



**GEORGIA  
LANDSCAPE  
MAGAZINE  
2025**



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Owens Library  
School of Environmental Design  
University of Georgia

MEET THE TEAM!



Dear Readers,

Welcome to this edition of Georgia Landscape Magazine—a publication created by students, for students, and for everyone who's curious about the world of landscape architecture.

This issue highlights the diverse and dynamic perspectives shaping our field today. As students, we're constantly juggling studio deadlines, design critiques, and everything in between. But through it all, we're learning that landscape architecture is more than just a discipline—it's a way of seeing, questioning, and connecting with the spaces and stories around us.

Inside, you'll find features that range from community gardens blooming across Athens to reflections on how trails impact the way we move, feel, and live. We're spotlighting the work of emerging designers and amplifying voices that are pushing the boundaries of what landscape architecture can be. Every piece here was written with care, curiosity, and a genuine love for the place.

As Editor-in-Chief, I'm so proud of the team behind this magazine. It's not easy pulling something like this together in the middle of a busy semester, but the energy, passion, and perspective everyone brought to the table made it all worth it.

Thanks for flipping through these pages, for supporting student work, and for sharing in this ongoing exploration of landscape.

All the best,

Sam Nash Riggs  
Editor-in-Chief  
Georgia Landscape Magazine

To the Friends, Alumni, and Students of CED,

As we conclude the 2024–2025 academic year, I am thrilled to report remarkable growth and innovation at the CED. Our landscape architecture programs remain among the largest and most prestigious nationwide at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. This year, we welcomed our largest-ever Bachelor of Landscape Architecture freshman cohort, a nearly 10 percent increase, bringing continued energy and fresh perspectives to our studios. Across the college, enrollment grew by 6 percent overall, with 153 students pursuing minors and 45 engaged in our various certificate programs. Our new Urban Planning Minor was a standout, growing from 15 to 54 students in just one year.

We're delighted to share that our proposal for a new undergraduate certificate in Construction Management was approved in January 2025; we anticipate welcoming our first cohort in the coming academic year. A new Land Design and Development certificate is also being developed and is expected to be active January 1, 2026. We even expanded our Double Dawgs offerings this year. Urban Planning & Design now boasts three new pathways that let undergraduates complete both bachelor's and master's degrees in five years or less, saving time and tuition while enhancing career readiness. Together, we are building a brighter future for the College of Environment + Design and the world we help shape.

Sincerely,

Sonia Hirt  
Dean, College of Environment + Design  
University of Georgia



# The Ocean's Defender

Jessica Spires

Beneath the waves where colors gleamed,  
A vibrant world now dims — now dreams.  
Once bustling streets of fish and light,  
Now swallowed whole by endless white.

The coral, sculptors of the deep,  
Turn skeletal as waters weep.  
Their whispers echo through the tide,  
Soft warnings lost as currents slide.

The salt-laced windows now howl and wail,  
Through empty reefs grown cold and pale.  
No longer havens, no longer shields,  
The ocean's loss scars all its fields.

The waves lament in restless cries,  
As life dissolves before our eyes.  
Storms rise unchecked, the shores retreat,  
Their fury fed by our deceit.

Communities where salt airs weave,  
Shall watch the waters take and leave.  
What once sustained now pulls away,  
A bitter price we're left to pay.

What will we tell the ones to come,  
When silence reigns, the sea struck dumb?  
When beauty lost was ours to save,  
Yet we consigned it to a grave?

Yet in the deep, a hope remains,  
A chance to mend, to break these chains.  
Let forests bloom beneath the tide,  
Let hands restore what greed denied.

Let actions swell like ocean tides,  
To heal the wounds where loss resides.  
For when reefs thrive, the earth can sing,  
A future bright — restoring spring.



# How to Stay Productive in the Studio:

## Avoiding the Dreaded All-Nighter

Aaron So

It's 3 a.m. The repetitive tapping of someone stippling grass on their master plan, the crinkle of chip bags, and the soft glow of half-dead overhead lights— if you've spent even a semester in the landscape architecture studio, this scene is all too familiar. You tell yourself this is the last all-nighter, that next time you'll manage your time better. But somehow, the cycle repeats. While pulling all-nighters may be considered a rite of passage, there are better ways to survive (and thrive) in studio without sacrificing your health and sanity.

### *Start Early, Plan Ahead*

It's easy to push deadlines out of your mind until they're staring you down, but tackling them in smaller steps can make them feel more manageable. Break your project into milestones — concept sketches, base maps, digital drafts — and set personal deadlines days before the actual due date. Use a planner or digital calendar to track tasks, and don't just rely on memory. The earlier you start, the

more control you have over your work, giving you time to refine your ideas rather than rushing to assemble something last-minute.

Productivity workflows like David Allen's *Getting Things Done* (GTD) system can help organize tasks by breaking them down into actionable steps, reducing mental clutter and increasing efficiency. GTD involves five key steps: capture, clarify, organize, reflect, and engage. Our brains are great at coming up with ideas, but not so great at holding onto all of them. The first step, capture, means getting tasks out of your head and into an external system — like a notebook, a notes app, or a to-do list app. By writing tasks down as soon as they come to mind, you free up mental space and reduce the stress of trying to remember everything. Once tasks are captured, you can clarify what actions need to be taken, organize them into appropriate categories, regularly review your priorities, and take deliberate action. This method ensures that nothing slips through the cracks and allows you to focus on high-priority work without unnecessary distractions.

### *Find your Productive Hours*

Not everyone works best at the same time of day. If you know you're more creative in the morning, use that time for design work. If your brain turns to mush in the afternoon, schedule less demanding tasks like rendering or formatting presentation boards. Understanding your natural work rhythm will help you optimize productivity and prevent late-night panic sessions.

### *Work Smart, Not Just Hard*

The concept of Deep Work, as described by Cal Newport, emphasizes the importance of focused, distraction-free work periods to produce high-quality results. By setting aside dedicated time to work on complex design tasks without interruptions, you can achieve more in less time.

Spending hours in the studio doesn't necessarily mean you're being productive. To stay focused and avoid burnout, try time-blocking techniques like the Pomodoro method — work for 25 minutes, then take a five-minute break. These short bursts of focused work, followed by intentional rest, can help keep your energy levels steady throughout the day. Beyond just managing your time, it's also important to manage your priorities: focus on the tasks that will have the most impact on your project. Sometimes, delivering a polished

section elevation communicates your vision far more effectively than spending hours fine-tuning the placement of a single tree.

