

TOWARD AN ONTOLOGY OF DESIGN PHILOSOPHY IN LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTURE: DEVELOPING A PERSONAL  
DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

by

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## ABSTRACT

# TOWARD AN ONTOLOGY OF DESIGN PHILOSOPHY IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: DEVELOPING A PERSONAL DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

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This thesis uses qualitative inquiry to examine the process for developing a personal design philosophy. The larger goal of the study seeks to understand the universal and particulars of design as philosophy with the intent to develop an ontology for design philosophy in landscape architecture.

“Design is a crucial factor in the relation between beings and worlds as they shape each other, yet as a philosophy, design itself hardly exists” (Willis, 2009). Willis and others in the field of design philosophy suggest that design as a philosophy has only recently begun to be studied. Further, to begin an understanding of the universal philosophy of design, the definition and construction of the particulars must be laid down, thus forming an understandable ontology.

Expressed in the literature are the implications of design philosophy to daily lives, whether considering the universal concept of design as philosophy or the particulars that make it up. The literature further expresses the idea that every street, bench, and utensil has its grounding in design philosophy. Yet, when speaking of design philosophy, designers often state their philosophy in terms of an execution of form driven by a set of analysis of an inventory and program needs, ignoring the broader thought processes behind decisions they make.

The hypothesis of this study is that there is a process for developing a personal design philosophy which is similar among individuals in landscape architecture. This study uses open-ended

interviews with landscape architects and students at various levels of experience and types of practice, both academic and non-academic, from the Dallas-Fort Worth area and The University of Texas at Arlington's Program in Landscape Architecture. The aim is to identify their definition of the term design philosophy, describe their personal design philosophies, and explain how they came to those philosophies. The process can then be used to broaden a personal design philosophy by focusing training and experience on key factors.

Data from the interviews were analyzed to find consistent themes, which were broken down into main and sub-categories. A simple model was developed based on the findings. The model illustrates that the process for developing a personal design philosophy consists of the initial and ongoing influences which are moderated by how design philosophy is defined, what interferes with it, and what view is used by the individual for its evaluation. Further research is needed to fit this into design as philosophy in landscape architecture.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

*“Any genuine philosophy leads to action  
and from action back again to wonder,  
to the enduring fact of mystery.”  
Henry Miller*

This study looks at the term *design philosophy*, its context and meaning, and its broader network. Discussed here is the importance of design philosophy, the definition of design as a philosophy and the philosophies' relationship to the individual's design philosophy. The research objectives and questions that are to be answered are stated here, along with a definition of terms for better understanding of ideas proposed in this paper.

This thesis purports that, like the network of ideas (Johnson 2010), design philosophy has two parts that are interconnected and interdependent. The first part is the ontological universe of design as a philosophy. The universals in ontology are abstract and are the metaphysical scheme of design as a philosophy that serves as the platform for further explanation and discovery of design, and, according to literature, is just beginning to be examined.

The second part is the particulars of individual design philosophies which make up the larger philosophical design thinking. This study is concerned with the first steps of building an ontology of design as a philosophy in landscape architecture by first defining design philosophy and then understanding how landscape architects and educators of landscape architecture come to their personal design philosophy.

The term design philosophy is made up of simple yet powerful words whose physical manifestation has the power to corrupt or enhance the built environment. From the ancient mystic philosophy seeking to understand the universal order of life through found sacred places in nature, to the

environmental degradation brought on by the worship of the machine and technology in the industrial revolution, life on earth continues to be victims and victors of design philosophy. Landscape design addresses the relationship between people and place and is a partnership between art, nature and technology (Rogers, 2001). Driving the design, however, is an underlying universal design philosophy made up of particular design philosophies that begin in the mind and are displayed in the built environment.

Rather than a continuum as over time, these two components (universal and particular) consist of equal parts of theory, practice, past experience, creation and feedback. Like a fractal, the micro-scale of an individual's design philosophy feeds into and is fed by the macro-scale of the philosophy of design. Defining the components and relationships therein mark the first steps in understanding the bigger picture of design. The importance of defining and understanding the development of design philosophy in landscape architecture has implications for the future of environmental and cultural growth and development of society. The philosophy that nature is to be conquered, as in the middle ages, created landscapes that require manifold resources for upkeep. While the practice of many designers of pandering to a public whose whims change from year to year uses resources at an alarming rate. The philosophy behind the design underpins all the decisions that are made in design. Understanding what defines and drives the individual designer's philosophies can help us better manage the built environment so that both the earth and its creatures live in harmony.

## 1.2 Design as a Philosophy

An examination of web pages and advertising publication, whether in landscape architecture, architecture or even engineering, will likely show the phrase "our design philosophy is...." The phrase "design philosophy" has different meanings which change according to whoever is asked and in what capacity they work or think. A designer may begin explaining a project by using the phrase, "the design philosophy for this design is....," meaning that the philosophy changes from one project to the next. Though those who study design might wish to containerize it in an old school institutionalized manner, design philosophy itself mandates that it is a path to new and innovative thinking and realization (Ben-Eli,

2007). This involves a better relationship between theory, practice and production. Design is often misunderstood and used for commercial applications instead of a way to involve interdisciplinary collaboration and give new life to the conception and planning of the spaces (Margolin and Buchanan 1995).

An example of this lack of interdisciplinary process is in the design of video cassettes (Margolin and Buchanan 1995). The original design looked strictly to the function of the cassettes as a recording device. Once the inventors were forced to link with the end users and look to other disciplines for input, viewing, recording, deleting, distributing, and editing content can now be done quickly and easily. Through an interdisciplinary approach the ultimate in flexibility in function was achieved even though the tangible product itself ceased to exist.

Design philosophy has been defined as a component of functionalism (Fry 1999). This means that design in landscape architecture only concerns itself with purpose or function, and has little use for aesthetics. Functionalism, however, is concerned with the operation of things; that is, how they work and what part of a system they define. This functionality by its nature sets up the framework of meaning, thereby confining design within a philosophy that does not have the power to regenerate and grow (Fry 1999). Rather than flexibility and interdisciplinary involvement, designing something for a single function, by its very nature, limits it to that function. Design as a philosophy must come from somewhere and go to somewhere if it is indeed to fulfill the needs of future generations. This means that in design, and in landscape architecture specifically, the philosophy of design comes from multiple avenues to fulfill multiple functions in a complex and dynamic world. The universal design philosophy is expressed as individual design philosophy to solve problems.

Landscape design is implicated in resource depletion, climate change, and pollution of the soil and groundwater supplies (Sinclair 2010). As an example of the broader issue of how a design philosophy affects individual landscape architects a historical perspective can be viewed. The historic philosophy of humans subduing the earth through design for human comfort and convenience or to exercise power or control has lead individual designers, through client-driven processes, to participate

boldly in the destruction. As the interest in landscapes of the past grows, so do the undesirable practices that created the resource demanding, culturally and environmentally damaging land uses in the first place (Sinclair 2010).

