He and his brother Milton were uneducated. I think the others went through medical school and somebody else was a banker and so like that. And these two never went. They went into building and I presume--this is only piecing it together from way back--I presume he came up by having been in Miller's office and finally Miller wanting to get out some way said, "Well, I'll make you a partner." I don't know whether that's true but that's the way it usually happened in that period. Today they all go out and steal some good guy from a firm and make him a vice-president or something in charge of a certain section in these larger corporations. Like every big business is done the same way. That might happen today but then it would have come up by working it the hard way.

The first day when I went to work for Pflueger, he sat me down and he said, "I want you to correct this." It was a couple sheets of presentation drawings that somebody had done. I don't know who had done them. They were overworked and very dirty and I said, "Yes, when do I have to have this corrected?" "I need it right away." This was 2:00, and I said, "What time? What do you mean by right away?" And he said, "I want it by 6:00."

I looked at them and thought, "Well, I can only do so much," and I said to him, "I can just clean up the thing and try to correct it, but I can't change the whole perspective and everything else in that time." He said, "Do the best you can." I was too much concerned with what I had to do to think that maybe this was--later I thought maybe he was just trying to get rid of me, which he was, I think, by throwing me a really impossible thing.

By 6 everybody else had left, and I was still there working and he came out of his office, about 6:30, and he said, "Go out to dinner and then come back. I want you to work on it some more." So I went out. I didn't have any money, so I walked around the block, and I came back and worked, and at 1 a.m. he said, "You'll have to stop now. We want you here tomorrow morning." I said, "What time?"



Milono: "Seven o'clock if you can make it."

We took the elevator down together, not a word spoken, and he got outside and went and got into a Packard in a garage down the street. I was waiting for a streetcar. I could see my little round dot on the C car coming and thought, "Well, I'll get on the car and get home." He honked his horn, and I let the streetcar go by and I went across the street and he said, "Where do you live?" and I said, "I live out in the Richmond, out on 30th Avenue Richmond." He said, "That's not where I go, I live in the Mission," so he turned and he slammed the door.

Riess: Awful!

Milono: This was Tim Pflueger.

Milton was afraid of his brother. Milton wanted to be a baseball player and they didn't want him to be. He was a good baseball player. He played good ping-pong. We used to play at the Architectural Club. I had already left the Pflueger office when Tim died.

There was a very nice architect by the name of Vladimir Ogloo who worked in Pflueger's office. He was on the design team. Valdimir was on one side of the table and I was on the other side, and both of us were asked to perform the same task of designing something for him to review. He [Timothy Pflueger] would come and look at all the sketches that I made. (You had to really turn them out for him.) Then he would select something, and he would say, "Let's go on this."

Riess: He pitted the two of you against each other.

Milono: Yes, with Valdimir being the older of the two of us.

There were different things that occurred. My first job there was to work on George Washington High School. I did the lettering "Know Thyself" by Plato and so on, things like that. That was the first thing that he gave me to do, drafting. Then he decided I'd better stay with the design team. I worked there on the Patent Leather Room at the St. Francis.



## 4) On the Way to the F.S.A.

Riess: What prompted your departure from Pflueger's office?

Milono: Well, I wanted to get married and I wasn't getting enough money. I went up to him to ask for a raise and he offered me a 9-1/2¢ an hour raise and that was it. He never reviewed the salaries; in those days they didn't and you were happy to have a job. At that same time, Vladimir Ogloo and myself and Bob Kilmartin, a number of people, as many as 400, joined the Architects and Draftsmen's Society.

Riess: And was that a union?

Milono: We were trying to get unionized. We failed many times. We would get up to where we would have a close vote, but nothing to--

Riess: You mean the group of men themselves couldn't decide what they wanted?

Milono: They were afraid. They were afraid of losing what job they had. There were some jobs that were being split by the week. There was enough work for one man, but they would say, "Well, why don't you and I"--if you and I are working together we'd say, "Hey, look, why don't you and I go up to the boss and say, 'We both need a job. I'll work 2-1/2 days a week, you work 2-1/2 days a week. Or I'll work 2 days, you work 3 days.'" And that was done. Also, when you went for a job, you'd hear about it and you'd show up and then they'd say, "How much would you work for?" I guess maybe it's not part of architecture maybe, but it was.

Riess: You said there were about 400 who belonged to this group. Didn't that represent a majority?

Milono: Well, most of them were unemployed architects. A number of them had lost their offices. As a matter of fact, when I worked in Pflueger's office, almost everybody had had a practice of their own, so they were all architects, and they were older people. I remember being farmed out to earn a little more money at night for these men who had small jobs on the side. They were still trying to hang on. And you didn't dare tell anybody that you were doing that for fear that you lose your job.

Riess: Terrible. I've been reading about farmworkers during that period but it sounds like it wasn't much better for architects.

Milono: Well, this was part of that same period. That afternoon, when he said "9-1/2¢ an hour," I went down the street. I'd heard that the Farm Security had opened right down the street from my office. So I went

Milono: down at lunch hour and went upstairs and I walked in. The man who was sitting there was the man that I was to ask for a job.

He asked me where I was working and what I had done and where I'd gone to school. I told him. And he said, "When can you start?"

I said, "Well, I'm working down the street here right now and I haven't given notice." He said, "Well, I'll leave it up to you." He said, "Have you read this book?" and he shoved a book at me. I said, "No, I haven't." It was The Grapes of Wrath, and he said, "You take it home and read it and when you're through you come down and go to work. In the meantime, you're on salary."

Riess: Who was that person?

Milono: Burton Cairns. And that was the beginning of a very wonderful time with Burton, Emmy Lou Packard, who was his wife, and a wonderful person and artist, and Vernon deMars and Garrett Eckbo.

Riess: You were working on housing?

Milono: Yes, I was on housing for the migrant farmworker. That was an exciting period in my life. It dovetailed with everything that I felt for the people and for the farmworkers and so on and the touch of the labor movement just prior to that. Then also trying to get some raise in salaries which helped us to organize the architects and draftsmen group, disbanded, of course. Later, after the second world war, a group of young men tried to organize the draftsmen again. They've won a few shops. I've forgotten the name of the organization now. Organization of Architectural something-or-other.

Riess: Well, it sounds very much to the point to unionize. So you were with the Farm Security Administration?

Milono: Right. After the migratory camps we worked on defense housing.

I was put on a team to go out and look at the conditions of the Mexican laborers, because they had a sort of an arrangement with the Mexican government to supply farm labor and you had to have minimal housing for the Mexican workers before they would be permitted to work. It was our job to go and inspect the housing on the ranches. There were some terrible things that occurred.

Riess: You couldn't do much, could you?

Milono: Well, I've forgotten what the criteria were now, but it was minimal. You had to have so much running water; you couldn't have 20 families with just a 3/4 inch line of water as we used to see sometimes.

## 5) World War II, Japan

Riess: Then you went from the Farm Security Administration experience to working for the rich--doing beautiful gazebos and pavillions and pool houses. Should we continue chronologically and figure that out?

You were in the war?

Milono: I was in New Guinea, and I was always able to sketch a little bit. Then we moved to Japan, and I had some idea of what Japan was like, but I wanted to see more of it. When I first landed in Yokohama, I'd heard about Atami and Lake Hakone up in the Fuji area, and I wanted to see Miyanoshita and places like that. But I had to hide myself on a train to get past the MPs, to get there.

I was making a sketch of Kamakura when a woman came up behind me and spoke in English with a slight Japanese accent, and she said, "It's very good." I turned around and said, "Thank you." I said, "How far is Hakone from here?" She said, "It's not far. I live there. You can come there. You can visit me."

So I got there by hiding. I was the first sergeant in a company and so I wrote out my own ticket, my own pass, the first time I did it. I went on a train and the MP said, "Sorry, but this pass is out of line. Nobody goes past this point." The next time I wrote a pass anyway, just in case, and then I got on the train and there were some vegetables and things people piled on the train, and I moved the boxes of vegetables and I crouched down (and frightened the Japanese), and I waited 'til I got past the checkpoint, and then I got out and I took the tram up the mountain and hiked over the pass to Hakone.

I looked this gal up. Her brother owned a hotel near Miyanoshita. I stayed at the hotel there three days. When I left I came over the top on a truck that was carrying tangerines and also on the truck there was a young German boy, because they had put the Germans in a camp back of Miyanoshita up on the hill called Gora. The Japanese were driving the truck, and we were on top, and it was winter, it was damn cold, December or January, I've forgotten. I got off the truck at the stop where I could catch the train going down the hill, down the mountain.

As the train was going down, the man stopped one coach and we looked down in that winding road and there were lots of people down there and that truck that I had been on had gone over the side, with that young man. The oranges were all over the place. It was icy and the truck had just slipped and gone into the gorge. I thought, "How lucky can you be!"

Milono: I went back there a couple more times. Years later in Tommy's office, I told June Meehan about this little hotel. So she went there and sent me a card and said it was a delightful thing.

6) "You Wonder Where You Start"

Milono: These paths, they cross each other.

One wonders how you absorb certainly things visually, how you absorb them tactily, and how you absorb them from rubbing up against a person. The tenderness of one person will cause you to do things in a strong, soft way; in another one, a brutal person may force you away from doing something that's creative. All these things, you wonder where you start, where did you begin, how did you learn?

I was raised in the slums of Pittsburgh, so how did I go to architecture? Well, that's a story in itself, how you begin. And I look back on it now and while I was in it and doing it, it seemed the natural thing to evolve that way. But you wonder, going further back, whether this wasn't part of the genes that came from your parents, your mother, you look to see if there wasn't something there.

Or was it a desire of your father to make sure that his kids had enough of an education? (He wasn't able to give us an education so he gave us a box of paints. That was as far as maybe he could go.) And then you took the box of paints and you did something with it. Then somebody else saw what you did, and with their eyes said, "Hey, this kid has done something that should be hung." And the teacher hangs it, and that gives you, the person who did it, a little bit of encouragement to go on. It's that kind of steps that make you what you are.

Riess: And those were your steps?

Milono: I knew I wasn't going to go to college, that was never in my mind, so I took certain courses that didn't prepare me for college. One of the courses was mechanical drafting. When I was there, I did a building--it's hard to tell this story because it has to do with making love to an older woman and how that involved the architecture, but it also has to do with how I got into college.

It was because I was able to do a drawing of a building, a 40-story building, for my class, since I could see it where I worked on Saturdays, while it was going up. I didn't know what the scheme was going to be like at the time, so I just used the framework and I put my own skin on it and submitted it. And the two boys in the class who saw it were kids that I used to chase home in earlier years. They lived across the tracks from where I lived and I'd run them home.



Milono: One day the mother caught me in their vestibule. She invited me in, and that was my first look at a house that was appointed with furniture, that had more than just a bedroom and a kitchen. In those days you didn't know the neighborhood any further than where you were. You don't know where you get some of the early thoughts about how something should be, whether there ought to be more space for certain things and how to relate certain things.

These two boys who I knew later on in the class said, "Do you mind if we borrow that and bring it home?" and they brought it home to their mother. And the mother had a boarder living there and he was the superintendent of that building. He thought it was a worthwhile drawing, so he showed it to the architect. And the architect was Henry Hornbostel, Caleb Hornbostel's father. It was that little beginning.

The mother had married and had a child, and her husband was a drunk and they separated after the child, but he used to come and tried to beat her up. The two brothers were working to make a living as ushers in the theatre, so they asked me if I would spend the night in the house to protect their mother. I was the protector. You can see what could happen: I threw the man out, and we became friends.

Then the time came when she said, "I've fallen in love [with someone else] and we can't see each other. But," she says, "I want you to go to school," and so they arranged that I could get a job in the 40-story building and I did.

I wasn't ready then to go to college because I didn't have the credits. But earlier I'd been arrested, and the judge that I had appeared before wrote a letter--

Riess: Testifying?

Milono: Testifying to the kind of guy I was. Mr. Hunter did it, and the man that fell in love with this woman, and Mr. Hornbostel, and some teachers in school. Then I took a summer course for two concurrent math courses and I got through those. I took the exams at Carnegie and got in with English as a condition.

As a freshman I had a hell of a time with the English teacher. He accused me of copying a theme. I told him that if he could find where I copied that, I would quit school, and if he didn't, I wanted him to apologize and I wanted to be transferred out of his class. So he told me to get out. I went over to the dean and told him about it. He ameliorated the situation and he said, "We'll see what we can do about it."



Milono: I was depressed--my first month or so in school after working so hard to get in--so I went to the only place where I could get some comfort and that was with the people that I knew. I went back to the Hill district, the whorehouses where I knew all the men that ran them--my buddy from high school football and so on, his brother ran a lot of them, and they were the mafioso. I went looking for him and couldn't find him.

I came to one house and opened the door, went in, and was walking down the hall and looking in the rooms at the people sitting there. And I noticed a red-head sitting on a man's lap and the man was Camille Etienne Grapin, a Frenchman, the senior critic at Carnegie. I went up to him and said, "Monsieur Grapin?" and he quickly got up, dumped the girl, put on his coat and went out. And I thought, "If he can be in this place and I can be in this place, then maybe we have something in common," and so I went back to school, although up to that point I had quit.

Riess: You had quit because you thought the gulf between that and your other life was just so impossible.

Milono: Yes, I just felt "the hell with it. Even before you get started, you get hit, right bang like that."

In the class on Monday, freshman class--there were 166 of us in class--this professor came in, the Frenchman, and two young critics, profs. It was the first time the master had come down from his higher graduate school, and the other two who had both graduated under him. He came in and started to go around, came to my desk--we had two people sitting at each desk, a nine-foot table--and he said, "Monsieur, I want to see you in my office," and he shook my hand and he said, "That's a nice thing you're doing there."

When class broke, I went to his office. He offered me some coffee. Then he said, "Monsieur, you and I are men of the world and we are probably different than the people around us." I said, "Yes." So we became very close friends. And we roomed in the same boarding house in the part of society where nobody would go to. He had a Greek landlady and he was a great watercolorist, a great designer.

There was a French prof too and there was an Italian prof, and a couple of other architect profs, and we organized spaghetti dinners. Some of the men then would take on a gal if they wanted her for the night or for a short time.

We eventually disbanded our Saturday night spaghetti dinners and wine and song and so on because it was getting known too well on campus. But, that's how you get started with architecture. [Laughter]

Riess: That's how you got started. That's really amazing.

Milono: But that's only amazing because you're talking about me, but it has to be amazing for everybody. Everybody's got some way of making it in terms of surviving--I guess that's the word.

Riess: Well, I think lots of people just say, "Oh, things just happened." They don't think of themselves being receptors so much.

Milono: I think everybody has to be a receptor if they want to do it, or you do it yourself and in doing it yourself you are in a sense a receptor. Something is motivating you. The word "motivation" has been used over and over again. What motivated my father to leave the old country? Almost everybody that came was motivated in some way or another. So from that point of view, everybody, if they want to look at themselves, can find a thread, it's there. Maybe an inner drive which is not necessarily a pushy drive, but something which is your own, that you feel comfortable with.

(I can hardly do anything without a pencil. And here I am talking all this time without a pencil. When I talk to most people, I have to use a pencil to explain something.)

#### 7) The Wurster Office, and Tommy Church

Riess: Well, you're doing very beautifully without a pencil. Now I would like to hear how you got into the Wurster office, who interviewed you, and what your impressions were?

Milono: Well, Theodore Bernardi interviewed me. I mostly worked under Wurster, when he was in town, and Donn Emmons when he wasn't. Sometimes I worked with Theodore.

Riess: What kind of buildings were you on especially?

Milono: Wurster didn't have very many commercial buildings at that time. I think he had the Schuckl factory which he had finished which I was not a part of.

He had done many houses. I did working drawings for a number of houses. Then I did one small building, two-story, I think, a student union or library for College of the Pacific. I did much of the drawing and supervised. Theodore was on that one.

Milono: Then I did the presentation drawings for the Monterey library. They had struggled to get approval from Monterey and I said, "Why don't you let me take it home over the weekend, see if I can't do something with it." So I made a sketch and I used a "Mexican flavor," in quotes. I did a sketch in tempera. It was the design that they had, somewhat, in the office, but I put a tile roof on and I made the concrete look a little bit like adobe and so on and I put some trees on it in tempera. I brought it down and Bill Wurster said, "That's it. Put a frame around it." [Laughter] And he took it down and sold it.

Riess: At that time Church was working on gardens that were in association with Wurster houses. Did you have any direct contact with him?

Milono: Well, I knew that Tommy was doing things in the office. I've forgotten the names of some of the houses that Wurster did, some farm houses--

Riess: Well, there was the famous Gregory farmhouse.

Milono: Yes, well that was earlier. And that I visited with Tommy on several occasions.

Every Fourth of July the Gregorys used to have a parade down near the Gregory house and the kids there all grew up with that every Fourth of July, and different people carried the banner.

