



HIRSHHORN PLAZA SIGNIFICANCE EVALUATION  
100% Draft

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden  
Independence Avenue and 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

I.	Introduction .....	3
II.	Purpose and Methodology .....	6
III.	Context.....	9
IV.	Chronology of Design and Construction .....	35
V.	Evaluation of the Integrity of the 1993 Plaza .....	67
VI.	Evaluation of the Significance of the Hirshhorn Museum Plaza .....	82
VII.	Bibliography .....	84

## ***I. INTRODUCTION***

The artworks of the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden derive from the founding collection of entrepreneur, financier, philanthropist, and art collector Joseph H. Hirshhorn (1899-1981), as well as pieces subsequently bequeathed, purchased, or loaned to the museum. The Hirshhorn has always featured a rotating display of sculpture, exhibited not only within the museum but also on the Plaza beneath and surrounding the building and in the Sculpture Garden to the north, across Jefferson Drive. The drum-shaped museum building, Plaza, and Sculpture Garden were all designed by architect Gordon Bunshaft (1909-1990) and his firm, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), to help fulfill the museum's mission, as established by Congress in 1966, as a national institution for the display, study, and preservation of modern and contemporary art. Both the Plaza and Sculpture Garden as originally built featured high walls constructed of concrete with the same granite aggregate as the museum, itself a monumental form. Exposed aggregate concrete also covered the Plaza surface as originally built, which doubled as the roof of the lower level of the museum. Stabilized gravel initially surfaced the Sculpture Garden's terraces, and the minimal plantings and monochromatic surfaces of both the sculpture garden and the plaza, along with their dispersed arrangement of sculptures, called to mind aspects of Japanese Zen gardens.

Certain shortcomings with the Plaza and Sculpture Garden as constructed quickly became apparent, and the Smithsonian Institution altered both in order address the deficiencies and to make the spaces accessible to all visitors. In the case of the Sculpture Garden, the problems included excessive heat in the summer due to a lack of shade and its heat-trapping depressed location, as well as a lack of accessibility, difficulty for strollers and wheelchairs caused by the gravel surfaces, dissatisfaction with the minimalist expression of its features, overlapping sculpture viewpoints, and the lack of a coherent circulation system. In 1977, the Smithsonian Institution hired Washington, D.C., landscape architect Lester Collins (1914-1993) to devise a concept for the redesign of the garden, select plants, and prepare preliminary drawings for alterations within Bunshaft's original framework. When the design was ready to move to the construction phase, the Smithsonian hired E/A Design Group of Washington, D.C., to prepare architectural and technical drawings and to supervise construction. SI's Office of Horticulture was responsible for selecting specimens to be planted in the garden and to oversee their installation. The Sculpture Garden reopened in 1981.

On the Plaza, the exposed aggregate paving deteriorated quickly, and the loosened stones caused pedestrian hazards. The concrete paving panels also cracked and tipped, partly due to a lack of sufficient expansion joints, adding to potential tripping problems as visitors approached the museum or wandered among the outdoor art. In addition, the deteriorating concrete and efforts to repair it led to rainwater leaking into the below-grade spaces, which had the potential to damage the works on display or stored there in addition to causing multiple maintenance issues. After investigating several avenues to address the problems, the Smithsonian hired landscape architect James R. Urban (b. 1948) of Annapolis, Maryland, in 1985 to head a team that included architects, engineers, and lighting and other

specialists, to resolve the Plaza's deficiencies. These included deterioration of the Plaza surface, water leaking into the museum's lower level, the inhospitable aspects of the existing Plaza, and overlapping views of the sculpture on display.

Refinement and implementation of the Urban team's initial concepts for the Plaza's redesign were delayed by the acquisition of thousands of additional works of art bequeathed to the museum by Joseph Hirshhorn upon his death in 1981. The bequest doubled the museum's collections, resulting in an immediate need to reevaluate the Hirshhorn's space requirements. Among the possibilities considered by The Architects Collaborative (TAC), of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the Space Use Master Plan it developed for the Hirshhorn in the late 1980s was construction of additional buildings on the Plaza, as well as additional space beneath it. When those ideas were eventually dropped, Urban and a new team were hired to implement his concept design for the Plaza's rehabilitation. The landscape architect consulted with Hirshhorn staff on their needs and ideas for the space and refined his concept between 1989 and 1991 while the plans were reviewed by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office (DCSHPO). CFA wielded an important influence on the final expression of the Plaza when it determined that its pavement must be constructed of granite, rather than concrete. After agency approvals were received – and funding found for the granite paving that the CFA required – construction was able to begin, in late 1991. The Plaza officially reopened in June 1993. Urban's design took the form of a circular, granite-paved surface around the original fountain, beneath the museum's drum, and 20 feet beyond its outer walls (it had been 16 feet in the 1985 plan), where the paving gave way to outdoor rooms with raised planted areas divided by low walls and aerial hedges of pleached crabapple trees and other plantings. Expanses of granite paving also led from breaches in the perimeter walls on Independence Avenue and Jefferson Drive to the Hirshhorn entrance. Urban based the Plaza's paving pattern on Bunshaft's original design and the radial geometry of its outdoor rooms on the architect's circular museum building, while varying the size of the rooms to provide adequate space for the display of monumental sculpture. The raised planting beds and the carefully developed soil mixture and drainage system Urban adopted were necessary elements of a landscape that was essentially a green roof. The design provided an accessible entrance at the northwest corner of the Plaza, which brought visitors to perimeter walks along the Plaza walls and thence to the outdoor rooms and paved central space. The Plaza is a display area for the Hirshhorn Museum, as well as a Smithsonian Garden.

