The History of Landscape Trends in Hawaii and Contemporary Landscape Architects of Significance

Gardens are simultaneously real places and representations. They bring together in one place nature and our ideas about nature.

The treatment of the landscape tells the story of man.

Briefly, it is said that there have been 4 inventions in landscape design:
- Hortus conculus - from the Romans
- Topiary - From the French
- The English tradition or picturesque style, English landscape movement - from England
- The lawn - From the United State of America

The first 100 years the colonists occupied North America, their time was spent beating back the wilderness in order to survive. The colonists did not indulge in outdoor design.

It wasn’t until well into the 18th century that the colonists had time for relaxation, and gardens were constructed. Colonial gardens emulated the Old English Renaissance Style. Although this was the style that they could remember, the English Renaissance Style had gone out of vogue a generation or two before. In keeping with the English Renaissance style, the Colonists gardens were formal and tightly controlled. A typical Colonial garden included rectangular paths, square flower gardens and topiary gardens.
Gardens in America continued along the English Renaissance style until 1801 when Thomas Jefferson returned from his trip to England, favorably impressed by the English Landscape Movement. Jefferson was so impressed by the English Landscape Movement that the style appears in his 1807 sketches for the “winding or Roundabout Walk” at Monticello.

The English Landscape Movement was a reaction against agriculture’s conquest of the English countryside. Typically, English fields were enclosed by checkerboard hedgerows. This inspired nostalgia for more natural forms. The more the countryside came to resemble a formal garden, the more the garden came to resemble the countryside. It can be said that the English Landscape Movement is partly a work of restoration. It typically includes irregular landscape spaces, curving lines and slopes.

The American Colonial Landscape from the beginning was a Puritan landscape. To the Puritans, the entire landscape was God’s garden, and to draw lines around it was to throw this concept in question. To speak of aesthetics was regarded as vaguely un-American for religious reasons. “How can we improve upon God’s country?” The Puritans felt that if they were going to alter the land, they would do it together in a plain democratic, Protestant style. The landscape would underscore utility. The landscape would not give itself over to frivolity. Consequently, prior to 1894, there was no discussion of fragrance or color in garden literature in America. Those qualities ran counter to Puritan philosophy.

At the same time, in the United Kingdom, the picturesque designers such as Kent,
Capability Brown and Repton were busy making a point of obscuring boundaries. Thus the submerged fence, the Ha-Ha-, was invented. Productive property was hidden from view. The vegetable garden was relegated to the backyard, the logic being that the view of the vegetable garden betrayed the human effort that went into it's making. It invites us to take pleasure in the consciousness of the skill applied by man's contrivance, and spoils the desired illusion of the wild.

The appreciation of the "wild" became a hallmark of the most cultivated tastes.

Back in America, during the mid 1800's, a generation of landscape reformers set out to beautify the American landscape. Up to this point the American landscape was characterized by "out-of door-slovenliness." The land had quickly been denuded of trees, bore make shift fences and badly plowed fields. Tree stumps were everywhere. As a plot of land was exhausted, a new one would be cleared. According to Michael Pollan in his classic Second Nature, "nineteenth century visitors noted hardly anyone practiced ornamental gardening. The typical yard was "landscaped" in the style southerners would come to call white trash...a few chickens, some busted farm equipment, mud and weeds an unkempt patch of vegetables."

It was during this time that Andrew Jackson Downing wrote his popular treatise The theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America. In 1870 Frank J. Scott wrote the first book devoted to "suburban home embellishment, The Art of Beautifying Suburban Home Ground." This book more than anyother shaped the ideas behind the suburban landscape in America. Suburban Home Ground made Andrew Downing's concepts available accessible to middle America. At the core of their philosophy Downing and Scott believed that humans are effected by their
environment. Downing and Scott were proponents of the Gardenesque Style. They had respect for the site and believed that the “genius of the site lay in it’s history and topography.” These early landscape architects awakened Americans to the importance of improving the Wholeness of residential properties.