Another powerful tool to enhance your productivity is the use of checklists, as emphasized in *The Checklist Manifesto* by Atul Gawande. The book explores how checklists — often used in high-stakes fields like aviation — ensure that no critical step is overlooked, no matter how complex or routine the task. Before every flight, pilots go through a checklist to ensure safety, covering everything from engine checks to communications protocols. Similarly, you can apply this strategy to your studio work. Create a checklist for each phase of your project. For example, when preparing your InDesign presentation boards, break the process down: start with the overall layout, check that each image is placed correctly, ensure text boxes are aligned, then double-check for typos. For rendering, list out each step, from setting up the lighting to refining textures. A detailed checklist ensures that you're covering all necessary steps and can help prevent last-minute panic when it's time to submit. This simple yet effective practice can dramatically reduce the chance of forgetting crucial elements and keep your projects on track.



### *Leverage Your Peers*

Studio culture thrives on collaboration. Don't be afraid to bounce ideas off classmates or ask for feedback early in the process. A fresh pair of eyes can catch flaws you may have overlooked. Plus, working alongside others can keep you motivated and make long hours feel less isolating.

### *Take Breaks and Stay Healthy*

It's tempting to live off of caffeine and fast food, but poor nutrition and sleep deprivation will catch up to you. Keep snacks like nuts and fruit on hand, drink plenty of water, and take breaks to move around. Even a short walk outside can reset your mind and boost creativity. Most importantly, aim for at least some sleep- working while exhausted increases the likelihood of mistakes, ultimately costing you more time and taking a toll on your overall health in the long run.

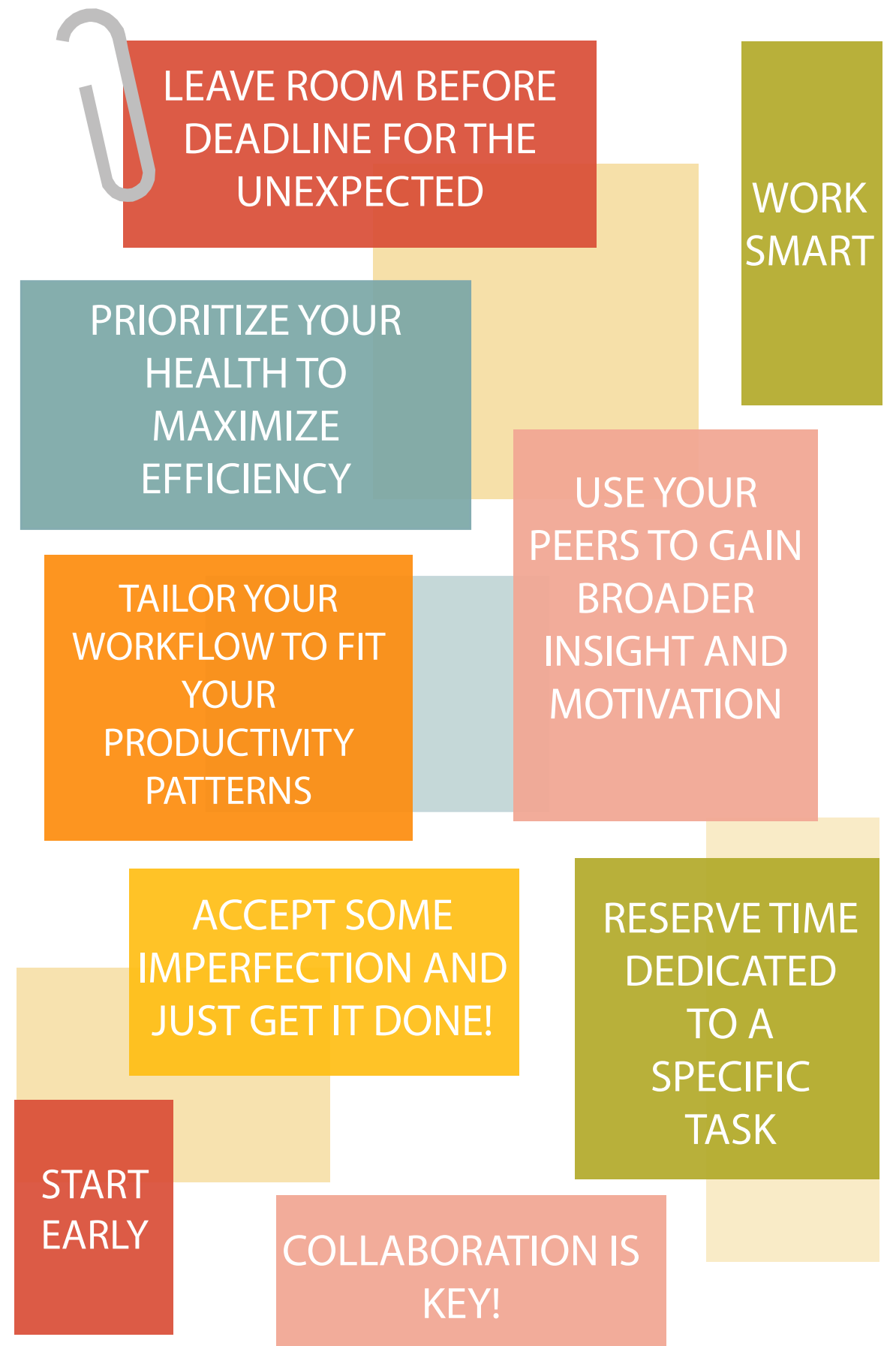
### *Know When to Stop*

Perfectionism is the enemy of productivity. At a certain point, you have to call a project done. Spending hours adjusting minor details won't make a difference if the core design isn't strong. Learn to recognize when refining is necessary and when it's just procrastination in disguise. Like in nature, perfection in landscape architecture is elusive. Trees grow with bends, rocks form with cracks, and landscapes shift over

time. The most compelling designs often have a bit of irregularity - some character that reflects authenticity. Know when it's time to step back, trust your work, and let those natural imperfections speak for themselves.

### *Final Thoughts*

Studio doesn't have to mean sleepless nights and stress-induced breakdowns. With better time management, strategic planning, and self-care, you can create high-quality work without running yourself into the ground. Landscape architecture is about designing spaces that promote well-being - so don't forget to take care of yourself, too. Your future self (and your body) will thank you.





# Before Our Eyes

## A Photographic Essay

Emmie Harvard

Diffusion describes a movement—of particles, of light, of time. In these photographs, light is not used to dramatize, but to soften. It scatters across surfaces, revealing textures that might otherwise be overlooked. Shadows, too, are quiet here—not voids, but veils that shape space gently.