The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, already determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, is documented in a draft National Register nomination, which determined that the complex was significant under National Register Criterion A as representative of the evolution of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Mall in the third quarter of the twentieth century and as an important part of the growth of the Smithsonian during this period. The nomination also found the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden to be significant under Criterion C "as an outstanding example of Modernist architecture by a recognized master in the field." The nomination states that the "building, plaza, and sculpture garden" were significant for their "evocation of the rigorous Modernism for which SOM,



and Bunshaft in particular, is celebrated.”<sup>1</sup> Further, it concluded that the Hirshhorn satisfied National Register Criteria Consideration G, displaying the exceptional importance needed to place properties less than fifty years of age on the register. The draft nomination posited 1974 as the period of significance for the property. The draft nomination also concluded that the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden maintained its integrity to the period of significance despite the changes to the Sculpture Garden and Plaza. In the case of both, the concrete walls continued to define the outdoor spaces in the formal manner that Bunshaft intended, and both continued to function as outdoor spaces for the display of sculpture, as was intended in the original Bunshaft-SOM scheme. The sunken position of the Sculpture Garden continued as originally designed, along with the intimate scale of the space in relation to the National Mall. The relationship of the Plaza to the drum of the museum was called out as an element that maintained the integrity of the Bunshaft design.<sup>2</sup> In discussing the merits of the later alterations, the draft nomination deemed them to be compatible with the resource as initially constructed, but not able to “rise to the same level of significance as the original Bunshaft design.”<sup>3</sup>

In 2019, as part of consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act on the proposed Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden Revitalization, the National Capital Planning Commission, the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office, and consulting parties requested that the Smithsonian Institution reevaluate the period of significance employed in the draft National Register nomination. The parties asked that the Smithsonian review the potential significance of alterations to the Sculpture Garden by Collins. A study of the space completed in 2020 concluded that Collins’s contributions to the Sculpture Garden and his stature among landscape architects of his generation justified alteration of the period of significance to “1974, 1981.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> EHT Traceries, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (draft), U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, January 30, 2018, 8:11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 8:13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson & Associates, Inc., and Laura L. Knott, Historical Landscape Architect, “Hirshhorn Museum Sculpture Garden, Significance and Integrity Report,” prepared for the Smithsonian Institution, Architectural History and Historic Preservation Division, February 18, 2020, 96.

## **II. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the current report is to re-evaluate the potential historical significance and integrity of the plaza modifications designed by James Urban to determine if the period of significance for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden should be revised to include the 1993 Plaza design. The report reviews the nature and extent of Urban's redesign and the contributions of relevant subconsultants and Smithsonian offices to analyze the redesign as compared to other similar works of the period, to review the landscape architect's career and achievements, and to determine whether extending the period of significance is warranted. Important to the study is analysis of the Plaza under Criteria Consideration G of the National Register of Historic Places, which provides standards for judging the significance of properties less than fifty years old. When the draft National Register nomination for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is revised, it will take into account the findings of the Plaza study.

To accomplish this task, the consultant team first reviewed documentation compiled by the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation (AHHP). These documents included the draft National Register nomination for the Hirshhorn, the South Mall Campus Cultural Landscape Report (February 2018), documents and images gathered by AHHP from the Smithsonian Archives and Smithsonian Gardens, and photographs taken in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, collected from Smithsonian Gardens files. Smithsonian Gardens also provided a current plant list for the Plaza, allowing for a comparison of its initial vegetation against current conditions. In addition, AHHP provided notes taken during a 2019 telephone conversation with James Urban by landscape architect Faye Harwell and arranged a series of interviews with current and former Smithsonian employees, several of whom were involved in the implementation of Urban's design. (See transcripts in the appendices to this study.)

The consultant team undertook additional research in the Smithsonian Archives and in Smithsonian Gardens records to develop a more complete picture of several aspects of the Plaza's history, including the process that led to the hiring of Urban and his team for what was labeled a "Renovation and Landscaping" project, the obstacles and delays to its construction, the evolution of the design, the Plaza's construction and plantings, and changes made to the Plaza after initial construction. The research was accomplished both at the archives itself and through its internet portal. The team reviewed images available from internet resources, such as Getty Images, Wikimedia Commons, and websites of relevant architects, landscape architects, and design magazines. The minutes and transcripts of relevant meetings of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts were reviewed to understand CFA's stance on the issue of materials for paving the redesigned Plaza.

Research into Urban's career was facilitated by an interview with the landscape architect himself, conducted by members of the Hirshhorn and Smithsonian staff as part of this project. The team also reached out to the American Society of Landscape Architects, which elected Urban to its Council of Fellows and from which he has received several awards. Unfortunately, although a summary of his nomination to the Council of Fellows was found online, the

nomination itself seems not to have survived the transition from paper to digital media. The Smithsonian Archives, however, contains materials related to the limited competition held to select a design team for the project. Urban's 1985 submission included a detailed report of his education and previous work experience, designed to demonstrate his qualifications for the job. As a living landscape architect with several works dating to the last decade, Urban's career has not yet been the subject of substantial review by historians of landscape architecture. As both a landscape designer and a researcher and writer devoted to successful methods of planting and sustaining vegetation in the urban environment, his individual works and publications have been reviewed in newspapers and journals. These reviews have been used to develop an understanding of Urban's career, as has his website, <https://www.jamesurban.net>.

