

Lindsay Knapp

A LAND ETHIC FOR THE RESIDENTIAL LANDSCAPE

I BELIEVE that the native vegetation of any given area comprises more than just habitat for fauna; it creates a common visual narrative.

I BELIEVE that the common visual has value beyond price; it is what makes an area unique, and is one of the foundation stones for the concept of place.

I BELIEVE that the common visual deserves the same level of stewardship currently applied only to large tracts of land and land conserved to the public trust.

I BELIEVE that the modern landscape practice of supplanting native vegetation with foreign varieties damages the visual habitat, in that the removal of flora associated with place identity neuters the landscape.

I BELIEVE that the spirit of place resides in the land: in the stone that forms it, in the soil that covers it, in the plants that grow from it.

I BELIEVE that when any one of those elements becomes depleted, the spirit is depleted in equal measure.

I BELIEVE that just as there are conservators of land and conservators of soil, conservators of art and music and architecture, there should be conservators of place.

I BELIEVE that we need to change the manner in which residential landscapes are designed and managed in order to conserve the common visual; and that in order to effect this change, we need a new paradigm.

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I BELIEVE that the new paradigm is best achieved by weaving together ancient skills and modern practices, by combining art with science and mathematics.

I BELIEVE that this will result in harmony between the expression of design and the stewardship of land, and will restore balance to the habitat.

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ELA CONFERENCE 3 MARCH 2011: REDEFINING HABIT

THE TAKEAWAY

If you remember only one thing from this presentation, let it be this: observation of the three habits I've outlined will give you everything you need to design a space in which the built and the unbuilt are balanced. In balance, these two systems work as one, allowing the desired bonds between person and place to form. Out of balance, the two are always in some measure of conflict which not only requires additional effort to resolve, but also limits the connections the human occupant of the habitat will be able to establish. These landscapes, these bits of "near nature," as Rachel Kaplan calls it, contribute to human health, and so a balanced environment is not just an altruistic, go-green endeavor, it's a calculated move in our own best interest. If you need a rationale beyond the artistic motive of better design, or the ecological motive of better biotics, there it is, so go ahead and be selfish ~ it's good for the Earth.

THE NUB

Habit is form; form is found in botany, site and locale. Collecting the cues from all three arenas is a matter of observation; using them is a matter of achieving overall balance in site design.

THE TIP

I photograph new sites from eight points (N, S, E, W, NE, SE, SW, NW) in morning, afternoon and evening light. This gives me lines, angles and shadows I may otherwise miss. For owner/designers, it's also a way to acquire a more objective rendering of the property than one who loves it, sees it every day, would naturally have.

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I'm just an email away if you have questions...