

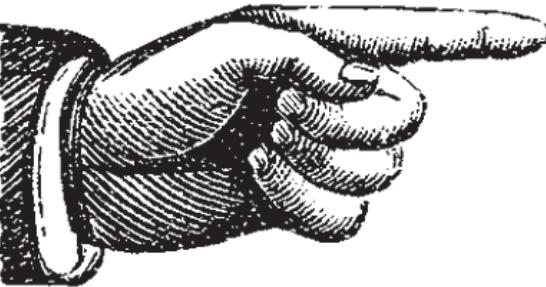
Geeta Wahi Dua

# IN PARTNERSHIP



I would like to start with the premise that meaningful landscapes can be designed by a person who has the sensitivity, sound knowledge and technical expertise to take forward ideas of engaging with nature in a specific context and in a sensitive way by addressing natural processes and related aspects of a site, its cultural context and finally the design brief. We have a few such noteworthy examples in the country such as the *India International Centre* designed by Joseph Allen Stein, *Osho Teerth* by Shunyo Foundation and recent example of ecological restoration of *Rao Jodha Park* by Pradip Krishen.

Today, the specialization of landscape architecture is much more recognized in professional circles with an impressive body of landscape projects being designed and executed over the last few decades. More architects than before are now open to the idea of working with landscape architects. They feel that involvement of a good landscape professional brings a natural synergy to the site that enhances the environment, imparting a sense of place and uniqueness to it. In a survey of 47 landscape practices that was conducted by LA Journal two years back, 89% of the client profile of landscape practices comprised of architects. It is indeed a healthy trend.



In the recent years however, during my professional association with architects for projects, I have come across certain negative undercurrents of this association which are important to address, before we can hope for such collaborations to evolve further for projects at much wider and complex scales.

In India, in an architecture project of any scale, the client regards the architect as the project leader. The architect is the face of the whole team of technical consultants that are involved in the project. It has been a trend from the start that architect quotes an overall fee taking into account the professional fees of all the technical consultants involved. This may be the best arrangement for the client as it allows a simpler way of administratively dealing with the project.

On the other hand, it can create complex situations for the other consultants, both in terms of their fee structure and the chain of command and responsibilities in the project. All the consultants, including landscape architects, should be treated on equal grounds. It is always healthy to have full transparency in such associations, with client knowing the role, scope of work and professional fee of all consultants who are engaged for the project. At this point

the client may choose to pay the consultants directly, or through the team leader. The architect may still be the main coordinator, refer consultants for their scope of work, mutually decide on final concepts and drawings, and finally supervise and coordinate all work on site. This transparency and direct link between the client and consultants will better clarify the technical responsibilities, and increase competence. It will also improve the fee scales of all consultants and give respectability to each discipline including landscape practice, establishing a more equitable decision making structure. For landscape architects, it is high time that we have our standard scales for professional fee for all the regions in India so that there are no discrepancies on this account.

The landscape architect usually is the only consultant in a design team whose nature of work overlaps with that of the architect as both address spatial character, rather than engineering. The landscape architects association with the site from the start, and design abilities provides him or her authoritative role as an overall coordinator of the site plan. The architect may have a landscape vision mainly for functions and aesthetics of open areas that needs to be addressed and detailed out whereas the landscapes architect, at times, may

view the site through a much narrower lens without looking at the bigger picture. Unless there is a combined and shared vision for the landscape design of the site from the very start, there are bound to be conflicts and even wars of ego in the collaboration.

The educational background of a landscape architect in India, with an undergraduate degree of architecture, may create a sense of insecurity in the mind of architect, especially, when working with landscape professional that is also practicing architecture. At times, the landscape architect, who is initially invited for landscape consultancy of a project, ends up designing the architecture as well the landscape with the services of the original architect being terminated. So they have been blamed of being project stealers. There are many such instances where the client has preferred to have a single professional office delivering both architecture and landscape consultancies instead of dealing with two different ones. As a result of such experiences, many architects design the outdoor spaces and other components of landscape themselves without taking in consideration important ecological and sustainability aspects resulting in poor examples of landscape without any value.



The full role of a landscape architect is yet to be clearly understood by a majority of architecture professionals in India. There are many instances where a landscape architect is engaged by an architect for the whole project, but whose services are terminated after developing conceptual plans, which are later developed in-house by the architect. This only illustrates the lack of understanding of the skills a landscape architect brings to the table, not the least of which is knowledge of natural systems and the role he plays in site development.

In large scale projects, landscape architects play a very important role in the process of getting statutory approvals, clearances and rating certifications. They collaborate in the preparation of technical documentation, giving presentations to the competent authorities such as MOEF, DUAC, or local municipalities during these processes of approvals. At times, their involvement is mandatory. Given this scenario, there are cases where the landscape professionals have been engaged for the project and then are excluded from the remainder of the project after getting

necessary clearances. Such situations create great mistrust in the minds of professionals, who are reluctant to then work with fellow professionals. They lose the sense of respect and companionship for them.

In large projects, a landscape architect ideally develops a comprehensive master plan in collaboration with the architect and other consultants that addresses amongst other factors, ecology, natural character, and use of open spaces. In many cases however, the landscape architect is given an already conceived site plan by the architect or team leader with the brief of designing the open areas. Collaborating with a landscape architect at the initial stage of the project will pave the way for a much more sustainable site plan addressing a diverse range of natural and design factors, and in doing so will add a lot of value to the development.

One has to work on any kind of relationship and association. Many young landscape professionals in India enjoy their intellectual discussions and working with architects. Senior landscape architects in the country fondly

remember their association of working with architect colleagues in many landmark projects. I am happy to share at this point LA Journal enjoys a strong subscriber base amongst architects. Moreover, architects more than landscape architects have placed orders for the newly released book, *Landscape Architecture in India, A Reader*. I hope that we are able to continue and further this long lasting camaraderie with fellow architects, so that we are able to share and learn much more together.

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