100 YEARS
100 LANDSCAPE DESIGNS

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INTRODUCTION

100 Years, 100 Landscape Designs is a continuation of the experiment I started with 100 Years, 100 Buildings. Like that book, this volume presents one hundred international projects completed in the past hundred years—one per year from 1917 to 2016. With each project accessible to the public, the goal is to present a list of one hundred must-visit places that span one hundred years and trace the evolution of various types of landscape designs. With the experience from my previous book, I knew the selection would balance icons and obscure gems with much in between, all the while giving me the opportunity to present important projects that did not meet the criteria of 100 Years, 100 Buildings. It would be possible to include some landscape-oriented projects from the first book, but instead of repeating them I reference them in the text, where appropriate, and in the timeline.

As with buildings, my taste in landscape designs veers toward the modern. Although modern building caught on fairly quickly after being espoused by like-minded Europeans in the 1920s, modern landscape architecture took longer to establish itself. This delay can be attributed to the fact that buildings can be whitewashed in order to appear simple and mechanistic, but the main materials of landscapes—plants—are inherently complex and not pared down so easily. Further, modern architecture early on ascribed itself a role in addressing social issues through new forms, while landscape architecture was already concerned with social problems in the nineteenth century, yet in a Romantic style that persisted well into the next century. It wasn’t until after World War II when prosperity and exuberance embraced modern landscape design that it became an important part of contemporary culture. My point here is that while 100 Years, 100 Buildings traced the evolution of modern buildings exclusively, the projects in this book encompass traditional designs that are nevertheless significant and worth visiting.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Being able to experience a landscape directly was one of the objective criteria I used in selecting the projects, although while all are publicly accessible, many places do charge admission fees. Other objective criteria included the fairly obvious facts that the projects are extant and are primarily exterior spaces. Since my previous book looks at structures that enclose interior spaces, 100 Years, 100 Landscape
Gardening and painting are two artistic fields that are often found to be synergistic. With the earth as the canvas and plants and flowers as paints, a garden can be like a living painting in the mind of a painter. Jardin Majorelle, named for its creator, French painter Jacques Majorelle (1886–1962) exudes this marriage of painting and nature through its combination of exotic vegetation and colorful surfaces.

The only son of furniture designer and École de Nancy founder Louis Majorelle, whose designs were rooted in natural forms, Jacques was brought up with a fascination for nature, particularly plant forms. He studied architecture and painting, but in 1917, unable to serve in World War I due to health issues, he visited Morocco and fell in love with Marrakech. The “Ochre City” served as his home base for exploring the rest of the country and from 1923, when he bought a 4-acre (1.6-hectare) plot on the border of a palm grove, until near his last days it would be his permanent home. On a trip to the Atlas Mountains he was enamored with the Berber tribes, who painted parts of their houses an eye-catching cobalt blue. Back in Marrakech he built a house and studio designed by Paul Sinoir that was inspired by the Berber towers, its walls covered with a paint color that came to be known as Majorelle blue. Majorelle planted the garden with plants and trees collected from his travels and treated the garden’s hard surfaces with the same painterly attention as the house and studio. He opened his creation to the public in 1947 and in 1980 Yves Saint-Laurent and Pierre Bergé, who shared Majorelle’s love of Morocco, bought it and then maintained and expanded on his vision.

Visitors to Jardin Majorelle encounter a garden only about half the size it was in Majorelle’s day, but one that is dense with cacti, bamboo, and other plantings from the tenures of both owners. Bright-red paths lined with Majorelle-blue planters wind throughout the planted areas that are maintained by a system of irrigation canals rooted in traditional Moroccan techniques. Water is also found in a tile fountain near the entrance, a lily pool, and a fountain fronting the house and studio. These elements reiterate the garden’s oasis-like character in the desert city, as well as the infiltration of color in nearly every surface of the painter’s garden.
Landscape architecture in the past one hundred years was not full of many firsts. Much of the groundbreaking work happened in previous centuries, but as cities grew—and grew taller—in the last century, the firsts concentrated there as open spaces were created in ever-more unique settings. Although San Francisco ripped up its Union Square to tuck a parking garage below it in 1942, Pittsburgh’s Mellon Square can boast of being the first modern garden built over a parking garage.