After the Civil War, Fredrick Law Olmstead was commissioned to design Riverside outside of Chicago. Riverside was one of the first planned communities in America. Olmstead initiated the concept of CC and R’s which included required setbacks and prohibited walls. Although Olmstead did not invent the lawn, they had been popular in England since Tudor times, Americans democratized the lawn. Americans considered lawn an end to itself. The uninterrupted lawn creates the impression that all live together, in one class, in a single park. Today the U.S. has some 50,000 square miles of lawn under cultivation, worth 30 billion dollars. It should be noted that lawn requires more herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers and water than any other crop grown in America.

The absence of walls and the presence of sidewalks (which came later) also convey Democratic and Christian ideals. Scott said “it is unchristian to hedge from the site of others the beauties of nature which it has been our good fortune to create or secure.” Olmstead also felt that the “high dead walls of England” made homes there seem like a series of private mad-houses.” The idea of making a claim, visually on God’s creation was unchristian. Incorporating the view of somebody else’s property, “leaping the garden fence” and “creating vistas which disregard bounds of property” was democratic.
Gardens in Hawaii possessed a strong agrarian component. This reflected Hawaii’s involvement with agriculture, and Owners involvement with their property and the out of doors. Plant materials typically incorporated into the landscape during this period include fruit trees and tropical shrubs for cut flowers and lei making. Properties of the well heeled in Europe and America and later in Hawaii fostered the tradition of turning the back side of the property to the street, and orienting the front of the property to a view, in Hawaii’s case of a downhill slope or a view of the ocean.

In Hawaii, the heart of the home was the lanai and garden. Lanais on the street side of a home acted as a transition between public space, the street, and the private space, the home. The lanai was were the inhabitants truly relaxed.

Homes of the 1800’s-1900’s were characterized by the presence of stately trees, trees, which required large parcels of land for the purposes of scale. Large trees in the designed landscape gave the design structure is one of the first trends observed in landscape design in Hawaii.

The character of development and the landscape changed after World War II. Prior to the War, town development was overseen by an individual, often a landscape architect or planner, who was the steward of a broad brush vision. The vision focused on quality of life issues. This individual ensured that all other discipline’s contributions supported the vision. The United States won World War II, in large part, due to it’s
ingenuity in production. Assembly line techniques relied on specialization. These same principals of specialization and production were brought to the development of communities. The prime discipline of a designed community after World War II was most often an engineer, frequently a civil engineer, or a traffic engineer and almost always a specialist. The broad brush visionary was relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy, or was extracted from the process entirely. Streets became wider, 52’ feet wide, with 42” concrete sidewalks on both sides. Trees were an extra cost and bother. The landscape came to mean the front yard. The front yard came to function as a social calling card. It communicated the status of the household to the community. In the words of Michael Pollan, if vied for your attention and then waved “howdy” at you. The private space, the back yard was relegated to a postage stamp size space for barbecuing, recreation and gardening. Trees became smaller.

New post war homes also offered up new technologies, such as air conditioning, which changed the way homes were built and people’s regard for the out of doors. New post war homes did not include lanais. The opportunity for neighborly, public/private interaction no longer existed. With the advent of air conditioning went the enticement for people to spend time outside relaxing, and contemplating the natural environment. To feel the soothing breezes, to smell the air. Instead, people turned indoors, to ever more heightened degrees of privacy. Houses began to contain more and more rooms, bathrooms, telephones and television sets. The ratio of open space to built space on a residential lot became smaller and smaller. Trees as well became smaller and fewer.
Catherine Thompson was Hawaii’s first licensed landscape architect. Catherine was born in 1897 in Nuuanu Valley to a privileged family. Catherine, also known as Kitty, attended Punahou School and then Smith College where she graduated from in 1919 with a B.A. in English Literature. Upon her return to Hawaii, Catherine married naval officer Russell Richards. The Richards had two sons. Catherine’s landscape architecture practice flourished despite her lack of a formal education. Her earliest professional commission are the Cottages at the Ala Moana Hotel. Catherine did not know how to draw plans, so she spent her time in the field with nursery men. She became the foremost landscape architect of her day in large part due to her intimate knowledge of plants. When Catherine was overlooked for the commission to design the landscape for the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, she decided to return to school for her Masters in Landscape Architecture. Catherine left her family and went to the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. It was while in Cambridge that Catherine met Robert Thompson, a Michigan native who was studying landscape architecture at Harvard. After receiving their degrees, the two of them went off to Europe for a year of study. Catherine returned to Honolulu in 1926 and opened up her office, eventually going into business with Robert as Thompson and Thompson. The Thompson’s brought a classical formality to their work, and married this formality with Catherine’s expertise in tropical plant material. In 1966 Catherine Thompson was admitted as a fellow to the American Society of Landscape Architects. The Thompson’s work is characterized by:

