LISTENING TO:

Landscape Architects

WHAT DO THEY THINK OF ARCHITECTS?

By Andrea O. Dean
Illustrations by Lebbeus Woods for ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

Often collaborators and consultants, sometimes competitors and star-crossed partners, landscape architects and architects bring different perspectives to their relationships with each other. To help bridge the gap that often separates architects from other design and construction professionals, ARCHITECTURAL RECORD is beginning a series of occasional articles in which voices from related disciplines will be given a forum. Earlier this summer RECORD assembled a panel of landscape architects at AIA Headquarters in Washington, D.C., to tell us what was on their minds. The participants were Dennis Carmichael (EDAW), Colin Franklin (Andropogon), Peter Walker (Peter Walker and Partners/Martha Schwartz), Michael Van Valkenburgh (Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates), William Roberts (Wallace Roberts & Todd), Patricia O'Donnell (Landscapes), Joseph Lalli (EDSA), and James van Sweden (Oehme, van Sweden & Associates). The moderator was RECORD editor in chief Robert A. Ivy. Next month, we listen to interior designers.
ost architects think they understand landscape architecture and its practitioners, but the picture conveyed by the panel we convened was of a profession only slightly more familiar than, let's say, entomology or constitutional law. How many architects would guess, to start with compellingly down-to-earth matters, that entry-level landscape architects tend to earn more than their counterparts in architecture? That landscape architects suffer less severely from economic fluctuations and cycles? That their responsibilities and opportunities are expanding just as those of architects seem to be narrowing?

And how many architects would acknowledge this: "Not only are we landscape architects not nervous about dealing with chaos, but sometimes it is what we like to play with best, because we are trained to understand large natural patterns and to recognize that chaos has an order or pattern to it that we can comprehend. Architects are a little nervous about chaos; they like order."

Or how about this one: "We're much more comfortable than architects in so-called controversial projects that require working with committees and various groups, filtering information and giving the client several possible intelligent decisions. Architects want to give clients an answer and quickly."

These statements were made by Dennis Carmichael, ASLA, a vice president of the Alexandria, Virginia, office of EDAW. With 415 employees in 15 offices, it is an unusually large landscape architecture firm, but Carmichael's belief that he and his colleagues tend to take a more holistic, less linear approach than architects was a pervading theme of the roundtable. Listen, for example, to Colin Franklin, who was trained as an architect and then became a founding partner of the 20-person, ecologically oriented landscape firm of Andropogon in Philadelphia. "Architects working on complicated buildings want to narrow a problem down. We have difficulties with that. Landscape architects like best to ask questions, expand the boundaries, find out how the whole thing works. It's a Sherlock Holmes thing. We are much more comfortable than architects in open-ended collaborative situations. Architects traditionally haven't been trained that way."

"I didn't know you did all that."

Landscape architects think they know far more about how architects work than architects know about them. Peter Walker, FASLA, a partner in the 30-person Berkeley, California, firm of Peter Walker and Partners/Martha Schwartz, Inc. and the chair of the University of California at Berkeley's landscape architecture department, told the panel what happens when he visits his architect clients every three or four years. "I give them a slide show to remind them of the breadth of services that we offer. Their response is always, 'I didn't know you did all that.'" What he tells his clients is that his firm will not only site a building, but evaluate the forces that may shape or affect its form, such as existing urban design configurations and wind and water flow patterns. He tells them that he has planned and designed plazas, courtyards, recreation systems, and parks; built and rebuilt roads and trails; planned new communities and towns; restored wetlands; reclaimed toxic landfills and extraction areas. Most of the panelists could present a similar list.

If time permits, Walker will remind his client that in founding the profession of landscape architecture in America, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., lashed together the science of farming or husbandry (now called ecology), civil engineering (now referred to as infrastructure), and sociology. The last, Walker stresses, was the generator of most of Olmsted's work, including his winning 1858 competition entry, submitted with Calvert Vaux, for New York City's Central Park. That commission transformed Olmsted into a man of purpose, obsessed with the democratic ideal of making nature accessible to all.

In the process of popularizing the idea of public parks in America and designing brilliant examples, Olmsted defined a profession that often deals with large sites posing complex environmental, social, and cultural problems, a profession that is predisposed to view even small sites as part of a larger context. A conceptual approach to design, while optional in architecture, is essential in landscape architecture.
Joseph L. Lalli, FASLA, the managing partner of EDSA, a Fort Lauderdale- and Orlando-based firm of 80 landscape architects and planners that has worked on hotels, new communities, and public-sector projects, explained, "We seem to have an ability to look at a bigger kind of thing. A lot of architects get so down to looking at a micro scale it doesn't seem to fit into the whole, the bigger picture."