Well before the plaza opened to the public in October 1955, the public space was badly needed. The “Golden Triangle,” as the once industrial land between the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers became known, had only one public space for 150 years. As “Steel City” transitioned to a downtown with banks and businesses beginning in the first half of the twentieth century, city leaders saw the soot that came with the steel as a barrier to luring new residents. So following World War II they embarked upon the three-decade-long “Pittsburgh Renaissance” to make the city more attractive for businesses and their employees, starting with the demolition of industrial buildings at the tip of the triangle of Point State Park. Tiny in comparison, Mellon Square was an integral part of the half-billion-dollar plan, since it provided a 1.3-acre (.5-hectare) block of green space in the middle of downtown.

Architecture firm Mitchell and Ritchey designed the six-level parking garage, while the eponymous landscape architecture firm of brothers John O. Simonds (1913–2005) and Philip O. Simonds (1916–1995) designed the plaza. John was the brother responsible for the design, and from the beginning he sketched a design with a central fountain. Over time he refined the plan and the details of the fountain’s bronze basins, the surrounding planters, and the paving. The distinctive three-color terrazzo paving was a response to comments from Sarah Mellon, who wanted a pattern like St. Mark’s in Venice, not rectangles. Triangles worked for John, since he had placed the entrances at the corners and this implied diagonal movement across the plaza.

Given this was the first building of a modern garden with trees and fountains above a parking garage, technical problems arose not long after completion. Combined with neglect and the plaza’s ongoing popularity, Mellon Square underwent a pair of restorations, most recently in 2013, when some questionable flourishes from the 1987 restoration were undone, returning the plaza closer to its original state.
Even though landscapes have long been a setting for artworks—going back at least to Roman Emperor Hadrian’s second-century villa in Tivoli—the first modern sculpture park dates to around 1960 when two important ones were being created: the Kröller-Müller Museum (see 1961) in the Netherlands and the Storm King Art Center in New York’s Hudson River valley. The latter, a U.S. counterpart to the European sculpture park, is notable for its dramatic setting but also its size, both of the grounds (now 500 acres [202 hectares]) and the artworks on display.

Ralph E. Ogden, who, along with H. Peter Stern, owned Star Expansion Company in Mountainville, New York, was inspired by the Kröller-Müller Museum’s efforts to complete its sculpture park and donated 200 acres (81 hectares) in adjacent New Windsor for the creation of Storm King Art Center. The nonprofit institution opened to the public in 1960, using the Normandy-style château at its center to display local Hudson River School paintings—a commendable but not particularly ambitious start. That changed with Ogden’s purchase of thirteen sculptures by David Smith in 1966, an act that pushed the landscape toward its current role as a setting for art. The Smith sculptures are grouped around the old building that now serves as Storm King’s museum building; it hosts temporary, small-scale exhibitions and sits on the site’s high point overlooking the rolling landscape extending to the north and south, where huge sculptures—most in steel—by Alexander Calder, Alexander Liberman, Mark di Suvero, and other familiar names make Smith’s important works look domestic in size.

The man responsible for Storm King’s landscape design was landscape architect William Rutherford (1917–2005), who worked on the site for twenty-five years. He dealt with grading, drainage, and other practical concerns, but his greatest task was to shape the landscape into a coherent whole. He also worked directly with artists to ensure that their sculptures found a synergy with the landscape. As Storm King grew over time to its present size, so did its landscape evolve: a gravel pit was filled, native-grass meadows were planted, a swamp was drained, formal gardens were removed, thick vegetation was thinned, and artworks were added. The whole is an informal landscape that invites wandering rather than a prescribed route. Its size ensures repeated visits are needed to take it all in.
A visit to the sculpture garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum in the center of the Netherlands is a visit to nature. The garden’s more than 175 sculptures sit on 62 acres (25 hectares), but the museum and garden are found in the middle of the Hoge Veluwe National Park, which covers about 21 square miles (55 square kilometers). If the park is considered “the green heart of the Netherlands,” then the sculpture garden is its soul.