Riess: Tommy used to go down for that?

Milono: Oh yes. He photographed it over the years and a number of the photographs he has in the files.

I was never invited to one of those. I don't know of any of the draftsmen or architects in his office who were invited to that. It was a private thing. I think Wurster would have been involved in it, but I don't think anybody outside of--I don't even think Theodore or Donn went to those things. This was just a closed little Fourth of July gathering of members of society and Tommy had done houses for them.

Funny, Tommy is a very difficult person to understand, because he doesn't explain himself except through his work. One can't say that Tommy is affectionate or outgoing or giving. One can't put those words to Tommy. He is a warm person in his work, but he's sort of almost shy as a person.

Riess: And you are such an outgoing person, or at least you give a lot of yourself. What would happen if you were talking to Tommy of an evening, wouldn't that bring him out?

Milono: Well, you've used the word "of an evening." It was very rarely "of an evening." Many evenings at work, but if you say "of an evening" like sitting around, not too many of those. I think maybe two or possibly three get-togethers in his home with his wife and his family surroundings though I've known Tommy now literally since '46, and more intimately '49; because then I was in his office from that time until I left in '50, which seems like a short time, but I only left to go one story up and I took over Wurster's space when he left.

I started my office in the back half of Tommy's office and did most of the architecture for him, and consulting for a few years. I used to keep track of the hours when I would be consulting with his garden structures and things like that. But I also was very much interested in landscaping, which was why I stayed when Wurster said, "Come back up, we need you." Or Donn Emmons did. I said, "No, I've got a job here with Tommy." And I stayed with Tommy.

#### 8) And Larry Halprin

Milono: Larry Halprin went on his own because Tommy apparently wasn't able to accept Larry yet as a partner, or whatever arrangement wasn't made. Larry married Ann and Ann's family I think decided to move out here, and they gave the house to Wurster to do, the I. Schuman house. Larry did the landscaping for that. And then Larry became a landscape architect for Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons. When Wurster moved out [of the Jackson Street building], then the association diminished between WB&E and Tommy. So they separated, and Larry got into that area.

But I have a feeling that Tommy for the first time had reached out to somebody, and maybe was rebuffed. This is a sense only.

Riess: Reached out?

Milono: Towards Larry and towards Larry's sense of design. The couple years that he was in association with him, Larry influenced Tommy and Tommy influenced Larry to the point that the two of them thought that they could work together, Tommy accepting some of Larry's curves and Larry accepting some of Tommy's earlier beginnings and some of the straight line things. At that point had the two of them gone together, Larry and Tommy might have hit it off as a twosome. But I have a feeling underneath that they would have not lived long together as partners because they both had strong feelings in themselves that sooner or later would have had to surface.



Milono: This seems to be true of most design people, that if you have it in you to be a designer, that you start off by being a creative individual and it's difficult to accept the way of somebody else. If you're tired a little bit, you might accept it or you might be pleased with the results, but sooner or later if it goes all in one direction, and somebody keeps taking over, then I think you feel that something's gone out of your life and you want to get out of that situation. I think that's what would have happened in this particular case.

But the way it did happen was that Larry went out and he expanded. They were very different. Larry was an aggressive person and was able to use the King's English. Tommy spoke very well, but he wasn't the kind of guy that would choose to handle a big group, whereas Larry would, you see. He loved the twist of a phrase.

Getting back to Tommy, if I can, he had Larry first, then he had George Rockrise, then he had me. Three of us in there, grown people, with Tommy over here. And he had June Meehan, another grown person in the field of landscape architecture.

I was busy trying to get established for myself in architecture. I also knew that what I was learning down there was invaluable to me and I liked what I was meddling with down there, which was plants and buildings. It was then I began to enjoy making my own curves, which is a lot different than making things like that in just a detail for a drawing. I could see the plants and we would go out and visit and it was nice to see how the landscaping fitted in to what in my own head would work for me and the houses that I would have to be doing. I could see visually that it was in me to do this and I understood what they were doing. So that both in Larry's understanding of it, and in Tommy's, I dovetailed.

#### 9) Markings: Curves and Lines

Milono: I didn't dovetail so well with Rockrise. He was very much like another architect, Mario Ciampi. Rockrise and Mario Ciampi have, for me, the same sort of understanding of architecture which comes from their having seen somebody else's work and evolved their own thing out of somebody else's work whereas I felt Tommy's lines and Larry's lines in landscaping were coming out of them. It doesn't matter what background they had, they interpreted themselves in their lines.



Milono: You can't stand over and work a few hours with anybody and have them do a curve or have them put a straight line next to a curve without saying to yourself, "I understand that, I understand why he put a straight line next to a curve," because two pieces of curve like that is like the cheeks of an ass, they don't go anywhere, there has to be a center. Whereas the minute you put a line and put a curve to it, then it gives direction, you see, and you can move off into something else. And so transitions move from one thing to another that way. [See illustration]

Riess: Architecture would very seldom offer that.

Milono: That's the reason that I enjoyed what I was doing. But it does offer that; that's the other thing, that it does happen. From what I saw there, and what I translated myself into architecture, then I began to notice that this occurs in other people's works.

For example, I was looking at some watercolors recently in a book by a Czechoslovakian. I returned the book but I made some photographs of it, and when I looked at them a second time on the screen I noticed that the man had something that he interpreted himself in the way he framed his watercolors and the organization of the color and where he put his lights. It wasn't just a one-time thing that he was doing, it was in a number of pictures. And yet all the watercolors were different. But inside that watercolor was a location of color, that whether he did it consciously or unconsciously, it was his trademark in a sense.

You don't see it right away, but when you do see it, you know it's a neuro-pattern that this man has that he keeps pushing out and he makes it work for himself. He doesn't even know it maybe. He even isn't aware of it. When he does something like this with a certain line, and when he moves it a half an inch over or an inch further, it is with him saying that "this fits better."

Millions of people see it and they don't know what's there. When you explain it to somebody, if that person becomes aware of that thing-- not necessarily copying it because that's what I'm saying about the other two men [Rockrise and Ciampi], they copied, they understood this and copied it--but to interpret that and make your own configuration and allow it to happen, then you're on, then you're really excited and you're dying to make another approach! And that's what I think Tommy had. It's hard to put this into words.

Riess: I'm interested in your saying that he got his curves from Larry. Do you really mean that?

Milono: Oh, it was there earlier because when he was in Europe, in Italy and France and so on, all these marvelous curves were visually there for him to see. And then he went further into the past to dig out the curves, French gardens and Italian gardens and so on.

Tommy's never written himself into a book to say, "This is where I learned it." I think he says, "My work speaks for itself. Where I got it, it's up to you to figure out" perhaps. Because we were never able to discuss things on that level but many times we talked about some place in Italy that he went and saw. Villa d'este was one of his favorite places. When I went to Villa d'este myself, I saw a lot of what Tommy was about. So I enjoyed visiting that place. It was like "now I see what he's doing."

10) "A Very Private Guy"

Riess: When you say you were never able to talk about "things on that level," is it a matter of Tommy just didn't talk about himself?

Milono: That's right. Tommy's a very private guy. I can't think of anybody who knows him. It's a very difficult job you [interviewer] have.

I've come down from my office on a Sunday morning, Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening, Saturday evening, Saturday afternoon, to sit there and talk. He's warmest when he let's me take a pencil to make some changes on his drawing. I'd ask him what the problem was and he'd say, "Well, I'm trying to do this and that." And I'd say, "Well, maybe you could do it this way." Then we would sketch around and then he'd try something else. That was as close as I got in all the years.

Riess: Well, I guess he must know himself very well because it worked for him. And everyone speaks of his charm.

Milono: Oh, yes. It has nothing to do with whether it worked, it just has to do with how private can you get, you see, and still survive.

I know what you mean when you say that everybody thinks he's charming. He's not "charming charming" in quotes, that way. His charm comes from the fact that he's able to drop a few key words and then he waits and hears all the things and sees what he has to see, and then he's got an idea and he'll verbalize it in a few words with people that he's working for at that point. Maybe that's the mesmerization that he goes into, seeing the picture already and making a sketch sometimes right there, and then he goes back and translates that-- [tape changes]

Milono: And that's what the people maybe translate into this charisma that Tommy projects. I think maybe that happens to a lot of people who are creative people. They have no other way of doing it. They may be bastards underneath, they may be horrible to their kids or so on, but they have a way of living through their pencil or through their work or through their paintbrush or whatever it is. They themselves don't know to what degree they influence the people around them. Tommy has obviously influenced me, but I also was eager to be influenced. And the clients were eager to receive Tommy's work. Even as late as the last few months, he has people calling to find out when he can get started on work.

Just a few weeks ago I helped put up some handles for a shower in his home so that he could manage to hang on in the shower. Oh, not to be able to talk with him now is the hard thing for me. All I can do is hug him when he's standing and put my hands on his hands and wish him, "See you again, Tommy."

But here's long years of association and I end up saying to myself, "Gee, you're [interviewer] coming today and I don't know where to begin about Tommy because I don't really know him." It's a hard thing. I've tried very hard to put my arms around him, physically, literally, and even gone to him with some of my problems. And I know from other people that Tommy's very fond of me. It has nothing to do with that. Just to be fond--what I'm trying to establish is what degree of fondness someone can have for somebody else.

Riess: It all sounds very impersonal. But as soon as you get personal you get involved and it takes more time and you can't get through situations as fast.

Milono: Now you hit it on the head. It does take time. And it means that you can't "get this drawing done." I'm not like that. I'm liable to, if somebody comes in and makes a story, or asks for something, I will drop what I'm doing. Tommy wasn't able to do that, no matter how many times he tried. He would stop for awhile, you know, and maybe do something, but it was very momentary.

Riess: June Meehan talked about the ten o'clock coffee hours. Jack Stafford mentioned them, too, as if that were a great convivial time.

Milono: Yes, I must say that that was a period in Tommy's life. It was because there were more people working. That was when you took your break. They would come and we would all sort of look up to the boss, the master. We made small chit-chats and we talked on projects that we were involved in, whatever had to be done in the way of "We'll get this job done" or "We need to get it done by tomorrow." Otherwise it was

- Milono: always at the table where you worked. Then Tommy would work here and work over there so that conviviality was carried at the table and a lot of it was supplied by the people around the table. Tommy was just a part of it. Wurster was somewhat like that too; and he was not a man who stirred laughter in people.
- Riess: When Tommy worked long, long hours, weekends and nights, was he perfecting and reworking drawings or did long hours come as a result of his undertaking too much work anyway?
- Milono: Yes, I would say pressure to do work was such that it began to back up so he'd have to do some. He would do the preliminaries and then he'd have to get it on to Jack Stafford or on to Casey Kawamoto or to Guthrie, whoever was in there to start moving it.

#### 11) Working Together with Tommy

- Milono: Then after a while Tommy wasn't able to keep George Rockrise busy, and also George had a class or something he taught at Berkeley and there wasn't enough work.

He kept me on, and George decided at that time, since there was a little bit of a feeling in there, that maybe he better get on his own, and Tommy felt that way, too, so they separated. When I heard that George was going, I went up to Tommy, I said, "Well, George was here first." He said, "I can use you. You've been working on this thing. I'll turn the Fahrney [Mr. and Mrs. Paul L. Fahrney, Kent Woodlands, 1950] house over to George and let him supervise it. That'll give him a start on his own practice." The Fahrney house was a job which I worked on, and Tommy turned it over to Rockrise to supervise.

And from there he went on his own. I guess there wasn't too much relationship that existed from then on between Tommy and Rockrise. Just as there wasn't much getting together with Larry. I don't know about Royston, whether they got together very much.

- Riess: You mean socially?
- Milono: Well, architecturally and in the construction of buildings together. When they left, the association dissolved. And Casey Kawamoto went on his own and I guess they didn't refer back to each other, but that's because they're in the same field. But the architect is different. Rockrise, I presume, may have worked with Tommy on one or two occasions, but I doubt it.



Riess: When you moved upstairs did Tommy give you jobs when he was asked first to do the site planning and then he recommended the architect?

Milono: Usually the architecture started first. With the exception of one project, the Hermann [Mr. and Mrs. Grover Hermann, Pebble Beach] house, which I did with Tommy. Then I did the Gauer [Mr. and Mrs. Edward Gauer, Geyserville] house for Tommy, not for Tommy, for Gauer, but Tommy had Gauer first as a client and they had a house which they wanted remodelled up in Sonoma. So I went up to look at that and it developed from that to a preliminary for a house in St. Helena area and from there they decided not to go there and they bought a ranch. So then I did a large house for them up outside of Healdsburg, for which Tommy did the garden. I'll show you pictures of that in the magazine [Architectural Digest, March-April 1972]. Very lovely garden Tommy did.

Riess: Once you got out of the office how did your working relationship change?

Milono: Well, I worked with Tommy on a job which I got not because of Tommy, a job to do the Social Science Building on campus in Santa Cruz. Jack Wagstaff was the architect on campus there. Tommy was the landscape architect on campus. So when I got this job, I decided that Tommy would be the landscape architect. Tommy put in the curves; I had put them all in myself in a sense and Tommy just refined it and changed it here and there. Guthrie did all the working drawings of it, and Tommy supervised it or whatever. The location of the building--I placed it among the redwood trees, so the grades were mine in that sense. Everything I'd learned was being made use of.

The same way with the Gauer house, the approach to it and all that was already on the boards and done by me when Tommy was a part of it. He moved things around, too, which when he did that, it was always with the understanding that I agreed. And I did agree. What he did was the right thing and I went along, and I added. So it was a give and take. It was a beautiful relationship when we worked together.

I found that towards the end I was doing a lot of the work and most of it myself, and just letting Tommy guide my hand in a sense. That was a nice relationship. Although probably I put more hours on any project that we did together than he did in the last few years. On the Berkeley campus what little we did as architects, it was always together with Tommy as landscape architect. The landscape preliminaries were mine and I would pass it over to Tommy. He'd come up with, "Yes, that's fine" or "Maybe you ought to do it this way." But he was the landscape architect on it nevertheless. There were things like that.



Milono: Tommy has inscribed certain things to me on the two books. I probably should show you the books so you can see how he wrote it, but in one of them he mentions "To Gerry, for the help in many of the gardens in this book" and in another one he says "To Gerry: Landscape, to him, is more than an exercise," which was the best thing I could have gotten from Tommy. It was the warmest connection for me. The first thing was making a statement that I did work, but the second thing was really what I wanted to hear from him, that he recognized in me that I loved the thing that he was doing as much as I loved it myself. He said it in those words. I think that really tells more about Tommy than anything I've ever heard or said about him.

Riess: When you were working with Tommy, did he talk much about the artistic aspects of his work?

Milono: He might have, to a class, but to somebody who's there and is--I felt, after I was into it with him, I felt that to move a line like that, across here, was to have seen the situation, the sun and all that and feel right away what it needs to have.

He was really not into the plants as much, except for the larger plants. The small flowers and stuff he wasn't really as involved in. He could see what a whole bed of flowers would be, but I don't think he really cared if somebody came along and put a lot of different colors together, as long as that curve was there. But he could say, in terms of the plants, "Maybe you ought to group the yellows together. Don't just put them one after another." And that he would say to the gardener. I could hear him tell him that. He'd say, "Look, I want to see them over here. Bring the plants out, and we'll distribute them." And then I'd go along and move plants with him. So I got a feel of that. But it was always, you had to feel it.

Riess: Where do you think the greatest pleasure was for him in the process?

Milono: Well, I can't think of any man of Tommy's stature who could just do this without knowing what it ends up being. I can't do it. I can't just do a drawing. You first have to say to yourself, "An architect, a landscape architect, is a man that does it on paper."

Years ago they might not have done it on paper; they'd say, "Move this over." So intuitively they would put it where they wanted it. This man has to intuitively do it on a piece of paper. He sees it there as a form sticking up in space. He translates this building. Then when he gets out there, he might move a tree since that's movable. But as an architect, if I put a pile on there, and I show it there, I can't wait until they come up and put the pile on for me to see. I've got to be damn sure that's where it's going to remain. When it's done, I may say, "I wish I had moved it ten feet over." Tommy sometimes has that ability. So he's designing after the job is underway.

## 12) A Few Words about Frank Lloyd Wright

Riess: Tommy worked on a Frank Lloyd Wright house in Carmel, in 1954. Do you know whether Tommy actually worked in association with Wright or was he just called in afterwards?

Milono: I can't say for sure. I know when he was doing that, because I was involved in something down in that area with Tommy and I visited the house and saw some of the garden work being done. He was close to Della Walker, the gal that owned it.

Riess: Yes, that's right, Mrs. Clinton Walker. So you mean he was a personal friend of hers, and he was called in by her, rather than by Wright.