1. The use of large specimen trees formally arranged, to give the design it’s “bones”. Examples include Thomas Square, Punchbowl, the Marks
Estate, the Laniakea YWCA

2. Moon gardens, or whither gardens

3. Planting design consisting of white and green plant material, an aesthetic which has recently reemerged in upper end residential developments such as Hualalai Resort on the Big Island.

4. Use of indigenous plant material

5. The incorporation of Asian motifs, such as at the Academy of Art.

Representative works include:

1. Punchbowl National Cemetery of the Pacific
2. The Honolulu Academy of Art
3. Thomas Square
4. Washington Place
5. Irwin Park
6. The Pacific Club
7. Downtown YWCA
8. Honolulu Board of Water Supply Pumping stations at Makiki, Aliamaunu, Kuliouou
9. Ala Moana Park
10. Doris Duke Estate
11. Theodore Cooke Estate in Makiki Heights, Winner of the ASLA/Life Magazine award
12. Dr. and Mrs. Howard Liljistrand Residence, Winner of the 1958 House Beautiful Pace Setter Award.
Richard Tongg

Richard Tongg was a contemporary of Catherine and Robert Thompson’s. Richard was born in Honoka’a on Hawaii in 1899. His father was a sugar cane plantation worker. Richard graduated with a B.S. in agriculture from the University of Hawaii in 1923, and then went to U.C. Berkeley to study landscape architecture. He earned his degree in 1925. After his schooling, Tongg worked for Ralph Stevens at the prestigious Hope Ranch, outside of Santa Barbara. In 1928, Tongg returned to Hawaii, opened his nursery, and began his design/build practice. Eventually Tongg gave up his nursery in favor of his design practice.

In 1935, as the Landscape Architect for the Territory of Hawaii, Tongg worked to beautify the Island’s highways. He had the foresight to promote and preserve the beauty of Hawaii by creating Hawaiian gardens complete with coconut trees and waterfalls for exhibits at trade fairs and world expositions.

Tongg’s work emphasized a Hawaiian sensitivity. His daughter, Rosemary Chun stated “he liked his.... designs to flow, as flowing out of an eruption. Nature was his motivation.”

Richard Tongg work was also influenced by an Asian sensitivity. In the mid 1930’s Tongg and Loraine Kuck traveled to China and Japan to study Oriental gardens. Tongg was greatly influenced by the Imperial Gardens of Japan in Kyoto and the famous gardens of Soochow and Hangchow. Placement of Stones, and the sculptural shape of plants became hallmarks of Tongg’s work.
Richard Tongg’s break came when he received the commission to landscape the corporate offices of Alexander and Baldwin located downtown. Tongg startled his clients and the community by planting all of the many field stock Coconut Palms on the property overnight. He was the first landscape architect to do this.

Tongg’s work strongly differentiated itself from the Thompson’s work. Tongg’s style is noted for it’s organic forms and massings of tropical plant material. He loved color in flower and foliage.

With the influx of hotel construction in the post war years, Tongg’s career thrived. During this period the palette of plants available for use in the landscape grew as scores of species were brought in for use in the resort landscape. These were the flamboyant years. Tongg developed the tropical design theme, gardens which belong in the tropics as opposed to the “pale copies of other styles” as Loraine Kuck described it. This style of design has stood the test of time and has translated directly to modern day resort and residential design throughout the tropics.

In addition to the aforementioned achievements, Richard Tongg, along with Loraine Kuck authored two books on landscape design, the classic, The Tropical Garden and the Modern Tropical Garden. Tongg was very generous with his knowledge and wrote a weekly garden article for the local newspaper. He was a popular speaker among those interested in gardens in Hawaii.

In 1977 Richard Tongg became a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects. He was honored for his outstanding works by the first person of Chinese decent to practice landscape architecture in the United States. At the Silver
Anniversary Celebration of the University of Hawaii, Tongg was honored as one of their 75 most prominent graduates.