Less fashion and style, say landscape architects

Another obvious difference in the way the two design professions approach their work, the panel members asserted, is that landscape architects are more attuned than architects to conceiving a project as an experience rather than as an orthogonal design. James van Sweden, FASLA, president of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, a 21-person practice in Washington, D.C., stressed that fashion and style play a smaller role in landscape architecture and that while "most architectural work will never look better than on the day it is completed, that of the landscape designer's will never look worse." Van Sweden's firm specializes in private gardens and urban parks and recently created the landscape design for the winning entry in the World War II memorial competition, the controversial final major addition to the capital city's Mall.

Landscapes undergo substantial change; they are ephemeral, which has its remunerative advantages, noted Patricia O'Donnell, FASLA, a principal of Landscapes, a five-person practice that specializes in preserving historic landscapes and has offices in Westport, Connecticut, and Charlotte, Vermont. O'Donnell includes in her reports to clients recommended plans for future upkeep and renewal. Overall, landscape architects claim high rates of repeat clients, Lalli said that EDSA has up to 85 percent repeat clients, while Carmichael placed EDAW's percentage at up to 50 percent. William H. Roberts, FASLA, a founding partner of the 110-person interdisciplinary firm of Wallace Roberts & Todd of Philadelphia, San Francisco, San Diego, and Coral Gables, Florida, reported a rate of up to 65 percent for his firm.

But by far the most striking characteristic of landscape architecture is the breadth of its domain. And while the influence and jurisdiction of architects has narrowed in recent years, in line with tighter budgets and the increasing authority of construction managers, the scope of landscape architects' work has expanded. (Architects, though, are trying to regain control over more of the building process. The AIA, for example, has launched an initiative called "Practice and Prosperity," aimed at expanding architects' scope of services from predesign to postoccupancy.)

From designing Central Park, which started as an improvement project on Manhattan's outskirts, landscape architects have broadened their sights to reclaim huge industrial areas and create plans for entire counties, new communities, campuses, ports, airports. "There's a lot of work out there," said Michael Van Valkenburgh, FASLA, the chair from 1990 to 1996 of the Harvard Graduate School of Design's landscape architecture program and founder of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, a nine-person practice in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Van Valkenburgh regrets that the most talented young people tend to be attracted to architecture, largely because they know nearly nothing about landscape architecture.

In fact, three of the panelists began as architects — van Sweden, Franklin, and Roberts — and subsequently became attracted to landscape architecture by the opportunities it afford to tackle complex and significant problems. Franklin explained that his firm has worked on ports and airports in Third World countries where the wrong site plan "might have obliterated 10 small towns or flattened a mountain. As a landscape architect-planner who knows what will happen to the environment," he said, you become central. "You may not get to do nice design work, but you're having an important impact."

WHILE MOST ARCHITECTURE WILL NEVER LOOK BETTER THAN ON THE DAY IT IS COMPLETED, MOST LANDSCAPE DESIGN WILL NEVER LOOK WORSE.
Propelling the profession's expansion during the last 25 years have been community planning, an increase in regulations, and the environmental movement. Legislation that established the Environmental Protection Agency in 1969 "created a mandate for environmental investiga-

tion, which was a terrific source of work. It legitimized us," said Carmichael. Panel members and their practices did not reflect basic changes that environmental legislation and regulations brought to the profession, O'Donnell pointed out. Today, landscape architects who work for public agencies constitute 20 percent of the profession. By contrast, only 3.8 percent of architects are in public service. Some landscape architects work for agencies that build, such as parks and public works departments, the National Park Service being the largest single U.S. employer of landscape architects. Franklin explained that the nature of design work for public agencies has also changed: the job of some landscape architects, for example, consists entirely of consensus-building for planning and design decisions.

Some don't design at all until another breed of landscape architect doesn't design at all, but works for government agencies on such policy issues as land-use planning, watershed maintenance, and forest management. Many of the schools, said Walker, give the Master of Landscape Architecture degree in environmental planning, a discipline concerned with regional plans, national preserves, and the like. Unlike city planning, environmental planning generates no buildings and, being protectionist, "often resists construction," said Walker. To which Robert Ivy responded rhetorically, "Isn't that a defining difference between landscape architects and architects?"