Milono: That's what I'm not sure of. When I saw it there, it seems to me that the wall was already in, the prow thing was in, and the house was already--I don't think that Frank Lloyd Wright would have said, "I can't do this. I want Tommy Church to do it." No way. I think he would have done it first.

As I sat in the living room there one night, my back to the ocean and the fireplace here (shows her), I said to Tommy, "Christ, isn't there anything we could do about the cars that are coming down there? The lights shine right into the house." And I presume that problem was what dictated some of the planting.

And I have a visual memory of going into the toilet and having to sit on the toilet and try to slide across to get into the triangular shower and saying to myself, "I don't ever want to be an architect like this." I like the feeling of the house, but I don't want to ever make a shower where you have to sit on the toilet to get in.

Riess: Did those angles dictate Tommy's landscaping, then? Did he carry that out?

Milono: I don't recall the plan, but I would think that Tommy would have. If there were some curves on it that were different than Frank Lloyd Wright, that would probably say to me that Frank Lloyd Wright was not in on it. Because I think Frank Lloyd Wright would have said, "Hey, if I've got those lines there, you bastard, you don't touch it. That's the way I want it."

Riess: Charming! There's a man who has a full-scale reputation.

Milono: Well, I'll never forget when he came to Carnegie Tech to lecture, or just to give a talk around 1931-32. I didn't know who he was. I had never heard of him as a freshman. I came out of you know where.

Milono: So this guy comes in there and so we're all waiting for him. He came in and he walked down the aisle. First of all, he kept us waiting for 45 minutes. The small theatre was packed and we kept waiting for him to come on stage from back stage. He came in through the back and he sort of went up the little steps. He had this cape and said a few words. He said he'd visited the school, didn't see how anybody could go to this school [laughter], that he had his own school that he was starting up in Arizona and that was Taliesin West.

I remember a couple of people left after their freshman year, I remember a gal by the name of Cornelius left and went to work for him for three years or so. She wrote back and said she hadn't learned anything about architecture, but she'd done a lot of cooking and stuff. [Laughter] That's the kind of person he was.

He was here in San Francisco I think right after the war. Robert Anshen had invited him. I went to hear him at the California Labor School. He told us that we ought to move out of the city and all that sort of stuff. I don't know what they paid him, but it was really an unworthy speech to get people to come there and not give them some understanding of what he was all about. He just told them, "Well, you idiots, what are you doing living in this kind of surroundings?" And these were hard-working labor people.

### 13) Success Story

Riess: Just what makes Tommy the father of landscape architecture?

Milono: I don't know, but I can't go into too many books and see where the people are original in the same sense. Even Larry Halprin's things are not necessarily evolved as Tommy. I feel that Tommy went from here to here [gesturing] and he was always his own man. In Larry's case he flew off in different directions and got bigger and became the daddy of certain concrete fountains. I feel that there's a thread of things all the way through in almost everything belonging to Tommy. It's hard to put your finger on.

Tommy had a sense, goddamn it, you can't put your finger on it-- and sometimes you can if you look at certain photographs or certain plans or if you walk through something. On the first walkthrough almost all the time he would see right away what should be done. He could see clutter, he could wipe it out. He could see a forest of trees, he could cut down trees and keep the main ones. He could see where there weren't any trees, and plant. He could see where the solution was by changing the orientation of the whole site.

Riess: How did Tommy's work get known, or seen?

Milono: Once in awhile Tommy would have a field trip back in the forties and fifties. In the summertime he would take time and he would have a few people in the office see some places. Then he would also invite sometimes a class from Berkeley, to see a few of his houses. Other than that, and outside of what came out of House Beautiful--and Liz Gordon was a great pusher of his, they were very close, Liz and Tommy--outside of that, you didn't get in to see these gardens. Until he published this book, Tommy had no way of saying to the public, "This is what I've been doing."

That's the case of most of us, unless we get published someplace. If I want to take somebody to see a job that I've done, I've got to call them, I've got to arrange for it, and so on. It's just like a lawyer. You don't know what he's done unless he gets his cases published and gets notoriety from that. In architecture it's a little easier because it's standing up.

Riess: Did Tommy work much with the artists around here?

Milono: Yes, I think so. Mary Erckenbrack was doing things for Tommy and she did some tile work for a pool house. I think Tommy was aware of Ruth Cravath. Adaline Kent was a once-in-awhile sculptress and Tommy was aware of her, and how he got her must have been through his connection in the society. Adaline Kent belonged to the Kent family.

Again, it was a society thing and Tommy was always being invited. He was, after all, the only real landscape architect around. Wurster came out of Stockton and got started in that wealthy group doing houses. This class of people sometimes latch on to somebody and there are a few architects that have that.

Riess: Actually that sounds like being "lionized" where you're never your own man, you never get around to doing what it is that you want to do.

Milono: In Tommy's case the people that you do work for push you and you accept the next commission, but you are your own man. But it's a strange thing that the society group feel that "if Joe down in that acreage has Tommy for their garden, why maybe we ought to have him do our garden."

Riess: You'd think the opposite would happen.

Milono: I know, and it did in architecture, but not in landscape architecture at that time.

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Burton Litton

A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT LOOKS BACK AT THE TRAINING AND  
THE PROFESSIONAL GROUPS IN THE FIELD

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess





TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Burton Litton

|                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| 1) Transitional Times          | 311 |
| 2) The ASLA and Church         | 314 |
| 3) Student Contact with Church | 315 |
| 4) The Church Office           | 317 |
| 5) Study and Apprenticeship    | 318 |
| 6) The New Era                 | 320 |



Burton Litton

January 26, 1976

Interview held at his office in the Pacific Southwest Forest and  
Range Experiment Station, Berkeley

1) Transitional Times

Riess: What have your contacts been with Tommy Church?

Litton: Do you mean from way back when?

Riess: Yes.

Litton: Well, I was a student in Berkeley from 1938 until '41, at which time I knew him as a colleague of Punk Vaughan's. They worked together and did projects together. Our faculty at that point was a mixed faculty with John Gregg representative of the old school, shall we say. Professor Vaughan and Tommy Church were a new issue on the horizon at that point. That was perhaps confusing for a student but it was also encouraging to have a light to look forward to.

Riess: Did it tend to divide the students or were they already divided in what they wanted?

Litton: No, I think they were reasonably tolerant of it, but there was something more attractive to what seemed to be a new movement afoot, which was true.

Riess: Did Punk Vaughan push landscape architecture towards city planning?

Litton: I would say Punk Vaughan did not push toward city planning so much as add a more contemporary view of what landscape architecture could do and was doing. It was pretty much oriented toward project design and site planning, which are what you might call traditional elements of landscape architecture.

Certainly Tommy worked in areas of project design. He always tended to call himself a garden designer rather than anything else. The differences really were in differences of form and relationships to

Litton: architecture. Tommy's work with Wurster in particular and the Pasatiempo golf course and residential housing were some of the early things. Then Tommy was beginning to do San Francisco residential in-town gardens--the Sullivan garden was one of them, McEnerney perhaps, though I'm not exactly sure I remember the names right. The majority of his practice took place down the Peninsula, Hillsborough, Woodside and in that sector.

Riess: That's in a way a very special niche that he carved out for himself.

Litton: Yes, it was.

Riess: By calling himself a garden designer he's saying that he's not a lot of other things.

Litton: That's right. He always did say that. So he was looking at landscape architecture during a difficult economic period. There was a great deal of activity in new forms of architecture, and he was in a way providing a sense of new forms in landscape architecture. It was an accompaniment to an architectural movement in the Bay Area. Professor Vaughan was simply a part of that and a colleague of Church's in that.

Riess: What was the influence of one upon the other?

Litton: [Misunderstanding the question, Litton answers regarding influences in general] Oh, it's pretty interesting because it was as much historical as it was anything else. And yet the expression was in terms of accommodating the needs of the time so that it was not the eclectic-historic approach that was perhaps most represented in John Gregg and the origins of the Department of Landscape Architecture here on the Berkeley Campus.

Tommy was certainly influenced by things historical; the French and Italian garden certainly had something to do with the clean, simple forms that he developed; and yet the interpretation was to what might have been called "modern living" at that point. Houses during the Depression years were no doubt smaller, and so the garden was called to do things that at one point might have been more nearly accomplished within architecture [but then] took place in the house surroundings and in the garden areas.

It was also a matter of being very straightforward in the solution of direct problems of entry and access, and privacy and the provision of adequate service facilities--you might say a straightforward approach to all of the functional problems that would have been involved, yet giving interpretation so that the garden was an expression of what you might call "abstract space" but abstract as related to useful, human needs. That's pretty generalized stuff.



Riess: These things that you're talking about, these were goals which would have not been recognizable by Mr. Gregg, or would he have been comfortable with everything?

Litton: I think he was perhaps comfortable enough with them, but yet he was firmly entrenched in an earlier time. This is no criticism of John Gregg. He was a remarkable man in his kind and time, but times change. Those solutions were an expression of what I would call the form that things were given, the expression that was given in terms of design as an abstract idea applied to projects and garden design. Prior to that the expression would have been much more nearly imitative; the sense of the eclectic model was surely more present.

What's interesting about gardens that Tommy did is that while some of the origins may be recognizable in such things as the parterre garden and the Baroque form of the French or Italian garden, yet it's one thing for it to be eclectic and another thing for the idea of form to be interpreted in a contemporary fashion. So while the origins might have been close together, another part of the influence was concern with materials and the way they were used.

Traditional gardens had involved much more in the way of planting and perhaps less emphasis on the use of paving and walls, and fences, so the garden that Tommy was designing, the space that he was making, was much more concerned with hard surfaces, sort of abstract expression of the use of plants, not so much involved in maintenance, perhaps, a simpler approach to the problem of the use of smaller spaces and of simpler solutions for the sake of people who either maintain their own gardens or had gardens that were very close adjuncts to the house, the house opening directly and at convenient levels to the architecture so that that very intimate and useful functional relationship between the architecture and the garden was surely an important part of that.

## 2) The ASLA and Church

Riess: How available was Thomas Church to students?

Litton: I'd say very available all through the years that I've been attached to the University, going back to 1948. One of the direct attachments was that we normally have a summer field course and certainly one of the major things that we looked at were those gardens and projects that Tommy had designed and for which he had a construction relationship. In early days, he and Punk Vaughan and some other colleagues, Hal Watkin among them, had their own construction crew because it was the only way they could get their particular gardens built. It's kind of an interesting professional question because Tommy was not in those early days considered eligible for the American Society of Landscape Architects because he had a contracting business, the ethical reason being that according to the professional society, you don't make money on contracting, you do it on professional services. Well, this was kind of a curious point because the only way Church and Vaughan could get their work done at that point was to have their own construction organization. They did it and I don't think anybody felt that they were any less professional about it.

In later times Tommy worked very closely with Floyd Gerow who practically in effect built all of his gardens, but it had nothing whatever to do with Tommy as a professional at that point, I mean Tommy was not engaged in construction at a later point. Neither was Vaughan. But that was one of the curious attributes of the beginning of his practice, the need also to do construction.

Riess: Did he ever then get into the ASLA?

Litton: I don't know whether he ever did or not. I think that he might have been in a measure offended by it, because I don't think any of the practicing landscape architects in the Bay Area considered that he was anything but highly professional and, of course, innovative. He was perhaps, not perhaps, he was unquestionably the best known landscape architect of the West Coast and perhaps of the United States during the thirties, forties, and fifties.

Riess: So it somehow weakens the ASLA if they can't include him.

Litton: Well, it had kind of an interesting spin-off, you might say: a local Bay Area Association of Landscape Architects was formed. I'm sure Tommy was a member of that. I was, before I was a member of the American Society, as was Professor Vaughan. He [Vaughan] was instrumental in the formation of what you might call a "progressive" professional society

Litton: in the Bay Area, which had its origins at the end of World War II. It was ALA, Association of Landscape Architects, very simple, San Francisco region. It was what you might call a forerunner of some loosening-up of the ASLA which at that point and earlier was very much vested in New York and Boston. They scarcely recognized that the West Coast even existed.

Then I guess during the 1950s the ALA dropped out of sight in deference to the ASLA, which at that time had become sufficiently liberalized for the rest of us to join it, and certainly Tommy amongst us at that point.

Riess: What did the San Francisco chapter address itself to?

Litton: Well, one thing that you could see was that it was instrumental in sponsoring three exhibits at the San Francisco Museum of Art.

Riess: Oh, that's right. I've seen the catalogues.

Litton: You've seen those three catalogues. Well, it was simply a professional expression of changes that were afoot in landscape architecture, I guess trying to suggest that times had changed and landscape architecture was changing with it. It was also about the time that registration emerged; I guess that was 1952 or thereabouts that California State Registration was enacted.

Riess: Licensing?

Litton: Yes, and if I'm not mistaken, California was the first state to have landscape architecture licensing. Since then most states do have it. The ALA and the professional society was a very instrumental force in that registration.

### 3) Student Contact with Church

Riess: Actually, everything we were just talking about was a spinoff from what you had said about the summer field study, and that's how the students got more contact with Tommy Church, I believe you were saying.

Litton: Oh, I lost that thread somewhere along the line [laughter]. Well, our field courses--we had in our curriculum for many years a field course requirement of some six weeks of travel, as I recall. The intention of it was to show student landscape architects all the different kinds of things that were done and were being done in the field of landscape architecture. Seeing work by Tommy was certainly

- Litton: one part of it, but it was in no way restricted to that; it included views of work by the State Park Department, now the State Division of Beaches and Parks, and county parks, if you will, city parks, national parks, and so on. I don't mean to say all parks, but then of course there are a great many planning departments in which landscape architects did have and do have some relationship.
- Riess: Well then Tommy would have been representative of somebody who was successful in private practice.
- Litton: One among numerous others. Of course Garrett Eckbo was practicing very shortly after Tommy, doing things in different ways from which Tommy did them. I mean the design form was recognizably different. Yet Garrett Eckbo and Bob Royston and Ed Williams and Tommy Church, to mention the obvious Bay Area landscape architects, would be people from whom our students would have some sense of the work they did and the kinds of projects that they undertook.
- Riess: Did Tommy talk about his things? Was he actually available as a sort of guru or whatever?
- Litton: Oh, yes. Very often one of the procedures that was involved was that you would take students to an office such as Tommy's. That was no doubt a rather common routine, to go to the office and see how that functioned, the kind of documents, drawings, and so on that he normally produced.
- Incidentally, one of the capabilities that gave Tommy visibility was he's an exceptionally fine photographer. So that from the very beginning I would say his capacity to portray garden design through the photographs that he took and provided as a part of the work that was published gave it visibility that I would say was a part of what he did. [He was] infinitely more aware of the need for these things to be seen by other than merely the clients who enjoyed them.
- Riess: Was that done out of a wish to promote business? That is a way obviously of making yourself known.
- Litton: Well, I think there are two things. Tommy started his practice in perhaps the most dismal times that one can think of in starting a professional practice; it's never easy to start a professional practice and surely more difficult in times of depression. So I'd say that he took photographs surely for promotional purposes and to become better known, but he also took them to express some idea of how time changes gardens.



Litton: I think he probably recognized that he was making part of a historical record, too, at the time that he did those things. That's been valuable. Gardens are a sometime thing. Some of them are maintained and make it through life in good style. Others just absolutely disappear and are so altered or their maintenance is such that they simply disappear. So the records that he made that way were important.

As to his availability to students, though, there were these kinds of things. Our students encountered him in the office, and got an understanding of what he did in the office--always very free with that. Then not infrequently he would meet us in the field and show us gardens that had been done and talk about how they had gotten to be that way. Then also seeing gardens under construction so that the process of building them was known and seen, too. I'd say those were sort of central themes that were part of his availability.

That in addition to what you might call the occasional appearance at the University and in talking about what he was doing, portraying it through the slides that he took and the photography and so on. There again, the excellence of his ability to portray it photographically was part of the way he could convey the message to students, which he did. Of course, that also appeared later in the writing that he did, like Gardens are for People. And I'm sure there were a great many magazine articles--Progressive Architecture, no doubt, and Arts and Architecture, the California publication.

#### 4) The Church Office

Riess: Particularly when he was just starting his practice, he published a great deal of what he was doing, which takes time and energy.

Litton: Well, he was certainly very, very active all during his life and remains so. He had a very well-tuned staff always which supported him.

Riess: Funny, I think of him as a one-man operation.

Litton: It was a one-man operation, you might say. But he always had at least one or two central or assistant designers with him. They indeed worked in the vein of Tommy Church. It was probably related to the idea that probably he gave the basic form to the project himself and then it was carried out in kind with his staff. It isn't accurate to describe Tommy as heavy-handed. He's always a gentle, affable person



Litton: and yet the work that came out of his office was always recognizable as Tommy Church's work. However the ideas that were portrayed by himself and through his staff, however that was done, I'm sure it was done with good understanding because his staff was amongst the more stable staffs that you found in all of the Bay Area offices.

