

Book Review

# Book Review: Melbourne, S. *Refining Nature: The Landscape Architecture of Peter Walker*, 2nd ed.; Birkhäuser: Basel, Switzerland, 2022; ISBN: 978-3-0356-2548-6

Laleh Dehghanifarsani <sup>1</sup>, Mohammad Reza Khalilnezhad <sup>2</sup> and Majid Amani-Beni <sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Architecture, Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu 611756, China; lalehfarsani@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Arts, University of Birjand, Birjand 9713753539, Iran; smkhalilnejad@birjand.ac.ir

\* Correspondence: majid@swjtu.edu.cn

Throughout the historical development of built landscape design, the process of creating and shaping landscape structures has demanded extensive expertise, creativity, and a profound comprehension of landscape design history [1,2]. It necessitates practical experience on-site, which every designer and design firm should strive to accumulate over their professional careers [3–5]. *Refining Nature: The Landscape Architecture of Peter Walker* is written by Scott Melbourne, an accomplished designer, educator, and the founding principal of MxM Landscape Architecture in Seattle, USA. In this publication, Scott Melbourne introduces and celebrates the remarkable skills and contributions of Peter Walker, one of the industry's most esteemed design practitioners.

Peter Walker, a highly acclaimed figure in the field, has been recognized with prestigious accolades, including the Honour award from the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), Harvard's centennial Medal, the University of Virginia's Thomas Jefferson Medal, and the Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe Gold Medal from the international Federation of landscape architects. Throughout his career, he has assumed diverse roles as a teacher, mentor, and collaborator, working closely with some of the industry's most renowned professionals.

The author of this book skillfully explores the distinctive qualities of Peter Walker's design works, which seamlessly blend originality with a strong connection to the surrounding environment, contemporary culture, and the traditions of landscape architecture. Walker's landscapes emerge from the innate human desire to shape ideas through design, transforming them into tangible entities that endure and can be experienced and appreciated by all. His profound influence in the field of landscape architecture is unquestionable, evident in the remarkable body of built work worldwide. Moreover, this publication contributes to the essential knowledge base for the present and future of landscape architecture.

At the heart of this research lies a fundamental question: What valuable insights can be gleaned from a thorough exploration of Peter Walker's built works spanning six decades? By focusing on uncovering the design approaches integrated within these projects, this book endeavors to equip landscape architects and other environmental designers with fresh perspectives to effectively shape inhabited outdoor spaces, creating landscapes that resonate and endure. To conduct this study, each of the discussed projects was personally experienced and meticulously documented, encompassing over forty sites across six countries and four continents. These landscapes represent complex and layered environments that can be accessed, inhabited, examined, and learned from. This aspect provides significant advantages for students of landscape architecture, and the author's observations from these site visits serve as a foundation for the identified strategies. Notably, the fact that most of these projects have withstood the test of time adds further value, as they carry narratives of physical weathering and evolving usage accumulated over the years.

The passage initiates by presenting a case for the significance of undertaking a comprehensive exploration of Walker's constructed projects. In chapter one, the author introduces the central lessons derived from this collection, right from the start. The introduction



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narrates the inception of this study through an anecdote featuring a security guard, a molecular collider, and miscommunication.

Chapter two provides a comprehensive survey of Walker's career, highlighting different phases and offering a chronological framework to enhance our comprehension of his professional development and trajectory. A person's career can be seen as a project in its own right, and by examining these six decades of design work with a sense of detachment and hindsight, we can uncover significant lessons. As the subsequent chapters intentionally deviate from a chronological order, chapter two plays a crucial role in establishing a temporal structure that will later serve as a foundation for project-specific discussions.

The main content of this text consists of chapters three to seven, which are centered around specific landscape components: topography, on-structure landscapes, craft, vegetation, and water. Each chapter begins with a general exploration of the significance of that particular landscape architecture component, followed by an examination of how Peter Walker has incorporated it in various built projects. The knowledge and understanding gained from these projects are then categorized into distinct design strategies.

Chapter eight of the book serves as a speculative conclusion that draws connections between the design work of Peter Walker, who is emblematic of the 20th century, and the contemporary challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. The epilogue consists of key excerpts from interviews with Peter Walker himself, providing insights into his reflections on landscape and the legacy of his works. Additionally, the appendix includes supplementary project details that may be of interest to readers, including site coordinates that can be entered into a map service for virtual or physical visits to the landscapes discussed in the book.

The significant duration covered in this book is characterized by a multitude of landscapes rather than a sparse collection of projects, showcasing the consistent and prolific output of Peter Walker's professional career. These landscapes are not mere conceptual ideas, but tangible built works that have endured the development process and are accessible for firsthand experience. Although this level of productivity may appear conventional for landscape architects who are inherently involved in continuous client engagements and project undertakings, the drawings and photographs presented in this monograph vividly depict the dynamic processes of landscape design. They exemplify the imaginative leaps supported by Peter Walker's consistent guidance, emphasizing the periods of creative design synthesis and integration.

This book holds particular value for design students among its readers. For those in the early stages of their careers, it provides a unique collection of case study sites that serve as valuable examples. Importantly, it also demonstrates how various landscape systems can be considered and interconnected at the site level. However, the design lessons highlighted in the book are not rigid principles, but rather ideas that can be integrated into a designer's thinking, ready to be revisited and tested over time. Even experienced designers can find new discoveries within its pages and gain fresh perspectives on their own work.

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