



Editorial & News

Employment

Community

People

Firms

Blogs

Forum

Work Updates

Academia

About

Shop

Login / Join

University of Tennessee CoAD = MLA Student | Cameron Rodman

All things Landscape.

Peter Walker Interview: Modern Design Part 1 of 2

By **CameronRRodman** | Jan 17, '14 4:19 PM EST

11

0

1

Follow

Peter Walker has been reinventing himself as a designer for the past 40 years. A current partner at PWP Landscape Architecture, Walker has become known for his Minimalist design flair, relationship to the Modern style, and numerous additional achievements. One thing which has remained consistent throughout these years is Walker's appreciation for art. His understanding of Minimalist and Modern design language through his academic studies, private collecting, and professional practice have positioned him and his team at PWPLA as an authority on the execution of these two styles.



I approached PWPLA before Mr. Walker's visit to The University of Tennessee and asked if he and I could discuss his views on Modernism and Minimalism within landscape architecture today. For the interview I set out a list of questions which I thought would help designers better understand the Modern and Minimalist styles in landscape architecture. I also hoped to get a response from Mr. Walker about the appropriateness and relevance of Modern and Minimalist styles for today's culture. The conversation that ensued helped reframe my understanding of these styles and the deeper issues under my questioning.

(*The following interview is not in transcript form but rather a mixing of guided thoughts and ideas as presented by Mr. Walker and edited by myself. First, Walker repositions understanding Modern landscape architecture design as something which cannot be fully realized at this point in time. He then



Architect Jobs Visualizer

Get a better look at the kind of projects you could be working on.

[Subscribe to this Blog](#)

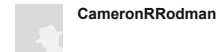
ABOUT THIS BLOG

I currently maintain a blog which features monthly firm interviews about their firm and specific projects in the Knoxville or near Knoxville area. Readers can also find information on photography, current trends in representation, or even social equality issues.

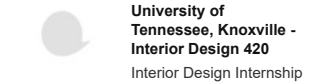
AFFILIATED WITH:



AUTHORED BY:



OTHER BLOGS AFFILIATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE - KNOXVILLE:



[View all](#)

RECENT ENTRIES

DEBASING DESIGN
Mar 27 '15

Submit

Share/Follow



Editorial & News

Employment

Community

People

Firms

Blogs

Forum

Work Updates

Academia

About

Shop

Login / Join

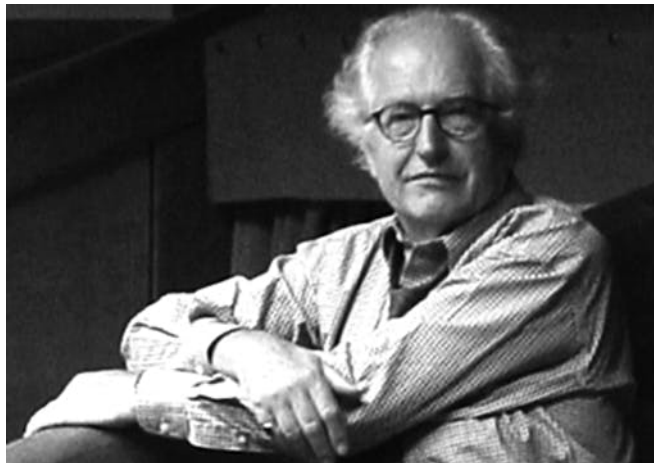
discusses his ideas on style and how style develops. Finally, he provides examples within his own work of modern/minimalist style and where these ideals have come from.)

History and Understanding Style

Mr. Walker began our discussion by first saying that much of what we read regarding modernism in landscape architecture is 'typically not scholarly conclusions,' but rather 'personal reactions' by individuals who are not historians. **"That doesn't mean we can't learn more"** from these writings. The lack of writing on modernism in landscape architecture is a unique problem to examine. One of the major reasons for this is our proximity to the timeframe in which Modern design was most widely exercised.

Modernism began during the late 1920's, stopped briefly during the Great Depression and World War II and then resumed after the war into the 1970s. "Most of the building was done in the 50s." Understanding design and style comes from a critical response about a topic. **"Our critical response is about sociology, landscape, and ecology. These did not really exist in the 50s consciousness."** Here, Walker is making a good point that much of the knowledge about modern landscape design which exists today is still developing. Those who were learning in the 1950s – 1970s "couldn't read about these (issues). Teachers didn't teach a critical response but more of a story about historical landscape."

Designers, academics, and students are placed in a unique position. **"We are kind of lost trying to put these things together ourselves. After time you find some things. But this doesn't mean that this is systematic or true. It is a chaotic process,"** Walker says. "This is a dialogue by art and cultural historians that isn't going on in landscape architecture." One such voice is English historian John Dixon Hunt. Hunt has been writing about gardens and designed landscapes since the 1970s. A more refined voice, Hunt helps to position landscape architecture in cultural and philosophical terms.