Riess: You mean in terms of long association?

Litton: Long associations of the same people. I'm trying to think of--

Riess: There's June Meehan.

Litton: June Meehan, exactly, was with him for many years. No doubt she came to think in many of the same ways that Tommy did and was perhaps as adept at giving form expression in the vein that he knew it, though she might have had much to do with it for a long period. Yet she was willing to subordinate herself to it and was for a long time a very mainstay of that office.

#### 5) Study and Apprenticeship

Riess: When you graduate from landscape architecture you still have a lot to learn?

Litton: You do indeed. The way we go about teaching landscape architecture, we intend to give the basics of what are involved in the profession. The profession has become infinitely more involved and complex in the last ten years than it used to be. But we do not try to do those things which are so much better accomplished through office practice. We're sometimes criticized for the sometimes casual approaches that we may take toward graphics for instance. I think we do a wholly adequate job of introducing the subject, but the way a person really learns to draw and to do technical drawings is through eight or more hours a day in an office.

I can recall some of the first drawings that I ever made in a professional office and I think they were of such things as drinking fountain details and some of the technical working drawings that are the time-consuming tasks that support project drawings. You start with those things. And I dare say very often you still do. It's not all bad. I don't resent it in retrospect.

Registration in this state involves two years of apprenticeship, that is two years of work beyond the University, or one year beyond the Master's degree. But either way, it's apprenticeship, getting nuts

Litton: and bolts a little bit better understood through practice. There is a great difference between what you might call the academic theoretical base and professional practice. We can only kind of touch on practice.

One thing that I always remember in respect to Professor Vaughan, and categorically Tommy Church, and that was that Professor Vaughan, amongst other things, probably taught everything in the department, as I have perhaps, also. And Vaughan said, "One thing you could never learn in academic circles was anything about construction." That's not entirely true; you can find out some things about the way the materials may be used and put together and the limitations of the strength of materials and so on.

But it is really hard to understand about the construction of things until you've seen the way the bricks go into paving and perhaps handled a few thousand bricks yourself and understand the steps through which concrete is finished. You can't learn those things in school. That was rather an important part of Tommy Church's design method, innovative and inventive ways of using old materials in new ways, design expressions that came out of understanding and exploiting materials in ways that perhaps they had not been used before.

Riess: In his case it would have been self-taught probably.

Litton: Pretty much, but he probably learned a lot of it through his early need to have to do construction and then when he passed beyond the need for that, it was certainly a part of his litany. You learn by doing things and by trying.

Riess: So what does he represent today? What is he to students?

Litton: Well, distinguished gardens and projects that Tommy did are still visible. Yet he's relatively inactive at this point. He probably assumes something of a historical figure almost at this point, which doesn't seem to make too much sense to me, but [laughs]--

Riess: Sort of up with Olmsted?

Litton: Yes. His name is significant. It's significant through the work he did. I don't know to what degree our students at this moment come into contact with his work. Unfortunately we don't have field work projects any more. Certainly they know about it through our tracing the history of landscape architecture from wherever you care to start it and bringing it up through California and through the United States from colonial days to the present. Tommy will certainly be a significant figure that we can identify in there for a number of decades, and a very strong figure in historical change.

Riess: Yes, and now landscape architecture has taken a different road.

## 6) The New Era

Litton: I said earlier that landscape architecture was more complex than it had ever been and that's largely because of relationships to what we might call environmental concerns that begin to surface in the sixties particularly. Now I think most all of us as landscape architects can look back and suggest that perhaps we've been concerned with those things longer than that, but I don't mean to sound presumptuous in saying that.

Riess: Would Tommy Church say that? Or would he say that's irrelevant?

Litton: He's probably somewhat disinterested in it because he is probably doing those things that he in a sense was strong in creating, continued to do, and did well. He might view himself as still providing essentially the services of a garden designer, an innovative designer.

Now landscape architecture is not all involved in strictly what you can call "design," which suggests the giving of form to things-- although design more broadly might be functional solutions and asking the right questions. What is the question? What's the problem? If you understand the problem well enough, presumably you can figure out the answer. Now part of that is design, but I guess design can be interpreted both as a physical form-giving and the answer to problems. Those are different expressions of what design means.

The question of environmental analyses and larger scale context analyses might still be the forerunner within which Tommy Church would and could design gardens, but he would have, I should say, probably nothing to do with the kind of environmental analyses that we consider the contemporary need in landscape architecture. The kind of work which I do, which is very much related to non-urban forest wild lands, and which interestingly enough I approach from a design background, nonetheless it doesn't have much to do with the designing of gardens. It's more problems of relationships between timber harvest and road building and mining and so on in terms of the larger landscape. That's different. And that is certainly an important part of what landscape architecture is about now, but that has really only surfaced in the last 15 years.

All kinds of people have had something to do with the environmental conscience which developed in the last 10 or 15 years. Landscape architects certainly don't presume that they can provide all of the technical and scientific analyses that are part of environmental analyses and impact assessment and so on. Landscape architects are essentially concerned with the relationships amongst things, amongst such things

Litton: indeed as geological analysis or vegetation analysis or topographic analysis or hydrological or whatever else. Yet each one of those now needs to have a great deal of scientific base which goes beyond the precise capabilities of landscape architects per se.

We tend to work now more and more in terms of larger and more complex teams in which you have the knowledge from geologists or social scientists or hydrologists or plant successional ecologists. Much of what a landscape architect has to learn now is what does all this stuff mean? How do you work with these people? How can we get all of this act together? So we're still learning to do it. I would say that's honest. That's much of what our department is concerned with now and yet a part of our department continues to be the concern for design which gives form and expression to precise physical projects.

He [Tommy] was an expression of an era all right. There's no doubt about that. And a new era at that, which I've alluded to. I recognized as a student starting in the late thirties that there was still a place for the designer to give form to projects, and that is and continues to be a part of landscape architecture. We certainly deal with it in our department, but we have added this other more complex adjunct of environmental analysis, what we choose to call in our announcement "environmental planning."

Punk Vaughan was never very enamored of that. He simply considered that was a part of landscape architecture and "Let's not confuse things by calling it 'environmental planning.'" In many ways I appreciate that attitude. Yet perhaps we were taking advantage of the time, and the name of our college, which was the College of Environmental Design. That was a suggestion of things to come, too--although it might be interesting to note that one of the real reasons for calling it that was that we decided you couldn't possibly have a "College of Architecture, City and Regional Planning, Landscape Architecture and Design." [Laughter]





Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

Joseph Howland

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL'S GARDEN EDITOR VOLUNTEERS COMMENTS  
ON CHURCH, 1948-1956

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess



TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Joseph Howland

Correspondence between Joseph Howland and Suzanne Riess

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| May 10, 1977       | 322 |
| September 18, 1977 | 323 |
| September 23, 1977 | 324 |
| September 26, 1977 | 329 |
| October 12, 1977   | 330 |

May 10, 1977

Miss Suzanne Riess  
Thomas Church Project Director  
Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California  
Berkeley, CA 94720

Dear Miss Riess:

Recently Bob Iacopi of Ortho was telling me about your interest in getting on tape the Thomas Church story.

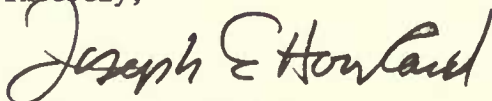
From 1948 to 1956 I was garden editor of "House Beautiful" Magazine. We had an arrangement with Tommy whereby he gave us first publication rights on any of his work. As a result, we published a large number of stories about his work. They were all by-lined by Tommy, although actually I did the writing for him. Later he put together his first book, and I helped him with the New York publication part of it. He actually wrote the book, so had to write sort of as I wrote Thomas Church!

I spent many weeks each year with Tommy, looking at various of his jobs. I once had the great pleasure of spending several days while Tommy and I went back and looked at jobs he did when first coming to California. Most of these he had not seen in 25 years. It was very interesting to be along with him to hear his reactions to what had happened to designs done that many years before.

Tommy is a great person, and a long-time friend. I'd be very happy to do anything I can to add to the work you are doing. My own book, "Gardens and Outdoor Living," probably contains more Tommy Church Gardens than gardens by any other designer in America. Certainly during the eight years at "House Beautiful," Tommy was very important in the ideas I was putting into print as an extension of my earlier work as associate editor of "Better Homes and Gardens" from 1945 to 1948 in "shoving" America into outdoor living and what I came to publicize as "the American style in gardening."

I'm in California rather often as a member of the Board of Directors of three of the large seed-producing California firms which our corporation owns.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph E. Howland  
Vice President, Technical Services

JEH/eam

Questions sent to Dr. Joseph E. Howland, September 18, 1977

1. Who initiated "first publication rights" with Tommy? Did you "discover" him through Sunset's publication of him?
2. I'm interested that though Tommy got the byline you did the writing. Did he send plans to you? pictures? notes?
3. I understand that Tommy was writing a book about gardens and when he showed it to Elizabeth Gordon she felt the material would be better put into House Beautiful. So Gardens are for People came out years later. And was probably not the same as what Tommy originally had in mind. (See Baylis interview, Volume III) What do you know of this?
4. Can you recall as much as possible of that visit you had with Tommy where you saw the gardens he had done 25 years previously? When and why were you here?
5. From your particular overview, what would you say Church's importance to the profession has been? Where would it be without him? Who would have filled his shoes?
6. In a 1965 letter to the editor of Landscape Design and Construction you compliment Doug Stapleton on an article on Tommy Church (March 1964) and say that you once asked Tommy which of the dozens of landscape architects he considered his prize. He answered, "I hope that I am lucky enough to be known as the man who trained Doug Baylis." Do you have further views on this?
7. Was Tommy ever partisan enough about his works to have told you what things he did that pleased him most? Or displeased him?
8. Can you always spot a Church garden? What are the clues?



Dr Joseph E Howland  
re THOMAS D CHURCH

9/23/77

1. Tommy came into House Beautiful magazine's life about 1946. The then new editor, Elizabeth Gordon, was just discovering gardening and landscape design in her own life. Someone, unknown to me now, brought her into contact with Tommy. They got along famously: Tommy took on the job of designing the garden for her new home at Dobbs Ferry NY.

HB at that time had a young lady gardener, Alice Dustan, as its garden editor. Alice loved plants and knew plants, but landscape design niceties were of little interest to her.

Elizabeth started looking around for a replacement. But we were still not free to move, you may recall. In time she offered me the job. In Aug '48 I came to NYC as Garden Editor of House Beautiful.

I came after 3 years as Associate Editor of Better Homes & Gardens. Its garden editor, the old time flower garden type of newspaper writer, had developed considerable interest in garden design, tho not in landscape architecture design. I pressured her for more good design. She responded by having me work with Doug Baylis on what she considered more practical approaches to garden designing. Remember, to her only plants had any real importance in the designing work.

- 2 We all read SUNSET, of course. Walter Doty was a favorite, personally, of all of us. How much he and SUNSET affected our interest in Tommy I don't really know. In my case I would say that Walter made me more aware of the genius we had in Doug Baylis in American garden design (he did Walter's own garden, as you may recall from the opening photo in my GARDENS & OUTDOOR LIVING book (1958:Doubleday).
- 3 I came to California for a month of garden photography with Maynard Parker,

still the greatest of the garden photographers, each spring, and again each fall, for 8 years. Each time Tommy would take me to see a dozen or more of his jobs that he felt were ready for national publicity. As we worked with Maynard, Tommy would tell us what he thought of the concepts, etc before us.

Each year I outlined, and got approved, a year of major garden stories for HB, including each year a garden issue of 30-40 pages. From this I selected photos and wrote the appropriate stories. Any that were using Tommy Church gardens were bylined TCD unless I happened to be using more than one in an issue.

As for whether GARDENS ARE FOR PEOPLE started before HB's interest in Tommy or came about as a result of the natural progression in thinking as we went along thru the years of use of the photos that H made, I have no way of knowing. I would suspect that Tommy may have had an idea in his head. My further guess would be that it got drastically changed as we went along. Few of the photos that I used were in existence in the pre-JEH days. Maynard made 8,000 photos during my 8 years, the majority of them about Church gardens.

Truth is that I rarely had time to send a copy of Tommy's story for review: He normally saw the story in print, often on a subject we had not really talked about except as we walked around the garden in question some 8-18 months before!

4. It was about 1955 or so that Tommy and I spent a full day visiting for the first time in 25 years the very first gardens Tommy had done in California. It was my idea: I proposed that HB do an issue of the effect on California--and America!--of T Church's decision to leave Ohio State U and come to Calif in a Depression time that forced him to accept landscape contracting work and thus barred him from the ASLA world (Tommy was to tell me, as Frank Lloyd Wright earlier told me about the AIA refusal to have him as a member when membership would have helped keep the wolf from the door, that he really saw

page 3

no reason to support ASLA now that they could profit so much more than he from an ability to claim him as one of their own).

HB never did what I proposed, as I left HB in Aug '56 to be Assistant to the President of O M Scott & Sons, of Marysville, Ohio, the grass people. It was because of this shift in career that I took time that first year at SCOTTS to write GARDENS & OUTDOOR LIVING. I wanted to get into print my philosophy of garden design and its importance in American life. So much of it sprang from the many, many days I travelled with Tommy, and his super-star, Doug Baylis, questioning, listening, probing their thoughts.

5. Who would have been the Tommy Church of America? I can't imagine a USA without Tommy! Or a post-war housing boom that brought California big-terrace living to all of America so quickly if there had been no years of experimentation by Tommy before the WW II soldiers were to get to see California living and develop a taste for it.

I suppose that Vincent Merrill, of Shurcliff & Merrill in Boston, Mass. might have been the experimenter and teacher. He could have developed a Doug Baylis as Tommy did. Yes, Royston, Williams, Osmundson, Staley, etc. Not Halprin: Only a Tommy could have helped him, and Tommy is responsible for any ability that Larry has, in my book. Altho I must admit that without his wife's abilities with him, Larry would have been too much for even a Tommy Church to make into anything successful.

6. Yes, Doug Baylis, rough diamond in handling clients, is the only genius Tommy ever had the good fortune to have. Extremely talented. Too bad he wasn't more interested in building his office. He was far too unselfish, did far too much for others, never asking for credit of any kind. REmarkable person.

page 4

7. Tommy never indicated a favorite garden, other than "the last one". I have a hunch, tho, that the re-do of his own garden, as shown in HB under byline TDC, really brought him the most pleasure. His wife was a super-demanding client. Or call her an impossible client. Yet the garden re-do pleased Tommy as much as it did her.

Tommy must have been disappointed in some gardens -- and some clients. But he never echoed a word of this in my years with him. In fact, I never could get out of him anything about the "bummers" -- they just seemed to be wiped from his mind, with casting about for them a waste of pre-cous time that could result in new gardens.

Tommy told me repeatedly that he got his biggest pleasure from doing the \$50 jobs scratched on the back of the letter of inquiry -- "and if it wasn't for them, I'd have gone broke years ago". He appreciated the big contracts but never lost sight of the compromises they forced because of their size and importance to the checkbook.

What pleased him most? Clients who USED their garden. Flowing curves, going on to make you walk and make new discoveries. Trees, esp those with character brought out by his pruning shears (he took the whole office crew out several times a year on a pruning spree, to go over the plants of previous clients to get them back into character).

What made Tommy maddest? To see bad pruning. Blue paint in pools. Green gates & fences. Narrow steps and narrow openings. Failure to light the garden so that it could be used (and thus important in the life of the man who worked away all day).

8. Could I spot a TDB garden? YES! Not by any signature gimmicks, just by a superstar quality of design that went thruout the project. All

page 5

Church gardens are not alike.  
By no means. But there is style  
that his students rarely  
achieve, good as they are now.  
Clues? Use of trees. Curving  
lines. Always architectural lines.  
Big grass areas, rarely with  
sq corners. Lots of water. Always  
an interesting pavement texture.  
Pattern, esp moving shadows  
caught interestingly.

When can we get together? I'm  
scheduled for teaching at San Jose  
Oct 17 & 18. Suppose I fly out  
Sunday morning the 16th and talk  
with you at Berkeley Sunday  
afternoon, planing to drive down  
to San Jose Sunday evening?

I do need to fly right back after  
my teaching stint, so can't make  
it after the 18th date.

Or send me more Qs that can get  
answers in areas you need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JH' with a large loop at the top and a flourish at the bottom.



Second round of questions sent to Dr. Howland, September 26, 1977

1. Did Tommy speak of architectural influences on him? Did he embrace and then later reject any "styles" that you are aware of?
2. The Japanese garden might well be an influence on a West Coast practitioner. Was it, for Tommy?
3. Tommy taught construction classes at the University of California briefly in the early thirties. Is he responsible for any innovations in that area?
4. How willing was Tommy to analyse his work? Could you get him to engage in doing that, or was he always in the here and now?
5. Did he admit his indebtedness to House Beautiful for publicizing his work and making him first choice for people who could afford him?
6. In 1971 Tommy referred to himself as perhaps one of the last residential landscape architects--I gather in light of what the profession was doing. From your point of view is this truly the case?
7. What comments do you recall from Tommy on the city garden he did for the Jerd Sullivans? It is a landmark garden and I would like to know its significance for the creator?
8. Likewise the Donnell garden. There he worked with Halprin, Milono, and Rockrise and acknowledged them in all publication of that work.
9. See Howland response for question.