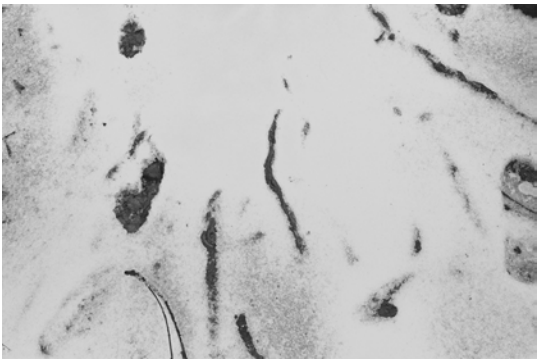
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These are scenes from the everyday, captured in moments of pause. The ordinary becomes noticeable through stillness: a tree holding snow, a dog drinking from a planter, water stains on concrete. In looking closely, I found that presence is less about clarity and more about attention—the willingness to wait and let light reveal what’s already there.





This year, in Georgia, snow drifted in like a forgotten memory. The rhythm of days slowed, steps softened by ice, breath suspended in cold air. Here, diffusion is no longer just light, but atmosphere. Weather, time, and stillness blend without warning. What arrives from elsewhere settles quietly, altering what is remembered of the season.



Presence diffuses slowly. Settling into the surfaces of time, where it can be most deeply felt.





# Portraits of the Past: Analyzing the works of a novelist and an auteur.

## From the cinematography of the Iranian Kiarostami to the prose of the French Proust.

Razeen Kanjiani

Born nearly 70 years apart, Abbas Kiarostami and Marcel Proust were both notable personalities in the fields of cinema and literature, respectively. Their works incorporate strong themes of time and memory, but often sidelined are their explorations of the environment. The environments they create in their fictional worlds provide important insight into the influence landscapes have on the human experience.

### Abbas Kiarostami:

Rural Iran. A mountainous landscape fades in to reveal a glorious marriage and conflict between greens of all hues. The grayish-green, heralded proudly by the olive trees, lays on top of a sea of a brighter, yellow-green grass, doused in shadow and light, ever-changing in the hilly terrain. All the while a clear blue sky joins in to watch the greens and to mock their diversity in wake of its perfect homogeneity. The symmetrically planted olive trees betray a glimpse of a man wearing a shirt, pants, and a coat, carrying a tea kettle and glass cups, navigating the trees as he tries to keep up with a woman ahead of him who is dressed in a traditional Iranian attire.

The camera zooms in to capture this chase, following them through the olive trees. He shouts after the woman, offering his hand in marriage, pleading her, begging her to consider him a worthy companion, begging her to look past his lowly status, his old brick house, begging her to rebel against her grandmother's wishes and to accept his hand in marriage, begging her to give him an answer. She remains silent. The camera tracks her face, as she walks faster to return home, to lose her admirer, revealing her unmoving, cold heart as the trunks of the olive trees intervene and interlude to change their course, to hide her heart less expression from his tender heart.

They make it out of the plantation and the camera, which had been keen on following this discourse, now pans out slowly to reveal the green-laden scenery once more and eventually returns to a static position. The man and woman remain visible but are not heard. He still chases after her as she passionately walks on. The man and woman, no more than insects in the frame, start to merge into the landscape surrounding them, the same landscape that is trapped in the frivolous marriage and conflict of the greens; the couple refuse to acknowledge the landscape, or learn from it. Suddenly, the woman stops, and less expression from his tender heart. They make it out of the plantation and the camera, which had been keen on following this discourse, now pans out slowly to reveal the green-laden scenery once more and eventually returns to a static position. The man and woman remain visible but are not heard. He still chases after her as she passionately walks on. The man and woman, no more than insects in the frame, start to merge into the landscape surrounding them, the same landscape that is trapped in the frivolous marriage and conflict of the greens; the couple refuse to acknowledge the landscape, or learn from it. Suddenly, the woman stops, and so does the man. She looks

back at him, while he remains frozen in place. She appears to speak to him, but the camera is too far to hear anything of consequence. After some time she continues walking on, but this time, instead of giving chase, the man starts running in the opposite direction, eventually reaching the olive trees. As he makes his way back through the olive trees, does he have a gleeful, or mournful stride about him? The trees that were once keen to give us eager onlookers a glimpse of their chase, are now all too willing to shade the man's fortune, or misfortune. The camera fades to black.



ILLUSTRATIONS: ANDREA GAMBOA



Physically characterized by the dark spectacles he donned, عباس کیارستمی, or Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016) was a filmmaker involved in the Iranian New Wave movement that had lasting impacts on Persian cinema and cultural representation. The most prominent feature of Kiarostami's films is the powerful elegance with which he is able to raise questions of the fictional or nonfictional aspects of the story, a reference to the unreliable narrator. This feature is presented alongside human characters that are well-established and human stories focused on social connection. Often, Kiarostami explores the identity of the common man as he navigates events in life, whether it is in the bustling Tehran, or the quiet, and sometimes Arcadic village that is Koker. It is Koker that sees Kiarostami harmoniously explore the aforementioned themes with nature serving as a companion for this exploration.

The first film that is based in Koker is *Where is the Friend's House?* (1987). The plot sees an 8 year old school boy, Ahmad Ahmadvor, on a quest to return his friend's notebook to ensure his friend turns in his homework the next day. This seemingly simple

premise leads Ahmad, the protagonist, on a hero's journey as he endeavors to locate his friend, Mohammad Reza, at his house in a different village. The first frame of the film introduces the recurring theme of authoritarian figures and the obstacles they present to children navigating life. The door of the classroom that swings back and forth echoes the joyous commotion of children enjoying life and is shut securely by their teacher who proceeds to close the open window. The authoritative restriction of children in the classroom represents the limited freedom children enjoy around adults and is reinforced by the fear of repercussions and through lessons of obedience relegated to them throughout their short existence. Subsequently, a notable event occurs in this scene when a boy bends under a desk and the teacher tells him to sit up straight. The teacher questions him for bending under a desk and the boy states that it is due to his aching back. The teacher leaves the matter there and does not inquire into it any further. It is later revealed that this boy is tasked with carrying milk containers on his back as part of his daily chores. Through this moment, Kiarostami emphasizes the disregard and disconnect that occurs between school and children and asserts

that if schools understood children and their personal lives, then education would be much more inclusive and effective.

Eventually, Ahmad sneaks out and heads to Poshteh, Reza's village. This sequence exposes us to the landscape surrounding Koker that is composed of hills and fields. In one shot, Ahmad scales a hill through a path carved into it that zigzags up the topography to the summit: a hill that maintains a recurring appearance throughout the Koker Trilogy. Kiarostami infuses this landscape with foreshadowing of the nonlinear reality of Ahmad's journey. In subsequent shots, Ahmad is shown to be running through landscapes that tower over him and stretch farther than he could ever hope to reach. However, the barrier that nature presents to Ahmad is low lying, and while viewers may presume this landscape to be a point of contention due to Ahmad's inferiority, it does not impose itself upon the protagonist. Instead, it displays another form authoritative figures could adopt; a form that is accommodating, and though dogmatic, fair and understanding in its treatment of its constituents. The landscape also reflects an aspect of Ahmad's character: his empathy and morality. Therefore, the shots that Kiarostami takes

of these landscapes portray them to be poetic, innocent, and attractive, mirroring the purity of Ahmad's heart and his strong moral fiber.