### 1.3 Individual Design Philosophy

Individual design philosophy is expressed in terms of the underlying objective of a designer and of a project. It is often defined by individuals or companies as a product of the market place, neatly prepackaged with the catch-phrase of the day firmly rooted in place. While it is well intended, it does not reflect the true nature or working of a design philosophy, nor is it necessary philosophically well informed (Willis 2009).

For example, a certain landscape architect has on his web site that he works from a philosophy of sustainability. A glance through his projects, however, reveals projects that, although beautiful, focus on large water features, expansive parking lots with isolated "green" islands and grading that removes storm water as quickly as possible off the site. The word "philosophy" is used casually and without significant definition or understanding. The underlying philosophy of an individual designer might be sustainability, but attempts to define exactly what is meant by sustainability is to find a sea of misinformation and misunderstanding. For instance, one does not know if the designer's philosophy is one of absolute or relative sustainability. Each will say the philosophy is sustainability, yet the manifestation of the process that makes up the language is ambiguous. Even the larger context of who defines sustainability is a moving target, as the excerpt below illustrates:

"Critical to implementation is Sustainability Plans, or Local Agenda 21 Plans, as set out in Agenda 21: Each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organizations and private enterprises and adopt a 'local; Agenda 21. Local authorities should learn from citizens and local, civic, community, business, and industrial organizations the information needed for formulating the best strategies. This process will also increase household awareness of sustainable development issues (Sitarz 1994, p. 177).

The process can enable a city to define its indicators and assist in the process of change toward achieving them (Newman 2007, p. 20)." While this designer might say his philosophy is one of sustainability, in practice his philosophy is to let the local governments and peoples decide what is meant by sustainability.

At the heart of an individual's design philosophy is a conflict between creating something that is remarkable while still coming in on time and under-budget. To ignore the functionality and practicality of a philosophy is to operate at one's own peril, but regarding only these items disallows the opportunity to expand and be more than the original design. For a project to have a life after the original design it must have the ability to grow beyond itself. How these philosophies are developed and interact make up the broader ontology of design as a philosophy. Like plants and animals that live in a complex web of interactions (Darwin 1909), design philosophy must also fight out its right to survive. One idea must supplant and choke out another in search of a perfect balance, which is only achieved through this fray.

#### 1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this paper is to consider the ontology of design as a philosophy in landscape architecture as compared to the individual design philosophies of landscape architects, professors of landscape architecture, and design students of The University of Texas at Arlington School of Architecture's Program in Landscape Architecture. The data were analyzed to better define what a design philosophy is, how it is developed, and how it relates to design as a philosophy. It is hoped that the research will share common understanding of the structure of design information, enable the reuse of the knowledge, make assumptions explicit, separate design philosophy of individuals from design as a philosophy, and explain the importance (Noy and McGuinness 2001).

## 1.5 Research Questions

The principle questions raised in this paper are:

1. What is the definition of design philosophy as viewed by the profession of landscape architecture?
2. How is a design philosophy developed in landscape architecture?

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

The following definitions give background information on words or subjects that in need of further explanation.

Agenda 21: A sustainable development program in the United Nations (UN) that was the planet's first summit to discuss global warming related issues. It is a comprehensive blueprint of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the UN, governments, and major groups in every area in which humans directly affect the environment.

Design: A noun meaning a deliberate, purposeful plan, the arrangements of elements that go into human production (in our case landscape architecture); the underlying scheme (Steinitz 1995).

Effective: To produce a decided, decisive or desired, effect; ready for service or action.

Functionalism: A philosophy of design (as in architecture) holding that form should be adapted to use, material and structure.

Fractal: Any of various extremely irregular curves or shapes from which any suitably chosen part is similar in shape to a given larger or smaller part when magnified or reduced to the same size (Mandelbrot 1982).

Habitable: A complex environment existential condition that cannot be reduced to its functional component. It is a condition arising from the intersection of a multiplicity of questions rooted in the anthropological and social nature of the human race (Margolin and Buchanan 1995).

Locus: A Latin word meaning center or focus of great activity or intense concentration.

Ontology: A branch of metaphysics first described by Plato then expanded on by Aristotle dealing with the nature of being or the kinds of things that have existed. The theory of objects and their ties, ontology provides criteria for distinguishing various types of objects (concrete and abstract, existent and non-existent, real and ideal, independent and dependent) and their ties (relations, dependences and predication) (Corazzon 2009).

Philosophy: A pursuit of wisdom; a search for general understanding of values and reality by chiefly speculative rather than observational means; an analysis of the grounds of and concepts expressing fundamental beliefs; a system of concepts; a theory underlying or regarding a sphere of activity or thought.

Principles: A comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine or assumption; habitual devotion to right principles (a man of principles); an underlying faculty or endowment of principles of human nature such as greed and curiosity.

Process: Something going on; a series of operations conducing to an end.

Theory: A system of ideas explaining something, especially one based on general principles (Turner 2005).

Theory of Forms: A theory first put forth by the classical philosopher Plato which examined the idea that form abstract forms (ideas) possess the higher and more fundamental kind of reality than does the material.



## 1.7 Summary

Design as a philosophy affects the design philosophies of individuals as much as design philosophies of individual affect design as a philosophy; the two are interconnected. Having a strong design philosophy is essential to consistently good design that grows and adapts over time. An individual designer may define his or her design philosophy in different ways and the philosophies themselves may be wildly different according to the designer's background, training and experience, but the process for developing a design philosophy is the same.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review evaluates previous research efforts in the philosophy of design and discusses the resulting information and conclusions. It is intended to provide a knowledge base from which an understanding of the concepts of ontology and design philosophy can be derived. While design as a philosophy has only recently begun to be explored (Willis 2009), this review will cover the basics for which the study was based.

The five topics covered in this literature review are design philosophy's connection to ontology, the definition of design philosophy, design as a philosophy, individual design philosophy, and design philosophy implications. The study is concerned with the development of a personal design philosophy, which was not specifically found in the literature. However, information exists on which to build support for the need for a design philosophy process, toward the greater purpose of an ontology of design philosophy in landscape architecture.

#### 2.2 Design Philosophy's Connection to Ontology

Throughout history design of the landscape has been influenced by the view of the relationship between God, man, and nature (Turner 2005). There exists the subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, emphasis on these relationships throughout garden history (Turner 2005). From the building of temples and monuments to the gods in the ancient world, through reason and science, to conceptual gardens of

the more modern day, the underlying philosophical focus has changed. Yet, the philosophy itself remains innate and is awakened from the first moment of birth (Dutton 2009).

