

A MAXIMAL PRACTICE

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The look at the past twenty-five years of Hargreaves Associates encourages a look to the field of landscape architecture – the role the firm has played and how that role could evolve into the future.

After the prevailing adoption of post-war modernism and the environmental orthodoxy of the 1970s, landscape architects, led by a group of core practitioners, sought new ways to practice, a new formulation of what landscape could offer to culture as a whole.¹ Hargreaves Associates played a significant part in the crafting of a new body of landscape ideas, breaking new ground in the mid-1980s, and developing an engaged critical practice since that time. With a handful of other landscape architects, Hargreaves Associates has shown civic leaders, the public and other designers how landscape architecture can lead thinking around issues of the environment, infrastructure and urban development, solidifying a vital functional role for the profession in these areas. This engagement with usefulness does not limit the growth of the field in this particular direction, but rather gives landscape architects an expanded role in increasingly large projects and allows for more freedom to continually renew ideas of landscape place-making. A look at the past of Hargreaves Associates sheds light on the continuing development of landscape architecture as a profession, and suggests ways to anticipate and imagine the future.

Looking back

Looking at the role of the firm within the field, the remarkable achievement of Hargreaves Associates is twofold. The first chief accomplishment of the firm is, from their earliest projects, their break with the prevailing practice of an orthodox modernism in landscape architecture.² This, coupled with their ability to synthesize environmentalism into design, allowed the firm to create a new framework for the design and experience of landscape architecture. In his early essay “Post-Modernism Looks Beyond Itself,” George Hargreaves describes the “failures” of modern landscape architecture as idealized, rigid constructions of space fixed to a stale diagram and symbolic relationship to site. Hargreaves opposed the increasingly formal qualities

of the modern landscapes that he summarized as “asymmetrically geometric and fluidly amorphous” both of which “revolve around an internal organization system, sharing with architecture and sculpture an idealized and invented space.”³ Also important to the critique of modernism, and insightful in the approach that the firm would take, is its lack of content. Hargreaves quotes art critic Kim Levin who describes the modernist sensibility: “It longed for perfection and demanded purity, clarity, order. And it denied everything else, especially the past.”⁴ For Hargreaves, modernist landscape architecture neglected both the history of the profession and the specificity of the site.

Hargreaves’ use of the word *failure* is indicative of the role of the young firm within the profession. The young firm looks to the field, finds its foundations lacking, and then, in defiance, shows everyone a new way forward. The action of the *break* is what we seek from the young firm – to challenge the status quo and inject energy leading to the creation of new frameworks that define the field. The early built projects of the firm confronted the failures of the field head-on and succeeded in changing the language – in materials, sites and concepts – of landscape practice. By pursuing “open-endedness” – abandoning the internally organized compositions of modernism, embracing of natural systems and phenomena, and working with the raw power of the large-scale sculptural site works – Hargreaves Associates created new methods and constructions of landscape architecture.⁵ The work of the firm emphatically affirmed content in landscape experience and in extracted site histories. This defined a practice that, while appropriating some techniques and ways of thinking from the environmental artists, is germane to landscape architecture as a cultural practice. The emerging structure of the firm’s designs created new ways for people to experience landscape architecture. The firm rethought and reformed the longstanding spatial typologies of park and plaza through integrated ideas of revealing large-scale natural phenomena and extractions of site histories. Hargreaves Associates’ early projects were rebellious acts, injecting vital energy into the field. These projects transformed the way that

the profession is practiced, and created new ways for landscape architecture to be experienced.

Further, through the projects they choose to work on, and their attitudes to the potential of the site, Hargreaves Associates has consistently reformed our expectations of what the landscape can achieve. Early in their work Hargreaves Associates showed a commitment to the brownfield site, remaking and transforming derelict sites into major public parks and nodes of green infrastructure as in *Byxbee Park*, *Parque do Tejo e Trancão*, *Crissy Field*, *Sydney Olympic 2000*, and *Chattanooga Renaissance Park*. Beyond the brownfield, Hargreaves Associates demonstrated new concepts in landscape architecture in projects like *Markings: Revelatory Landscapes* that explore the interrelationships of culture and ecology, and *Candlestick Park* that reconstitutes a dump site as a large-scale art informed earthwork as a public state park.

Another achievement of the firm is of duration - the development over twenty-five years of a coherent critical practice. As Corner writes in *Recovering Landscape*, “landscape architecture is not simply a reflection of culture but more an active instrument in the shaping of modern culture.”⁶ The critical practice of Hargreaves Associates is represented by a body of ideas manifested, reiterated, continually reinterpreted in built work. While the early projects broke new ground, their work since then has further explored the body of key concepts. The coherence of the themes of the firm’s work – looking to the site, engaging the open-ended processes of ecologies and local histories – has emerged over their entire history of built work and critical essays. As the work of the firm has progressed, these themes and their manifestations in design strategies have evolved.

