

Authentic, Whole, and Alive: Design Lessons from Wild Landscapes

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Summary

Wild landscapes offer design inspiration that goes beyond species composition and ecosystem services.

We value wild places — places where form arises more from natural process than from human intent — not only for their biological value, but for the experiences they afford.

By understanding some of the spatial patterns that give rise to wild places' experiential qualities, we can develop design techniques that help us bring those qualities to built landscapes in urban and suburban settings.



Taxodium Grove at the Rose Kennedy Greenway, Boston MA, Wolf Landscape Architecture
Photo courtesy Shadley Associates, 2013

Resources

The approach that I describe in this presentation — looking at places that offer meaningful and enjoyable experiences; identifying the patterns that foster those experiences regardless of setting or style, and incorporating those patterns in our designs — is adapted from *A Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander and colleagues. Every designer should own this book. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977.)

For an Architecture of Reality argues that design can bring us joy through “the simple correspondence of appearance and reality,” which author Michael Benedikt finds in good architecture and I find in wild places. The book describes four components of “realness” in architecture, which Benedikt dubs presence, significance, materiality, and emptiness. (New York, NY: Lumen Books, 1987)

The *Landscape Performance Series*, at landscapeperformance.org, makes for good browsing. (The series has grown and evolved, so the earliest studies may not have the depth of the later ones.) Sponsored by the Landscape Architecture Foundation, the program also provides great opportunities for researchers and designers to collaborate.

Resources for the Bioswale at Cornell Botanic Gardens:

Plant list:

www.cornellbotanicgardens.org/sites/default/files/bioswale.pdf

Interpretive panel:

www.cornellbotanicgardens.org/sites/default/files/Biopanel_Rd.final_.l.r.pdf

LAF Case Study by Michele Palmer and Mujahid Powell:

landscapeperformance.org/case-study-briefs/nevin-welcome-center