Design styles have developed throughout the ages, often times as a reaction to previous styles. Gaining a proper understanding of these styles and their genesis helps everyone gain a clearer understanding of their meaning and relevance.

Style

One of my original intents in approaching Mr. Walker was to elicit ideas about Modern design and how it can become manifest or folded into today's design vernacular. It seemed that in the works of many of the mid-century Modern landscape architects, there existed a response to current cultural trends which sometimes had roots in previous styles. Being sure to avoid a prescriptive answer, Walker said that one **"shouldn't tell other artists what they are supposed to do but encourage them to do what they think of."**

Exploring the Intersection of Design, Landscape, & Psychotherapy - An empirical based approach.

Jul 7 '14

Villa Adriana an ancient artifact in Tivoli, Italy.

Mar 17 '14

Vote for the next Student Representative to ASLA's Board of Trustees.

Feb 21 '14

Peter Walker: An influenced Modern style. Interview Pt. 2

Jan 20 '14

Peter Walker Interview: Modern Design Part 1 of 2

Jan 17 '14

Monster Park - Bomarzo Italy

Jan 4 '14

Gateway Communities: Norris, TN | UTK-MLA Studio Finals

Dec 15 '13

Landscape architecture leads the way for multiuse development!

Oct 24 '13

Foothills Parkway for the 2016 centennial!

Oct 19 '13

UTK's Phi Mu Sorority House gets a fresh start from Landscape Designer Brandon Orrick.

Sep 26 '13

The 9/11 memorial. Understanding Peter Walker's inspiration.

Sep 23 '13

Gatlinburg Streetscaping and Underground Utilities Generate Economic Growth and Provide a Unifying Look.

Sep 9 '13

[Tweets by @archinectjobs](#)

Submit

Share/Follow



Editorial & News

Employment

Community

People

Firms

Blogs

Forum

Work Updates

Academia

About

Shop 

Login / Join

To read the remainder of my interview, visit my website here: [PETER WALKER INTERVIEW](#)



TAGGED

[peter walker](#) [modernism](#) [minimalism](#) [landscape architecture](#)

No Comments

[Back to Top ↑](#)

POST A NEW COMMENT:

Post Comment

[Back to Entry List...](#)

 Submit

 Share/Follow



Editorial & News

Employment

Community

People

Firms

Blogs

Forum

Work Updates

Academia

About

Shop

Login / Join

University of Tennessee CoAD = MLA Student | Cameron Rodman

All things Landscape.

Peter Walker: An influenced Modern style. Interview Pt. 2

By **CameronRRodman** | Jan 20, '14 2:07 PM EST

1

0

1

Follow

-The following is the 2nd portion of my Interview with Peter Walker.-

Peter Walker's Minimalist style

In the 1950s and 1960s "two major schools existed at the time - Minimalism, an offshoot of conceptualism, and then Pop" (i.e. Andy Warhol). Walker was interested in Carl Andre and Donald Judd. "Judd and Andre were doing things out of doors with several pieces out in the landscape." **These objects went "beyond objects seen in space and gestured to big space,"** says Walker. Often, the focus was not simply about the object in and of itself. **The object was calling attention to something else.** In Carl Andre's piece "Zinc-Lead Plane" sought to call attention not to the square pattern on the flat plane but to control the space which was above the plane.



Like Kiley and many others, Walker began to collect a vocabulary about himself which could inform and shape a new design language within the landscape. Walker **"read everything about modernism and minimalism and what they (Judd) wrote. He was a very thoughtful and educated guy,"** says Walker. Walker also began to collect art in the early 1970s and has acquired an extensive collection.

The **learning process** seemed to be very experiential for Walker. A few years ago Walker was attending a history lecture at IIT. "At the time I was familiar with Mies van der Rohe. I spent three hours walking around campus and finally grasped what the architecture and landscape relationships were. More examples came to Walker through learning about how the "International style relates to minimalism, and how things are put together with scale,

Architect

Search jobs

Save your searches

Get email alerts

Subscribe to this Blog

ABOUT THIS BLOG

I currently maintain a blog which features monthly firm interviews about their firm and specific projects in the Knoxville or near Knoxville area. Readers can also find information on photography, current trends in representation, or even social equality issues.

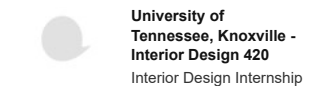
AFFILIATED WITH:



AUTHORED BY:



OTHER BLOGS AFFILIATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE - KNOXVILLE:



[View all](#)

RECENT ENTRIES

DEBASING DESIGN

Mar 27 '15

Exploring the Intersection of Design, Landscape, & Psychotherapy - An

Submit

Share/Follow



Editorial & News

Employment

Community

People

Firms

Blogs

Forum

Work Updates

Academia

About

Shop

Login / Join

proportion." These often, "came not through Frank Lloyd Wright but Corbusier and Mies."