Traditionally, philosophical preference has been based in unity, permanence, and universals over change and particulars (Dewey 1958). Modern science uses qualitative methods to look at similar properties and recurrences as opposed to fixed substances (Dewey 1958). While both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry use the idea of matter and mind presented in different contexts, they miss the underlying and ultimate substances (Dewey 1958). This is to say that to focus on philosophy's universal components, constraints and ideas separate from the particulars that make up those elements ignores the fractal properties of the ontology.

### 2.3 Design Philosophy Definition

Defining design philosophy requires a structured approach which takes into consideration all its particulars. "The question of design is always an ontological question, which is a question of what it does in the ways that it acts. Equally, design is also a domain of metaphysical knowledge. Design always arrives as the way something acts as, in, and on the world, and as a learned thinking (theory) that informs practices which bring something into being" (Fry 2009, p.5).

Design is a feature and function of the mind as a practice, an object, and an agency. It is in constant need of scrutiny (Fry 1995, Buchanan and Margolin 1995). This means that a process for creating and evaluating a design philosophy is needed on which to measure design thinking. "An ontological theory of design, while important as a way to explore what comes into being through material conditions of existence, is even more significant as an approach to constitute a general re-creation in the face of what retrospectively appears to be a crisis" (Fry 1995, Buchanan and Margolin 1995, p.201).

There have been attempts in the field of landscape architecture to define landscape design or at least categorize it. Zeisel (2006) admits that it is difficult to describe design because it includes many intangible elements. The importance of history in this regard comes into play at this juncture. A study of design intentions and societal context exposes philosophies and beliefs. While the history of an event

may remain static, the interpretation of that event is fluid and has an impact on future design (Thompson 1996).

In examining how knowledge is organized, research has focused on how entities are grouped under common concepts, and how such categories are hierarchically related (Crewe 2003). Unfortunately, this categorization is focused on the functional parts of the design and not the process of design. Though the philosophy is the underpinning for this grouping, it is not addressed in any of the literature this researcher has found.

## 2.4 Design as a Philosophy

Design underpins every form of creation, from objects such as chairs to the way our lives are planned and executed (Dini 2005). For this reason it is useful to seek out some common structure that can be applied to any kind of design, be it video games, consumer products or one's own personal life (Dini 2005). The importance of purposeful design cannot be overstated. Financial crisis, structural failures, and accidents can all be traced back to a lack of good design (Fry 2009). Design begins with an underlying philosophy, which affects design as a philosophy for good or ill.

Design as a philosophy is in a constant state of discovery which demonstrates an ontological theory of the agency of design (Fry 1999). While new foundations are established (Fry 1999), it is recognized that design is a living system for which all life is part and parcel. The constant state of flux frustrates those who wish to define and understand design philosophy. This living system resembles Darwin's understanding of nature or nurture; design philosophy that creates, (nature), and design philosophy that grows, (nurture).

Fry (1999) sets forth three points of focus to understand design beyond its final object and form:

1. the designed object that results from the design act or process;
2. the design agency: that is the designer designing, or the designing tool created by a designer for the design act; and

3. design in process, which is the on-going designing that is the agency of the designed object as it functions or dysfunctions (p.6)

That is, the process of design as a living system has the power to create or destroy the future. Objects come into being based on a concept steeped in experience as a response to a need or desire. The act of designing and the tools and process used to bring it into being are also subject to design. Design does not exist in a vacuum. How creation happens, with what tools, through what process affects design and impacts the future of design. This is the fractal nature of the design philosophy.

## 2.5 Individual Design Philosophy

Designers are looking for concrete knowledge that combines practice and theory under the heading of design thinking. Design and design thinking continue to expand their meaning and connections. For example, Plato's theory of forms searched for the perfect form, while deconstructionist took forms and pulled them apart in an attempt to separate out preconceived ideas of what should be. More recently, the theory of sustainability has found arms and legs in practice as issues of traffic, population density, resource allocation and global warming are addressed.

Design eludes the search for its foundations and in doing so remains surprisingly flexible (Margolin and Buchanan 2009). Design has elements of aesthetic, such as balance, scale, and color. Design also has functional elements, such as fitness for use, place appropriateness, and environmental psychology forces. If, for instance, design were grounded in functional constructs, the elegance and creative inspiration found in something like Dan Kyle's Fountain Place in Dallas, Texas would be missed. The plaza serves a function, yet its primary attraction is its beauty and uniqueness. This goes far beyond its primary function of an urban plaza.

The diversity of ideas and methods labeled under the development of design thinking makes it futile to create one definition for design. Like aesthetics, design is a matter of perception, preference, and taste, with the added practical uses and applications in the liberal arts of science, art, and more recently social sciences. (Margolin and Buchanan 2009).

The search for concreteness in design philosophy is expressed in many different ways. In the study of landscape architecture for example, Swaffield (2002) notes that “The multiple interrelationships between form, meaning, and experience in landscape have been the focus of theoretical debate [ ] since its inception. A range of perspectives and design strategies have been explored and advocated” (p.73). While the focus of this passage is on form, meaning, and experience, both reflects the greater experience of design as a philosophy.

## 2.6 Design Philosophy Implications

Confusion exists between a design philosophy and a design objective, intent, or goal. The final planned or perceived outcome is not the philosophy of the design. For instance, in the Pythagorean School the belief was that all things are numbered and mathematics should be the fundamental study in physics (Russell 1972). This theory led to the belief that forms are perfect and calculated and that beauty is somehow ordered. Therefore the theory of math impacted the philosophy of design, but was not the philosophy itself.

The form of something is not the philosophy of it. Plato's theory of forms, which is the belief in the existence of a perfect world that can only be accessed through reason, has been thought of as a philosophy. In actuality it is known as the *Theory of Forms* (italics mine). This theory is said to be partly logical, partly metaphysical (Russell 1972). Theory impacts philosophy, just as logic does, but it is not philosophy.

“In general, design as an object, process, history and theory have not arrived ...as a recognized area of critical study or action outside of design education and practice” (Fry 1999, p.4). This is particularly alarming when the impact of design decisions affect our present and future. “An understanding of design will never be theoretically secure, simply because design gets configured so differently into relations of varied discourses of its practice, presentation, and economic exchange” (Fry 1999, p.4). While the implication, definitions, and interrelationships are uncertain, untried, and unexplained, it does not negate the fact that an ontological process exists. An ontology is a description of

the concepts and relationships that can exist (Gruber 2010). Therefore, the first step in ontology requires an understanding of how a design philosophy is defined and developed.