In order to understand the potential significance of the 1993 Plaza, the consultants undertook research to create context for the discussion of the Plaza redesign and Urban's career, the influences on his evolution as a landscape architect, and the outdoor display of sculpture in a museum context. An important current in landscape architecture during Urban's professional career has been the Urban Forestry Movement, which developed in response to the loss of trees in the increasingly dense development of American cities. Urban was among the leaders in adapting studies related to urban forests to landscape design and in compiling and publishing information on the topic for the use of his colleagues. Among the online sources reviewed were the Dumbarton Oaks Library and Archives, landscape journals available through JSTOR, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and regional newspapers, *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, to which Urban was a regular contributor, *Journal of Arboriculture and Urban Forestry*, and The Cultural Landscape Foundation website and publications.

Next, the team conducted fieldwork to document existing conditions on the Plaza in the summer of 2022. The fieldwork for the initial draft of the report was constrained somewhat by the replacement of the Hirshhorn's façade and related rehabilitation of the building. As a result of the fieldwork, however, the team was able to compare then-current conditions with those documented by as-built construction drawings and photographs from before and after the 1993 Plaza reopening to determine the integrity of the Urban landscape features. An understanding of the Plaza's key landscape characteristics and features was developed – both those of the original Bunshaft design and Urban's redesign. The team then developed a comparative analysis, illustrated with graphics and photographs. Using this analysis, an assessment of the integrity of Urban's design was undertaken, based on the seven aspects or qualities the National Register uses to define this concept: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The team used this analysis and the historic context evaluation as the basis for addressing the question as to whether Urban's redesign of the Plaza contributed to the significance of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. An additional site visit was conducted in the summer of 2023 to finalize a description of the Plaza's existing conditions after the façade project ended and the grounds refreshed. The additional site visit also made it possible to verify the conclusions of the earlier fieldwork. It should be noted that by the time of the second site visit, as a result of a project to upgrade the Sculpture Garden, the sculpture that had been displayed on the Plaza was removed and works of art

formerly displayed in the garden had been installed on the Plaza in their stead. Photographs used to illustrate the report may occasionally, therefore, depict the same spaces graced by different works of art.

Due to the lack of significant evaluations of Urban's career and his place in the landscape architecture and urban forestry movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the study has concluded that the 1993 Plaza cannot be said to contribute to the museum's significance and that the Plaza design does not satisfy Criterion Consideration G for a work of landscape architecture less than fifty years old. It should be noted that this conclusion is not based on any lack of aesthetic appeal, functionality, or sustainability of the design as implemented, nor on a lack of regard for its designer's work by his contemporaries. Rather, it is based on a lack of sufficient scholarly assessment of the career of a still-living practitioner of landscape architecture and arboriculture and of the Hirshhorn Plaza's place within that career. This deficiency may be rectified with time, given regard for Urban's work in spreading an understanding of the requirements of trees and other vegetation in urban settings and his use of this understanding in designed landscapes.

### III. CONTEXT

#### Outdoor Display of Sculpture in a Museum Context

The display of three-dimensional artworks in an outdoor setting “has become a customary feature at many modern art museums throughout the world,” according to Peter Reed of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. A designer’s challenge in creating such a space, he has written, “is to accommodate its role as a gallery for changing displays of modern and contemporary sculpture while creating a landscape conducive to the contemplation” of these works.<sup>5</sup> It is not a new challenge. In the history of western art, the practice goes back to at least the Renaissance and has encompassed a multiplicity of purposes. In addition to its aesthetic functions, statuary and the settings in which it was placed often expressed didactic, religious, or political ideas. Statues, whether dating from antiquity and repurposed for outdoor display or contemporary works, were often placed in such a manner as to create an iconographic narrative. The villas of prominent cardinals in Renaissance Rome, for instance, often included gardens that used ancient statuary, recovered from the city’s ruins, along with contemporary works to illustrate man’s progress from pagan to Christian beliefs.<sup>6</sup> In Chinese and Japanese cultures, the display of stones in outdoor settings began at least a century or two before sculpture gardens were established in Europe. Chinese garden makers often chose unique or unusual stones for their displays, while the Japanese preferred simpler stones and those less unusual in shape. The Japanese also placed stones in groups to provoke contemplation of the relationships between them. This practice led to the art of Zen dry gardens by the fourteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

The modern concept of outdoor display of sculpture, whether in a garden, a park, or in the immediate vicinity of a building, is usually understood as having its beginnings in the late nineteenth century when sculptural works started to shed their religious and political associations, as well as ties to specific sites. Methods of producing multiple casts of the same design were also developed, further distancing statuary from specific locations. In an influential essay published in 1979, Rosalind Krauss pointed to two sculptures by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) – *The Gates of Hell* (commissioned in 1880) and *Monument to Balzac* (commissioned in 1891) – as exemplifying this movement. Both commissions sought works for specific sites but yielded statues that were never erected in their proposed locations. In the case of *Balzac*, Rodin’s subjective interpretation of the French writer proved unsatisfactory to the Société des Gens de Lettres, a private organization that had commissioned the work. The statue thus became, in Krauss’s words, “siteless,” and in fact was not cast in Rodin’s lifetime. Today, multiple castings of *Balzac* are displayed in Europe and the Americas, including the

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Reed, “The Sculpture Garden in Modern History,” in *Peter Walker and Partners, Nasher Sculpture Center Garden*, Amidon, Jane, series editor, Knowlton School of Architecture, Source Books in Landscape Architecture, no. 3 (New York: Princeton University Press, 2006), 133.

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Lawrence and George Foy, *Music in Stone: Great Sculpture Gardens of the World* (New York: Scala Books, 1984), 9-14; Peter Reed, “The Sculpture Garden in Modern History,” 134.