# Baill

330

Geo. J. Ball, Inc.  
P.O. Box 335  
West Chicago,  
Illinois 60185  
312/231-3500  
Cable: BALLSEEDS  
TWX 910-230-3295

October 12, 1977

Miss Suzanne Riess  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California  
Berkeley, California 94720

Dear Miss Riess:

Yes, let's do it by mail. Attached are the answers to your most recent questions, also the release.

After you get these, feel free to send in any additional questions that occur to you.

My October California trip is such a rush affair that this will be easier for my schedule.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph E. Howland  
Vice President, Technical Services

JEH/eam

enc.

10/12/77

Dr. Joseph E. Howland to Suzanne Riess

Tommy Church always credited his initial interest in the Spanish influence on architecture as having the greatest effect on his own design interests. I seem to remember that he did a thesis, or wrote a paper, on what you might call his predictions on the direction of garden design in California, and thus on the rest of the country, as a result of his own personal intense interest in the patio living that the Spaniards brought via Mexico to California.

I don't think Tommy ever lost his love for the Spanish patio living. What he did do was to bring it to non-Spanish housing in California, and then later convinced architects and clients to design with this use of the outdoor space in mind from the beginning.

Did Tommy embrace and then later reject some "styles"? Of course! Many of his earliest clients not only had formal houses reflecting a non-California adaptation but the kind of life the people lived was anything but California. Tommy "opened up" many of these houses and got the people outdoors, maybe not to live as much as we do now, but at least he got them to want to be outdoors. Tommy made a great point that the typical businessman really gets very little use out of the land surrounding his home because he gets home late enough from the office so that if the dinner is eaten indoors there is no daylight time to use the garden. Tommy got businessmen to eat outdoors, and later got them to put beautiful lighting systems outdoors that in my opinion were the best in America. The lighting was so beautifully done that you just weren't aware that the darkness of evening had come everywhere except on the skillfully lighted Tommy Church terrace or patio. Tommy got away from the formal gardens as

fast as he could lead his clients. And he had to lead most of the architects practicing in California. After all, in the early days Tommy was usually called in after the house was built and occupied and asked to "fix up the yard".

You ask what influence the Japanese garden had on Tommy? I've asked myself that question a number of times. I remember a garden that Tommy did for me in Orange, New Jersey. We worked directly with the architect, Emil Schmidlin. Together, Tommy and Emil managed to have a house and garden that flowed together in typical Church style. But out front there was an opportunity to build a Japanese garden wanted by the owner. Tommy really wasn't interested, and in the end they turned that project over to Ethelbert Furlong. Tommy seemed to like the Japanese garden when it was done, but I've never really seen a Japanese garden that he did himself. The closest that I recall was a remodel in the Atherton area. I forget the name of the owners who asked Tommy to think through how an old house designed for arrival by chauffeur-driven limousine could be turned into a modern servant-less style of living. Tommy reversed the sides of the house so that the garage side became the front entrance. He connected the garage with the new front door with a most handsome Japanese trellis arrangement that completely changed literally everything about living in that house. This got me thinking in terms of having Tommy extend this interest I had never seen in him before. He did a garden for us in Bronxville, New York, for the publisher of "House Beautiful" Magazine. This time it was a new house built on the site of a turn-of-the-century house that had burned many years before. There were many mature trees on the site, and numerous rock outcroppings. All of the surrounding houses were turn-of-the-century "formal" structures. Tommy fit the house and its garden around the rock outcroppings such that in the end it seemed that all

of the rocks were exactly where you would have placed them if you were to design a garden for that particular site.

I have always thought that Harwell H. Harris, in his Los Angeles days, was the real influence that brought Japanese architecture importantly to the West Coast. Harwell seemed to understand both Japan and California in a way that allowed him to design living that made sense to modern California families. Harwell, of course, was also probably the most skillful practitioner of the best of the Greene & Greene fund of original ideas. I always thought California and America suffered a large loss in design thinking because Tommy and Harwell never really seemed to work together, despite a tremendous respect each had for the other. My guess is that the wives caused this. Jean Harris was so enamored of the Greene & Greene work and her insistence on being its publicist, coupled with her resentment of the disproportionate amount of national publicity Tommy was getting in comparison with Harwell, that the two men never really got together on a project, as far as I know. I have to rate Harwell Harris as probably the most sensitive architect I ever met, though I hasten to admit that he never seemed to get much of a body of architecture built.

Guess I've already answered your question about how Tommy responded to the need in the early days to work on center-line, symmetrical, Beaux Arts houses and gardens. That day that I went with Tommy to look at some of these gardens that he hadn't seen in 25 years I found myself pleased and amazed at how he had given architectural structure in ways that I feel sure the original owners didn't recognize. The gardens looked conventional at first glance, but then as I stood there and realized I was seeing a garden designed 25 years before and without any additional design work during the intervening 25 years, still maintained its original



style. Obviously without the architectural structure there would have been a fantastic change just because the living parts of the garden had time to grow.

I didn't realize that Tommy had taught construction classes at the University of California in the 30's. I thought that when he left Ohio State he also left formal teaching duties. I do know, as I told you earlier, that Tommy found it necessary to be his own landscape nurseryman and contractor in those early days because the bush peddlers that were then the California nursery industry were unable to be of any help whatsoever in the architectural construction necessary to make a Church garden possible. Tommy told me that he early turned over his business to Floyd Gerow because Floyd developed such a flair for construction. I don't really know how Floyd came into Tommy's life. Could it be possible that he was a student in one of those early construction classes you talk about? In any event, it quickly became apparent to Tommy that Floyd could take a very preliminary Church sketch and create exactly what Tommy had in mind in the way of construction, plants, and planting. What a happy "partnership" for California. Indeed, for the rest of America, because, as I said earlier, what Tommy brought to California, the American serviceman brought back to the rest of America from his brief exposure to it in World War II days as a serviceman passing through California.

You ask about innovations and construction techniques that may have come from Tommy. One that I think has had more effect on America than any other is his insistence on using precisely detailed curving lines for industries that never heard of anything except square corners. Think of what Tommy did to the swimming pool industry! Or the paving contractors! Not to mention how he shook up the fence builders

of America. Don't forget, too, how Tommy convinced architects, clients, and the fence building industry that the interesting side of a fence, and therefore the one that the man paying for it should have for his enjoyment, was what up until then had been called the backside of the fence. How about the use of materials like Transite, both smooth and corrugated, in fences. Nobody had thought of this. And certainly nobody had thought of using the paint colors that Tommy used for fencing!

Also, don't forget the tremendous interest that Tommy developed in using construction to create planned shadow displays, especially to capture moving shadows in planned ways. This came out of his early experiments with fence design when he was still trying to prove to people that the backside of the fence was the one that they ought to save for themselves. I recall a super job in Amarillo, Texas, where shadows were used in ways I have never seen equaled in America. The site was nothing but the Panhandle flatness of Texas, but once inside the walled world that Tommy created you were treated to visual stimuli of the creative genius of Tommy Church.

How willing was Tommy to analyze his work? No one was ever tougher on himself! He talked constantly of design concepts. He always knew what he would do "better next time". Yes, it was easier to get him started by walking through a garden with him, but he was always ready to talk about design concepts if you prompted him with a few good questions. Tommy is an extremely patient man, and he's a real teacher, but he has the knack of a good teacher in quickly deciding how deep to delve into a subject on a particular occasion or for a particular person. Tommy took his office people with him to see gardens in a planned program every year. He talked about

why the garden was done as it was and how he would do it now if given a second chance. He insisted that everybody think about a completed project as a learning experience that should never be duplicated in total. Tommy's quest for excellence was never ending. Yet he was never disappointed, nor would he hesitate to show you any project that you wanted to see.

Indebtedness to "House Beautiful"? Yes, Tommy was aware that we played an important part in making him, as you say, "first choice for people who could afford him". But you have to remember that Tommy was at heart a teacher at all times. He could see that national publicity for his work also was national publicity for his ideas and concepts and that this is what would live after him when most or all of his gardens no longer existed. Tommy encouraged me to write my book, "Gardens and Outdoor Living", saying that I, too, ought to get my concepts into a single book, reminding me that people would not go back through those years of my magazine writings and discover what I believed unless I took the time to summarize them into a book. He justified taking time for "Gardens Are For People" for the same reasoning.

I remember being invited to speak at a national convention of the National Society of the American Society of Landscape Architects. I believe it was in Philadelphia. I was asked to talk about how a landscape architect should go about getting national publicity for his best gardens. After the talk I offered to answer questions. They seemed to nibble at the subject that I finally expressed, "What You Really Are Asking Me Is How I As A Landscape Architect Can Get The Kind Of National Publicity That Tommy Church Gets in 'House Beautiful'!" There were at least a dozen people who said, "Yes!" almost simultaneously. I explained that I had only to send Tommy a note, telling

him when I'd be arriving and how long I'd be in the particular area with Maynard Parker, our first choice and Tommy's first choice for a photographer. When I arrived, I explained, Tommy would have a list of a dozen gardens that he wanted me to visit with him, plus another list of a dozen or so held in reserve in the event the first did not deliver picture possibilities that I might have in my mind. Tommy always went with me to the gardens. He had alerted the owners in advance that he was bringing me there and why. The owners always had the gardens cleaned up and ready for the visit. Anything that we needed in the way of props were quickly produced by the Church office. What might have proved a hassle always proved to be productive, enjoyable days. I always came away with more good material than I had hoped to find. And the days with Tommy were mentally highly stimulating to me and seemingly so to Tommy. Tommy's fantastic "Scully" and June Meehan kept all pressures off Tommy for those days. We rarely saw Betsy Church and, indeed, she seemed to have no real interest in what we were doing although she seemed to consider herself a close friend of Elizabeth Gordon.

Yes, Tommy is right in saying that he is perhaps one of the last residential landscape architects. Who can afford a landscape architect today! And it's not that his service is expensive as much as it is that most of today's work is merely copying concepts of the past. It's not breaking new ground as Tommy had to do. With the cost of running an office, the designer has to gravitate to commercial work to get large enough jobs to bring in the necessary revenue. Or is that true? I ask myself this. I think the real problem is that landscape architecture schools today interest their students only in the never never land of city planning. Here the end result is volumes of pretty plans filed and forgotten rather than the hassle of converting



plans into a garden acceptable to a single client who is going to live with your joys or mistakes day to day. I had always expected Doug Baylis to be the last of the residential landscape architects in that, like Tommy, he preferred to see discerning clients enjoy the results of collaboration with a garden designer more than he wanted the income of a big professional office dealing with less than human corporations or do-gooders redesigning the way they wanted communities to exist.

You ask about the Jerd Sullivan city garden. My recollection is that Tommy did several gardens for Sullivan before he did this one. I seem to recall that there was a city garden, and then the peninsula garden. Interestingly, Tommy probably talked less with me about Jerd Sullivan than any other client. He seemed to have a very personal relationship with Sullivan that he didn't want to talk about in any way. I always gathered that Sullivan was probably his most favorite client. It's pure speculation on my part, but I always thought that Tommy saw Sullivan having the same kind of relationship to his wife as Tommy had with Betsy. I got the feeling, again without any real substantiation, that both men would have enjoyed the mental stimulation of doing the garden over completely every year. Neither saw the design time or the construction time as a hassle but only as something tremendously stimulating for them. You really ought to talk to Scully about the Sullivan garden. Maybe to June Meehan, too?

The Donnell garden is something else. Tommy talked freely about this. This garden was the subject of much comment because it was completed in the days when Larry Halprin was most insecure and bitter. Tommy was always ready to walk away from squabbles. He was very free to tell anyone, "If you want the credit for something, go ahead and claim it." I do know from many talks with Tommy, both before seeing the Donnell job and after spending



a number of times there with Tommy, that in my own mind I am convinced that it was Tommy who saw the possibilities in repeating the lines of the distant marshes with a swimming pool that reflected them in its design. I also heard Tommy talk enough times before this design about his great interest in getting swimming pools completely away from any constricture of the pool company. I also heard him talk about the fun of making a pool an interesting experience for swimmers to believe that he more than George Rockrise or Jerry Milono was responsible for the art form swimming experiences at Donnell.

Tommy really suffered in this failing to challenge students claiming that they, not the teacher, were the creators of a design expression. I guess it was always thus with the best teachers. But I submit: With the exception of Baylis, which of Tommy's students ever came up with original concepts to equal that which they claim that they, not Tommy, created? Baylis, I admit, created the concept of portable gardens in the form that we see today as integral in all of the best office designs across America as well as outdoors in what is coming to be known as "tub farming".

Your last question puzzles me. You ask: How much the architecture of the house influenced Tommy, but then go on to ask if the influence was negated later because Tommy may have been able to figure out "How to ignore or mask it".

I think Tommy was always terribly conscious of the house and the kind of living it forced upon the family. This is why he rarely accepted a house "as is". I can't think of a Church garden that didn't involve doing something to the way living went on indoors after the garden was done. No, I'm not thinking of the many times when he broke out walls, enlarged doors, or did something physical to the house itself to make its space an extension of the outdoor living that Tommy brought into the lives of

the owners. I'm thinking of what he did to move dining and entertaining and living outdoors for such a large part of the life of the owners. Show me a Church garden that was purely decoration! Even when hired in the early days to "fix up the yard", Tommy skillfully changed the lives of the owners of the house and made them happy to spend hours outdoors using the space under the sky as an experience in daily living rather than merely as a chore of maintenance.

I suppose you can say that Tommy was fortunate to work in the years when the results of the income tax and inheritance tax were starting to make themselves felt in a depressed economy that made America ready for servant-less living and the kinds of houses and gardens that this change precipitated. Think of the number of times Tommy was called in because the owners no longer could afford a cadre of gardeners outdoors and servants indoors. Think of what happened when Tommy was called by people who longed for airconditioning, or the ability to have great walls of glass without the attendant necessity of washing hundreds of small panes. Think, too, of the happy marriage of the arrival of Tommy Church in California and the ready-mix concrete truck--or the small gasoline-driven roller for asphalt paving work replacing the cumbersome big steam roller.

And what would it have been like if Belgium blocks or handsome bricks had remained as widely available as in the days just before Tommy arrived in California. And wasn't Tommy in his sweeping curves so right for the arrival of the family-driven automobiles, with everyone wanting to drive right to the front door. What do you do for parking cars when everyone for the party arrives by self-driven automobiles? Just think of the many entirely new concepts that Tommy had to come up with during those few years when so much about American living changed so drastically.

Suzanne Riess - 11 -

Do you have access to the garden annuals, "House Beautiful's Practical Gardener", which I produced every year from 1949 through 1956? Much of the best of the Church material I published in "House Beautiful" was included in these annuals. When I wrote "Gardens and Outdoor Living" I, of course, delved into the collection of some 8,000 photographs that I had made during my years at "House Beautiful", most of the photographs being of Church designed gardens, either by Tommy himself or by his more successful students. I regret now that "Gardens and Outdoor Living" did not list the name of the then-owners. My reasoning at the time was that many of the houses had already changed hands, and many more would during the life of the book. I can probably dredge up names of any that you may wonder about, and Maggis Baylis may be able to help us out with others of them. Is Tommy in good enough condition to help on anything like this?

Send along any more questions prompted by these comments, and I will try to get answers off to you. I expect to be back in California about December 20th for a week or more. I am really pleased that you are taking the time to get the Church story organized, and I am more than happy to do anything that I can to help you on your project.



Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Thomas D. Church Oral History Project

George Rockrise

AN ARCHITECT ASSOCIATE RECALLS HIS ROLE  
IN THE CHURCH OFFICE, 1947-1949

Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess





TABLE OF CONTENTS -- George Rockrise

|                                                          |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1) A More than Architectural Practice                    | 342 |
| 2) Ed Stone and Tommy Church and Larry Halprin           | 345 |
| 3) George Rockrise Joins the Church Office               | 349 |
| 4) The Donnell Garden                                    | 350 |
| 5) Staff, and Design Conferences                         | 354 |
| 6) Departing the Office                                  | 358 |
| 7) Public Work, Consultation, and <u>House Beautiful</u> | 361 |
| 8) How Architects and Landscape Architects work Together | 363 |
| 9) Some Added Remarks on Tommy                           | 366 |

George Rockrise

October 4, 1977

Interview held at his office, Rockrise, Odermott, Mountjoy,  
Associates (ROMA), San Francisco

1) A More than Architectural Practice

Rockrise: In a small way I have tried to be a generalist in the face of increasing speciality. My basic degrees were in architecture yet I was extremely fortunate, after ten years' experience, to be invited by Tommy Church to San Francisco, and I spent two years in his office at a very key time, probably when it was most productive, when Larry Halprin was also an associate there, and we two worked together like a right and a left bower. Then I went on to open my own practice, which has survived and grown, and I became very interested in planning.