As the theories about design have changed, so have the particulars of design philosophies. In the past the center of the universe was based on knowing the means and powers of operations and interactions (Dewey 1930; Margolin and Buchanan 2009). For example, ancient Egyptians designed tools to carve and move stone from which to build. All interactions were of a physical nature, the process was slower, and results were realized over time.

On the other hand, the new center is indefinite and interconnected taking new and unpredictable directions. It travels quickly and leaves little time for contemplation or reevaluation before the next great thing comes along. This new center leaves “a messy conjunction of notions consistent neither with one another nor with the tenor of our actual lives” (Dewey 1930; Margolin and Buchanan 2009, p.4). This does not reflect a change in the reality of design thinking but it points out the realization of the lack of boundaries for design thinking. Design as a philosophy grows unbounded even when confined it to a certain theory or practice.

There is an interrelationship between art and science, theology and technology, and archeology and architecture that reflect great creativity for good or ill. The forms that this creativity brings into being and the design behind them have great implications for the future (Flusser 2002). For example, through the process of design thinking cities of the future may run on growing vegetation, be self cleansing and create unique spaces for all of life. Understanding the process of thinking and experiencing design exposes the risks and makes for a catalyst for positive growth.

In the final analysis, the designer’s ultimate responsibility is to contribute to the production of a habitable world; a world in which human beings go beyond survival to expand their cultural and spiritual possibilities (Margolin and Buchanan 1995).

## 2.7 Summary

The literature review identifies the absence of a well thought out philosophy of design. Design as a philosophy is demanding of the same rigor other philosophies have enjoyed, such as aesthetics. Design philosophy affects every part of our world. The examination of the definition of design philosophy and the process for developing a design philosophy will affect the design and improvement the response to the human condition.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### 3.1 Introduction

Given the primary research questions (how is design philosophy defined and how is it developed in landscape architecture?) qualitative research is most appropriate because the data are descriptive and based on the perceptions of the interview subjects as stated in their own words (Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

This research study began with the hypothesis that the process for developing a design philosophy is similar among individuals yet collective individual philosophies contribute to the design philosophy of landscape architecture.

In this study, in-depth interviews of selected students and faculty in the Program for Landscape Architecture at The University of Texas at Arlington, and a sample of practicing landscape architects in the Dallas-Fort Worth area were used to identify how each defined and developed a design philosophy. Interview questions were developed to reveal participants responses and to tease out data based on their knowledge and experience in this area. The interview transcriptions were analyzed using Glaser and Strauss' constant comparison/grounded theory method to identify patterns and categories that might emerge (Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

### 3.2 The Participants

Participants for this research were selected from The University of Texas at Arlington's Program in Landscape Architecture faculty and student body and from selected landscape architects practicing in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. A cross section of professionals with design interest was taken to see if there was any difference between practicing landscape architects, pedagogical professionals and students. While there may be differences in their definitions, the process for which they come to the philosophy should be the same, if the hypothesis bears out.

The participants were selected based on their group. Fourteen respondents were interviewed during the course of the study.

- four faculty/adjuncts from The University of Arlington School of Architecture's Program in Landscape Architecture
- three students/emerging professionals from The University of Arlington's Program in Landscape Architecture
- seven landscape architects from the Dallas-Fort Worth region

It was determined after fourteen interviews that the data had begun to repeat itself and that additional interviews would not yield any substantial new insights. The size of the sample was determined toward the end of the research and not at the beginning. This approach matches the criteria set forth by Taylor and Bogdan (1998).

### 3.3 Interview Protocols

Based on the criteria set forth by Taylor and Bogdan (1998), in-depth interviews were determined to be the best method for acquiring the data needed for the study. They define in-depth interviewing as “flexible and dynamic...nondirective, unstructured, non-standardized, and open-ended...modeled after a conversation between equals rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange” (Taylor and Bogdan

1998, p. 88). They also noted the suitability of in-depth interviewing when: the research interests are relatively clear and well defined; settings or people are not otherwise accessible; the researcher has time constraints; and the researcher is interested in understanding a broad range of settings or people (Taylor and Bogdan 1998, pp. 90-91).

Using the assistance of the faculty from The University of Texas at Arlington School of Architecture a list of landscape architects was identified as potential respondents for the study. Each person was contacted by e-mail or letter to obtain their agreement to participate in the study. Appointments were then scheduled to conduct the interviews and collect the data. The in-depth conversational interviews were conducted using unstructured, open-ended interview questions. The questions served as a guide and to remind the interviewer to ask about certain topics. Respondents were encouraged to discuss topics and issues which they deemed important, even if the topic was not covered in the interview script.

Interviews were conducted in person and were digitally recorded. To protect their anonymity, respondents were given an alphabetic code. The digital audio files were used to make detailed notes by the primary researcher. Names or other identifiable information were left off from the interview notes unless they were in reference to an author or other public figure. The audio files were destroyed after the completion of the study.

### 3.4 Interview Questions

The following are the interview questions, which were asked in conversation style with additional follow-up questions based on the responses.

1. What is your definition of design philosophy?
2. What is your design philosophy?
  - a. How did you come to your design philosophy?
  - b. What makes you think about design philosophy?
  - c. When do you think about design philosophy?

### 3. Does your design philosophy affect your design?

These questions were designed to engage the respondents in conversation leading to a richer base of design philosophy information and thinking.

#### 3.5 Interview Analysis

Taylor and Bogdon (1998, p. 7) note that “qualitative researchers develop concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories.” The process of identifying patterns in the data was not mechanical or preconceived. The data were not automatically checked for specific key words or phrases or tabulated using computer software. While it is impossible to set aside induction and personal interests, the goal of the research was to verify that the theory fit the data rather than forcing the data to match the theory (Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

The strategy used by the researcher to gather and analyze the data, based on the approach put forth by Taylor and Bogdon (1998), has some aspects of grounded theory based on theoretical sampling combined with some aspects of analytic induction. Theoretical sampling, as Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p. 137) describe it, is “...the researcher selects new cases to study according to their potential for helping to expand on or refine the concepts and theory that have already been developed. Data collection and analysis proceed together.” The emphasis is on understanding people on their own terms through description and theory while also analyzing negative cases to refine and qualify the hypothesis (Taylor and Bogdon 1998, pp. 139-140).

The data analysis and categorization were based on inductive reasoning, thinking and theorizing, rather than on a mechanical or technical process. This means that many observations are examined with the goal of finding a few, powerful statements about the subject. Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p. 141) states “In qualitative research data collection and analysis go hand in hand. Throughout participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and other qualitative research, researchers are constantly theorizing and trying to make sense of their data.” The researcher read and reread the data looking for emerging themes. The interview transcriptions were analyzed for common responses and perceptions as well as ideas and

thoughts that were unique to the particular respondent. Several concepts were developed and uniting themes were identified in the data (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). The data were then categorized using key words and then divided into sub-categories to further classify the data. Titles were created to describe the over-arching themes from the data. These themes were then placed in a process model for illustration purposes.