<sup>7</sup> Maggie Keswick, “China”; Sir John Pilcher, Dr. Patrick Goode, Shigemaru Shimoyama, and Michael Lancaster, “Japan,” *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*, Sir Jeffrey and Susan Jellicoe, editors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 114-116, 294-295; Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (New York: Henry Abrams, 2001), 286-287.

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, reinforcing the notion that modern sculpture is “functionally placeless and largely self-referential,” essentially “nomadic.”<sup>8</sup>

Partly as a result of their disengagement from cultural references or ideological purposes, sculptural works in the twentieth century became more abstract. In addition, they were often cast independently of their sites and acquired as additions to collections of art works gathered by wealthy patrons, rather than planned for a particular setting. With sculpture no longer integral to the composition of their exhibit spaces, a new garden typology evolved in which the objects in a collection, whether owned privately or as part of a public museum, were placed in spaces created for – or in existing spaces simply used as sites of – changing displays of a variety of works.<sup>9</sup> “The installation of outdoor sculpture according to the reputation of the artist rather than that of the subject depicted,” landscape historian Elizabeth Barlow Rogers has written, “is a modernist contribution to landscape design.”<sup>10</sup>

Temporary exhibits in public parks became one avenue for the display of these collections, and some purchasers of the artworks, as well as sculptors themselves, created outdoor display areas, usually on their own property. The sculptors Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore are two twentieth-century artists who created their own outdoor exhibit areas.<sup>11</sup> Joseph H. Hirshhorn (1899-1981) displayed many of the sculptures he owned on the grounds of his home in Greenwich, Connecticut, before donating his art collection to the Smithsonian.<sup>12</sup> In the 1960s, avant-garde artists exploited the possibilities of using the landscape itself as a feature of an artwork, whether placing manmade materials in a space in order to influence its perception, as in the work of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, or manipulating the earth itself, as in Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*. Artists have also been commissioned in the pre-modern manner to design a work for a particular place. Sculptor Isamu Noguchi’s collaboration with Gordon Bunshaft at Yale’s Beinecke Library is an example.<sup>13</sup> Institutions such as the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, with their emphasis on changing displays of sculpture, for the most part still adhere to the modern practice that began in the late nineteenth century of outdoor display of “placeless” works that can be moved or rotated in and out of exhibition.

In *Art Parks: A Tour of America’s Sculpture Parks and Gardens*, Francesca Cigola, a writer and curator in New York, defines an outdoor display area as an “an open space where the landscape and works of art are designed and arranged

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<sup>8</sup>Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (Spring 1979), 34; “Auguste Rodin – *Balzac*,” Musée d’Orsay website, [https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search/commentaire/commentaire\\_id/balzac-7084.html?no\\_cache=1](https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search/commentaire/commentaire_id/balzac-7084.html?no_cache=1). The Hirshhorn’s *Balzac* stood in the Sculpture Garden until the renovation of that space began in the summer of 2023, when it was placed on the west side of the Plaza.

<sup>9</sup> Lake Douglas, “Objects in a Garden,” *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 94, no. 3 (March 2004), 82-83.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 435.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Lancaster, “Sculpture Gardens,” in *The Oxford Companion to Gardens*, Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe, editors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 506-508.

<sup>12</sup> Valerie J. Fletcher, *A Garden for Art* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 1998), 21.

<sup>13</sup> Francesca Cigola, *Art Parks: A Tour of America’s Sculpture Parks and Gardens* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 15.

to coexist.”<sup>14</sup> She defines three categories of outdoor spaces for sculpture that developed during the twentieth century: leisure spaces, collectors’ spaces, and learning spaces. Spaces in the first category are frequently referred to as sculpture parks, through which visitors walk as they view sculpture in a natural, minimally landscaped setting. Collectors’ spaces refer to collections of works placed on private property. Such collectors may be individuals, artists, or corporations, and the display space may be large or small, designed or more natural, depending on the resources and desires of the collector. Cigola defines learning spaces as museums or university grounds used for display of the institution’s collections. “The scale, urban character, and architectural nature of these spaces,” she writes, “make them true sculpture gardens that function as individual parts of larger institutions.” She cites the sculpture garden at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York as a prominent example of this learning space type.<sup>15</sup> Now known as the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, the MOMA garden helps define the type of outdoor display space against which the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza will be compared – a relatively small space in the immediate vicinity of a museum that acts as an extension of its galleries and focuses on changing displays of art. Further, the display spaces reviewed in the following discussion were chosen because they share other similarities with the Hirshhorn Plaza: they are located in urban areas and have a relatively large percentage of their surface areas covered by paving, in addition to plantings. Several of the spaces identified in the review number monumental works of sculpture among the pieces displayed, but several also include smaller works, both figurative and abstract. In the following analysis, ten outdoor sculpture display spaces in the United States of the learning space type are discussed as a context for the Hirshhorn design. Information about these spaces is contained in Table 1, along with data on the Hirshhorn Plaza.<sup>16</sup> As part of the evaluation of the potential National Register significance of the Hirshhorn Plaza, it should be noted that, of the museums reviewed in this study, only the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden has been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Cigola, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Included among the sites is the Kreeger Museum Sculpture Terrace and Sculpture Garden, although the museum did not open to the public until 1994. It is included, however, because the building was designed by Philip Johnson as a home for David Lloyd Kreeger and his wife Carmen with the expressed intention of displaying the couple’s collection of modern art and included purpose-built sculpture terraces. It was completed in 1968.