Richard Tongg’s work is characterized by:

1. The arrangement of lush, colorful plant massings in organic forms.
2. The use of plant materials strongly associated with Hawaii such as Coconut Palms, Monstera and Hawaiian Tree Ferns.
3. The incorporation of the Asian motif into landscape design through the incorporation of rocks, and focus on the sculptural form of plants.

Representative projects include:

1. The Alexander and Baldwin Building
2. Honolulu Hale
3. The original Halekulani Hotel
4. Honolulu Airport
5. Maui Hyatt Hotel
6. Gardens for the Vanderbilts
7. The Doris Duke Estate
8. The residence of Gloria Baker
9. The residence of Henry Kaiser
10. The residence of Clare Booth Luce.

George Walters

George Walters was born in Hawaii in 1926. At the time of his birth his father was a lighthouse keeper at the Kalapapa Light House on Molokai. When she knew her time
had come, George’s mother took a barge over to Oahu to give birth to him. George was the third generation of his family born in Hawaii.

George lived with his family at Kalapapa until his father was transferred to the Kilauaea Kauai Lighthouse. He and his family lived there until his father was transferred to the Diamond Head Lighthouse on Oahu.

George Walters graduated from Roosevelt High School and enlisted in the army during the Second World War. During this time he was stationed in Hawaii as a battalion engineer. After the War, George went to San Mateo Junior College in the Bay Area on the G.I. bill. From there he went on to U.C. Berkeley where he graduated with a degree in Architecture. George then went on to earn a Master’s in Landscape Architecture from Berkeley in 1954. In 1958, after working in the Bay Area for a few years, George returned home to Hawaii, and opened up his office, G.S. Walters and Associates. In 1965, Julie Walters left her career as a concert cellist with the Honolulu Symphony, and went to work for George. Four years later George and Julie married. In 1975 the firm changed its name to Walters, Kimura and Associates. Julie credits the fact that she shared George’s world and passion for Landscape Architecture for their successful marriage. Indeed, Ms. Walters speaks lovingly of her deceased husband, and goes so far as to say that “in my mind, he’s still the best landscape architect I’ve ever known. He was a real advocate of the environment. He could really move people”.

George Walter’s style can be called the California style. His designs were very clean and architectural in character. He often incorporated modular paving into his designs. While his work also was influenced by Oriental sensibilities, Walter’s style was very
dissimilar to Richard Tongg’s. Walter’s projects had a hardscape backbone, while Tongg’s designs have much less structure to them. An innovator, with an infectious enthusiasm, and strong opinions, Walter thrived on projects of a civic nature. Ms. Walters states that George was more appreciated on a national level than on a local level, because of his strong opinions.

George died at home, in 1976 of a brain tumor, a short 18 years after opening his Hawaii office. “Total life was his work” Ms. Walters states.

George Walter’s work is characterized by:

1. Geometric structure defined by hardscape elements
2. The use of hardscape modules
3. Contemporary themes
4. Love of Coconut Palms, at a time when they were out of fashion. During the 60-70’s the City and County of Honolulu turned against Coconut Palms because of the liability/maintenance associated with them. The City and County at the time encouraged the planting of Manila Palms as an alternative. George fought to save the the Coconut Palms at Blaisdell Center.
5. Incorporation of Asian motifs.

Projects representative of George Walter’s work include:

1. The Queen Emma Garden, which was the first roof garden in Hawaii. It won local and national awards. This is “classic Walters”.
2. Victoria Ward Offices. This project won local awards. It is now radically changed and unrecognizable as his design.
3. Kona Airport
5. A'Ala Park. This project is unrecognizable now as his design
6. Kuhio Beach Promenade
7. Blaisdell Center
8. State Office Building at Punchbowl and Beretania Streets
9. MacCarthy Mall at the University of Hawaii
10. The Waikikian Hotel
11. The Sheraton Maui at Ka'anapali Beach

Jim Hubbard

Jim Hubbard came to Hawaii from Washington State in 1960 as an employee of the University of Hawaii. Jim held a degree in Home Economy in Landscape Design, the precursor to the landscape architecture program, from the University of Washington. Hubbard worked to improve the housing conditions for plantations workers, and taught class at U.H. In 1968 Jim opened his landscape architecture practice, James Hubbard Landscape Architect. During the course of his career, he created a refined signature statement of tropical landscape design.