You would assume that a significant degree of disunity exists in a profession embracing ecologists who don't concern themselves with construction and designers who make a profession of it. So it appeared during the early part of the session; talk centered on "schisms" and "dichotomies." But Van Valkenburgh shifted the discussion's direction, saying, "You don't have to make a choice here. The programmatic imperative of being environmentally sensitive has become a kind of foundering ground for landscape architecture, just as functionalism was a part of the Modernist movement." The conversation increasingly described a profession of exaggerated divisions important mainly to academics. The panelists turned their attention to their shared interests and characteristics, their working relationships with architects, and present and future trends in their own profession.

Common to all landscape architects is an environmental ethic, Roberts spoke of a moral calling: "I think that in the field there is..."
a commonality of taking the high road, having a moral integrity toward managing resources and saving the planet.” At this point Van Valkenburgh interjected, “The sappiness that comes along with that is a real problem in the profession. I think it makes a lot of confusion to get preachy, as we do, about what we do.”

Turning to the profession’s relationship with architects, the panelists described a love-hate affair. “The love part is when a collaboration is a true, honest-to-God respectful one. The hate part is when we’re not treated with consideration but brought in after the building design and the site plan are complete to shrub it up,” said Carmichael. The panel agreed that productive alliances improve the work of both professions, but none denied the existence of landmines for landscape professionals who work as subcontractors for architects. Franklin, who called his firm’s relationships with architects “very good but always fraught,” remembered instances of “being brought into a project as the landscape architect/environmentalist or the landscape architect/sustainable designer on a team to have our ideas totally subverted by a budget whose sole focus is the building.” It was stating the obvious, he said, to assert that most architects don’t regard landscaping as a high priority.

**Different mindset than architects**

Nor does it help that architects and landscape architects tend to approach projects with different mindsets, the landscape architect being more inclined to give at least as much weight to process as to product. (Architects, however, might argue this point.) There is also a matter of ethics: the way the panel saw it, the architect represents the client, while the landscape architect feels an obligation to also represent the interests of the environment, the community, and even the culture. “You often stand right where the warring factions come together on positions that are not easily resolved, and no amount of roundtabling is going to resolve them,” said Walker.

“MY RELATIONSHIP TO ARCHITECTURE IS LESS SATISFYING THAN MY RELATIONSHIP TO CERTAIN ARCHITECTS,” STATES WALKER.

He further recalled that the Modern movement brought with it a belief in interdisciplinary collaboration, and he noted that Roberts’ firm, founded by two landscape architects (Roberts and Ian McHarg) and two architects (David Wallace and Thomas Todd), is an unusually successful example of interdisciplinary teamwork. Wallace Roberts & Todd is, however, an exception, according to the panel participants, as are true collaborations between the professions. “My relationship to architecture is less satisfying than my relationship to certain architects,” Walker concluded.

Lalli observed that collaboration required more than mere participation on a team: “It means you’re an active contributor to all parts of the design process.” O’Donnell later mentioned in a follow-up telephone interview that she routinely gives architects with whom she will work a list of conditions for collaboration. The list demands, among other things, that her firm be privy to all communication with the client and that she be allowed to review all documentation that is presented to the client in time to react and suggest changes. Often forgotten, she said, is that architects and landscape architects have an important common interest: the “growing of good clients. We all know from our own experience that when our peers give us awards it’s because we had a good client.” And the more enlightened the clients become, the better the chances of also enlightening the public about design.

The surest way for problems of subcontracting is panelist mentioned it as the preferred arrangement. Although direct contracts remain the exception, they are becoming the norm for designers who have gained broad renown (Walker, Van Valkenburgh), have strong track records in large-scale commercial or institutional work (Lalli’s EDSA, Carmichael’s EDAW, Roberts’ WRT, and Oehme, van Sweden), or have sought-after specialties (O’Donnell’s preservation emphasis, Franklin’s expertise in ecological design and planning).

There are, further, at least two types of projects for which clients are increasingly hiring landscape architects directly with the expectation that they will lead the team: projects that reclaim environmentally damaged sites, and controversial projects, such as wetlands restoration and community planning projects, that require building a consensus, a process requiring an open-ended approach, rather than a simple choice between two alternatives.
What about sprawl?