No.	Name	Location	Acres	No. of Works	Density	Designer	Date
1	Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, MOMA	New York, NY	0.5	10-15	1 per 2,178-1,452 sf	Philip Johnson, James Fanning; Zion & Breen; Yoshio Taniguchi	1953, 1964, 1984, 2004
2	Kreeger Museum Sculpture Garden	Washington, DC	5.5	15	1 per 15,972 sf	Philip Johnson	1968, 1994
3	Oakland Museum of California	Oakland, CA	0.56	10-15	1 per 2,439-1,626 sf	Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo; Dan Kiley; Geraldine Knight Scott	1969
4	Kimbell Art Museum	Fort Worth, TX	?	4-6	?	Louis I. Kahn, Harriet Pattison, George Patton, Renzo Piano	1972, 2013
5	Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza	Washington, DC	2.7	15-40	1 per 7,840-2,240 sf	Gordon Bunshaft; James Urban	1974, 1993
6	Janet and Alan Wurtzburger Sculpture Garden, Baltimore Museum of Art	Baltimore, MD	1.1	34	1 per 1,409 sf	George Patton	1980
7	Dallas Museum of Art	Dallas, TX	1.2	20	1 per 2,614 sf	Edward Larrabee Barnes, Dan Kiley	1984
8	Noguchi Museum Sculpture Garden	Long Island City, NY	0.23	15-20	1 per 664-1 per 498	Isamu Noguchi, Shoji Sadao	1985, 2004, 2008
9	Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston	Houston, TX	1.5	35	1 per 1,869 sf	Isamu Noguchi, Shoji Sadao, Johnny Steele	1986
10	Charles W. Ireland Sculpture Garden, Birmingham Museum of Art	Birmingham, AL	0.7	unknown	unknown	Warren, Knight & Davis; Edward Larrabee Barnes, Elyn Zimmerman	1959, 1965, 1967, 1974, 1980, 1993
11	Nasher Sculpture Center Garden	Dallas, TX	1.5	25	1 per 2,614 sf	Renzo Piano, Peter Walker	2003



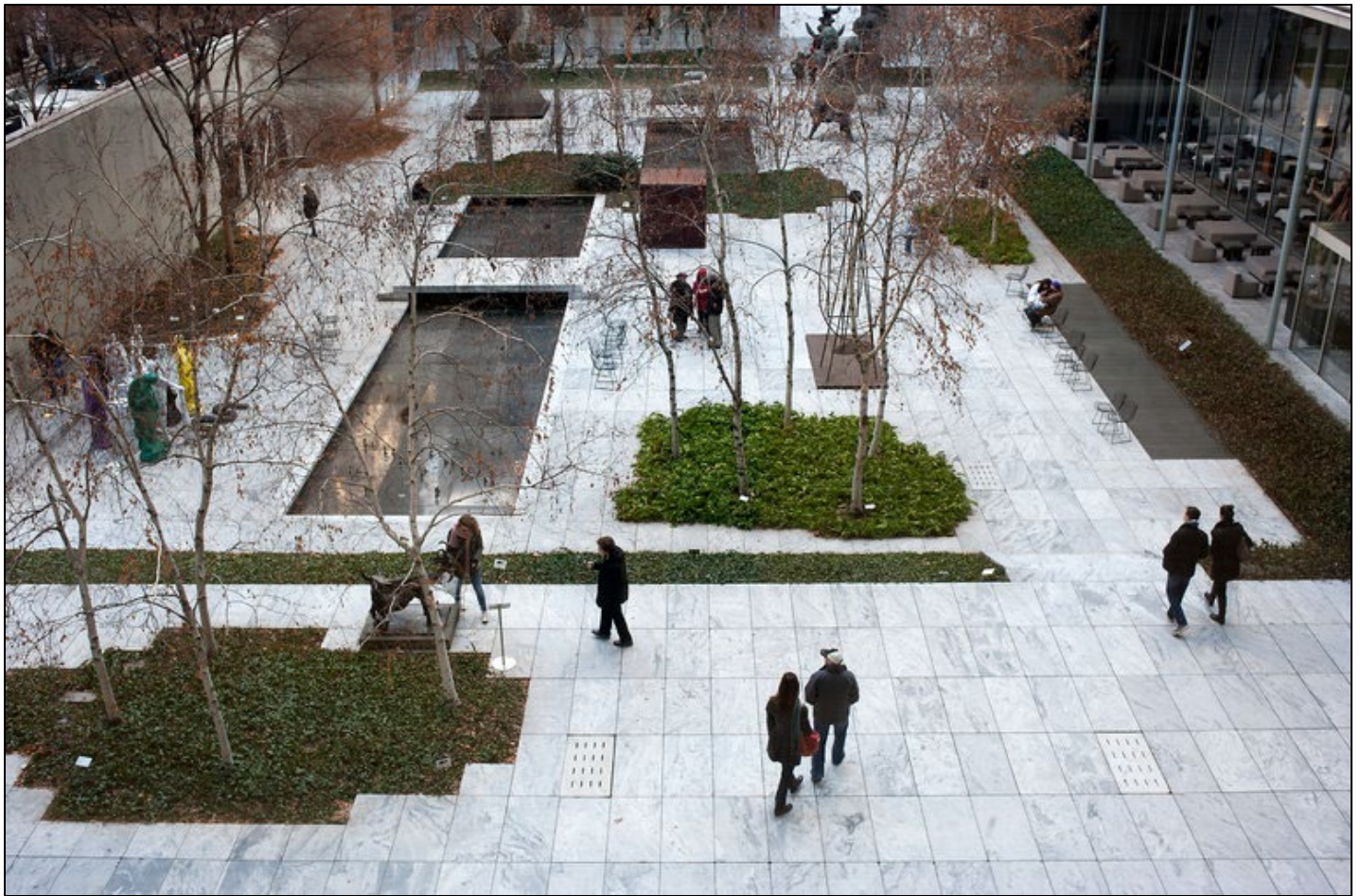


Figure 1 – The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden after its 2004 alterations. (*New York Times*, 2014)

*Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, Museum of Modern Art:* The sculpture garden at MOMA in New York is thought to be the first garden purposely designed for the exhibition of changing displays of museum collection sculpture in the United States.<sup>17</sup> It was initially created as a temporary space for the museum's opening in 1939 and made permanent in the design of architect Philip Johnson (1906-2005) and landscape architect James Fanning (1911-1998) in 1953.<sup>18</sup> The MOMA garden also established two other precedents – the association of sculpture gardens with museums of modern and contemporary art and the use of Modernist design principles in the manifestations of such gardens.