As the story progresses, a link between authority and the built environment develops, triggered by Ahmad's return from Poshteh. Ahmad's grandfather, a bastion of conservatism and the bygone years, asks Ahmad repeatedly to grab his cigarettes. Though Ahmad does tend to this request, the grandfather regales to his companion the importance of corporal punishment and swiftly following commands. He illustrates this by pointing out that he would get beaten by his father every other week and given a penny on the remaining weeks: a practice he believes instills discipline. In another example, he points out that Iranian engineers are paid less than their foreign counterparts because it takes Iranian engineers two passes to complete a command that foreign engineers complete in one. The grandfather, accentuating the importance of discipline and prompt obedience, demonstrates the philosophy that numerous designers have long operated under, one of imposition and dominance over the natural environment. A counterpart to this ideology is represented by the path that zigzags up the



hill. It is a linear and artificial construction borne from the power of human engineering. However, it does not diminish the hill, nor does it extend past its dimensional necessity; yet it still manages to mark the existence of the human race and realize the human desire to connect. To some spectators, the hill anthropomorphizes into a god-like observer, witnessing the events of the trilogy, serving as a landmark seen but not acknowledged in the human stories and emotions, and, above all, representing the image of the divine as a harmonious creator and collaborator, both a driver of industry and a steward of the environment: all that the human race hopes to be.

Abbas Kiarostami is one of the most accomplished storytellers to ever live. Evident in his films, this quality bleeds through his career as a photographer and cinematographer. Perhaps, Kiarostami is singular in his love of doors as muses of photographs and in the deeper symbolism one might extract from observations of different doors.

Where is the Friend's House? emphasizes this through the replacement of aged wooden doors of the past with sturdy iron ones, emphasizing the heavier, yet subtle theme of life, death, and change. The Aga Khan Museum located in Toronto, Canada housed an exhibition showcasing Kiarostami's photographs of weathered doors, taken over a period of two decades in Iran, Italy, France, and Morocco. The exhibition titled "Doors Without Keys" ran from 2015 to 2016 and became his swan song, ending a mere 3 months before Kiarostami's passing. In many ways, this exhibition culminates and condenses the ideas that Kiarostami has portrayed throughout his films, especially the idea of time. Despite the fact that these doors have lost their functional and aesthetic values over the years and seem to be stranded aliens in the technological modern age, they retain the most valuable thing there is: time. The monodirectional attribute of time implies the accumulation of an "intrinsic time value" in each and

every object in existence, and, as it relates to human memories and experiences, these objects gain emotional value proportional to their time value. A simple illustration of this fact are family photographs as former prints are more valuable than latter ones. Therefore, doors are symbols in this exhibition (as they were in Where is the Friend's House?) of objects that, to the inexperienced eye, may seem counterproductive and inefficient,

but actually contain emotional power due to their long existence. Additionally, despite having garnered a substantial age, these doors remain functional and open to strangers and family alike. This represents their acceptance and understanding of people through all epochs of history, even when their counterparts, the patriarchs and matriarchs of a family, may not indulge in such accommodations. Another feature of the exhibition was the inclusion of sounds characterized by conversation, knocking, and noise that would be associated with a functioning household, without which these doors would be symbols of death and desolate civilizations. There in lies the importance Kiarostami places on the way people value these older objects and use them to reminisce about their bygone days. In the absence of people, these objects gather dust and neither signify anything greater than themselves nor anything less. Time without people seems to be an unimportant construct.





## Marcel Proust:

Fleeting memories and shifting reality brought upon the dormant slumberer by the tenuous and amorphous realm of sleep awakens in man all that he had unwittingly forgot ten-sleep calls upon the tension of the strings which keep him tethered to his hometown and to the inhabitants that personify the spirit of the town, and it reels in those episodic memories of his formative years to be dusted off and remembered. This foray into memory is how Proust elects to commence his most reputed publication, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, or *In Search of Lost Time*. This novel was published in 1927 in seven volumes that observe the narrator's recollections of his past and experiences in adulthood. The first volume, *Du côté de chez Swann*, or *Swann's Way* is set in the fictitious village of Combray, France and focuses singularly on the narrator's past—a recollection ignited by slumber, but also through involuntary memory. This leads to, perhaps, the most iconic part of *Swann's Way* often referred to as the “madeleine episode” where the narrator is reminded of the past while he dips a madeleine in tea. This results in a cascaded resurfacing of old memories guided by the ones that

came before it and, before long, he is lurched back by the strings of his past that begin to ensnare him increasingly.

The inclusion of the theme of involuntary memory and the happenings of the narrator's past retains interest in the material; however, a second hallmark of Proust's writings are the long run-on sentences he makes use of, mimicking the grip the past enjoys on the narrator. Proust is deliberate with the words he uses to narrate these events and, along with the use of run-on sentences, describes the environment around these events in great detail, an especially memorable description being of the town church. The order in which Proust chooses certain events to appear, and why they might be of importance to a child, and are therefore remembered, is authentic and deeply nostalgic. Using these memories, Proust conveys his views on society in a manner that is both philosophically rich and profoundly implicative to human mannerisms at large. The rigid structure present in other works of fiction contrasts with Proust's prose which constantly changes and is expanded upon much like the natural induction of memories as they are recalled.

Proust's approach to the concept of nature is extremely unconventional; he interlaces

nature with the themes of memory and time. In the madeleine episode, the narrator recalls his childhood home through indulging in a petite madeleine, and the first details that seem to take form are the flowers in Swann's garden and the water lilies in the Vivonne river. The landscape, Proust implies, holds power over the village of Combray and its people, or at least proves to be more primordially and intuitively ingrained in memory. This passage is also reminiscent of the impressionist movement, pioneered by Claude Monet. Monet's numerous paintings of French gardens and water lilies were rendered in a visual style that demonstrated the evolution of a landscape during different times of day and dismissed the unrealistic ideal of the painter as an inertial observer. Through this passage, Proust echoes the ever-shifting quality of the landscape in memory and claims that, in some regards, memory consists of an amorphous structure - similar to dreams. He highlights this shapeless quality by comparing it to paper that takes on unique forms when placed in water. However, despite this indefiniteness, Proust argues that the physical forms remain permanent in memory and come to shape the experiences themselves.