The museum opened in 1938 when Helene Kröller-Müller, with her husband, Anton Kröller, realized a design by Henry van de Velde for displaying some of her nearly 11,500 artworks, mainly paintings, including a sizable collection of works by Vincent van Gogh. They owned the surrounding land that became the national park (it is still private and therefore requires an admission fee to enter) and donated their artworks and building to the Netherlands. In the early 1950s, the OKW (today’s Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science) proposed a sculpture garden to sit east of the museum by a grove of trees. Museum director A. M. Hammacher hired landscape architect J. T. P. Bijhouwer (1898–1974) to lay out fifty to one hundred sculptures over the coming years, but delays meant that the sculpture garden only partially opened in 1961, with forty-three sculptures in place; a second phase followed soon after in 1965. Most unique about Bijhouwer’s approach is that it was more of a strategic plan than a concrete design. Sculptures were placed informally within the meadows and forest, pulling people through the landscape with almost constant surprises. Renovations by Evert van Straaten in the 1970s (around the same time architect Wim Quist expanded the museum) and the firm West 8 this century followed Bijhouwer’s path, so the experience of the sculpture garden is one of discovering art in a natural environment.

There are plenty of notable works among the many sculptures. Highlights include Marta Pan’s Floating sculpture, Otterlo, specially commissioned for the 1961 opening, which literally floats in a pond close to the museum, and serves as an important transition between the museum and garden; Jean Dubuffet’s playful Jardin d’e-mail; and Richard Serra’s Spin out, for Robert Smithson, which sits in a clearing in the trees. Two pavilions, one by Aldo van Eyck and one by Gerrit Rietveld, were rebuilt on the sculpture garden, giving the museum space for small sculptures and adding architecture to the types of works on display.
Land art was a movement that arose from two very American conditions: the open spaces of the West and New York’s gallery scene. New York’s arts patronage, most notably gallerist Virginia Dwan, enabled artists Robert Smithson (1938–1973), his wife, Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer, and Walter De Maria to construct permanent artworks in the 1970s in Utah, Nevada, and New Mexico—far away from the city’s galleries. Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* is one of the earliest and most significant examples of artists breaking outside of the gallery’s confines to confront the natural landscape.

After the Land art baby steps of documenting industrial monuments in his photographic essay “The Monuments of Passaic” and crafting sculptures out of dirt and mirrors, Smithson launched into finding a location that would become his famous *Spiral Jetty*. Intrigued by a phenomenon he heard about in which lake water turned red from certain microbes, the artist found such a spot on the northern end of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Further inspired by the spiral structure of salt crystals and a legend that the lake was connected to the ocean via an underground channel that would reveal itself as a whirlpool, Smithson envisioned an artwork that would capture “a spinning sensation without movement.”

In April 1970, after finding a contractor daring enough to work with him, Smithson started work on building *Spiral Jetty*, a counterclockwise spiral measuring 1,500 feet (457 meters) long, 15 feet (4.5 meters) wide made from 6,650 tons of basalt rock. Amazingly, it took only three weeks to complete. Smithson walked in and out of the lake to stake out the path of the spiral, and the contractor, Bob Phillips, and his crew followed with truckload after truckload of rock stacked to Smithson’s specifications. Phillips asserted that the rocks had to be mounded like a dike, but the artist didn’t budge in his demand for a relatively flat surface with the rocks slightly higher along the edges. This profile means people who go to the effort to find *Spiral Jetty* can traverse it to its center, but it also means that the artwork was submerged for most of its nearly fifty-year existence. In 2002, three years after Smithson’s estate donated the artwork to the Dia Art Foundation, the salt-encrusted jetty reappeared, enticing another generation of fans of Land art to the shores of the Great Salt Lake and revealing the environmental predicament that has seen the lake depleted to near-record levels.
At one point in his long career, New York architect Philip Johnson (1906–2005) asserted that his best work was in Texas. Most likely he was referring to a few of his buildings—Republic Bank Center and Pennzoil Place in Houston, and the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth—but also to the Fort Worth Water Gardens, a 4-acre (1.6-hectare) cooling oasis in the middle of downtown.