The Evolving Practice

A common thread through all Hargreaves Associates projects is site specificity. As the work of the firm developed over time, the approach to site-specificity evolved and adapted to suit the particular project. Early projects explored a working methodology



of site specificity through repeated visits to the site to understand its potential. At *Candlestick Park* this prompted the large landform construction that organizes the entry sequence and interacts with the ephemeral experience of the wind on site. At *Byxbee Park* the design team looked to the site, again through repeated visits, to understand the landscape and find areas of prospect and points of attraction. This action of unlocking the potential of the site equates site specificity as the origin point of design. Each Hargreaves Associates project looks to the site to determine, at the most basic level, what the project is about. This kernel of content then manifests itself throughout all of the design content of the site, from overall spatial configuration to paving patterns. In this way, the work of Hargreaves Associates is not only site specific but also site-generated. This is seen most clearly at *Guadalupe River Park*, where a systematic set of conditions, working in concert with the Guadalupe River, generates the design of the park, which simultaneously functions as flood infrastructure, ecological corridor and recreational passage.

For Hargreaves Associates the concept of site-generated landscape architecture is as much rooted in the spatial structure of a place and its environmental phenomena as its historical and cultural narratives. In early work this is seen at *Plaza de César Chávez*, where the social and historical conditions of the site are manifested through the structure of the design and key

programmatic features – the fountain and festival plinths. *Crissy Field* also uses the past uses of the site as historic airfield to guide the structure and form of the park. Increasingly over time, as projects became more sophisticated in their construction and drew from layered design strategies, aspects of site specificity are integrated within the structural fabric of the park. This provides a strong foundation without site-specificity being the primary object of the design. The site construction of the *21st Century Waterfront* in Chattanooga and the *Clinton Presidential Library Park* function in this way, with site specificity forming an integral role but shared with other strategies. The *Los Angeles State Historic Park* maximizes the use of historic and cultural narratives of the site in the design of the park. In Los Angeles, this has a physical manifestation in the grain of the rail lines through the park, and is reinforced through interpretive displays. In this case, the history and culture of the site is brought to the forefront, through a diverse approach that lays out the overall structure of the park, the approach to plant material (agriculture and cultural), and the architectural structures at the park, which are structures that give information about the site history.

Spatial design strategies that were new and transformational in their early work take their place in a powerful toolkit of design strategies. For example, after incorporating sculptural landforms in early projects like *Candlestick Park* and *Byxbee Park* the firm

understands how landforms perform in the overall spatial construction of space, how they organize people and movement around them, how they are enjoyed by children and adults, and how they can opportunistically deal with problems on a site – the large mound at the contains and stabilizes the polluted fill from the site. As these functional criteria are understood, the earthworks exist not as art form but as a material of landscape architecture. For Hargreaves Associates, an earthwork can be deployed to create a number of known conditions. If a site has polluted fill, the earthwork becomes a known way that that a deficit can be turned into a strength. Landforms skillfully manipulate the movement of water on site to create functioning wetlands, while also screening the wastewater treatment facility at *Brightwater*. At *University Commons* at the University of Cincinnati, landforms provide identity for the campus while creating enclosure for the students. The firm also uses earthworks with different forms to create widely varied spatial relationships and sense of place. At *Parque do Tejo e Trancão* the earthworks express waste processes below ground. The large-scale sweeping landforms at *Candlestick Park* differ greatly from the playful serpentine mounds at *South Pointe Park*. As *Candlestick Park* uses andform to create the raw power of an unbridled nature, the landforms at *South Pointe Park* explore enjoyment while also providing access to ocean and bay views and the roof of the pavilion.

Another major evolution in the work of Hargreaves Associates is the treatment of program. While early projects explored ideas of process with little program to satisfy, later projects became larger in scope and with specific programmatic goals. Spatial design strategies for program emerged at *Plaza de César Chávez*, where program is linked to the narrative history of the site. The fountain at the crossroads of the park represents the intersection of the past – the artesian wells of the Guadalupe River – and the future, the hi-tech future of Silicon Valley. At *Louisville Waterfront Park*, Hargreaves Associates worked with the idea of linking program with landscape typology, and the juxtaposition of contrasting typology/program to produce heightened relationships between landscape types and interactions between different groups of people brought together at the park. The strategy of juxtaposition is also fundamental at *Crissy Field*, where the ecological program of the salt marsh abuts a wide range of recreation spaces. Hargreaves Associates produces meaning from these strategic juxtapositions, generating moments of landscape experience each time that aspect of the park is discovered by a visitor. In recent work, the strategy of juxtaposition has evolved into a strategy of layering. The most recent work of the firm aggressively explores issues of program. These works pursue flexible structures that allow for long-term adaptability and resilience of the built work and explore how people can engage with the design. At *Discovery Green* in Houston, Hargreaves Associates creates a flexible and coherent structure that layers multiple programs across one space, maximizing the programmatic capabilities of the park.