The episodic, nonlinear narrative structure of the novel lends itself to the emphasis Proust places on the disconnect between the human soul and human existence. Existence, defined by perception through the senses, informs the thoughts, emotions, and judgments one places on the immediate environment. As Proust notes, it is through appealing the reader's sensual perceptions, which constitutes the very core of their existence, that a novelist is able to accomplish.



ILLUSTRATIONS: ANDREA GAMBOA



the herculean task of conjuring sympathetic inclinations towards a character in their narrative. Additionally, Proust states that the skilled writer is able to evoke empathy by portraying fictional characters in novels as mere representations of real humans. Real human stories, Proust argues, contain intrinsic complexities that alienate the readers from these stories. The writer then replaces these complexities with certain traits that the readers are able to empathize with more readily. Proust makes this argument in tandem with the depiction of landscapes in fiction writing. He claims that while character arcs generate empathy, the landscapes the writer describes seem to be more real than the environment the reader is surrounded by. This is especially true for the protagonist of Swann's Way who fervently reads over the summer. There are many reasons for this, chief among them being the trust the protagonist places on the author: a trust that leads him to believe that every word printed on the page is a step closer toward truth as if the lines and paragraphs were themselves a divine revelation containing celestial teachings and truths. Thus, Proust believes that these fictional landscapes are a part of nature, and characterize a

natural extension of the physical world into the conscious mind.

The fictional landscape also becomes more tangible because of the particularly uninspiring garden—the symmetrical, linear product of the gardener's conception—where the protagonist reads during the hot summers. The contrast between the mundane garden and the exotic, fictional landscapes contained in the novel gives birth to the increased connection the protagonist feels to these landscapes and his desire to visit these fictional places. Perhaps this is where Proust is strongest in expressing his disdain for the French formal garden style, favoring something foreign, unconventional, and unexpected in domestic environments. A final aspect that provides tangibility to a fictional landscape in the reader's mind is not contained in Proust's prose, but which readers of Proust's prose can deduce, is the detail with which a novelist describes a space. The strongest example of this is the town of Combray which Proust infuses with a unique spirit, a genius loci, through descriptions of the town, its people, and its strange quirks: the regiment that passes through as the townspeople gather to look at them, the church steeple that, much like a fingernail,

scratches the sky, and Camus's grocery store, convenient but not as well stocked as Borange's in literature. The church itself is presented as a character in Proust's prose with its "crude" apse that resembles a prison wall rather than a remnant part of a larger religious body, the tombstones that form a "spiritual pavement" but have now been given a softer touch by time and thus visually flow smoothly, defying their rectilinear inception, and the blue rectangular panes that seem to be a peacock's train at a glance and sapphires at another because of the changing light. All of these elements seem to allude to a distant past, a yearning for an era long gone, and a search for the time lost to rapid progress. In conclusion, Kiarostami and Proust both explore the environment in their unique ways. However, some similarities do exist in their works, since both Proust and Kiarostami take pride in creating idealistic settlements representing the French and Iranian cultures. Their characters navigate these settlements through direct encounters and learn to find their place within the fabrics of these places. Through these parallel approaches, both artists demonstrate how environment and identity are intricately

intertwined in their narratives. Ultimately, their respective bodies of work have made a strong impact on the creative arts and influenced many generations of storytellers to come.



# How a Neighbor's Machete and a Greenbelt Changed My Life

Clare Smith

As I find myself training for my first marathon, I am marveled by the physical and mental impact that running has on me. Not only has running made me stronger physically, but it has also given me mental strength like I have never known. My freshman year of high school, I took my first run. I ran around the safety of my neighborhood, scared to exit its boundary. In 2016, my hometown of Carrollton, Georgia began construction of a 17 mile long, recreational loop encompassing its borders. Lucky for me, my elderly neighbor wanted direct access to this amenity, so she grabbed her machete and cut a portal in her backyard through the brush - giving the entire neighborhood access to the Greenbelt.



ILLUSTRATION: AMBAR REYNA

Eager to see what the Greenbelt was about, 16-year-old me decided to breach my neighborhood safety net, pass through the portal in Mrs. Parrish's back yard, and run. I found myself regularly using the Greenbelt to guide my runs. Nearly 10 years since my first run as i train for my first marathon, I find myself pleasantly on the Greenbelt. As I run, I pass families, children, pets, and people of all kinds. Without this accessible and safe trail, my running would have come to a halt either when I tired of the same neighborhood roads, or I forcefully encountered a car trying to expand my horizons. The Carrollton Greenbelt gave me and all of Carrollton a safe place to begin and expand their exercise journey. The Carrollton Greenbelt is one of thousands of community trails developing across the United States in the early 21st century. The physical, psychological, and economic benefits of pedestrian safe, accessible trail systems are coming to light, and communities are rightfully acting upon it.

ILLUSTRATION: JO ROBINSON

In a 2023 article by the Rails to Trails Conservancy (RTTC), there has been a steady increase in multi-use trail construction in the United States. Today, over 41,000 miles of multi-use trails exist across America. The RTTC states that 49.75% of Americans live in a county developing a trail network. There is currently overwhelming public support for the investment and implementation of trail systems, with a 2023 RTTC opinion poll consisting of 1,200 adults finding that half of the respondents believe that the government spends too little on walking and biking infrastructure. This same opinion poll also found that regardless of political opinion, four out of five people believe that tax dollars should be spent connecting trails to each other. The people want accessible and safe recreational trails, and they are willing to pay for them.



ILLUSTRATION: AMBAR REYNA

Along with solid public support for walking and biking infrastructure, there are also health benefits that can arise from trail construction. According to a 2024 report from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), approximately 40.3% of American adults are obese. The CDC claims that obesity is a "chronic condition that increases the risk of hypertension, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers". The main causes of obesity are a number of factors including unhealthy eating habits, poor quality of sleep, high levels of stress, genetics, and medications. One of the main causes we as landscape architects can address is a lack of physical activity. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, most adults need 150 minutes of aerobic activity per week. Studies show that having safe and accessible space to perform this aerobic activity increases a community's likelihood to partake in it. A study from the American Journal of Public Health in 2014 found a correlation between peoples' proximity to biking and walking infrastructure and the amount of exercise they get per week. The American Trails Association summarizes their findings by stating, "The study was conducted on three communities who were



upgrading their walking and biking infrastructure, measuring the exercise habits of the residents both before the trails went in, and after. The results showed that those living within less than a mile of the new trails were getting on average 45 minutes more exercise a week after the trails were built than they were before they had that available infrastructure. The amount of increased exercise per week went down the further away people lived from the new trails, but benefits were still seen up to those who lived 2.5 miles away". This shows that we as landscape architects have the ability

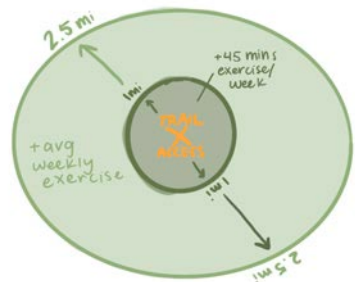


ILLUSTRATION: JO ROBINSON  
to create physically healthier communities.