How ingrained such an approach is among landscape architects became apparent when Ivy asked the panelists to talk about issues that concerned them. What, for instance, was their stance on sprawl? The panelists agreed that, yes, sprawl and the automobile culture are deplorable, but suggested that the phenomenon must be understood in all its contradictions. The cause of sprawl is not always what you are led to believe, one speaker pointed out. In Los Angeles, for instance, sprawl followed the path not of roads but of railroad tracks that once covered the area. He also pointed out that freeways might not be all bad, since they join widely scattered people with common interests into a community of sorts. The approach was to ask questions; solutions or a stance might emerge later.

Of course, solutions didn’t emerge in this meeting, but Lalli, whose firm has planned and designed new residential communities in the United States and abroad, observed that the preferred model now tends to be a mix of the so-called New Urbanism—with its town centers and walkable distances—and the more open conventional suburb. Carmichael asserted that “developers have learned that good design equals return on investment. Rather than bulldozing a site into submission, they now try to celebrate its intrinsic qualities.”

Another issue that is of great concern to both landscape architects and architects, said Van Valkenburgh, is that “the 99.999 percent of the world out there, which none of us does work for, consists of a Balkanized public of warring interest groups. The majority knows little and cares less about design and wants every-

thing Lite, dumbed-down.” No one disagreed, but most panelists saw another side of the argument. Carmichael, for instance, pointed out that a worldwide reaction against homogenized, synthetic culture has set in. His firm and Lalli’s are among several that have made a specialty of planning and designing large commercial and residential projects that attempt to retrieve the individuality of a region and culture. Franklin finds that often his role in a project is “just to reveal a group’s place to them.” Similarly, along with our culture’s tendency to oversimplify complex issues, there exists an opposite tendency, said (text continues on page 160)
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Franklin: a recognition that important issues and problems are growing more complex.

This recognition is opening doors for American landscape architects abroad. He explained, “What’s peculiarly American about our landscape architecture is that it regards what the community wants, what the environment needs, and what the client wants and needs as being part of a big puzzle that has to be fitted together. Such an attitude—together with their environmental ethic, their business savvy, and the ability to start and stop on a dime—makes American landscape firms popular with overseas clients.

What other trends did the panelists observe? Nearly all expressed confidence about their future. Projects are becoming larger, more significant, and more interesting. Walker was, perhaps, the least optimistic, being convinced that the public is turning away from nature.

“Environmentalism is like a lot of things that are popular, like family values,” he said. “The media whips up a frenzy, but I don’t see effective demand in terms of increased budgets.”

What about the fact that 85 percent of Americans describe themselves as environmentalists? Van Valkenburgh was convinced that the environment’s increasing degradation is heightening the public’s appreciation of nature. Indeed, said Roberts, “landscape architecture’s environmental ethic is pervasive all over the world.”

O’Donnell added that one of the hallmarks of the 1990s is a new-clashed concern about sustainability: “We’re much more interested than we were in the 1980s with being good stewards, with preserving limited natural resources.”

Not always definable in traditional terms

The world economy, the panelists pointed out, is also creating new ways of working. Franklin explained that often “the work I do isn’t definable in any traditional terms.” His firm sometimes finds itself participating in two- and three-day charrettes, sponsored by an international client who gathers the outstanding experts from seemingly unrelated disciplines to define and solve problems posed by proposed large-scale development on a particular site. The exercise is far more efficient, Franklin observed, than the traditional planning process that stretches over a two-to-five-year period and is often obsolete upon completion. Many international companies, he added, now expect new facilities to be planned, designed, and operational in six months’ time.

In surveying future markets, the panelists noted that the reclamation of industrial sites and of deteriorated neighborhoods, toxic sites, extraction areas, and the like will play an increasingly prominent role. And that work, Walker said, “tends to be centering, because it uses land that is already serviced, attracts the educated (research centers, the entertainment industry), and has a cultural component. It’s not just land and housing. I think in our world we do have opposite, mindlessly opposite trends.” A trend that worries Van Valkenburgh is the paucity of highly experienced and talented fellow practitioners. “We’re like a pancake that’s too thin,” he said.

Are landscape architects heading in the same general direction as architects? Perhaps you won’t be surprised to hear this panel said “yes” but/and “no.” Walker saw divergent paths: “Because we didn’t come from the same place, we’re essentially different in our orientation and outlook.”

