

WHAT IS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE?

DESIGN: About Landscape Architecture

Landscape architecture translates as the design of almost anything under the sky. Think of iconic places like New York City's Central Park and the FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C. But also consider your downtown square, your local park, or even your own backyard. Green roofs, urban farms, corporate campuses—all define landscape architecture.

Landscape architecture covers a huge spectrum, perhaps best understood by the profession's mantra: achieving a balance between the built and natural environments. It requires a multidisciplinary approach involving environmental science, art, ecology, and much more, leading to extraordinary results: restoring endangered wetlands, reducing hospital stays, securing government and other buildings, removing toxins from rainwater. These aren't pie in the sky. It's what landscape architects are designing right now.

Here are just a few of the project types covered by landscape architecture:

- School and college campuses
- Corporate and commercial grounds
- Public gardens and arboreta
- Historic preservation and restoration
- Hotels, resorts, golf courses
- Hospital and other facility sites
- Interior landscapes
- Land planning
- Landscape art and earth sculpture
- Monument grounds
- Parks and recreation
- Land reclamation and rehabilitation
- Residential sites
- Security design
- Streetscapes and public spaces
- Therapeutic gardens
- Transportation corridors and facilities
- Urban and suburban design
- Water resources



New York City's Highline Photo: Iwan Baan

DESIGNERS: About Landscape Architects

Landscape architects typically hold a bachelor's or master's degree in landscape architecture, covering a broad spectrum of design, science, and technical know-how. Topics include site design, historic preservation, planning, grading and drainage, horticulture, and even subjects like psychology. All 50 states require landscape architects to earn a license to practice. This not only involves earning a university degree, but usually several years of work experience, passing of a rigorous exam, and taking continuing education courses.

It's easy to confuse landscape architects with other landscape professionals, but the difference is straightforward. Landscape architects design, often working with landscaping or other construction companies to install those designs. Think of the fashion designer imagining an outfit while a clothing manufacturer makes the apparel, or an artist designing a wall poster that's printed by another company. Landscape architects and contractors are complementary but highly distinct professions.



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DESIGNING: How Landscape Architecture Happens

Design isn't as simple as just breaking out a sketch pad or loading computer design software. Creating the spaces we use to live, work, and play requires many steps—especially for larger-scale landscape architecture projects.

Learning the Landscape

Design starts here. Landscape architects need to know what they're getting into and what the client needs. The designers speak with the client, visit the proposed site, conduct an analysis of its history, research possible uses, and, depending upon the project type (especially if it's a public project like a park), solicit input from the community.

Concepts

Will a park include an amphitheater or an athletic field? Should the space use a green roof, water system, or solar panels? Landscape architects use initial drawings or 3-D models to propose the big ideas. If it's a large public project, there may be more opportunity for public feedback.

TOP: Houston's Buffalo Bayou Promenade *Photo: Tom Fox*

BOTTOM: Chicago's Gary Comer Youth Center Roof Garden *Photo: Scott Shigley*



Nueva School, Hillsborough, California *Photo: Marion Brenner*

Designing

Instead of simply proposing a green roof, now the drawings or computer models will include the exact look of the green roof. Many projects require a series of drawings to cover the whole project, all brought together into a final master plan for the client to approve. From there, a whole new set of construction drawings covers the minutiae of exactly what type of materials to use and where each individual plant, stone, fountain, or bench should go.

Breaking Ground and Beyond

A landscape architect's job doesn't end with the final plan. The designers routinely visit the site, meet with the client, and work with the construction team to ensure all goes smoothly. After completion, landscape architects evaluate the success of the project and, depending on the client, continue to oversee management of the site post-construction. Many cities and counties have their own landscape architects on staff to manage all the parks and public land.



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