When planning a new project, the physical benefits of implementing a trail system can be predicted by conducting what is known as a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). The World Health Organization identifies an HIA as "a practical approach

used to systematically judge the potential health effects of a policy, strategy, plan, programme or project on a population, particularly on vulnerable or disadvantaged groups". The AJPM conducted an HIA before the construction of the Atlanta BeltLine in 2007, a multibillion dollar transit, trails, parks, and redevelopment project in Atlanta, Georgia. The AJPM recommended the prioritization of trail and greenspace construction rather than residential and retail construction in order to identify an "explicit goal in project priority setting". The BeltLine has since been constructed and has eluded all that the HIA predicted, and has become a key place in the timeline of my life. This is the beauty of what can happen when landscape architects prioritize trail networks in their work.

The most noticeable change in myself while running on the Carrollton Greenbelt is the mental clarity. I run on the Greenbelt never fails to lift myself out of a mental funk, and it turns out that the positive mental impact that running has on me is scientifically proven. A 2019 Study from the University of Exeter claims that people who regularly spend time in nature are "significantly more likely to report good health and higher psychological wellbeing than

those who don't visit nature at all during an average week". Additionally, the University of Michigan performed a study that measured saliva samples from people before and after spending just 20 minutes outdoors. The results showed a 21.3% drop in the stress hormone cortisol. So scientifically, spending time outside can improve mental health, but how can having accessible recreational spaces nearby benefit communities? The majority of the 20,000 people who took part in the University of Exeter study reported spending their time outside within 2 miles of their home, showing the importance of having safe and accessible space for them to do so.

The economic impact that green networks have for the communities in which they lie is shocking. The NYC HighLine is a multibillion-dollar public park built on a historic freight rail line elevated above the streets on Manhattan's West Side. New Yorkers have coined the Highline's economic impact as "The High Line's Halo Effect". Three years before the High Line's completion, a 2013 article in Mansion Global reported adjacent property values increasing by 10% - before the High Line was even completed. The current median price of a condo in the High Line neighborhood is a whopping \$6 million, with the

2024 median price of a Manhattan apartment being \$1.6 million (Castle Avenue Real Estate Team, 2023). Along with real estate value increases, decreases in medical costs have also been reported. According to the American Heart Association, for every \$1 invested in building trails, there is a correlation to \$3 saved in medical costs. This means both communities and community members can benefit economically from safe and accessible green networks - a win-win situation.

Landscape architects have the ability to directly improve public health, community wellbeing, and financial success, encapsulating the power of landscape architecture. The Carrollton Greenbelt gave me a landscape that every day leads me closer to my goal of running a marathon, an experience with which I know that I am not alone. The Greenbelt, along with thousands of other safe and accessible trail networks, wholistically strengthens its community.

PHOTOS: JO ROBINSON





# The Case for Community Gardens

Delaney Mertz

Monday, March 24 2025

In Athens' Boulevard Neighborhood lies a newly constructed school garden, prepared to become an educational haven for children to learn and grow in an outdoor environment. Raised beds line the red brick school, accompanied by rain barrels and existing vegetation. However, the current framework is just the beginning for this small but mighty space, and the future is bright.

"I think it's going to be loved a whole lot," said third-year University of Georgia Bachelor of Landscape Architecture student Dailey Jackson, who helped design and construct the garden throughout the past year. "I think it's going to become a gathering space and something that everyone's going to look forward to seeing grow and cultivate. I hope that [the school] is going to get more money so they can put more and more resources toward it, because it seems to be a really,

ILLUSTRATION:  
DELANEY MERTZ

really good direction that they're going in."

Community gardens like the one at Johnnie Lay Burks Elementary are a vital piece of the Athens-Clarke County food system, providing access to fresh produce for people who might live in a food desert or be facing food insecurity. One in six Athenians are food insecure, 5,200 children face food insecurity and 35 percent of food-insecure Athenians do not qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Community gardens and local nonprofits focused on addressing food insecurity fill a gap that government resources cannot bridge.

Defined by their communal nature, collective ownership, and magnetism as a meeting ground for diverse identities, community gardens are a shared green space cared for by individuals for the greater good. These gardens serve different purposes and address a myriad of issues, from human

health and food insecurity to development and sustainability.

The first American community gardens, dubbed "victory



THE JOHNNIE LAY BURKS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GARDEN AWAITS PLANTING AFTER CONSTRUCTION IS COMPLETED (PHOTO: DAILEY JACKSON)

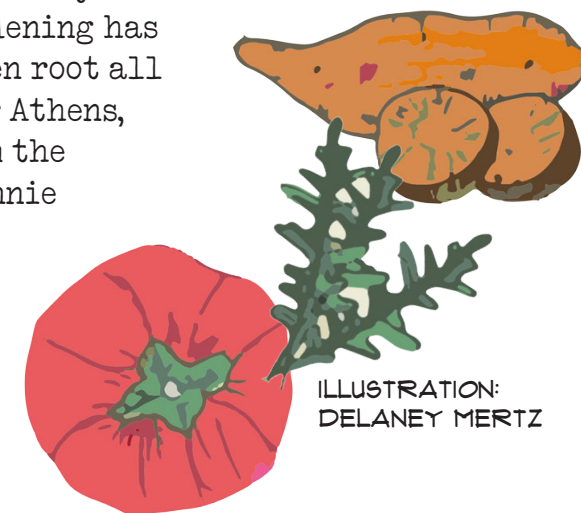
gardens," emerged during the World Wars in the 20th century. Created and funded by the federal government, these gardens set out to offset general food shortages in Europe. Working in the garden was a way to boost morale and contribute to the war effort from home. Many high-profile individuals promoted their use, and President Woodrow Wilson declared that "food would win the war."

In the early 1970s came guerrilla gardens – a form of protest through which green activists illegally transformed abandoned lots into food- and flower-producing community spaces. One of the most

infamous is the Liz Christy Garden in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York City. Constructed and cared for by a group of urban gardeners identifying themselves as "green guerrillas," the garden was eventually legally recognized as public property and the gardeners given rights to the land. Located on a skid row of the Bowery neighborhood, the Liz Christy Garden still stands today.

Although different forms of community gardens have existed throughout the past century, the popularity of urban gardening has steadily increased in the past decade. During the COVID-19 pandemic, urban gardening became a medium for safe social interaction and functional outdoor exercise, leading to an especially large influx of gardening plots in 2021 that continued into the following years.