Just as the family of publisher Amon G. Carter was Johnson’s client on the museum, the Amon Carter Foundation hired the architect and his partner at the time, John Burgee (1933–), to design an outdoor space behind the Fort Worth Convention Center, which was completed in 1968. The convention center and park were two elements in an effort to undo the decades of blight that gave the area the name Hell’s Half Acre.

Johnson and Burgee treated the public space as a miniature landscape of mountains, forests, and lakes in three materials: tan-colored concrete, trees (oak, gingko, and gum), and water. Diagonal paths lead from the corners of the irregularly shaped site to the central, polygonal plaza; here, the sounds of the city are buffered by the trees, the artificial mountains, and the sound of water. Befitting the place’s name, the three fountains are the main draw, each with a different character, yet each articulated with diagonal lines, a contrast to Johnson’s rectilinear sculpture garden at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (see 1953). The Sunken Lake, hidden by high walls, is a calm oasis where the pool is rung by rows of cypress trees. The aptly named Dancing Pool features about forty jets shooting water up to create a misty plane above the surface of the water. Most dramatic is the Active Pool, which features water cascading down progressively smaller tiers and fed through twenty narrow channels to a frothy central basin. The designers provided some steps running diagonally to the waterfall for those brave and foolhardy enough to descend to the bottom. Sadly, four people died in the deep pool in June 2004—thirty years after the water gardens were completed and gifted to the city—leading to renovations that raised the floor of the basin to make the pool shallower. Even with warning signs and a memorial for the victims installed, it is still popular to walk the steps to the bottom, where a sense of danger remains.
Postmodern architecture, which came to the fore in the late 1970s and early 1980s, was primarily about buildings rather than landscapes. This makes sense, since its defining trait was the ironic use of historical architectural elements like columns and pediments. But the most successful piece of postmodern architecture, in terms of ironic exuberance and polarizing aesthetics, was a landscape: the fountain Charles Moore (1925–1993) designed for the small Italian community in New Orleans.

Moore, who was working with Urban Innovations Group (UIG) at the time, gained the commission after coming in second place for a competition to design the larger Piazza d’Italia project, which would have included buildings around it. Very little beyond the fountain was built, so what people have encountered since its completion in 1978 is only a partial Piazza d’Italia, open to a parking lot on one side rather than in the middle of what should have become a bustling commercial development. Nevertheless, for Moore it was a particularly exciting project, his first chance to direct the design of a fountain since his doctoral dissertation on water and architecture, and since assisting Lawrence Halprin on a fountain installed at Lovejoy Plaza in Portland, Oregon, in 1965.

Moore and his UIG colleagues approached the design by thinking of the most Italian things possible and coming up with the map of Italy and the Roman orders: Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite. Alternating lines of slate and light granite crumple up from the circular basin to form the Italian “boot”; Sicily is at the center with a rostrum for St. Joseph’s Day festivities, since most of the Italian population of New Orleans traces its heritage to the island. The five orders are arranged along walls and colonnades that follow the circular plan, increasing in complexity from Tuscan near the center to what Moore called the “delicatessen order” at the rear (it frames an opening to a restaurant that never came to be). Moore’s creativity with water was rampant: it flows from the “lakes” and “rivers” of the map of Italy into the basin, and a ring of falling water forms the Tuscan columns, to name just two uses. Neon lights round out the colorful postmodern design features of the Piazza d’Italia, which was restored in 2004, a sign that criticism of the design has given way to a reappraisal of the fountain’s brazen postmodern manners.
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