Sidney Lawrence and George Foy, in their book *Music in Stone: Great Sculpture Gardens of the World*, describe Johnson and Fanning's garden as a "serene, modernist, Miesian design," a "strongly geometric piazza with islands" of vegetation.<sup>19</sup> (Figure 1) The site, slightly below street level immediately adjacent to the museum's north side,

<sup>17</sup> The Rodin Museum in Philadelphia, operated by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, opened in 1929. Unlike the other museums discussed here (with the exception of the Noguchi Museum), it is devoted to the work of a single artist from the collection of one individual, rather than changing exhibitions of works across the spectrum of modern and contemporary art acquired in a variety of ways. (Frank Edgerton Martin, "Through the Gate," *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, 104:1 (January 2014), 96-101, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44794536>, accessed November 28, 2022.)

<sup>18</sup> Reed, "The Sculpture Garden in Modern History," 134.

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence and Foy, 92.

encompasses approximately .5 acres, which Johnson enclosed with a 14-foot-high gray brick wall along West 54<sup>th</sup> Street and paved with unpolished gray and white Vermont marble. The space is entered from the museum itself, rather than from the street. Johnson and Fanning broke up the space with plantings and two rectangular pools crossed by flat bridges. The firm of Robert Zion and Harold Breen acted as landscape architects in Johnson's expansion of the garden in 1964. The alterations included a raised level at one end, a glass wall along the street and additions to and alterations of the plantings. Zion and Breen were both students of Lester Collins, who reworked Bunshaft's Sculpture Garden at the Hirshhorn in 1981, at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard.<sup>20</sup> A 1984 expansion of the museum by Cesar Pelli resulted in a glass-walled "Garden Hall" overlooking the outdoor sculpture space. In 2004, additional museum expansion by architect Yoshio Taniguchi employed glass walls facing the garden in the new wings, further merging interior and exterior space. Zion & Breen's successor firm, Zion, Breen and Richardson Associates, handled changes to the garden itself in 2004, replacing the no longer available Vermont marble paving with slightly lighter stone from Georgia, and maintained the spirit of the 1953 original while changing many details. Cigola describes the existing garden as "a linear composition of horizontal planes," noting that, with its piazza-like composition, "[t]here is no specific order recommended for enjoying the [10-15] works in the garden."<sup>21</sup> The work of Diller, Scofidio + Renfro at MOMA, completed in 2019, did not alter the sculpture garden itself, but did create new lounge areas on the first and second floors that overlook the space.<sup>22</sup>

*Kreeger Museum Sculpture Terrace and Garden:* Johnson also designed the home of David Lloyd and Carmen Kreeger in 1968, which became the Kreeger Museum in 1994. Kreeger, the son of Russian immigrants, was a federal government attorney until joining the GEICO insurance firm, eventually becoming its chairman and president. He and his wife used the wealth they accumulated to establish a large collection of artworks and hired Johnson to design a house in which they could display them. The 2.7-acre sculpture garden consists of two formal outdoor display spaces immediately adjacent to the residence, as well as informal display in the lawn areas of the property. Both formal spaces are located to the rear of the house. A terrace with a rectangular pool stands at the lower level, with arcades of low arches opening toward the grounds on one side and toward the house on the other. (Figure 2) The second exhibit space extends from the upper floor and constitutes a paved terrace beneath low domes with open walls of columns and beams. Both spaces follow the modular dimensions of the house, integrating the exterior spaces into the architecture. Multiple sculptures

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>21</sup> Cigola, 79.

<sup>22</sup> "The Museum of Modern Art Renovation and Expansion," Diller Scofidio + Renfro website, <https://dsrny.com/project/the-museum-of-modern-art>, accessed November 28, 2022.





Figure 2 – The Kreeger Museum includes two sculpture terraces. (Joe Chrisman, National Docent Symposium)



Figure 3 – The renovated Oakland Museum of California garden. (Tim Griffith, Oakland Museum of California, 2021)

are placed within the “galleries” created by the solids and voids of the architecture. Sculpture is also displayed in the entrance court, the lawn areas, and in the more wooded areas close to the house.<sup>23</sup>

*Oakland Museum of California*: The outdoor display area of the Oakland Museum of California, which opened in 1969, is a true roof garden. (Figure 3) The museum is generally dedicated to California history, but it has a small collection of sculpture that is displayed in the rigidly rectangular terraces of the garden that roof and surround the museum. Architect Kevin Roche (1922-2019) of Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates, designed the building, landscape architect Dan Kiley (1912-2004) laid out the terraces, and local landscape architect Geraldine Knight Scott (1904-1989) chose the plantings. A major renovation of the exterior and outdoor display areas was completed in 2021 to the designs of Mark Cavagnero Associates (architects) and Hood Design Studio (landscape architects). The original sculpture garden design consisted of square and rectangular, concrete-walled, outdoor rooms on the upper terraces with a larger lawn space on the lower terrace surrounded by trees. Each of the terraces acted as a roof for the gallery below. Low plantings in concrete planters ringed the outdoor rooms, which are connected by concrete walks. A total of ten to fifteen sculptures are displayed within the rooms, generally one per room, although more are on view on the larger terrace. The 2021 renovation removed, or created openings in, walls surrounding the site to make it easier for the public to use the space. It also updated accessibility, added an outdoor theater, and created a new public entrance. The general arrangement of the outdoor rooms for display of sculpture did not change. Plantings native to the area were substituted for the original planting scheme.<sup>24</sup>