What I'm trying to say is that I am an accredited professional in three fields which are closely related, in fact I would like to think are inseparable--architecture, landscape architecture, and planning. The scale is different, the media used are different, but the aims are really the same. I feel really very good about this, and somehow I think if it had not been for Mr. Church I probably would have remained an architect. But having learned somewhat to deal with the site, and to deal with other media (natural media as opposed to man-made), it seemed easy to keep on going and then change scale and get into the planning of cities and urban areas.

Riess: And so do you have to decide who you are when you're doing a particular job, or do you take it all on?

Rockrise: I don't think it's quite either of those; it means that it broadens our scope of practice. Specifically we are well able to do a 5 or 10 million dollar architectural project for a high-rise educational center in downtown San Francisco, which we're doing, which sits on a piece of a city block. We're also able to plan a community which may take as much as 5,000 acres, as in Sun River in Oregon. And we're also able to do 15 blocks of urban renewal planning in downtown San Diego, with all the complications that attend to reversing blight.

- Rockrise: In other words, we operate in three different categories, architecture, community planning--which is taking usually agricultural land and creating all the amenities and that's basically for housing and residences--and then urban design, which deals usually with portions of a city, and usually portions that are needful. And these are three areas in which architecture occurs, in which landscape occurs, and in which the planning discipline occurs, as you can see.
- Riess: When you put your office together did you look for people who would strengthen that view of how you thought you were going to do it?
- Rockrise: "When I put my office together" it was really due to the largess of one Thomas Church who, when we decided that it would be good if I tried my wings as a young architect, very generously gave over to me three or four house commissions which had come to him because of his reputation and which I was working on in his office. Those I took up, plus a teaching assignment at Berkeley, and it somehow kept me going from that first faltering point of making an office go. It was a one-man office for the first year.
- When you say "put together an office" well, each year that went by I acquired one more in staff. It's taken that long. I've been in practice now almost 30 years. Much of the time with my two stalwart partners, Bob Mountjoy and Bob Odermott. Our firm name is Rockrise, Odermott, Mountjoy, Associates.
- Riess: I guess it's hard to set out to master all three disciplines, these days at least. You'd be in school all your life.
- Rockrise: Well, planning, basically, at least the academic credential, is a masters degree, and architects and landscape architects are readily accepted, being from design disciplines, into graduate schools of planning; they're really welcomed. From that melding of the planning discipline with design knowledge, you very often get the Urban Designer, which is part architecture, part planning and part landscape, weighted either to open space design, if it be a landscape architect, or more architectural spaces if it be an architect. But happily it begins to meld and flow, so I would rather say that the melding of these three disciplines is to be strongly recommended. But that's a whole subject of itself, and I think we probably want to talk about Mr. Church.
- Riess: We do indeed. But do you still do private residences these days?
- Rockrise: Well, I did for about 15 years after leaving Tommy, and again I think it's fair to say that the houses were well designed, due in large part to the challenge of the quality of domestic architecture already extant, the work of distinguished professionals like Bill Wurster and Gardner Dailey, and men before them, and Mr. Maybeck.

Rockrise: When I struck out on my own I felt very comfortable with the site, and relations of the site to the actual architecture, by reason of having been in Mr. Church's office. I felt I had--I've often said I would rather have had that experience than a graduate degree from Harvard in landscape architecture. And I think I still mean it.

Riess: And who do you have do your landscape design work on houses, or do you do it yourself?

Rockrise: I have done some of them myself, but the best residential work was done with Halprin and Royston. We have not done houses for, oh, I would say the last 10 or 15 years, principally because my associates who kind of grew up doing houses, and myself, all wanted larger and greater challenges, as we matured to the art that we professed.

It really takes, I think, a very sensitive experienced person to do a good house, or the garden that relates to it, because it requires a sure knowledge of the human dimension, of family activity, or who makes the best doorknob, or where you put barriers. The young persons just coming out of school are ill-equipped to do this because they have only theoretical large-scale knowledge and burning hopes. Which is fine, it's what schools are about. But many offices make the mistake of shoving off houses on their young people. While it's great for the young people, the clients gets a little bit short-changed.

Riess: But then you're saying that the older professional has grander hopes than houses, so where does that leave houses?

Rockrise: Well, I think there is a period in your life (at least I would speak for myself) where--well, really two periods--you learn how well to acquire and design a house. This obviously includes understanding the client, communicating with the client, identifying their needs (and I could be talking about garden design just as well as house design, in fact they come together very often) in the fashion that their needs (the client's) are satisfied. That is primordial and pre-eminent, not ego or the arguments of the designer wishing to do something more unique or something in his greater image.

Because if designers have a fault it's that they tend to use their clients as a springboard sometimes for experimentation. Not that I'm against experimentation, but one should always do this with sure regard to the people who have to live with this experiment maybe for a long time. So it should be an experiment that could be a meaningful enrichment to their lives, the users. And maybe incidentally the luxury to the designer of an experiment himself.



Riess: So did you have Tommy do the landscape architecture when you did houses?

Rockrise: Well, I did work with Tommy; we did several houses together. But, interestingly enough, Larry Halprin opened his office about three months before I did, and since we were about the same age, and since we had worked very closely together under Tommy's mentorship, it was very logical that we would work together. So that, oh, I would say we've probably done 20 or 30 projects together over time. And, of course, Larry has gone on to wonderful heights, a most talented man.

Riess: At that time were Halprin's gardens similar enough to Tommy's that a client would be as happy with one as the other?

Rockrise: I think so. But Larry's influence of the curving line (like Burle-Marx's work) as opposed to Tommy's geometry had already strongly appeared in the work coming from Tommy's office.

Tommy was in those days very busy; he was very selective, as he should be. It was his prerogative as a distinguished member of the profession. Larry and I being younger were probably more hungry or more eager, whichever [laughs] and it was a little easier for us to get together. Plus we had achieved, I think, a very good working rapport in all the things that we did together for Tommy, so that I tended probably more to work with Larry. I think it's fair to say that Larry, given the initial impetus, or the initial launch if you will, from Tommy's office, has gone on to do things that Tommy never thought about or never was interested in, all kinds of things, whether it was community action, or large-scale planning projects, or other kinds of design.

## 2) Ed Stone and Tommy Church and Larry Halprin

Riess: Now, let me back up and ask how Ed Stone and Tommy Church had come together in the first place, because that's the connection for you and Tommy Church?

Rockrise: Pre-World War II, Tommy had had a lot of publicity because of the quality of his work. Ed Stone had done some work on his own pre-World War II, but his first big post-war job was the hotel in Panama, the El Panama Hotel. This was really a precursor of post-World War II tourism fomented by the airlines throughout all the countries of South America. There was suddenly, once the travel bans were off, a great desire to expand, to travel, to know Latin America.

Rockrise: Panama had been a tremendously active place by reason of the Canal. Many people knew about Panama, and Panama's economy was very strong, and they could readily accomplish a hotel of first quality. And so the directors interviewed a number of people, and chose Mr. Stone.

It happened I was in Panama at the time when Mr. Stone was chosen. He was a New Yorker, and I was a New Yorker, so when it became known that he was going to be the architect, I arranged to meet Mr. Stone through Mendez and Sander, Panamanian architects with whom I had been working, who were to be Stone's local associates. He was excited about this job, and I told him that I could speak the language, and had been working "moonlighting" in Panama, which young architects do, all during World War II. He agreed to hire me, which was wonderful. I had local knowledge, and I wanted to go back to New York, and here was a very talented man [Stone].

As he put the team together, he chose, quite naturally, Tommy Church, whose work was the most contemporary and imaginative. Since Panama has a tropical climate, Stone made a very wise choice, because Tommy certainly understood, if any American landscape architect did, the quality of the tropical and sub-tropical atmosphere.

Riess: [Roberto] Burle-Marx wasn't around, I guess.

Rockrise: Well, he was still in Brazil. I don't think he ventured up here as yet, as he did subsequently.

Riess: So Stone would have chosen Church on the basis of the national reputation and publication in magazines like House Beautiful?

Rockrise: I would say, although I never discussed this directly with Ed, that the choice was mostly because of the contemporary architectonic quality of Tommy's work. It was the ease, or the grace, with which his gardens complimented or worked with contemporary architecture. (And that was certainly what Ed Stone did.) As opposed to axial gardens, Italianate gardens, English natural garden, any of this.

Riess: What other nationally-known landscape architects were around for Stone to choose?

Rockrise: Oh, Rapuano and Clark--

Riess: Was Eckbo, Royston a well-known firm?

Rockrise: Remember I hadn't got here yet. I spent a year working for Stone and a year for United Nations, but I did arrive, let's see I think in '47, and at that time Eckbo's firm was very active. There was

Rockrise: a chap named Doug Baylis who had worked for Tommy. Who else? It seemed that many of the practising architects, landscape architects, were really graduates of Tommy's office. Bob Royston notably, Doug Baylis, I think Garrett [Eckbo], but very briefly, as I recall. But Tommy at any event had this pervasive influence as the senior distinguished contemporary practitioner in the Bay Area, if not the country.

Riess: Was Tommy there very much in person in Panama?

Rockrise: The work on the hotel was done in Ed's New York office, and Tommy would go to New York.

Riess: So he didn't have anything to do with siting it?

Rockrise: Well, I think Tommy may have made one or two trips to Panama while I was there, but mostly in New York.

I remember meeting--Larry Halprin was working as Tommy's designer, and we'd see all these gorgeous drawings coming from San Francisco, which were Larry's drawings. As you know, Larry is a beautiful draftsman. And we wondered about these drawings--they were abstractions, they were almost like paintings. And so Tommy--and I remember this very well, because it was right in the middle of a blizzard--brought Halprin to New York with him to a design meeting on the hotel, and that's when we met the guy who had done these drawings.

Larry was then a chap of about 30, and I remember the two of us went off and we had a snowball fight going down Madison Avenue [laughs], while I guess Tommy and Ed went off to discuss higher level things. But that was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. I think that Larry contributed in detail a great deal to that project and other projects.

Riess: That's interesting.

Rockrise: Given the, well, to use an architectural term, having established the parti--it's a Beaux Arts term--or the scheme, Larry was really very wonderful at being able to get it into a fine and delicate kind of detail with strong composition. I think you can see this if you look at Tommy's work; around that period it got more detailed and more jewel-like.

Riess: Was it this fine draftsmanship that Tommy was looking for in his associates?

Rockrise: Larry was such a superb draftsman, really almost an artist. Most of us can't draw that well. We may be good landscapers, designers-- If you've seen Halprin's sketchbooks, it's a very special quality.

I think what Tommy was looking for [in choosing his associates] were people who could understand the site, who could come up with the contemporary solution which would enhance the form of the land, and reach out and embrace the architecture, if I could use a few phrases. All of these men [Royston, Halprin, Baylis, etc.] to a greater or lesser degree of skillfulness, all reflect the essence of what Tommy could do.

Riess: What were your impressions of Tommy the first time?

Rockrise: I first met him in Ed Stone's office, 50 East 64th Street, which is a rather posh neighborhood of Manhattan. As I remember, Tommy showed up in an old tweed jacket, and probably khaki pants, and I don't know if he had a red bandana hanging out of his rear pocket [laughs], a blue work shirt, probably. Here was this guy who was completely relaxed, full of humor, just immediately on a first name basis with everybody, just delightful and charming and full of ideas, but equally receptive if you had an idea. A thoroughly engaging man-- unbelievably so.

Riess: Was the client there also?

Rockrise: No, the client really was a board of directors, and the client was there very little.

I remember going to Panama once with Ed, the key presentation after we'd done the design drawings, and we had the Church drawings and so forth. We flew to Miami and picked up the man who would manage--I'm trying to think of his name, it may come to me, Arnold Kirkeby, who was a small Mr. Hilton, he had a few hotels standing around. And we flew to Panama, and Ed made his presentation to the board of directors, the design drawings which inevitably of course were approved, because it was an exciting design, with good site and landscape drawings, and Ed was a most charming, persuasive man in any event.

On the way back--Mr. Kirkeby at that time owned the grand hotel of all hotels in Havana, the Hotel Nationale--Ed and I went to Havana, and the reason for going was to see how Mr. Kirkeby ran a hotel. And this involved everything from the restaurant to the laundry and the whole bit. I was really very fortunate to go along on this kind of expedition with Ed Stone--a field trip.



## 3) George Rockrise Joins the Church Office

Rockrise: The eventual thing of it was that since Tommy appeared several times, and although Ed had some associates that certainly ranked me in experience, somehow when it came to winding up the construction documents before sending them to Panama to go out to bid, I was chosen to go to San Francisco--and I think this was really the turning point--to coordinate the architectural drawings with Tommy's landscape drawings. Perhaps this was because they had to be done in the metric system, and perhaps because the notes had to be in Spanish, and I spoke Spanish. Also, I was one of the designers, though certainly not the lead designer, but I knew the job very well.

In any event, I was the lucky gent that was sent to San Francisco. And I stayed for two weeks and worked very hard in Tommy's office, and stayed in his Victorian house on Hyde Street. I was really made part of the family, to get this all to go together, to do what we call a coordinating check, so that there were no inconsistencies between the site drawings, the landscape drawings, and the architectural drawings.

I think probably it was that experience, which was really good, in which Tommy was a wonderful boss, and wonderful host, which led us to continue a conversation which eventually caused Tommy to invite me to come and work for him in San Francisco, which occurred perhaps more than a year later after I had worked for the United Nations for a year. I knew exactly what I was getting into because I had worked for Tommy, I knew that he was an inspired, delightful person. I was completely enchanted by San Francisco and the Bay Area. Once we thought of discussing it it seemed very clear it would be very easy to leave New York.

Riess: [Laughs] Yes. Did he talk in terms of expanding the office in different directions in thinking of including you?

Rockrise: No, his reason specifically for inviting me was that he saw me as an architect, and that I had some pretty good experience, and that I was somewhat of a known quality, and the work that he was doing, like the [Dewey] Donnell job and other things, required fairly heavy architectural design and construction drawing capability, the kind of thing an architect is well trained to have. I'd had about ten years of experience by then, I was not just out of school. I did have a good idea of how things went together and had had quite a bit of design experience.



Rockrise: He felt because of the importance of some of the things that he was doing, and to maintain the quality of control, control of the design, it would be well to have an architect working in his office, because his work was really architectural. This would allow Larry, who was certainly his lead designer, to do really the kind of sweeping design--the overall design based on discussions with Tommy who would, again, establish the initial parti of the scheme. It allowed Larry to do planting plans and all these other things; whereas Rockrise would get to eventually design and detail buildings, and steps, and do the engineering work for retaining walls, all of this. I think it was a very, very good arrangement, because I was both designing and doing some of the engineering and the architecturing, and then supervising the construction in the field.

Riess: It sounds like the person it would be least good for would be Larry.

Rockrise: Well, Larry did construction drawings, too. Yes, I think he made more and more input to design.

Riess: But the initial conception is the great moment, isn't it?

Rockrise: Yes. But I would suspect, and I cannot really give you exact examples, but I think more and more solutions came to have considerable Halprin influence. I mean, it was just clear that Larry could come up with fresh themes and ideas quickly. He was tremendous, prolific.

And in his case it was perfectly natural--and yet there was never any friction or anything, it was just that Larry had that much talent--that if he was going to go out on his own he really ought to be about doing it. He should be able to do his own thing, as it were. Tommy and Larry remained the best of friends, but it was clear to both that Larry really ought to do his own thing, he should "fly" on his own, as it were.

#### 4) The Donnell Garden

Riess: They were already working on the Donnell thing when you got there?

Rockrise: Yes. Larry had been in Tommy's office I would say a year, or a year and a half before I got there, or maybe more--maybe two years. Tommy had done rough sketches on the Donnell. The site had been chosen, the location of the two buildings. It had basically been solved as a concept. There were very rough sketches.