Walker continued "trying to find what they were doing and copying to learn." Gradually he "developed a set of principles on how to make these forms and formal attitudes and some of the rules (like Mies and Judd did) and how they could relate to landscape." Referring to Dan Kiley, "he used classicism. I use minimalist art," Walker states. "Le Notre is my hero." Similarly, Kiley and Walker sought to achieve what minimalist artists do not. "Minimalists try to produce something you look at. Kiley and I are trying to build something you can get into and use."

"There are couple of ways to get at minimalism. 1. Simple concept. Take a square or sphere and just build it. Then turn it around and change or modify it. 2. Start with something more complex and complicated and reduce and get rid of what is not needed. I use both. I sometimes start on the inside and generate out or start on the outside and reduce inward." Walker uses the analogy of marble sculptures from Greco-Roman times and their ability to release what was inside to further illustrate his point.



These concepts are found in works like that of Le Notre at Parc du Chateau de Chantilly. "Great Baroque gardens are huge and simple. Chantilly by Le Notre has nothing in it. It is reductive." Walker attempts to bring this level of simplicity to his works. "Everything has to have three, four, or five uses. This is a method of reducing. **Complexity and simplicity at the same time produce tension.**" Referring to some of his own designs Walker states that "sometimes they are technologically expensive."

empirical based approach.

Jul 7 '14

Villa Adriana an ancient artifact in Tivoli, Italy.

Mar 17 '14

Vote for the next Student Representative to ASLA's Board of Trustees.

Feb 21 '14

Peter Walker: An influenced Modern style. Interview Pt. 2

Jan 20 '14

Peter Walker Interview: Modern Design Part 1 of 2

Jan 17 '14

Monster Park - Bomarzo Italy

Jan 4 '14

Gateway Communities: Norris, TN | UTK-MLA Studio Finals

Dec 15 '13

Landscape architecture leads the way for multiuse development!

Oct 24 '13

Foothills Parkway for the 2016 centennial!

Oct 19 '13

UTK's Phi Mu Sorority House gets a fresh start from Landscape Designer Brandon Orrick.

Sep 26 '13

The 9/11 memorial. Understanding Peter Walker's inspiration.

Sep 23 '13

Gatlinburg Streetscaping and Underground Utilities Generate Economic Growth and Provide a Unifying Look.

Sep 9 '13

[Tweets by @archinectjobs](#)

Submit

Share/Follow



Editorial & News

Employment

Community

People

Firms

Blogs

Forum

Work Updates

Academia

About

Shop 

Login / Join



I asked Peter if his design for the Sony Center in Berlin, Germany was one such example of the complexity and simplicity. Specifically I inquired about the cantilevered water feature which overhangs a Cineplex lobby below. "Yes. It was used in a modernistic and minimalist way. Instead of flying water in the air, it was used in a reflective way. It can sit there and do its work without a lot of electricity. It was used for its transparency and as a reflective pool. It does two jobs at once." This ability to achieve multiple things with little effort and little expense is a quality which Walker finds admirable. "Olmsted was not very expensive. Neither was Le Notre. Laurie Olin lectured on Le Notre's tricks to cheapen things. Le Notre often used very simple devices." <http://tcf.org/pioneer/oral-history/laurie-olin>

Concluding thoughts

There are a few important points which we can glean from Mr. Walker's responses and experience.

1. Modernism and Minimalism in the field of landscape architecture are styles which are not fully realized or understood. One reason for this is our proximity in time to these designs.
2. A design vocabulary is still being developed which helps us put words to and gain understanding of modernism and minimalism. (This is true in the field of landscape architecture and our sociological systems worldwide.)
3. There seems to be a lack of dialogue about these styles within the profession. While other professions are considering the topic, it would be beneficial for landscape architects and design academics to boost their involvement in the conversation.

I would like to express my appreciation to Mr. Walker for his generosity with his time and his willingness to participate in my interview. Also thanks to Janet Beagle at PWPLA for working so diligently to arrange this opportunity.

Should you have more interest in learning about Modern landscape architecture visit the below links.

<http://tcf.org/landscapes>

<http://lah.org>

<http://www.amazon.com/Modern-Landscape-Architecture-Critical-Review/dp/0262700514>

Visit PWPLA here: <http://www.pwpla.com/>

 Submit

 Share/Follow

To read the first part of this two part interview [go here](#).

View the Miller House by Mid-Century Landscape Architect [Dan Kiley HERE](#).



A Brief article about the 9/11 Memorial in NYC by PWPLA. [Read Here.](#)



Editorial & News

Employment

Community

People

Firms

Blogs

Forum

Work Updates

Academia

About

Shop

Login / Join

No Comments

[Back to Top ↑](#)

POST A NEW COMMENT:

Post Comment

[Back to Entry List...](#)

Submit

Share/Follow