Kiley designed the garden at the J. Irwin Miller House in Columbus, Indiana, the architect of which was Eero Saarinen (with junior partner Kevin Roche). Both the Oakland Museum terraces and the Miller House express Kiley’s dedication to adapting landscape design to the principles of Modern architecture, which he imbibed at Harvard in Walter Gropius’s early years teaching there, as well as in his work with Saarinen, Roche, SOM, and other architects.<sup>25</sup> As noted by Peter

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<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Forgey, “The Architecture: Well-Ordered Surprises,” in *The Kreeger Museum, Washington, DC* (Washington, D.C.: The Kreeger Museum, 2009), 35; Stephen Fox, *The Architecture of Philip Johnson* (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2002), 134-137; “History,” Kreeger Museum website, <https://www.kreegermuseum.org/about-us/history>, accessed October 17, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence and Foy, 110; “Oakland Museum of California,” The Cultural Landscape website, <https://tclf.org/landscapes/oakland-museum-california>, accessed October 17, 2019; Sarah Scascone, “Behind the Oakland Museum’s \$20 Million Plan to Transform its Roof into a Public Art Oasis,” *Artnet News*, August 5, 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world>, accessed September 5, 2022; “Oakland Museum of California Surpasses Five-Year Capital Campaign Goal, Exceeding \$85 Million,” press release, Oakland Museum of California, August 17, 2021, <https://museumca.org/press/oakland-museum-california-surpasses-five-year-capital-campaign-goal-exceeding-85-million>, accessed September 5, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Landscape architect and University of California professor Marc Treib has identified principles of modern landscape architecture derived mainly from architectural modernism as follows: 1) landscape expression derived from rational approach to conditions created by industrial society, site, and program; 2) concern for space and volume, rather than pattern and plane; 3) abolition of a dominant axis in exchange for omnidirectional space; 4) plants chosen and used for their botanical qualities (appropriateness to specific conditions) and as sculpture; 5) integration of indoor and outdoor spaces; and 6) design of landscapes for human use, rather than for their picturesque qualities. See Marc Treib, “Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture,” *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*, Marc Treib, editor (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), 36-40.

Walker in his entry about Kiley in *Shaping the American Landscape*, Kiley's gardens "use hedges and walls in a manner influenced by the work of modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and his grids of trees perhaps owe more to the columnar grid of contemporary architecture than to early [garden] designers such as Le Notre."<sup>26</sup>

*Kimbell Art Museum*: Texas businessman Kay Kimbell and his wife Velma began collecting art from around the world in 1924. Before Kay's death in 1964, the couple had formed the Kimbell Art Foundation and begun plans for a public museum in Fort Worth, Texas, for the Kimbell collection, as well as additional works to be acquired through the foundation's endowment. Under Director Richard Fargo Brown, the Kimbell foundation hired American architect Louis I. Kahn in 1966 to design the new museum, to be located on a 9 ½-acre site in public parkland adjacent to the Amon Carter Museum. Kahn, considered one of the most accomplished architects in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, had already designed the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut (1951-1953). His design for the Kimbell Museum consisted of sixteen parallel cycloid vaults, each 100 feet long, grouped into three wings. Two of the vaulted spaces are open on one side creating a portico and an entrance. Openings along the length of the vaulted units allow natural light into the galleries, helping to create what is widely considered one of the most significant works of Modern American architecture.<sup>27</sup>

The program that Brown wrote for the museum design, distributed to architects in June 1966 to inform their proposals, envisioned a "Surrounding Sculpture Garden," but such space never materialized. This was due in part to the necessity of providing parking for visitors and staff, nearly all of whom were expected to arrive by automobile. Instead, three interior courtyards, open to the sky, provided opportunity for sculptural display, as well as illumination for interior galleries and the conservation studio.<sup>28</sup> In addition, two additional outdoor spaces were set aside for sculpture – one at the street entrance to the museum on the east and one at the southwest corner along the pedestrian entrance. In 1980, after visiting the Kimbell Art Museum, Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi created a work in honor of Kahn, his friend and collaborator, which he sited in an open green space on the south side of the museum. The work, *Constellation (for Louis Kahn)*, was installed in 1983. (Figure 4)

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Walker, "Daniel Urban Kiley," in *Shaping the American Landscape*, Charles A. Birnbaum and Stephanie S. Foell, editors (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 171-174. The quotation can be found on page 174.

<sup>27</sup> *In Pursuit of Quality: The Kimbell Art Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 3-10; "Louis I. Kahn Building," Kimbell Art Museum website, <https://kimbellart.org/art-architecture/architecture/kahn-building>, accessed November 29, 2022; Hilton Kramer, "Kimbell Museum Opens in Fort Worth," *New York Times*, October 5, 1972, 54, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>28</sup> *In Pursuit of Quality*, 320, 325; Kimbell Art Museum, *Constellation (for Louis Kahn)*, Kimbell Art Museum website, <https://kimbellart.org/collection/ag-198301-d>, accessed November 29, 2022; "Public Works," Noguchi Museum website, <https://www.noguchi.org/artworks/public-works>, accessed November 29, 2022.