- Rockrise: I looked at the site, and the logic of where things went was unassailable. Everything was in the right place. And it remained only then for me to develop sketches and the quality of the architecture to fit in those two key locations, subject, as it should have been, to intense scrutiny by Tommy and Larry. Because I was scrutinizing their gardens as I was learning about gardens, and this was the spirit of the team. Nobody said, "You do this and I'll do that." It was just, "How can we make it better?" And so we all made suggestions about anybody's work, about this line of paving or that overhang or whatever. It was a delightful way to work.
- Riess: Were there a number of sketches developing the shape of the pool, and the shape of the rock island? Did that develop slowly?
- Rockrise: My recollection was that it was a kind of an irregular shaped pool--
- Riess: Shall we look at this sketch? [Page 231, Gardens are for People.] Would that help?
- Rockrise: You would laugh if I told you how this drawing came about. [Laughter] I did part of it, and Larry did part of it, and it was almost symbolic of the way we worked. I did all the architecture, and the furniture--all of these things. And we blocked it out from the site plan and this is the design presentation drawing, which since then has been published hundreds of times. This is all Larry's work [referring to rock garden perimeter areas]. I mean, he did the planning, and the trees [laughs].
- You know, it was just as it actually came off in construction when we were both up there supervising the construction, with Tommy who also came up (I remember he was flying around the country and doing many other things). And the two of us, we knew that this job was something really special. Not that it was the biggest, but it was the most imaginative and the most exciting thing that had been done.
- Riess: These amoeba shapes, how were they arrived at?
- Rockrise: Well, I think it was clear that the bathhouse should be kind of out of the way because the view was out this way, that there should be a wall--and these were all Tommy's contributions--that there should be some kind of a lanai here, and the pool should be out in front. Because, when you're in this pool, you're swimming in it and you just look over the level, you look right out to infinity at the horizon. It's unbelievable, you think you're on the top of the world, or something. I think the refinements of these curves one could attribute to Larry, but the general location certainly was Tommy's scheme.

Riess: Was he just doing curving pools at the time?

Rockrise: I think this was probably as curvaceous as anything he had done. But there were many things that were done using the curving line during that period when I was there.

If you look at Tommy's earlier work, much of it was done at a 45 degree angle, kind of angular, to get obliquely from a point to another point but not straight on. Many of the gardens in this book were done this way, backyard gardens and so forth. But then additionally to using that kind of diagonal grid, then came the counterpointing, and this shows it almost. Here's this kind of angularity on X and Y coordinates, as we say. Then counterpoint against this rectangular area here is this very sensuous line working on the other side--it's beautiful point, counterpoint.

Riess: And did you see this developing as you were there? Can you talk about the thinking?

Rockrise: Well, I think this is the first thing. (It would be interesting to see how Tommy and Larry will take to this.) But, this [zig-zag on left, south-west] is really Tommy, classic Tommy, this kind of thing. Larry moves in, and this [north-east side] is kind of sensuous counterpoint. Well, Tommy was very sympathetic with it. I think it is--I wouldn't say it's the old and the new, but the discovery was that these forms would work beautifully. To reproduce this [zig-zag] on this other side would have been brittle and quite geometric.

Riess: Tommy gives you and Halprin (and Adaline Kent) credit [in the book]. Why on this job in particular?

Rockrise: Do you mean why he gave us all credit?

Riess: Yes.

Rockrise: Oh, I think-- Well, in the first place June Meehan, Larry Halprin and I were all his associates. I mean, our names were on the door, and on his letterhead, which made me feel good--it was the first time it happened to me. Tommy was really very good about giving credit. He was not a big egocentric like some architects are who would have you believe they did everything himself. No, he'd admit the team effort, and the team contribution, and the interplay that went on between us.

We all knew this was a very special job, and therefore the fact that he would give us credit and identification had a lot of meaning. Because it was far and away the most exciting. It was just sensational.

Rockrise: I haven't seen it in years but just talking about it makes me feel like calling the Donnells and asking if I might see it after all these years.

Riess: That idea of having the swimming pool located in such a way that visually you feel you're practically going over the edge, Tommy knew it would work just like that?

Rockrise: Well, I think he knew because he really had a marvelous intuitive sense. If this were the area for the lanai, where people would entertain and lounge, and have drinks and so forth, then the pool, looked across at this angle, becomes a very interesting fore-shortened form, and not intrusive to a view across the marshes, Suisun Bay, the whole panorama. That was a proper way to place the pool. And if you notice, the pool has no steps up or down or anything.

Riess: It's like a reflecting pool.

Rockrise: Exactly. A very flat surface, and even then this oak tree, and these steps are all receding below this level of the ground plane. So that you can't even see those steps. Purposely this was decided in such a fashion so that the hill will start to roll down and give you that sense of infinity. He was very careful not to put anything out there, if you notice.

Riess: Does it have any predecessors?

Rockrise: I don't think so. You mentioned Mr. Marx: after the war and before I came back to the United States I did go to Brazil and did look at Mr. Marx's gardens, and I was very impressed by the curving lines which I had never seen before. The Marxian gardens, many of them (he was also a painter) were just completely arc-like forms, if you will. Just beautiful, with different colors of grass, and gravel and pebbles. I was just thrilled, I had never seen anything like that.

Obviously Tommy had seen that reproduced, and obviously Larry had. You know, he was really turned on, and I think Mr. Marx had a great influence on Tommy, but most of all on Larry who in turn interacted with Tommy. They might both hate me for saying this, but that's just my guess, having seen the Marx gardens.

Riess: But they would have gotten it through the literature, so to speak.

Rockrise: It certainly wasn't plagiarism, it was really just a stimulus.



Riess: Oh, yes. Although I have wondered whether professionals do open their Landscape Architecture Quarterlies and study them, or the Architectural Forums.

Rockrise: Yes, and actually you may remember an architect whose name is G. Kidder Smith. He's a fine gentleman and a great photographer, and a good architectural critic. He put out a book called Brazil Builds. And that was the first time that any of the profession really knew the quality of work, the exciting work, that was being done by the Brazilian architects. And, of course, including what they were doing with garden design. Le Corbusier's influence was very apparent. Oscar Neimeyer--that's an Oscar Neimeyer garden which he signed over to me [sketch on office wall]--was probably the leading exponent of the new Brazilian architecture.

Riess: How did Adaline Kent's work get in there? Was that Tommy's idea?

Rockrise: I'm sure, I'm very sure of that, because they were very close friends also, they worked together. I can remember the pool just needed something, and I can remember generally Addie coming in and the discussion. And there were several kind of geometric models.

Finally one day she walked in with a plaster model of this kind of vertebral form. There was really a large celebration because you could tell this was right! And it was really very exciting. Eventually it got cast and it was carried up there in a truck, and it was put in the pool. The pool didn't have any water in it then, and it sat there for a long time, but we had to get that in before we finished the pool. And it was just terrific as a visual object, and you can swim through it (underneath the water), it has a hole in it. It was just the clincher, to the whole composition.

##### 5) Staff, and Design Conferences

Riess: You were at Tommy's office how long?

Rockrise: Two years.

Riess: I wondered what kind of staff and design conferences you had, and how the whole office ran.

Rockrise: It ran in a fashion more pleasant than any office I have ever worked in, including this one. [Laughter] It was at 402 Jackson Street, in an old brick building, with white-washed brick walls (you may have seen the office), with wooden joists up above, a cast iron stove,



Rockrise: and just kind of indifferent furniture, a few Aalto pieces scattered around, and it couldn't be a less swish, more "country store" atmosphere. You couldn't imagine. Nobody was very strict about when you came to work or any of that sort of stuff.

The staff comprised Tommy, Larry, June Meehan, myself and a gal named Scully [Elsie Sculthorp], a Girl Friday who was kind of a plant specialist, an older lady, who was really Tommy's secretary and made tea, edited and just kind of fit in. And then occasionally a chap named Jack Stafford, although not all the time, who is now a landscape architect in his own right.

Riess: He was a student then, I guess.

Rockrise: I guess that was the case. He came over and worked part-time. And then Gerry Milono, who was working for Bill Wurster, would come down and work occasionally also. In fact, I worked for Gerry nights on a house that he was doing, using Tommy's office, which was all right with Tommy, as long as we got his work out. It was a very small staff. We always had coffee mid-morning, and we always had tea in the afternoon.

You asked about design conferences: If a client came to the office, and they usually came in the afternoon, we would sit around the tea table, and we were so few that we could talk to the client ourselves. Even if we were not working on the job, the client could talk to us, and we discussed his design, and it was a marvelous open kind of thing.

If someone were working on a design we would go over and crit. Maybe he [Tommy] was working with Larry. Or, he'd be giving me a crit and he'd say, "Larry, come and look at this." So that there was this constant kind of easy interchange, which was Tommy's nature, you know, sharing and a participation. And also we were at a size where you could readily do that without stopping the whole organization.

Riess: In fact you would almost have to do that sort of thing.

Rockrise: It was really for the good of the job. Maybe it was to design a retaining wall, and I was the local expert on retaining walls. Maybe it had to do with planning, or whatever, but we all had a very good idea of what all the jobs were doing in the office. It was kind of wonderful. I can't do that here in my own office--too many things going on, too many people. And yet this is not a very big office, it's only 15 or 20 people. But we've got three partners, and we each run our own projects.

Riess: And you have doors here. There are no doors at 402 Jackson.

Rockrise: We're sorry we're on two floors. I wish we had one big space.

Riess: Were his crits remarkably right to the point?

Rockrise: Well, I think he was a very good critic in the sense that you were allowed to develop-- It probably started by going out and looking at the ground, so everybody had a common base of information. And maybe Tommy would report the program, which was to be applied against the particular site. Then he'd make some sketches, or he may have dropped suggestions out in the field. "Well, I think maybe this ought to go there." The property would be surveyed, and we'd make kind of field notes. Then maybe he would do a very rough sketch, and we'd agree that one of us would develop that, and he'd come and look at it. If you had alternate ideas for a new scheme, which was unlikely because of the logic, he was very good at accepting detailed changes, additions, etc. In that kind of atmosphere we could readily, as we should, of course, being the staff, accept his directions for change or refinement.

I think it's fair to say that we all had the same vocabulary, we all looked at the jobs in the field, and we were surrounded by pictures--Tommy was a tremendous photographer--we were surrounded by pictures of his work, reference photos of everything that had ever been done. So we had indeed a common fund of information, and one would have had to be an idiot to have fumbled about, "Let's do steps as we did in Woodside, and so-and-so." So that things would come out clearer. Communication and common vocabulary were certainly strong points in that office.

Riess: What other kinds of artifacts were in the office; what's the view when you shut your eyes and visualize the place?

Rockrise: Well, one thing I remember, and I wouldn't know whether it was conscious or not. In the alcove where we all had tea, he had a big kind of an egg crate situation in which all the drawings relating to each job had its own pigeon-hole, and then the names were lettered with a Speed-ball pen, and a piece of white cardboard. But when you read those names those were all the illustrious people in the Bay Area that you ever heard of. It's just like this book [Gardens are for People]. If you read these names [clients], these are names that are well known. And anyone could come in and sit down at tea and look up at these names and think, "My goodness..." "Wow"

Riess: "I'm in good company."

Rockrise: And that never changed. I suspect that that had a good effect. This man who could command a clientele like that really should not be argued about when he proposed something.

Riess: How very interesting.

Rockrise: Plus his ability to communicate, his flexibility and his good humor. His personal charm was unbelievable.

Riess: I do hear about his style. Is that something that you and Halprin learned? Do you think you learned how to be a person that the client just wanted to hang on to?

Rockrise: I can't speak for Larry, because Larry's a very strong individual and sometimes Larry's way of prevailing would be just to be tough, because he was right.

I would say in my case I learned a great deal because immediately I left Tommy's office I was doing houses, and the house would cost five times as much as the garden and it would take five times as long to build. There was just that much more involvement. Where do you put the grandfather clock? or the desk that my grandfather had when he was in the state legislature?

With all this detail that goes into planning a house, it was necessary to have good humor to the extent that you could, and patience, and kind of skillful meeting, winnowing, whatever, to try and keep a house moving, and very often even maintain peace between man and wife, who could occasionally disagree about things. These kindly arts, learned at Mr. Church's knee as far as I'm concerned, stood me in good stead, because up to that point I had always been a young designer who sat in the back room--I never had much live contact.

Riess: Was Bill Wurster able to do it in architecture in the same way that Tommy Church was?

Rockrise: I think so. I think so, because it was a very special time in the Bay Area, and Bill Wurster of course was upstairs, in the same building at that point in time, as were Donn [Emmons] and Theodore [Bernardi] as partners, and a select few. And they were still doing [Bernardi] really fine houses, and without being able to name them, there were always three or four or more projects which both offices were working on. There was a lot of interchange between the second and the third floor. Bill would come in, or Tommy would go up, and to a young architect it was pretty exciting.

I could not have picked a better place or better time, believe me. I was so fortunate. And my respect for the Wurster office and the quality of the work continues to this day.

## 6) Departing the Office

Riess: Did you have promises from Tommy? Did you expect it to go on?

Rockrise: Oh, I think it was implicit, sort of like, "Would you like to try it for a year?" which is a fair period of time, and it's worth going across country. I don't know that he even said that, but it was obvious that he had kind of taken my measure in that intensive work session for a couple of weeks on the hotel. Plus which, I was a bachelor, I had practically nothing anyhow. I lived in an apartment in midtown Manhattan; and I think I owned an Aalto table and a little trunk, [laughs] and an overnight bag and nothing else very much so I was very happy to come out.

It worked very well. [Rockrise was in Church office January 1947-January 1949.] After the first year I was asked, and he encouraged me, to teach design at Berkeley because the Berkeley School of Architecture was hit with a tremendous influx of returning veterans.

Riess: And Wurster had just come--

Rockrise: Wurster had just got back from M.I.T. and became Dean. A lot of things were happening, so I taught design at Berkeley for four years--two years under Bill Wurster as Dean. It was a very small little community, and if you were a part of it, it was pretty exciting.

So that again, Tommy, being the wise and generous person that he was, thought that for a young designer, a young architect to teach, which he had done, was another step in one's evolution. To be sufficiently humble to teach, which I discovered in my own time; to teach is to listen.

Riess: I don't think he liked teaching at all.

Rockrise: I think he did it in his early years, and I don't think he ever went back except to give an occasional lecture.

Riess: Was there a thought that you might stay on as far as a design staff in that office indefinitely? How did it all break up?

Rockrise: I think that when Larry had developed to a point that he thought about leaving, and Larry was a very strong designer, when Larry really felt that he would like to try on his own--and he left in September of 1949, the year in which I left three months later--the fact that Larry decided to leave really, I think, kind of jolted Tommy, in the sense that they had developed such a good rapport, and



Rockrise: the work was so good, and everything else, and I do believe, although I never talked with him about it in detail, it was really Larry's decision, he wanted to leave, he wanted to have his own show. Well, that caused Tommy to kind of re-evaluate his staff, where he was, and the rest of it.

In my case, being an architect, wanting to be an architect, not wishing to change my field, I had immediately gotten a California license to practice architecture, I think we both realized that it was more a defined period of time, wherein as long as Tommy was doing the kind of work that could take strong architectural input, and if I felt good about it, that this was a mutually beneficial association. I never felt that that would be long-term for me. I never saw it as appropriate that I would become even a partner in a landscape office, or that it would be a joint partnership or anything. I didn't see it that way. I thought that it could have been two years, three years or four years, but sooner or later my aim (since my father had been an architect, and I had already had ten years experience) was to have my own office.

Riess: When you talk about "strong architectural input," are you talking about buildings on the site, or are you talking still about the retaining walls?

Rockrise: No, buildings. I'll give you an example. Belvedere Lagoon had just been dredged and filled out. Belvedere Land Company asked Tommy if he would do a house and garden, as a model to kind of kick off their development thing. And he agreed to do it. So I did the house, pretty much. And it's in this book [p. 136, Gardens are for People]. Tommy did the garden. I designed many pool structures and some houses.

I think the realization grew with Tommy that maybe he was getting too far into architecture, and this probably displeased some of his architect clients, who were his loyal supporters. They did not think that Tommy should necessarily have an architect "in house," if you will. I now understand that.

Riess: By architect clients, you mean--

Rockrise: Many of Tommy's clients were in effect architects because architects would be the prime contractors, and would say, "I really want Church on this job." Architects really liked working with Tommy and thought that he made great contributions, and would just go to bat for him. And the same thing was true of Larry--because architects learned that Larry was a very strong force in Tommy's office--so when Larry opened his own office there were people who wanted to try Larry, you know, of himself.



Rockrise: By the same token I think Tommy's thought was, "Larry's leaving gives me cause to consider. I'm sure you want your own office. You are an architect, and teaching at Berkeley, and the whole thing. I'm not sure that we should have a very strong architectural element in my office." Which is perfectly reasonable. He really wanted to maintain as a landscape office.

And so, to solve the problem in great good grace, I was working on, I think, three houses, in addition to other things, which were Tommy's jobs--they came to Tommy and he took them because he had an architect in the house, Tommy just without any strings said, "Well, Rock, if we decide to separate, would you please take those houses, and that will start you on your practice." Which he did. So, I moved down the street into a little cubby hole, and worked on those houses for a year, and gee, that kept me going until I could begin to get some publicity and win some prizes, and it really turned me on. That was just the neatest thing that a man could do. "I have confidence in you, I'll give you my clients." Goodness!