Community gardening has taken root all over Athens, from the Johnnie Lay







COMMUNITY MEMBERS HELP CONSTRUCT THE JOHNNIE LAY BURKS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GARDEN ON MLK DAY OF SERVICE, JANUARY 2025 (PHOTO: DAILEY JACKSON)

Burks Elementary School and School Garden Network, to the UGA Geography & Geology building green roof, Williams Farm and more.

### How Community Gardens Grow More Than Just Vegetables

The most important aspect of community gardens are the benefits they provide, such as community engagement, educational value, environmental benefits and economic impact.

The presence of community gardens in urban neighborhoods sprouts crime prevention and civic engagement, which in turn addresses urban blight, agricultural education and the need for volunteerism. Some gardens hold workshops on everything from seed saving and medicinal herbs to

healthy cooking and canning, with activities for both adults and kids. Community gardens bring the community together, strengthening ties between generations and races and targeting problems like inequality and green space loss while raising neighborhood pride.

Additionally, creating this type of green space to counter biodiversity loss has proven to conserve resources, save fuel, decrease air pollution, regulate microclimate, filter atmospheric particulates, retain rainwater and mitigate urban heat island effects.

Harvesting food from community gardens helps increase access to healthy, affordable foods. They generate 20.4 servings of fresh produce per 11 sq. ft on average, provide access to organic foods at reduced or no cost and help gardeners consume more fresh

fruits and vegetables. Community gardeners consume fresh produce nearly 6 times per day.

These gardens can also help generate extra income for gardeners. At Williams Farm, managed by Athens Land Trust, the Young Urban Farmers program creates opportunities for high school students to learn gardening, farming and entrepreneurial skills through growing fresh produce and selling it at an affordable price at the West Broad Farmers Market. The program has instilled the value of sustainable urban agriculture in the 200+ students it has hosted since its inception.

### Where Learning Takes Root: The Power of School Gardens

The Clarke County School District's School Garden Network, made possible through a partnership between a variety of organizations such as Keep Athens-Clarke County Beautiful, UGarden, Clarke County School District, and Athens Land Trust, offers a unique and enriching educational experience for students while fostering community engagement and environmental awareness. Through the program, community gardens are constructed for and managed by every school in the county. The diversity of

garden types – from community gardens and art gardens to pollinator and native habitat gardens – ensures that students have access to a wide variety of learning environments. These spaces aren't just about growing plants; They serve as living classrooms where students can explore subjects like math, science, ecology, and even history in a hands-on and interactive way.

The Johnnie Lay Burks Elementary School Garden is a pertinent example of how these spaces are designed to be



COMMUNITY MEMBERS LAY SOIL INTO A RAISED BED AT JOHNNIE LAY BURKS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ON MLK DAY OF SERVICE, JANUARY 2025 (PHOTO: DAILEY JACKSON)



ILLUSTRATION: DELANEY MERTZ



functional, educational, and visually interesting; among other uses, it houses a network of tiered raised beds, a trellis, and fairy garden. During the school day, it is primarily used as a teaching garden.

Jackson emphasized the importance of accessibility in the garden to provide opportunities for kids of many ages and abilities: "We wanted there to be planters, but to incorporate the accessibility part, we thought about tiered planters, so ... at one level a younger student could access, then the next level would be a little bit higher, so someone who is older, or an adult can reach over." Balancing functionality and accessibility in the

design reflects a larger commitment to inclusivity - ensuring that everyone in the community can participate and benefit. Those design elements can be subtle, like leaving extra room between raised beds. "We did it in a way that would encourage walkability through it, so not putting them super close together," Jackson said. "We made sure that there [were]

ILLUSTRATION:  
DELANEY MERTZ



four or five feet between them so people could walk, regardless of if they were students or adults." This thoughtful layout not only makes the garden more accessible but also allows people to move freely and engage with the plants without feeling confined. The idea is to create a space that invites exploration, conversation and collaboration - a space that fosters a sense of belonging.

As far as educational value, the staff at Johnnie Lay Burks Elementary places "a pretty big emphasis on encouraging students to work outside," Jackson notes. A study published in the NIH National Library of Medicine shows that contact with soil while digging or planting improves mood, enhances the learning experience and decreases anxiety, proving that gardening is beneficial for mind, body and soul. Tending to a garden helps kids learn not only nutrition and the science of growing plants, but also mindfulness, responsibility, stewardship, and confidence in their abilities as they watch their efforts come to fruition.

The gardens in the School Garden Network embody the spirit of collaboration, sustainability and comprehensive education, providing students with the tools they need to thrive both

academically and personally. These gardens are not just about growing food or plants; they are about inspiring the next generation to grow up ecologically conscious and intelligent.

### UGA's Green Roof Fosters

#### Sustainability and Food Access

A hidden gem on the UGA campus, the Geography & Geology Green Roof is a "living laboratory" where current UGA Office of Sustainability Urban Agriculture intern Amelia Shugart manages a garden to produce vegetables for Campus Kitchen and other food security-focused organizations in town. "Students can come up here and volunteer and learn about the processes of all seasons of a garden," Shugart said. The green roof is an extension of UGA Garden and the Office of Sustainability.

The space was originally created in the 1960s to serve as a climate buffer for the Climatology lab located on the roof. Over time, it transformed into a fully functional garden for food production and biodiversity, which has many more

environmental benefits than a traditional roof. Shugart says the garden is "an important space in an urban area ... it's a great pollinator habitat in an otherwise urban area where there's not much support for pollinators." Creating space for pollinators is essential, resulting in higher crop

yields and cleaner air and soil.



ILLUSTRATION:  
DELANEY MERTZ



UGA GEOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY GREEN ROOF VOLUNTEERS ASSIST IN WEEDING AND MAINTAINING THE GARDEN (PHOTO: DAILEY JACKSON)

Additionally, all the produce grown on the green roof is donated to food security initiatives around Athens. The biggest economic impact of the garden is "lowering the burden of cost for produce," Shugart noted. Donation recipients vary, but last semester, produce went to Campus Kitchen, UGA Garden, and Fresh Express, and the herbs grown on the roof were



sold at the Farm to Campus Market. Through Campus Kitchen, 572,170 pounds of food have been recovered since 2012, with 133,295 meals made from scratch.

The garden also offers a unique form of community engagement by being accessible to individuals with varying schedules. As Shugart points out, volunteering on the green roof garden is often possible outside of the traditional 9-to-5 workday, making it a great option for students or community members who might not be able to participate in other volunteer opportunities typically confined to business hours, such as at UGarden. This accessibility ensures that a diverse group of people can experience the benefits of community gardens, creating an inclusive space for anyone who wants to get involved. "Volunteering on the green roof garden is typically past five, so it can be more accessible for students living on campus, people who are working jobs," she explains.