Roberts agreed: “Regrettably, architects have that ridiculous race for fashion and style; landscape architects are not always driven by having to do something god-damned different.” But a more optimistic Carmichael had the last word: “The underlying concerns of both our professions are good design and an environmental ethic.”

To provide a better picture of how the landscape architecture profession works, we take a closer look at four of the designers who participated in the RECORD roundtable. These profiles show some of the diversity in backgrounds and approaches found in the profession.

WILLIAM H. ROBERTS: Taking the interdisciplinary path

Trained as an architect, Roberts “drifted into landscape architecture,” he says, because it seemed more interesting than the construction details he labored over as a novice designer. “When you’re revitalizing urban front districts or planning a new university campus,” he says, “design encompasses cultural, environmental, behavioral, and political issues.” He liked the broad opportunities.

Wallace Roberts & Todd, a 100-person international firm employing all manner of designers, planners, and engineers, took root in 1963 when Roberts and three other young University of Pennsylvania faculty members—landscape architect Ian McHarg and architects David Wallace, FAIA, and Thomas Todd, FAIA—submitted a competition-winning master plan for Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. They founded their practice on the then-progressive idea of integrating the building professions into interdisciplinary teams, which Roberts still regards as the firm’s greatest strength. Instead of incorporating small groups of engineers, environmental planners, landscape designers, and interior designers within a large architecture practice, do large A/E firms, WRT built up a collaborative practice in several equally strong disciplines.

The firm’s interdisciplinary nature and the fact that it has offices on both coasts (Pennsylvania, Florida, and California), provides a flexibility that buffers it from the effects of recession. After benefiting from the office and residential construction boom of the 1980s, for example, WRT was able, during the recession of the early 1990s, to shift its emphasis to planning and landscape architecture and to public, institutional, and overseas clients.

But the firm’s broad capabilities also blur its identity. When Roberts tells a client how diverse his firm’s services are, the response is often, “So you’re an architect.” As a result, WRT frequently seeks clients looking for planning services and promotes its architectural abilities only after having proved itself as a planner. “We can be like a chameleon,” says Roberts.

About 70 percent of the time the firm works directly for the client, an arrangement Roberts finds preferable to working for an architect. “If we’re responsible for all the hydroelectric studies, all the environmental studies, site planning, signage, and up to the walls of the building, the client inevitably gets better services, because we are free to challenge the architect if there are wasteful solutions.” He also finds joint ventures with architects problematic, because “it’s better for one person to be in charge.”

MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH: Finding a context for Modernism

One of landscape architecture’s most respected firms, Van Valkenburgh Associates of Cambridge, Massachusetts, has become known for blending the Modern movement’s essentially placeless language with more contextual responses, for developing a strongly sculptural approach, and for tackling the needs of degraded contemporary landscapes. Among the (continued on page 162)
recently completed projects of the 15-year-old, 13-person firm are the 85-
acre Mill Race Park in Columbus, Indiana; the master plan and design for the
renovation of Harvard Yard for Harvard University; the 4.5-acre expan-
sion of the Walker Art Center Sculpture Garden for the Minneapolis Park
and Recreation Board; and the master plan for the Iowa Center for the Arts at
the University of Iowa, Ames.

“Sometimes we work for architects, sometimes they work for us,”
explains Van Valkenburgh. He prefers collaborating with “architects who are
pushing the limits of the envelope.” The designer credits his firm’s success to
“working 50 percent harder to be 10 percent better, to misquote Venturi.”

As a teacher and as the former chair of the Harvard Graduate School of
Design’s landscape architecture program from 1990 until 1996, Van
Valkenburgh worries about several current educational trends. One is that
many landscape architecture programs are run by people who may have
Ph.Ds but little or no practice experience. He also laments a tendency
among some state university programs “to try to quantify and therefore
obscure the importance of design.”

Disagreeing with those who believe that design should be taught as a
cooperative discipline, Van Valkenburgh finds that it’s hard enough for stu-
dents to master their own discipline. He also believes that teaching has
veered too far in the direction of stressing process over product. “I don’t
think we should return to empty formalism, but we should place more
emphasis on assessing the quality of the projects we make as a conse-
quence of all this environmental and other input,” he says.

Most important, however, Van Valkenburgh is convinced that in order to
prepare designers for an uncertain future the schools should be educating
them as generalists. He says, “I went through one of those BLA programs—
itis a good one—where they tried to figure out the five or six things that
people were doing in offices and then built studios around campus planning
or playground design, vest-pocket parks, whatever. There are larger ideas
you need to have in design.”