Riess: Exactly.

Did he ever propose a partnership to Halprin?

Rockrise: I honestly don't know. I think that's a question to ask Larry. I honestly don't know. That may have been something off in the distance. Larry in a sense was professionally young, and Tommy was at his full powers. And to Tommy that meant (I'm just surmising now) that may have seemed too soon, and Larry, of course, feeling that he really was good, wanted to try his own wings.

Riess: These days everybody is so "into" communication and "out front," really, in saying what they're thinking and feeling. You say "I surmise," and "I guess," but did Tommy talk about what it was that he wanted, tried to do, or did you have to surmise and guess?

Rockrise: I don't remember any time being spent planning future growth or organizational patterns or, you know, all the stuff we do around here. Stuff that we spend a lot of time on, or grading employees, all the stuff that when you get into a larger office you really have to. It was kind of Tommy's show, and he ran it out of a sense of fairness, and intuition, and enthusiasm. And it kind of rocketed off. We had a therapeutic community, but it just happened over the tea table.

7) Public Work, Consultation, and House Beautiful

Riess: Was there any public work being done at the Church office while you were there?

Rockrise: Yes, Tommy I think worked on the General Motors Center while he was there. I know that he had been working on Parkmerced, though I don't know whether you'd call that public work. It's certainly not domestic scale work. Very often Tommy would work very closely with the architect of record as design consultant. Which would mean that he would do rough sketches or guide an architect's designer, or occasionally we would do rough sketches, or he would. And then he would go and work with the architect and have precise design development drawings, and then the working drawings, the construction documents would be done in the architect's office. He did that very often with remote work, work that he would do around the country, and this included houses. So that we might see only some sketches that he was working on, and then he'd take off. And he usually had two or three gardens going around the country, or things going where he'd work directly with the architect.

Riess: Was he able really to make a significant contribution in that way, or is that just putting his imprimatur on a job?

Rockrise: I think so. I think, and I'll say this with some bias [chuckles], the architects in the Bay Area, by and large at that juncture of time, there were a few of us who competed constantly, in terms of residences, and by working with Church and others were well conditioned to deal with the site. We just knew this.

Architects in Wichita, and Des Moines and wherever, "a house is a house is a house," sort of thing, and they were not used to reaching out and embracing part of the site; they really didn't know how to deal with it. Unusual people like Mr. Wright or some of his disciples tried to make a conscious effort to find sites that were dynamic, and then embrace them. But that was very rare for the average. Many of these [jobs outside the Bay Area] are nice colonial houses, or stuff that would not be called contemporary, and needed something, so that I would say that Tommy made a considerable contribution. This book is full of examples which show you how well he counterpoints even against very eclectic and full houses.

Remember Tommy had this thing going with Elizabeth Gordon for years. She would appear at least twice a year, and just kind of take over the office and flutter around, because she thought Tommy was the "greatest," which he was for her purposes. This book [Gardens are for People] is a collation of much that was published in House Beautiful,

Rockrise: the color plates and the whole bit. It was relatively easy to put this book together just from editorial material. Which is fine. But that, of course, added to Tommy's fame, and so people who could afford to bring him on would ask their architect. With this kind of publicity in domestic work Tommy was much sought after.

Riess: That reminds me, when you talked about that egg crate with names of all the great people of the Bay Area, that sounds stultifying after awhile, it sounds like it would knock all the creative wind out of you to know that you couldn't do wrong, first of all.

Rockrise: You mean it would become kind of a push-over?

Riess: Yes. For the designer himself. People say that he didn't want to do a job unless he had a real interaction with the client. It sounds like most of those people would simply be buying his reputation after a certain point.

Rockrise: Well, I would fault the consumer rather than Tommy in the sense it was very fashionable to have Mr. Church. There's no question that he was society's landscape architect. They could afford him, they wanted him, in the narrow sense [laughs], and after all of that he was just God damn good. He was better than anybody else.

Riess: Would he try to give each one something new, so to speak?

Rockrise: I think so. Let me say "new" in the sense that Tommy had a vocabulary which was well standardized, and that could be his list of plant materials; the way he would use his small retaining walls as seats; the way he would treat paving; and the way he would design benches, steps, all of these things; and he had this very sure vocabulary which we who worked for him all knew and supported because it was well designed. And Tommy's contribution would be, given the configuration of the land, and the impact of the house, to take (which I think is entirely fair) this vocabulary and deploy these components in a very organized, sympathetic fashion.

As an example, here's a basketweave deck, and you see the same thing in the Donnell job, five years later. These forms, all of these things, he had this surety of vocabulary, so that the unique contributions--this was still all his design, and you cannot be criticized for repeating yourself, unless you don't make a contribution, and his contribution was taking this very sure-footed "kitchen-tested" vocabulary of these arts, and organizing them on a particular site to fit and relate to that site in a special fashion, and also to respond to the client's function needs. So, I would say, yes, he did make an innovative, significant contribution.

Riess: Speaking of what's new, David Streatfield, the architectural historian, says that after you and Halprin left that was the real end of creativity, that Tommy hired no more really creative people in the office, and not only that, but that the sixties were a return to a formal idiom on Church's part.

Rockrise: It's true.

Riess: That's because a lot of that creative intelligence went out of the office?

Rockrise: Yes, I think it's true, and I think that-- No, let it go at that.

#### 8) How Architects and Landscape Architects Work Together

Riess: I have a list of some architects who Tommy worked with over probably a 10 or 20 year period. This was figured out from the catalog of a show on the "Bay Region Style" that was done at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1949. I was interested to see that the two busiest firms were Eckbo's and Church's.\* Looking at the list of architects I wondered if you could make any sort of general statement about the kind of work that the architects did and whether it's all perfectly obvious that Church would work with one group and Eckbo with the other.

Rockrise: [after pause, with tape turned off] With reference to your list, I think that there was probably a natural cleavage. To explain, I would say that certain architects really compose their houses in simple rectangles; others were intrigued with triangles and hexagons. Eckbo's design, by nature, was more geometric and complex and seemed to find more favor with the architects intrigued with geometry, perhaps as an extension of their design module.

---

\*Eckbo, etc., worked most often with

Anshen and Allen  
 Worley Wong  
 Confer Ostwald  
 Mario Corbett  
 John Dinwiddie  
 Henry Hill  
 Clarence Mayhew

Church worked most often with

Hervey Clark  
 Gardner Dailey  
 Joseph Esherick  
 Lois & Fred Langhorst  
 George Rockrise  
 Eldridge Spencer  
 Wurster, Bernardi, Emmons



Rockrise: Tommy's work of simple rectangles, squares, and occasional curves and diagonals seemed most comfortable with the Wurster, Dailey, Clark simplicity. The addition of Halprin's simple, yet sensuous, curving lines, to me just reinforced an exciting counterpoint that would be difficult against triangles and hexagons.

Also I think that Garrett's gardens were much more full of design in almost every detail. Whereas Tommy's tended to be understated; nature could do her thing with the plant materials.

Part of the Bay Area style had to do with the fact that clients and architects chose challenging sites which in many instances demanded sensitive but dynamic solutions. An architecture emerged which allowed a considerable freedom of disposition of parts--and I am talking about domestic architecture related to the site--but required the ability to compose the architectural elements in close proximity to the site. As this architecture developed which could readily and gracefully disport itself over these rugged landscapes, and because the California lifestyle leaned toward maximum development of outside living, inevitably a kind of landscape architecture arose that could deal equally with the dynamic terrain yet provide many useable and functional areas.

It was absolutely necessary that a sensitive person like Tommy, with a really good architectural sense, get into the act and be able to take the talent of the architect and guide it or do it better than the architect.

Riess: But always following the lead of the architect?

Rockrise: No, no, no. I didn't say that. But enough so that he would use the same sorts of materials, same colors and so forth. But deal with the site in a way that supported and complemented what the architect was doing. And that, almost, is the least of it, really making the architect look good, and in many instances moving the house.

I can remember doing a house once, and this deals with Larry, but I had it where I thought it ought to be, and Larry said, "You're 100 feet off. You've just ruined the most beautiful part of the site." Persuaded, I backed the house away from the view and thereby created the most handsome viewing lawn one could want between the house and the view! Super!

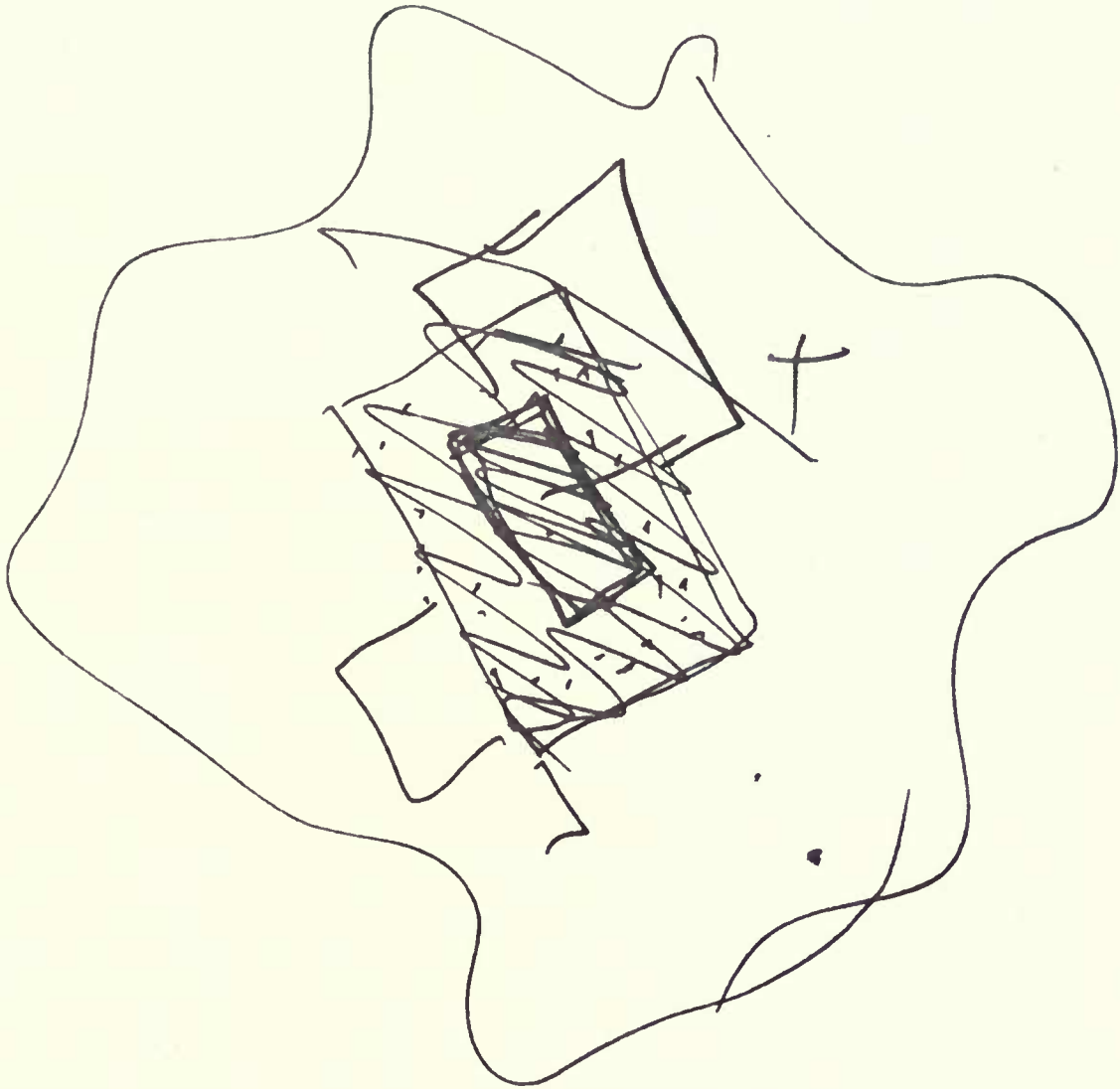
But the point is that the architects I think have learned a great deal from Tommy. After architects work with landscape architects and they have good experiences, the alert architect pretty soon gets into an understanding with the landscape architect, and he begins to



- Rockrise: establish a common vocabulary of communication about specific items of design and specific details, so the reason for the recurrence [of architects consistently working with particular landscape architects] is that they have learned to speak the same language and work together very nicely.
- Riess: And they really influence each other?
- Rockrise: Yes.
- Riess: Would Tommy subscribe to the idea of the garden being an extension of the house?
- Rockrise: Well, it's a little more subtle than that. [See illustration] There are three zones. And if that's a rectangle [the lot] and that's the house, then in my view there's another intermediate zone, which is not the garden, but it's the roof overhangs, porches, balusters. It is that transition between the house, which you lock up, secure and so forth, and the lawn, gardens, trees, pool, whatever. It is an area which transitions the house really to outside space. California architects got very good at this, the extensions of the roof, the trellisses, etc., and Tommy was very good at this. If they met, they met not by extending the house out to the garden, but probably in this middle zone to which both contributed and they met gracefully. And from the porches, then, if the ground was dropping away, we'd extend decks and carports and these things would happen, which Tommy was very capable of handling, and the architects were receptive, or vice versa. But I have always thought that this meeting ground was very important.
- Riess: How did you and Tommy coordinate your styles in the cases where you were doing garden structures of an architectural nature?
- Rockrise: In doing residential gardens there was a whole category of what we could call Peninsula estate gardens, that included a swimming pool, recreation area, a bathhouse, and lanai. I did many of these, 10 or 12, which I would classify as minor architecture, even more minor than usual, but which began to architecturalize and denote a specific recreational center as an adjunct to the house.

I can remember that I felt that it was appropriate, and I think Tommy agreed with me, that if we were dealing with a contemporary house, the structure should be contemporary. On the other hand I can remember working with a very elegant Victorian house and producing a lanai which at least had Victorian arches, some architectural consonance. I say that because it seems somewhat of a moral responsibility to be consonant in spite of my contemporary bias. [Laughing]





Rockrise sketch  
Illustrating comments on preceding page

Rockrise: But the interesting thing was that it seemed to both of us, and I can laugh about it, that the architectural consonance should come in what I was doing, whereas when it came to what Tommy was doing in general site development, it seemed perfectly logical to Church to do whatever Church wanted to do and that was not a Victorian swimming pool! [Laughter] Maybe because mine was three-dimensional, it stood up in full view whereas most gardens are two-and-a-half dimensional, but not a story high or two stories high.

Occasionally I would remodel the house itself, the reason for that being that it was clear that somebody in doing the house, or the architectural designer, had made some basic mistakes, and therefore it was necessary to work on the house in a fashion to maybe open up a view or move a fireplace or add a porch, to do something in order to make the house work better with the garden space. Often the house needed remodel, more than a new garden to properly exploit a good site.

#### 9) Some Added Remarks on Tommy

Rockrise: [Remarks added by Mr. Rockrise in editing] In this interview I have talked about Tommy Church as an inspired and receptive person who patiently introduced me into the art and science of dealing with the site. But, as all of us who worked for or with Tommy felt, I should speak of him as a friend.

I came to San Francisco in January of 1947. In March of that year I met Margaret Paulson, a bright, challenging, attractive lady, whom I married some months later. Tommy was delighted and certainly Maggie and Tommy enjoyed each other, which Tommy was pleased to show. When we were married, Tommy (and Betsy) insisted on giving the wedding reception at their delightful Victorian home on Hyde Street. I was really made to feel as if I had done something great for T. Church and Associates. And he certainly took a friendly and warm interest in my new family.

Although I have mentioned it before, this is so important to me that I must mention it again, namely, my leave taking from Tommy's office. He endowed me with all the houses on which I had been working as an outright gift while persuading the clients involved that their interests would continue to be well served. There were good words of advice and encouragement. For I was about to make the move I had dreamt about for years, to open my own office, truly the major step of my career. Even after I had left Tommy's office there were client referrals, and generous credits for projects on which I had worked.

Rockrise: Truly Tommy Church was a good friend, for to bring me to the friendly design climate of San Francisco, be my mentor in the learning of landscape, and then make possible the beginning of my own practice, which has grown and flourished, could a friend do more?

In conclusion, I would say that Tommy Church made a tremendous contribution to the character of contemporary landscape design: His ability was to take natural ground forms and features and subtly architecturalize (organize) them into a composition that was both supportive and functional to the architecture against which it was counterpointed. And this was done free of eclectic or traditional impedimenta, yet there was always a kindredcy with the existing or proposed architecture, traditional or contemporary. And this reasonably and naturally integrated the architecture itself even more with the site.

His work has said to the two succeeding generations of landscape architects now in practice that careful sensitive analysis of the site and the functions the site must support will yield almost all the site design concept or scheme while correcting bad architectural placement on site and greatly reinforcing the good.





















