

# What We're Thinking

## The Landscape Architect as Celebrity



THERE IS NO BETTER EXAMPLE of placemaking than Michelangelo's design of Rome's Piazza del Campidoglio. At the height of his fame, this commission offered Michelangelo the opportunity to build a monumental civic plaza for a major city as well as to reestablish the grandeur of Rome. His original work dates from 1536 and construction continued faithfully to his designs until the Campidoglio was completed in the 17th century. For me, one of the most striking features of the piazza, and the one that is central to its visual organization, is Michelangelo's paving design, a feature that

wasn't finished until almost four centuries after the artist's death. Visual organization requires a combination of art and engineering, aesthetics and usability. Unquestionably, Michelangelo had the kind of intellect that allowed him to deal with those left brain/right brain contrasts.

THE PIAZZA'S PAVING PATTERN is so iconic that the set designers for the 2009 Academy Awards ceremonies mimicked it on the surface of the stage, again as part of visual organization. It led the viewer's eyes around the stage and linked the events occurring on it (see photo above left).

IN RECENT YEARS, but certainly at a far less grand scale, we have been thinking about the visual organization of Replay destinations. In our case, visual organization is the interconnectedness of horizontal elements like broad plazas, narrow streets, waterfront boardwalks, paths and trails and how they relate to vertical elements such as trees, monumentation, waterfalls and, of course the buildings themselves. Visual organization is critical to a visitor's enjoyment of a place.



AS OUR TEAM has continued to work on creating the next generation of resorts – ones consistent with our guests' newfound desire to get outdoors, to get moving, to have fun, to stay healthy and spend less time in the electronic world and more in the soul-satisfying natural beauty of the real one – Replay is beginning to see landscape designers emerging as the design superstars of the next decade. Like Gehry's Bilbao, Wright's Burj Al Arab and Hadid's flowing, modernistic designs, iconic landscape architecture is beginning to change the way we think of places, whether it's an entire tropic island, a wine country vineyard retreat or a mountain lodge. Landscape architects – at least the most fearless of them – have the potential to become the next Michelangelo's of placemaking. Landscaping is no longer an add-on to a master plan, it is becoming the Eden, the organizing device that knits the man-made elements of the destination together with what Nature put there. In my opinion, it is the ultimate expression of place making. As a huge bonus, great landscaping has the potential to become a must-see attraction in its own right.



JUST TO BE CLEAR, we're not talking about fantasy landscaping like we see at Las Vegas, Atlantis or many of the themed resorts around the world. We're referring to what I call reality landscaping that makes use of indigenous plant species rather than foreign ones, which as we've seen in places like Hawaii and the Caribbean, can be invasive. Reality landscaping also makes use of local materials and longstanding topographical features. Native plants provide suitable habitats for native species of butterflies, birds, pollinators and other wildlife. Therefore, as a benefit of reality landscaping, natural relationships between the two – meaning flora and fauna – are re-established and become the foundation of authentic, flourishing ecosystems.

WHAT MAKES THESE destination landscapes so appealing, apart from the fact they satisfy one's longing to escape from the hard edges of cities, is that they appeal to all five senses in the most sensuous of ways. They are visually beautiful – they combine color and texture, tone and pattern, lightness and darkness, foreground and background in ways that triggers something philosophers call the "aesthetic emotion." It's that response to the natural world that moves us to tears or takes our breath away.



LORETO BAY IN BAJA CALIFORNIA. THE RESTORED MANGROVE ESTUARIES ONCE AGAIN SERVE AS HATCHERIES AND ROOKS FOR THE LOCAL BIRD AND FISH POPULATIONS

LANDSCAPES CAN BE HEARD – the wind rustling through the leaves of a tree. The sound of birds. Or just the calming absence of sound. They can be felt. A soft carpet of moss underfoot. The roughness of bark. The fine texture of tall, feathery ornamental grasses. Landscapes have aromas. Every species of tree, shrub and flower has its own scent. Different scents can alter your mood. Knowing this, designers are able to create distinctive “rooms” or “pockets” within the landscape.

BUT IN TERMS of creating multi-sensory experiences, it’s the concept of “edible landscapes” that intrigues us most. We’re designing resorts with orchards, vegetable and herb gardens, vineyards and even fishponds and lakes to supply the resort’s restaurants with fresh locally grown foods. In one situation, we’re even considering raising our own hops so they can be used by the resort’s pubs to create their own seasonal microbrews.