With much of the discourse of the profession centered on the infrastructural scale, the projects of the firm that are the most often mentioned are the large-scale projects. Smaller projects, however, make up an important facet of the firm's overall practice. Site narrative, in *history*, *culture*, and *spatial volume*, is the focus of the firm's smaller projects. At *Plaza de César Chávez*, site history provided the basis for the layout and materials of the park. The firm looked to the site as the Spanish formed town square of

San Jose, as well as the influences of the agricultural traditions of the area and its technological future in Silicon Valley. The synthesis of these aspects formed the structure of the site and provided the source for its features, including the surging fountain that references both the artesian wells of the site, which marked the territory for settlement, as well as its technological future. Cultural history also forms the origin for site narrative in such projects as the *Shaw Center for the Arts* in Baton Rouge. Here, the design is produced from the nearby Mississippi River, its river flows and the spatial movement of its barge traffic. The design is a unifying landscape for the arts center, which is an unusual hybrid of arts institutions in fine art and theater. At the *Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation* in Tokyo, the ancient cultural tradition of the Zen garden was transformed spatially with influences from the culture and forms of scientific exploration. The resulting landscape creates a design narrative that speaks directly to the function of the science museum within its cultural context. The *Minneapolis Residence* communicates its design narrative through spatial volume, choreographing the movement of spaces between architecture and landscape, and also as a sequence through landscape garden rooms that prompt movement from one to the next. The volumetric design of the landscape, in conjunction with the architecture and art collection, creates the site narrative - the interaction and interconnections of those elements. At *One Island East*, narrative is created through volumetric design coupled with intricate and specific details for seating, lighting and fountains. These site narratives of history, culture and spatial volume, executed precisely, create landscape experience in the firm's smaller projects.

With projects built at a spectrum of scales from small to large to infrastructural, the firm completes a full range of practice. The work of the firm at the *University of Cincinnati* is at both the large and small scale – from the campus-wide masterplan to the specific open spaces that the masterplan envisions. In a working relationship with the University of over fifteen years, Hargreaves Associates was able to shape the overall form of the campus

and see the reciprocal relationships between the masterplan and individual open spaces as the form of the overall campus emerged. The academic goals of the University evolved as projects were built and the masterplan was periodically revised to create the campus that would support those changing goals. Over the years of Hargreaves Associates' involvement on the project, the campus transformed from a car oriented commuter university to a twenty-four hour campus that emphasizes an active, vital student life. The project shows the relationship between scales of work, with long term and large scale strategic thinking reinforced with small projects.

Looking forward – a Maximal Practice

As we look to the young firm to reinvent ways of seeing and making, we look to the established firm to produce, develop and expand. The work of Hargreaves Associates over the next twenty-five years will surely continue to explore the core issues of both the profession at large and the specificity of the firm's critical practice – creating meaning through place-making while exploring environmental process, the culture of place and art. Hargreaves Associates' methods and modes of practice will be applied to the ever-shifting conversations of our larger culture. Currently these conversations are settling around issues of sustainability. Natural disasters associated with global warming, strife over the control of oil, and a recognition of the ongoing abuse of limited natural resources has prompted a sea change in attitudes towards sustainability and their relevance beyond the fringe and well into the mainstream. Where landscape architects have expertise in land management and understanding of how a range of technologies can work in conjunction with natural processes, other professionals such as engineers, architects, and "sustainability experts" are starting to tread, as sustainability becomes a more widespread goal, as well as another business opportunity.⁷

Hargreaves Associates has always incorporated groundbreaking sustainable technology within their work, without making this



overtly the mission. It is important for the firm not to relegate a project into the exclusive territory of science and the politics of the useful. Furthermore, the firm does not prioritize an environmental analysis over the cultural history of a place. An example of this is in their proposal entitled “New Orleans: The Big Fix” (not presented in this volume) where the firm devises a system of super levees that act as green infrastructure – providing elevated park and recreational spaces while protecting lowland New Orleans from the flooding of Lake Pontchartrain.⁸ This proposal contrasts sharply with the many calls within the design community after Hurricane Katrina that suggest restoring this area to wetland. The firm found in their research for the project that the low-lying developed areas were occupied primarily by low income families. However, there was also a high percentage of home ownership, and these families wanted to return to their homes. This social factor led to the decision to create the super levees and system of green infrastructure rather than revert the area to wetland. For Hargreaves Associates, a commitment to sustainability cannot preclude the range of qualities that creates place-making. Landscape architecture has always served the classic oppositions of western culture— science and art, nature and culture, city and country – landscape architecture occupies these conflicting territories simultaneously and can use this ground to address sustainability within vibrant place-making.⁹