### 3.6 Research Questions

The research questions used in this study are:

- What is the definition of design philosophy as viewed by the profession of landscape architecture?
- How is a design philosophy developed in landscape architecture?

### 3.7 Summary

The research for this study used qualitative methods because of the need to capture descriptive data based on perceptions in the participants' own words. An introductory e-mail was sent to the respondents chosen for the study and interviews were scheduled based on respondents' convenience. Open-ended interview questions were developed in order to gain the most information from respondents and provide an opportunity for the respondents to introduce other topics into the conversation which they deemed important and relevant to the issue. Fourteen interviews were conducted and it was concluded that a broad range of perspectives had been uncovered and that additional interviews would not yield any substantial new insights. This conclusion was based on the fact that the data had begun to consistently repeat itself as the interviews progressed.

Analysis and data collection proceeded together. The comparative data were read and reread to identify emerging themes and categories. Several concepts were developed, such as the influences that affect the philosophy, the factors that affect the philosophy's expression and how the philosophy is evaluated. Uniting themes were identified in the data and a final list of themes, or primary categories,

was made. The data were classified using these categories, and then further broken down into sub-categories. From the categorization a process map was created for illustration purposes.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

In-depth interviews were conducted with The University of Texas at Arlington's Program in Landscape Architecture faculty, students and emerging professionals and landscape architects practicing in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. A cross section of professionals working at various levels in different types of industries was taken to identify any differences between the respondent groups in their definition of the term design philosophy or their perceptions of the process for developing a personal design philosophy. The data show that respondents had differing definition of design philosophy, but very similar processes for developing a personal design philosophy. A simple model was then constructed to illustrate the process and its constraints.

#### 4.2 Themes from the Data

The data were analyzed to identify common themes, as well as ideas and thoughts that were unique to the particular respondent. The data revealed that there were four basic steps in the process of developing a personal design philosophy in landscape architecture:

- Individual definition of design philosophy
- The influences for developing a personal design philosophy
- Filters

- Evaluation loop

The first category, the individual definition of design philosophy, was used to classify the respondent's descriptive words or phrases in their first response to design philosophy as a term. Upon further analysis of the responses it was determined that there existed a realized definition of the term. A further sub-categorization system was used to break these responses down into one of the following categories:

- Project
- Position

The second category, the influences for developing a personal design philosophy, was used to classify information into categories reflecting the particular influences respondents stated. These influences were further broken down into subcategories as follows:

- Initial influences of the philosophy titled "locus of inspiration"
- Ongoing influences the philosophy titled "locus of aspiration"

The third category, filters, is the classification of items that interfere with the final design and interrupt the full realization of the philosophy. It is further categorized by the following:

- Interference with the philosophy
- Intergradations with the philosophy

The fourth category, the evaluation loop, is the classification of items that affect how the manifestation of design feeds back into the creation of the philosophy. It is further categorized by the following:

- Focused view feedback loop
- Facilitator view feedback loop



- Mechanic view feedback loop
- World view feedback loop

#### 4.3 Definition of the Term Design Philosophy

##### 4.3.1 Project

Eight of the fourteen respondents' realized definitions fell into the sub category of Project. They defined the term design philosophy as somehow linked to the active process of the project. In their conversations concerning design philosophy development, these respondents used terms such as design intent, design approach, client needs, or response to a project, site, or region. A quote from one of the respondents exemplifies this thinking: *"Every situation has needs. What can I do that is unique in that situation?"* Another respondent put it this way: *"It's an approach. How do you approach design? Not a process but an approach from step one to step ten - what leads you."* Yet another quote on the subject is, *"it depends on variables - not like they tell you in school - they tell you about a process - it's actually who the client is, what the client wants...."* Their definitions indicated that design philosophy is something that changes from one project to the next, depending on customer, site, culture or economic needs.

##### 4.3.2 Position

Six respondents' realized definitions fell into the sub-category of Position, defining design philosophy as a position relative to the larger design thinking. Unlike the Process group, they used more universally applicable terms, such as guiding principles, universal design continuum, and personal creativity in their conversations about design philosophy development. Their definitions indicated that their personal design philosophy was independent of physical or environmental factors. As one respondent put it, *"I tend to always situate discussions of philosophy as world view; that is a construct of one's personal experience combined with knowledge. One's knowledge comes from the lore (theory) of architecture."* Another respondent stated, *"We do things in cycles and waves and we are one more person that has entered the arena of design. We must be committed to being part of the whole."*

## 4.4 Influences for Developing a Design Philosophy

### 4.4.1 Locus of Inspiration

The locus of inspiration, or place of inspiration, deals with where respondents felt their greatest initial design philosophy influences were centered. Respondents stated several sources of inspiration for their initial development of a personal design philosophy, but three were common amongst most; college professors, childhood experiences, and traveling.

Ten of the fourteen respondents stated that a college professor was a primary source of the development of their personal design philosophy. Most spoke also of having challenging classmates and having been inspired by exposure to great works of landscape architecture during their college years. The following quote exemplifies this influence:

*"I had several great teachers. "One saw me in studio looking at a magazine with contemporary architecture and asked me what I was looking at it? When I showed him, he said I should be looking at the work of Michael Angelo, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, because my time was worth what they have to offer. Don't waste your time looking at the work of those who really haven't contributed anything significant. Time is valuable. Don't look at second and third tier individuals- pre-occupy yourself with the works of greatness because that's what they were preoccupied with."*

Of the fourteen respondents, eight stated that childhood experience with the nature or built environment was a significant factor to their design philosophy development. While most were positive experiences, one respondent stated a frustration at having to live far from friends in rural areas: *"My mom became a taxi driver."* Another respondent stated that moving frequently as a child created an awareness of how cities were organized at a very young age. The following is a quote from one of the respondents that further exemplifies the childhood experience factor: *"I got interest in landscape architecture because I grew up in the desert. As a child I noticed that the wildflowers grew in the spring. In the desert you notice the flowers. I pretty much walked home from school every day so I noticed that when it rained where the*

*water went, what grew close to it. I always thought back to the desert and the water. Maybe a philosophy of keeping what you've got. You have to be somewhat frugal in the desert."*

Six of the respondents stated that travel in the United States and abroad had a significant influence on their design philosophy development. It allowed them the opportunity to see things with fresh eyes, to meet new people, experience new cultures and get a sense of space outside themselves. Two of the respondents stated that living abroad changed the way that they thought about everything including their design philosophy as the following quote gives example:

*"When I was in school the renaissance period in architectural history was strong, a lot of geometry. I thought that was fine and good. But when I went to Japan it was a different view point. I found that what they did and because they lived on an island that was rocked by earthquakes they found that the environment was not that stable. So don't look at the world as big, look at it as small and intimate because that's what you can control and maintain. It made a different viewpoint that it did not have to be big and grandiose in scale, but big and grandiose in concept."*

#### 4.4.2 Locus of Aspiration

The locus of aspiration, or place of outgrowth, deals with where respondents felt their greatest ongoing design philosophy influences were centered. For the purpose of this study aspiration is used to mean the act of breathing life back into a personal design philosophy. It centers on those influences to help rejuvenate, reinvigorate, or reinforce a personal design philosophy.