PATRICIA O’DONNELL:
Where heritage and environment intersect
In 1982, when she founded Landscapes, a five-person firm that specializes
in preservation, O’Donnell held two master’s degrees: one in urban planning
(with a preservation emphasis), the other in landscape architecture (with a
concentration in applied behavioral research). The services her firm offers
range from preservation planning, design, construction, and interpretation
and management of historic sites and museums; through rehabilitation, eco-
logical restoration, and maintenance planning for urban parks; to community
preservation and interpretive planning. Her clients include municipal and
recognition departments, not-for-profit citizen groups, the National Park
Service, museum boards, and institution managers and personnel.

O’Donnell, who also founded the National Association of Omlsted Parks
in 1970, has restored Omlsted parks in Rochester, New York, Louisville, Ken-
tucky, and Baltimore. She says that in the 1970s “environmental values
cycled back to intersect with cultural ones. You had this intersection
between heritage and environment.” One of the challenges of her work in
historic preservation is reconciling the often-conflicting requirements of
nature and culture. How do you approach a problem, for instance, in which
the structural integrity of a historic building, beloved in part for its vine-cov-
ered facades, is threatened by those same vines?

Another requirement of particular importance to O’Donnell’s work is
“thinking of resources in a broader time frame,” she says. “You have to make

sure what you plan and design can be sustained, can be managed five
years from now, 10 years from now.” Her reports to clients, consequently,
include proposals for future maintenance and rehabilitation, and her rela-
tionships with clients tend to be long-lasting.

Because Landscapes’ clients tend to be public agencies and institu-
tions, much of its work consists of trying to reconcile the interests of diverse
groups and committees. This consensus-building process, O’Donnell
explains, is a large part of every landscape architect’s work. To the surprise
of many architects, perhaps, it is also O’Donnell’s favorite type of work.

COLIN FRANKLIN:
Understanding social and natural systems
Franklin was introduced to landscape architecture in the early 1960s as
a young British architect working in Islamabad, Pakistan, on a Modernist
plan that seemed to him unrelated to the local topography and culture.
After earning an MLA from the University of Pennsylvania, Franklin and his
landscape architect wife, Carol, joined with Leslie and Rolf Sauer—a
scientist and an architect/landscape architect/planner, respectively—to
found Andropogon in 1975. (The firm takes its name from the American
field grass that is the first to colonize and heal the landscape after it
is disrupted.)

“We were interested in taking Ian McHarg’s philosophy of combining
natural science with landscape architecture and making a new discipline,
what he called ecological design,” says Franklin. The partners hoped to
expand the meaning of collaboration, allowing all team members to
stretch beyond their own disciplines and become “much more open and
fluid in their approach,” says Franklin.

Andropogon’s completed work includes a master plan for part of New
York’s Jamaica Bay, which serves as a “refueling stopover” along the
Atlantic Flyway for 326 species of birds. In Denver, the firm created a nat-
ural drainage system for the Stapleton Development Plan, integrating site
rainage and storm-water management into a continuous system of
swales, wetlands, and ponds. And the firm is now on a design team that is
working to create a model for the U.S. Navy’s nationwide program of reno-
vating bases according to sound environmental principles.

“We’re very good technically in understanding social and natural
systems,” says Franklin. “We go in with the idea of a participatory process
and tend to work well with institutions. Some of the best things that
happen on the job come from people who don’t like something—commit-
tees, neighbors.”

Work in the Third World comprises a small but significant proportion
of the 20-person firm’s workload. Franklin maintains it allows him “to see
in sharper focus problems we have here.” His experience in flood-plagued
Sri Lanka, for example, underscored the reality of climate change and the
need for regional sustainable planning. The firm’s new roadways for the
capital city of Colombo will incorporate storm-water management via a
porous paving material that absorbs runoff. “We’re thinking of the road as
a major instrument in the environmental mix, getting synergies from
putting roads in the right places,” Franklin explains.

His overseas work has also involved him in new working methods
that are collapsing the planning process from years into days and blurring
distinctions between professions. Franklin sees these changes as healthy,
making an analogy to the teamwork that developed the atom bomb in the
1940s at Los Alamos, New Mexico. He says, “I’m fascinated by the way
these different scientists, all emigres, were pulled together and had to find
new ways of working. This is what America does.”