Outside of gardening on the roof, Shugart leads volunteering workshops and tours. You can learn more about the roof and find opportunities to volunteer by following the UGA Geography & Geology green roof Instagram @geog\_greenroof.

### Athens' Opportunity to Design a Connected Garden System

While a strong culture of community gardening exists in Athens today, the city has an opportunity to create a more structured, interconnected web of gardens that function together to solve shared issues, such as food insecurity and biodiversity loss.

Other cities across the country have more robust community garden networks that function as publicly owned entities. Seattle's P-Patch program, for example, is comprised of community-managed green spaces throughout the city where organic food, flowers and herbs can grow. These spaces are truly public and utilized as "communal spaces, restorative spaces, learning and idea incubators, and venues for community gatherings" according to the Seattle city government website. Seattle has more garden plots per capita than any other major city in the U.S., and 90+ gardens are a part of the program.

Athens could learn a lot from this model. The creation of a centralized, unified web of community gardens managed by the city government would be

the most efficient way to meet the shared needs of the community.

### Cultivating Community, One Plot at a Time

Community gardens' most important characteristic is that they provide community – the word is in there for a reason. In cities today, many people do not know their neighbors and have little access to "third places," – public spaces for gathering and interaction outside of home and work – creating a feeling of disconnection and loneliness. Community gardens help heal this wound, providing a space where people can interact with others in a safe, enriching environment. They get the chance to put their hands in the dirt and engage with the earth, which has been proven to have an immense positive impact on human health.

Community gardening also addresses the need for green space in the city. Most city residents do not have their own yards or gardens to manage, and as a result, can only enjoy the outdoors through public green spaces – which many cities desperately need, yet lack.

In a concrete jungle, having the ability to access a community garden aids in this issue.

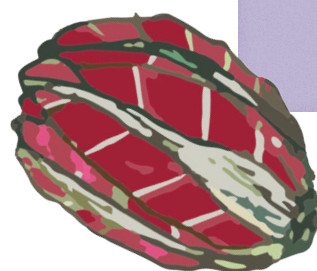
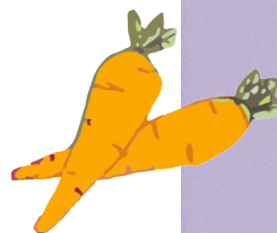


ILLUSTRATION:  
DELANEY MERTZ

With proper governance, adequate funding, and access to arable land, community gardens and their stewards have the potential to heal many of the divisions plaguing today's cities—much like Victory Gardens did during World War II, and as Guerilla Gardens still do today. Human needs parallel the needs of nature when it comes to community gardens, and that's their beauty.

Community gardens serve as powerful tools for cultivating not just flora and fauna, but also social connections, environmental awareness and educational opportunities. As demonstrated by the many gardens throughout Athens, they are instrumental in addressing food insecurity, fostering inclusivity and providing vital green spaces in urban environments. By bringing together individuals from all walks of life, community gardens promote civic engagement, community pride and sustainable practices that benefit both people and the planet. With thoughtful planning and continued support, these gardens have the potential to transform cities, creating healthier, more resilient communities. The case for community gardens is clear: they are not only spaces for growing food, but for growing stronger, more connected societies.



# What I Learned About Landscape Architecture from Across the Sea

## Lessons from Croatia

Faye Decker

Humans are inherently connected to nature. As landscape architecture students, we study how environments shape human experience and vice versa. Traveling to Croatia gave me a fresh perspective on how design can evoke emotion, preserve history, and highlight natural beauty. Whether through centuries-old trees, a memorial that forces reflection, or an ocean that plays its own music, Croatia's landscapes reinforced the power of thoughtful design.



One of our first experiences in Croatia took us to a small historic town, where we learned the local tradition of making paper flowers. The women teaching us moved with practiced ease, crafting intricate blooms in seconds while we struggled to keep up. These handmade flowers brighten homes during the long winters, standing in for real blossoms when the landscape turns gray. This tradition speaks to the deep cultural appreciation for nature—when the seasons take it away, they find a way to bring it back. It was a small but meaningful reminder of how humans have always sought to integrate nature into their lives.

As we traveled through Croatia, I was struck by how landscapes there are designed to be deeply emotive. Some places exuded a



sense of calm and romance, while others evoked reflection or even unease. Three stood out: Park Zrinjevac, the Sea Organ, and the Jasenovac Concentration Camp Memorial.

In the heart of Zagreb, Park Zrinjevac is lined with 100-year-old elms, their immense canopies creating a sense of stability and peace. Our guide shared how this park was once a central spot for courtship—young women would dress in their finest and wait in the pavilion while men approached them for a stroll. Walking beneath those trees, knowing they had silently witnessed generations of people falling in love, added an extra

layer of significance. Even today, couples lounged on the grass, sat close on benches, and walked hand in hand beneath the trees. It was a reminder that landscapes hold memories as much as they hold space.

One of the most captivating places we visited was the Sea Organ in Zadar. Designed by Nikola Bašić, it looks like a set of concrete steps leading into the water, but beneath them lies a series of pipes that create sounds as waves push air through them. The result is an ever-changing melody played by the sea itself.





# CROATIA



Experiencing the Sea Organ at sunset was unforgettable. As the sky shifted from orange to deep purple, we sat quietly, listening to the ocean's song. The typically loud and energetic group fell silent, caught in the moment. Something about the combination of sound, setting, and movement made it feel like time had slowed down. The Sea Organ doesn't just highlight nature—it allows it to be the main performer.

The most sobering site we visited was the Jasenovac Concentration Camp Memorial. Designed by Bogdan Bogdanović, the Flower Memorial is a stark, brutalist structure of reinforced concrete, rising from the open field where the camp once stood. The long walk to reach it forces visitors to take in the vast emptiness, creating time for reflection.

Standing in front of the monument, I felt a mix of emotions—unease, sorrow, reverence. Unlike traditional memorials filled with plaques and explanations, this one uses scale and space to communicate. The lack of barriers, the openness of

the field, and the sheer size of the monument make you confront the weight of history in a different way. It was a powerful lesson in design: sometimes, the most impactful spaces are the ones that leave room for interpretation and contemplation.

If there was one key takeaway from my time in Croatia, it was the importance of lasting landscapes. The ancient elms of Zrinjevac continue to shape experiences after more than a century. The Sea Organ remains a place of wonder, each visit offering something new based on the movement of the waves. The Jasenovac Memorial ensures that history is remembered through design rather than words. These places endure, not just physically, but emotionally.

As designers, we should strive to create spaces that resonate beyond their immediate function—landscapes that tell stories, evoke emotions, and stand the test of time. Croatia reinforced for me that the best designs don't impose—they reveal, enhance, and let nature and history speak for themselves.