The majority of the responses focused on four areas of ongoing inspiration; critical evaluation of projects, travel, interaction with other people and reading outside the field of landscape architecture.

Twelve of the respondents stated that critical evaluation of completed projects influenced the ongoing development of their personal design philosophy. As one respondent stated, *"It comes from doing a post-mortem evaluation of design."* Another respondent stated, *"Trial and error - making mistakes*

- *evaluating the projects*," The evaluation concerned such elements as construction, durability, uniqueness, user interface, contextual fit, response to the environment, elements that failed, and access.

Nine of the respondents stated that travel keeps them rejuvenated or reinforced their design philosophy. Some comments were that it afforded them an opportunity to see what other works are being done, how elements are organized, and how culture and environment have shaped the built environment. They used travel to expose themselves to both successful and unsuccessful projects, ideas, and implementation, as well as exploring a sense of place and space. One respondent stated that travel helped one *"see how other cultures have responded to the environment over time."* Another stated it this way:

*"Traveling gives me exposure and it's all about exposure. I mainly travel throughout the states but I did some work in South America and Albania. I love city environments - love Italy - some are more grown up and some are more juvenile and some are more old time. I like to start walking and look for districts and special areas and things I like to explore. I used to do a lot in nature but now we go to a city and explore."*

Seven respondents stated that interaction and understanding other people helped them continually build their personal design philosophy. These interactions included other designers, other fields of interest, personal and professional relationships and people from other cultures. One respondent stated that the influence came from looking at *"what animates people"* to do the things they do. Another respondent stated, *"I also like people; interfacing with people. People have different outlooks, different mannerisms. You have to be like a sponge."*

Five of the respondents stated that reading outside the profession of landscape architecture was a critical component to the ongoing development of a personal design philosophy. As one respondent put it, *"when I read articles or look at magazines I try to look at the philosophies and ideas they are attuned to."* These respondents cited readings from a wide field of subjects and sources including newspapers on

current and international events; periodicals on anything from politics to fishing; books on music, politics, people, photography and technology.

## 4.5 Filters

### *4.5.1 Interference with the Philosophy*

Nine of the respondents stated specific things that interfered with the full realization of their expression of a personal design philosophy. These included consideration for budget, client preferences, time constraints, site limitations, regulations, and cultural issues. One respondent exemplified it as follows: *"Unless you have a design firm with a select clientele, there are markets that you are responsive to. You have to be market driven. My philosophy is tempered by the market, but I welcome the limitations of the market."*

### *4.5.2 Integration with the Philosophy*

Five of the respondents didn't mention constraints to their expression of a personal design philosophy. While two of the five respondents spoke in theoretical terms of a personal design philosophy, the remaining three integrated and embraced constraints and limitations into their expression of a personal design philosophy. One respondent stated that *"constraints operating within established forms make it more beautiful."*

## 4.6 Evaluation Loop

The evaluation loop concerns itself with four overall views that modulate how a personal design philosophy feeds back into itself. The data suggests four evaluation views - focus, facilitator, mechanic, and world - and are explained below.

### *4.6.1 Focus View*

Four respondents fell into the focus view modulator. They are characterized by a personal design philosophy that evaluates information and influences based on a set of definite criteria. These criteria

included a sustainability, regional appropriateness, and money saving. When evaluating a project or process their personal design philosophy was reinforced by its relationship to that certain criterion. One respondent stated it this way: *"I'm always looking for ways in the design to apply this thinking."*

#### *4.6.2 Facilitator View*

Three respondents fell into the facilitator view modulator. They are characterized by an evaluation loop that is reinforced by their ability to be the hands and feet for the customer and other interested parties. As one respondent put it, *"I am interested in what the choreography in the garden is, what does my customer want to happen in the garden...I generally think of myself as a facilitator rather than an artist because I have to bring site, and function, and program together to catalyze the ideas and forms that emerge from that."* They evaluate and reinforce their personal design philosophy through the eyes of their clients and other affected parties.

#### *4.6.3 Mechanic View*

Four of the respondents fell into the mechanic view modulator. They are characterized by their structured approach and evaluation of a personal design philosophy. They typically follow a set process of form follows function and evaluate their personal design philosophy in terms of practicality. As one respondent aptly put it, *"All my choices reflect this order."*

#### *4.6.4 World View*

Three of the respondents fell into the world view modulator. They are characterized by an evaluation loop that is fed on a continuum which comes from outside them, passes through them, and continues on. The expressed evaluation process is reflected in the following quotes from each of them:

*"I want to be understood in my own time. Like Georgia O'Keef said 'I wasn't behind the time or ahead of the time because I was with the time.'"*

*"They talk about not being a creator but being a receiver, and that there is a pure stream in creativity out there that you tap into and let come through you."*

*"Design in the continuum - know what's come before and try to make things that resonate and yet be very responsive to the places you have been allowed to work."*

#### 4.7 Summary

Respondents gave different definitions to the term design philosophy, but upon further examination of the responses, the realized definitions from respondents fell into two broad categories; design philosophy as an active process relative to the project, and design philosophy as a position relative to the larger design thinking. These categories indicated whether or not certain issues, or filters, affected the full realization of the philosophy.

Participants who defined the term design philosophy as an active process relative to the project were more likely to later state that things like clients, budgets, regulations, site limitations, time constraints and cultural issues filtered the full realization of their philosophy. These were categorized under the heading of interference with the philosophy. Participants who defined the term design philosophy as a position relative to the larger design thinking were far less likely to later mention any of these filters. These were categorized under the heading of integration with the philosophy.

The data analysis indicated that the filter factor was further modulated by the participants evaluation loop, discussed later. Those with a world view never spoke in terms of filters, while those who had a feedback look with facilitator, focused, or mechanic views were more likely to mention filters.

The process for developing a personal design philosophy was consistent amongst the participants. A distinction was made between two types of influences into the philosophy creation process; the initial influences of the philosophy, locus of inspiration, and the ongoing influences of the philosophy, locus of aspiration.

The locus of inspiration consisted of those factors that set up a framework for thinking about design. Of those influences, there were three that were consistently stated to be the most significant for the creation of a design philosophy; childhood experiences, college professors, and traveling.