Hargreaves Associates occupies these opposing grounds through their strategy of juxtaposition and layering, creating a practice of the maximal. In this way, “usefulness” – whether manifested as sustainability or economic development – is embedded as a distinct layer of the project on separate but equal ground with other layers of history, culture, aesthetics, art, program and ecology. As landscape projects become more complex, this layering condenses multiple aspects into one place, creating meaning through the individual layers and their local interactions with other layers and as a whole. At *Guadalupe River Park*, distinct systems – the natural hydrological system, design interventions to influence the hydrological system, and a

recreational path system – create the total park. This strategy has been expanded upon in recent projects that create an integrated infrastructure that in turn supports multiple programs, optimizing flexibility and maximizing variety, as discussed earlier at *Discovery Green*. In that case, the park manages the range of program, uniting the experience of place with the support of the economic development goals of the city of Houston.¹⁰

In each project Hargreaves Associates looks for the performance potential of a landscape – what is the most that the landscape can do? These landscapes provide essential services for people that enrich quality of life. This is the practice of the *maximal*, developing landscapes whose structures incorporate utility and design elements. It is through this strategy that sustainability can be fully integrated with powerful landscape experience. Hargreaves Associates has worked on several large-scale green infrastructure projects that show the potential of large-scale sustainable landscapes. Projects like *Guadalupe River Park* and *Louisville Waterfront Park*, where the park surfaces are able to withstand massive flooding and protect the developed areas at higher elevations, are early examples of how landscape architecture can create sustainable urban infrastructure. At the *Sydney Olympics 2000*, the firm cleaned a brownfield site through the opportunity of the international event. At *Acuario Xochimilco* in Mexico City, Hargreaves Associates is currently integrating neighborhood waste infrastructure within the ecological and recreational structure of the overall park. The *London Olympics 2012 Park* is designed both for the Games and to transform into a permanent linear green infrastructure for East London. The *New Orleans: Reinventing the Crescent* project creates a continuous linear open space from an inaccessible industrial riverfront, with the goal of catalyzing development for the struggling city.

Hargreaves Associates incorporates green infrastructure while creating vibrant landscape experience. While their early work that emphasizes open-ended process may seem to indicate

a natural flow with the systems approach of the landscape urbanists and Hargreaves Associates has indeed pursued a systems and operational approach to crafting landscape, the firm has always maintained the designer’s hand in the design of the park, resisting the notion that ecological systems will take care of everything as the “tyrannies of ubiquitous process,” a surrender not only of control, but of any intentionality of place making.¹¹ In the competition for the *Orange County Great Park* an overall ecological framework is balanced with flexible phasing, dependent on the changing needs of the community as the park develops. This negotiation between process and design, science and art characterizes Hargreaves Associates’ practice – work that engages process and natural systems while still asserting the hand of the designer. Hargreaves Associates holds fast to art, to the impulse and human desire to create and to make choices rather than leave things to chance. The firm seeks to reconcile open-ended process with intentionality.

The landscapes of Hargreaves Associates have a powerful character – vibrant places that are deeply embedded with functionality. This is both a result and a strategy, a clear intention at the outset of any project and an idea of what constitutes an engaging, potent landscape. These multivalent and layered works have resonance within distinct communities – the general public, and its many smaller user groups that enjoy the park in a myriad of ways, and the planners, cities and private interests that look to the park to promote the growth and success of cities and regions. While there is a timeless aspect to the formulation of vital landscapes with functionality, as Olmsted’s large parks clearly fit in to this model, for Hargreaves Associates the attention to these concepts has formed a specific practice of contemporary landscape architecture. The idea of landscape as animated designed space with embedded functionality has led the firm to create projects incorporating ever-increasing kinds of program, infrastructure and cultural meanings in new and subtle ways.



Within this model the firm inherently looks to the future. George Hargreaves describes the design techniques of the firm as systematic strategies to create *legibility*, *durability* and *longevity*, or put simply, “the things you do on the way to create projects that last generations.”¹² The concepts of legibility, durability and longevity encompass a wide range of fundamental issues in landscape architecture, from the content in social, cultural and environmental aspects of projects to new types of partnerships to build and maintain parks, to an increasingly global impact of today’s practices. The firm is currently working on several large park projects that will leave a lasting impact

on their cities – the *London Olympics 2012* which after Games mode will anchor the revitalization of communities along the River Lea in East London, *Acuario Xochimilco* in Mexico City, *New Orleans: Reinventing the Crescent* and the *Los Angeles State Historic Park*, which activates a reengagement with the LA River in downtown. With an accrued knowledge of twenty-five years of practice and a continued dedication to dynamic place-making and bold form, the firm looks to the future to create vibrant landscape experience with an enduring impact on cities and regions.