THE ANNUAL WANDERLUST FESTIVAL ON OAHU’S FABLED NORTH SHORE

WHAT ALSO INTERESTS US is a destination landscape as a setting for events, especially those that celebrate the purity of nature and the relationship of mankind to the natural world – events like live moonlit concerts, farmers’ markets and outdoor art festivals featuring nature-inspired and hand-crafted items made by local artisans. Nevada’s Burning Man is an extreme example of a landscape as a performance venue. At the more peaceful end of that spectrum is Wanderlust Oahu staged each year at Turtle Bay Resort (a Replay-managed property). Wanderlust is a yoga festival that offers visitors the opportunity to unplug from the ordinary in one of the most dramatically



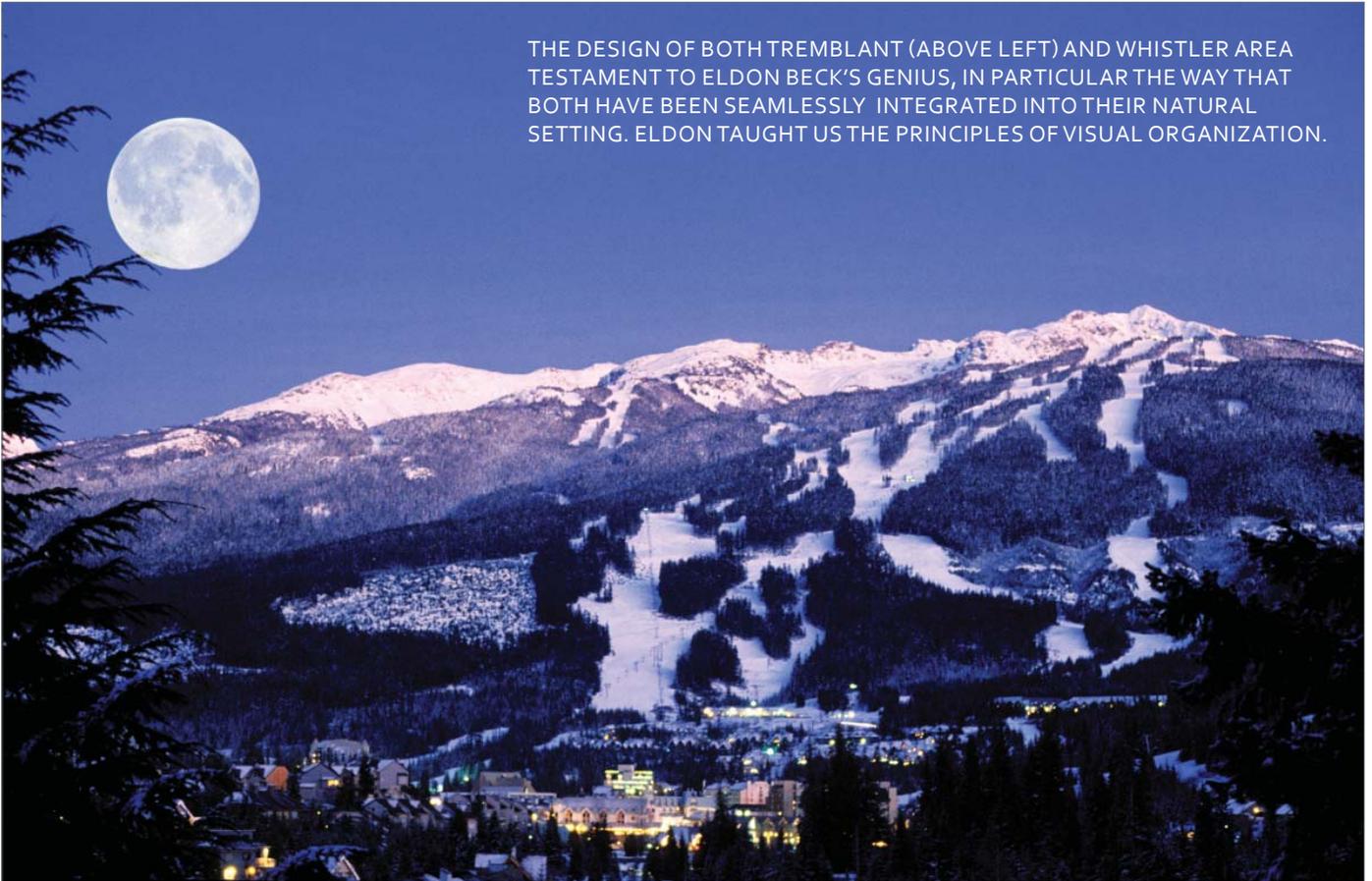
beautiful oceanfront settings in the world. Both of these events attract busy, successful professionals immersed in their work but who also refuse to “put off living.” They find renewed sense of purpose and inspiration through reconnecting with Nature. A landscape, even a small pocket park integrated with its setting, can have that kind of impact on people.