Similarly, responses concerning the locus of aspiration focused on the ongoing development or reinforcement of a personal design philosophy. They indicated consistent factors such as new or existing project critique, reading outside the field of landscape architecture, travel, and interaction with other professionals inside and outside the field of landscape architecture.

Finally, the individual respondents fell into four categories of philosophical process thinking that comprised the feedback loop, namely a focused view, a facilitator view, a mechanic view, and a world view. These categories modulated the process for the recreation of a design philosophy. The respondents with a focused view modulator had one particular ideology, such as sustainability, that influenced the ongoing development of their personal design philosophy. Respondents with a facilitator view modulator saw themselves as a vehicle for the design process and therefore had a feedback loop that strengthened their facilitation skills but did not affect their personal design philosophy.

The mechanic view modulator respondents had a functional process for design development. This modulator feedback loop influenced the individual's ongoing design philosophy development by measuring outcomes by their adherence to the rules of function and form.

The world view modulator respondents described their ongoing design philosophy development in terms of universal connection, weaving of information from different sources, and inspiration outside themselves or their projects.

The examination of data collected in the interviews show that there is a very strong process for developing a personal design philosophy which is consistent over individuals. Based on the above information, a simple model was constructed (Figures 4.1 and 4.2) to graphically illustrate the process, its filters and modulators. Figure 4.1 is the basic personal design philosophy process model. Figure 4.2 is the process model with attributes for a more detailed illustrated.



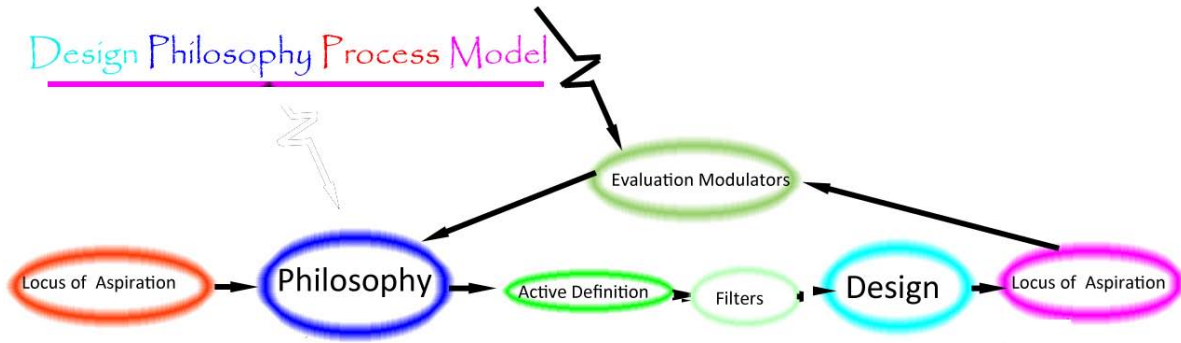


Figure 4.1 Personal Design Philosophy Process Model.

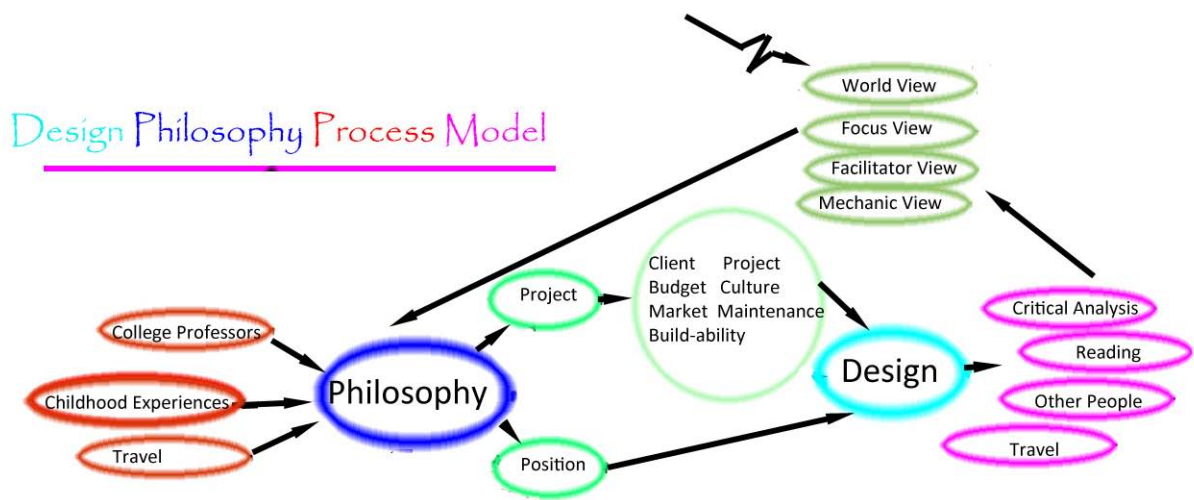


Figure 4.2 Personal Design Philosophy Process Model with Attributes.

CHAPTER 5  
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS  
FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Conclusions

The objectives of this research study were to:

- consider the ontology of design philosophy in landscape architecture as compared to the individual design philosophies of the profession of landscape architects
- examine how design philosophy is defined by individuals of the profession
- evaluate the factors that contribute to how the design philosophies are developed
- explain the importance

The literature review describes the lack of research in the area of design philosophy and design as a philosophy. It points out the importance of the development of an ontology to give structure to how we think about design, since every form of creation is underpinned by design.

The literature review also points out that while design itself has an intangible nature and is open to interpretation, the process for developing it is neither intangible nor interpretive. Design philosophy is in a constant state of discovery. While new thoughts and foundations are established, it is recognized that design is a living breathing system. To this end, the research looked at design philosophy as a living system which has a growth structure in need of understanding and nurturing.

This study addresses the process for defining and developing a design philosophy. Qualitative analysis of the interview data is used to explore the definition and perception of respondents. Based on the analysis a model was created to illustrate the components which initially feed the designer's philosophy, the filters that affect the expression on the design, and the evaluation loop that modulates how the designer re-invent his or her design thinking.

## 5.2 Discussion and Implications

The process for developing a personal design philosophy as revealed in this study have implications for the future of landscape architecture as discussed in the following paragraphs. Further research into the underlying reasons for each of these influences would yield a better understanding still. This is meant to be a starting point for future research.

Using the factors that comprise the locus of inspiration; college professors, childhood experiences, and travel; those who wish to impact the initial creation of a design philosophy can focus the efforts for greater impact. Further research on the exact reasons these are influential will bring further insight and understanding.

The definition of design philosophy amongst the respondents reveals a difference in project or position thinking. Individuals can use this information to critically analyze how and why they approach projects. Understanding which filters have the potential to affect the design and how a landscape architect deals with those filters can lead to better design through purposeful planning.