Jim Hubbard and George Walters were from a similar period in time, and shared a similar aesthetic. Hubbard’s work like Walters was architectural in character, although Hubbard’s work was more soft spoken than Walters. Hubbard used plant material architecturally, where as Walters often relied on hardscape elements and geometry to provide structure to his designs. Jim Hubbard’s projects all display a quality of understatement and elegance. His designs have an integrity and strength which have
stood the test of time. They possess an appropriateness of site and materials. They give equal time to the creation of space and structure, and homage to nature.

As did the other masters, Hubbard emmersed himself in the study of plants which could be grown in Hawaii, and shared that information generously with those were interested. Mr. Hubbard collaborated with Horace F. Clay and Rick Holt on the reference books, Tropical Shrubs and Tropical Exotics, and with Horace Clay on Trees for Hawaiian Gardens.

Throughout his career Jim Hubbard was motivated by the opportunity to create beautiful gardens. For almost four decades Hubbard gave generously of his time and expertise working without pay on behalf of non-profit organizations in Hawaii. Such organizations include Bishop Museum, Foster Botanic Garden, and the Hawaii Botanic Gardens System.

Jim Hubbard’s work is characterized by:

1. Architectural use of plant material to create and define space
2. Softness achieved through earth contouring and or simple plant massing

Representative public venue projects include:

1. Tamarind Square
2. Queen Emma’s Summer Palace
3. The Contemporary Art Museum Gardens
4. The Banyan Court
Paul Weissich was born in Mill Valley, California in 1925. He graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 1950. The same year, he and his wife moved to Hawaii with their two young boys. A third boy was born in Hawaii.

After arriving in Hawaii, Paul worked for Richard Tongg for 3 years. Afterwards he became the Park Master Planner for the City and County of Honolulu. This job launched Weissich on a course he followed for the rest of his life, that being the beautification and promotion of horticulture and landscaping on behalf of all people in Hawaii. While Park Master Planner, Weissich met Loraine Kuck, and through her, Dr. Lyon. In 1957 Paul Weissich became Department Head of Planning and Construction. After Dr. Lyon’s death, Paul was in charge of what later became the Beautification Division for the City and County of Honolulu. There, Weissich ushered in the first motorized equipment, organized the street tree council, and took inventory of all street trees in Honolulu City and County. There were at that time, a small amount of people working in his division, and an enormous amount of trees. Weissich moved on to completing the construction of the Waikiki Shell and is responsible for the amphitheater seating area. In 1960, Weissich began the Division of Botanical Gardens. In 1961, Weissich was asked whether he wanted to run either the Beautification Division or the Botanical Gardens. Weissich chose the Botanical Gardens. Paul Weissich played a key role in helping organize the Friends of Foster Garden and helped fight off a threat to loosing a portion of those lands. Infact, Weissich contributed to adding two more acres to the area of Foster Garden.

"The 1960's-1970's were very active days...there was a lot of energy", Weissich
recalled. During this period Paul Weissich conceived of a Garden System with gardens which represented the various microclimates found within Hawaii. Weissich brought the 27 acre Wahiawa Gardens into the system, made Koko Crater a botanic garden representing arid environment plants, developed Hohomaluhia into an ethnobotanic garden and expanded Foster Garden. Today Weissich speaks of developing a strand garden, a garden for the plant material which thrives in on-shore winds conditions.

Weissich, like all the Masters sited in this paper has shared extensively of his knowledge. He provided the information for Majesty, put out by the Outdoor Circle. Paul wrote Majesty II, and wrote with his co-author, Fred Rauch, the recently released Plants for Tropical Landscapes. Paul has been working for the last eight years on Na Lei Naka Mai, a book which celebrates and discusses leis from the pre-contact period.

Paul Weissich has been a mentor to those who live in Hawaii and visitors to Hawaii alike. He has seen the landscape change, and been the best of friends to many who left their mark behind, he has in his own words seen the "freeing of the Asian aesthetic". He has a passionate, youthful and generous spirit which is truly an inspiration to us all. Paul Weissich along with the other masters discussed in this paper make you ask of yourself, "what is it I want to say. How can I contribute to the story of the garden, mankind's story".