ON A MORE PRACTICAL NOTE, landscaping can be used to conceal service buildings and resort infrastructure, to provide privacy and establish areas of strong visual interest, and to transform the simple design and construction of modest buildings into softly textured and vibrantly colored objects of soothing beauty. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the harbor towns of the Caribbean Out Islands with their narrow streets, shaded plazas and flower-draped cottages and inns. It can be the landscape that makes us want to explore, to leave the beaten path, whether it’s in the lush, green tropics of St. Lucia or in downtown Seattle, which coincidentally calls itself the Emerald City. Every exploration is an enriching experience.





ONE PERSON WHO UNDERSTANDS and believes in the connection between exploration and experience is Eldon Beck, an award-winning planner and landscape architect from Mill Valley, California. We have had the pleasure of working with Eldon on a number of destination resorts and he, more than any other designer we have met, understands the concept of organizing a destination around “views, sunlight and socializing.” Eldon likens his organizational principles to a winding stream with streets, side streets, alleys and paths being the mainstream and its tributaries. He describes the edge of the stream where it meets the bank as “an ecotone where life flourishes in full diversity.” When applied to a destination, he views the edge as “the place where we find the shops, restaurants and galleries, where people slow down to interact with the built environment and with one another.” In its totality, Eldon’s analogy was and still is sheer brilliance. So much so that we produced a placemaking mini-documentary based on it.



THE DESIGN OF BOTH TREMBLANT (ABOVE LEFT) AND WHISTLER AREA TESTAMENT TO ELDON BECK’S GENIUS, IN PARTICULAR THE WAY THAT BOTH HAVE BEEN SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATED INTO THEIR NATURAL SETTING. ELDON TAUGHT US THE PRINCIPLES OF VISUAL ORGANIZATION.

AS IS THE CASE WITH “STARCHITECTURE” and designer-branded hotels (think Philippe Starck), celebrity landscaping may command a premium price from guests or owners. We now know that in many cases the cost to the developer of starchitecture makes sense in terms of increased valuations. But as with all new approaches it will take time to be able to accurately measure the worth of iconic landscaping to destination visitors and resort real estate purchasers. Ideally a destination would have both – head-turning architecture and breathtaking landscaping in gorgeous natural settings. My own instinct is that at a time when ever-increasing numbers of people seek to disconnect with cities and reconnect with nature if only for a few days or a few weeks, celebrity landscaping will quickly be seen as a must-go-there attraction, especially among travelers who want to support the preservation of the natural environment.

IN WRAPPING UP, great landscaping is a form of large-scale environmental sculpture, one that requires an understanding of both art and science. It is visual and experiential organization. It is a form of sensory engineering. It is the ultimate form of placemaking. It is a way of enticing people to be more active, to eat healthier and, at a community level, to share interests with one another. As a master planning technique it is a means of connecting disconnected elements in ways that aren't yet fully understood. Fredrick Law Olmsted, North America's first landscape architect, described it as "the genius of place". Certainly his Central Park has stood the test of time and has dramatically elevated the price of everything that surrounds it.



LIFE AT KUKUI'ULA ON THE ISLAND OF KAUAI IS ROOTED IN THIS LUXURY RESORT'S COMMUNITY FARM AND GARDEN.



In a world that's intent on living well, our destination research suggests that a need for a closer connection between the natural and the man-made exists and that a landscape architect with a Renaissance mentality has the opportunity to become a 21st century design celebrity.

If you're a landowner, a municipality, a member of government, an island or even a country that is interested in knowing our unique approach to placemaking, call or e-mail Greg Ashley or myself at Replay.

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