The factors that contribute to the refining or redefining of the design philosophy, or locus of aspirations; critical analysis of built work, travel, interaction with other, and reading outside the profession; consist of definite areas that an interested party could build on to enhance the understanding of design. Further study into the aspects of these components would help to focus on which facet of the influence is in operation at a give point in time.

The view modulators are significant as to how a person relates to the critical analysis of work and a design philosophy. All the views are unique and add depth and breadth to the field of landscape architecture. Those with focused views push the envelope of a certain set of ideas to increase their practice and development. Those with mechanic views are the stalwarts of the profession, using tried and true methods to get the job done. Those with facilitator views work well with large groups of diverse people to come to consensus and build significant works. World view modulators reach outside themselves and the profession to bring in fresh ideas and information.

### 5.3 Limitations

This research is limited by a number of things. The literature for developing a design philosophy is limited. A large population in the field of landscape architecture is being represented by a small number of respondents. The broad subject matter is meant to be a beginning place for future research and the model is expected to change as more information is added and the ontology is actually manifested.

### 5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

As the literature points out, design affects all parts of our lives yet design philosophy has not been well researched and is little understood. While this is true, every person has a design philosophy. Though an individual may not have thought the philosophy through, or indeed even considered the subject at all, the manifestation of how a person thinks is reflected throughout all design.

This study can serve as a starting point from which to address many other questions and issues regarding the importance of developing an ontology of design philosophy in landscape architecture and begin developing a systematic approach to design education and manifestation. As a result, the following research questions and topics are recommended for exploration and further study:

- How important is it to have a ruling design philosophy?

- Is there a difference in the respondent's design philosophy and the professional position they hold?
- What is the impact of design as a philosophy on human culture and sustainability or thriving?
- What is the impact of big-name designers on design philosophy?
- How do consumers, developers or politicians affect design philosophy?
- What impact do childhood experiences have on design philosophy?
- Does a population's mix affect design philosophy?
- What would a model of ontology look like in landscape architecture?

### 5.5 Summary

This research study began with the hypothesis that the process for developing a design philosophy is similar among individuals yet collective individual philosophies contribute to the design philosophy of landscape architecture. It was discovered that the definition of the term varied amongst individual designers, yet they shared a common structure of how the philosophy was developed. The manifestation of the philosophy passed through certain filters that affected the final design; the locus of inspiration in the model. The redevelopment or recreation of a personal design philosophy was influenced by an individual's view filters; the locus of aspiration. The understanding of how a personal design philosophy is developed allows for the purposeful education and growth of a healthy design philosophy, which affects all life on earth. As one respondent so eloquently put it "without {a personal design philosophy} how can you design anything - if you don't have one you are doing it without a soul. One must design with a soul."

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*I would like to ask you some primary and perhaps some follow-up questions concerning your personal definition of design philosophy and how you came to that definition: My interest in this subject was sparked by the casual use of design philosophy in literature and in the classroom. The literature suggests that design philosophy exists concretely but it is not really well defined.*

1. What is your definition of design philosophy?
2. What is your design philosophy?
  - a. How did you come to your design philosophy?
  - b. What makes you think about design philosophy?
  - c. When do you think about design philosophy?
3. Does your design philosophy affect your design?

*Thank you for your time!*

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION E-MAIL



Dear Mr./Mrs. John Doe:

I am completing my Master of Landscape Architecture degree at The University of Texas at Arlington. My thesis topic deals with how individuals develop a design philosophy and I am asking for your participation in this research.

My interest in this subject was sparked by the casual use of design philosophy in literature and in the classroom. It has become clearer that design philosophy has a critical impact on how space is defined and how people subsequently use it.

I would like to ask for your participation in an interview on the topic that will take approximately 60 minutes of your time and is completely voluntary and confidential.

Would you please call or email me if you have any questions and do let me know when I may contact you? Your participation is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Rhonda E. Fields  
Graduate Student  
Program in Landscape Architecture  
The University of Texas at Arlington

5244 Dillon Circle  
Fort Worth, Texas 76137

Phone: (817) 975-8167  
Email: rfields@mavs.uta.edu  
Email: rhonda.f@charter.net

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION LETTER

Date

John Doe  
1092 Somewhere Drive  
Hometown TX 76999

Dear Mr./Mrs. John Doe:

A few days from now you will receive a phone call requesting your participation in an interview on an important research project. The interview concerns design philosophy in landscape architecture.

Because of your experience and expertise, your participation in the interview, which is voluntary and confidential, is highly important. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time.

Thank you in advance for your participation. It is only through the generous support of people like you that we can contribute to the knowledge based of landscape architecture.

Sincerely,  
Rhonda E. Fields  
Graduate Student  
Program in Landscape Architecture  
The University of Texas at Arlington

5244 Dillon Circle  
Fort Worth, Texas 76137

Phone: (817) 975-8167  
Email: rfields@mavs.uta.edu  
Email: rhonda.f@charter.net

APPENDIX D  
TELEPHONE SCRIPT TO SCHEDULE INTERVIEW

Script for Initial Call to Schedule Interview

Hello Mr. / Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Rhonda Fields. I am a graduate student in the Program of Landscape Architecture at The University of Texas at Arlington working on my master's thesis. I am calling to request your participation in a voluntary interview for an important research project. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes of your time and your experience and insight will be valuable to the study. My research concerns the definition and development of a design philosophy in landscape architecture.

What would be a convenient date and time for us to discuss this subject?

Thank you for your time and I look forward to talking with you on \_\_\_\_\_.

I can be reached at (817)-975-8167 or you can e-mail me at rfields@uta.edu.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Rhonda was raised in a small town in the Colorado Rocky Mountains where her love of nature and natural systems became a part of her life philosophy. Being constantly surrounded by the beauty, majesty and unforgiving nature of the mountains instilled, or perhaps awoke in her, an innate and profound desire to make the world a better place, drawing from the ends of time. She moved with her family to Fort Worth Texas and found an appreciation for the urban mountains, with its buildings, streets, and people. Rhonda Graduated Magna cum Laude in 1996 from the University of Texas at Arlington with a Bachelor of Business Administration. After working in the manufacturing sector for twelve years as manager of organizational development, education and administration she began pursuing her first love and, indeed, vocation of landscape architecture.

With the much appreciated support and blessings of her family she entered the University of Texas at Arlington's Program in Landscape Architecture in 2006 and will complete her Master's in Landscape Architecture studies in December 2010. Rhonda resides in Haltom City, Texas with her husband, John and enjoys the continued love and support of their four children, Amber, Aaron, Adam, and Ashley, their spouses and their children, along with her large extended family. God bless you all.