Figure 4 – Isamu Noguchi's *Constellation (for Louis Kahn)* is one of a small number of outdoor sculptures displayed at the Kimbell Art Museum. (Noguchi Museum, ca. 1983)

*Janet and Alan Wurtzburger Sculpture Garden*: George Patton (1920-1991), of Philadelphia, designed a formal exhibition space surrounding the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1980, which was named for its patrons and donors. (Figure 5). The 1.1-acre garden employs beige concrete perimeter and dividing walls and bluestone paving, with small trees, shrubs, flowers, and ground covers in rectangular voids in the paving or in low planters. Nearly three dozen sculptural works, both figural and abstract, are placed on the paving itself or on low pedestals, per the museum's wish to display the sculptures as they stood in the Wurtzburgers' garden. The materials employed in the garden exemplify the muted colors and simple materials and forms that characterized Patton's work. The result, according to Frank Edgerton Martin, is perhaps "the finest surviving example of his [Patton's] work" and "a high point for landscape modernism."<sup>29</sup> Placement of the statuary provides both views of individual works silhouetted against bare concrete walls or in the midst of vegetation, as well as overlapping views of multiple sculptures within the same space.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Frank Edgerton Martin, "Baltimore's Grounds for Art," *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 99, no. 6 (June 2009), 94-95; Joan Cook, "Obituary: George Patton, 70, a Leading Architect of Landscape Sites," *New York Times*, March 7, 1991; Charles A Birnbaum and Scott Craver, editors, *Shaping the Postwar Landscape: New Profiles from the Pioneers of the American Landscape Design Project* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 151-154.

<sup>30</sup> Martin, "Baltimore's Grounds for Art," 96-97.





Figure 5 – George Patton's Wurtzburger Garden uses a simple Modernist palette of concrete walls, bluestone paving, and modest plantings. (Charles A. Birnbaum, The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2014)



Figure 6 – The sculpture garden at the Dallas Museum of Art. (The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2018)



*Dallas Museum of Art Sculpture Garden:* Dan Kiley's planting design for the Dallas Museum of Art Sculpture Garden was completed in 1983 as part of Edward Larrabee Barnes's plans for the museum, sculpture garden, courtyards, and entry. (Figure 6) The hardscape design of the sculpture garden employs a simple palette of limestone walls, paving, and pools to which Kiley added an equally formal planting arrangement. The features divide the 1.2-acre garden into smaller spaces for the display of approximately twenty sculptural works. The composition illustrates the appropriateness of Kiley's work to the designs of the Modernist architects who frequently employed him.<sup>31</sup> The small number of works displayed in the sculpture garden provides opportunities for settings either of individual works or small numbers in dialogue with each other.

*Noguchi Museum and Sculpture Garden:* Of the landscape architects analyzed in this survey of sculpture gardens, only one, Isamu Noguchi, ranged outside the Western canon in his design approach, and then only in combination with Modernist design precepts. Noguchi (1904-1988) was born in Los Angeles, son of a Japanese poet and an American writer. He lived in both the United States and Japan and made his reputation as a sculptor, having worked as Constantin Brancusi's assistant beginning in 1927. He also designed furniture and sets for collaborations with choreographer Martha Graham. Noguchi's interest in architecture led to a concern for the integration of sculpture into buildings and their sites, resulting in collaborations with Modern architects such as Gordon Bunshaft at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University (1960-1964), where he designed a sunken garden. He also designed the Billy Rose Sculpture Garden for the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem (1960-1965).<sup>32</sup>



Figure 7 – The Noguchi Museum Sculpture Garden in Queens, New York. (George Hirose, courtesy the Noguchi Museum, The Cultural Landscape Foundation website, 2009)

<sup>31</sup> Cigola, 123; "Dallas Museum of Art," The Cultural Landscape website, <https://tclf.org/landscapes/default/files/microsites/kiley-legacy/DallasMuseum.html>, accessed October 17, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Brenson, "Isamu Noguchi, the Sculptor, Dies at 84," *New York Times*, December 31, 1988, Section 1, page 1.



The museum dedicated to the sculptor's own work opened in Long Island City, Queens, New York, in 1985. Noguchi had begun the purchase of a brick industrial building across the street from his studio for a museum of his work in the 1970s. He also purchased a gas station next door to the museum building, which he demolished for the garden. The small outdoor space (less than a quarter of an acre) opens from, and can be viewed from, the museum. Noguchi selected and placed the sculptures and plantings in the outdoor space, choosing a katsura tree that grew to 40 feet in height, as well as Japanese black pines, bamboo, and ivy to give texture to the enclosing walls. (Figure 7) The garden is a single space, with an angled, paved path running through it. The small number of sculptures are displayed directly on the pebbled ground or on low pedestals in view of each other along the path. The pebbled surface of the Noguchi Museum and Sculpture Garden, the selection of plantings, and the arrangement of the sculpture recall the Japanese influences on his design sensibility.<sup>33</sup>

*Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden at the Museum of Fine Arts:* An example of Noguchi's work more Modernist in conception is the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston (1986). Ludwig Mies van der Rohe designed two buildings in the four-building complex of the museum, the last completed in 1974. The



Figure 8 – The curving paths and angled walls create a variety of views in the Cullen Sculpture Garden. (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, n.d.)

<sup>33</sup> Frank Edgerton Martin, "Abstractions of Nature," *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 99, no. 11 (November 2009), 84, 86, 88-91; Cigola, 173.

museum planned a sculpture garden for the adjacent rectangular lot, and Noguchi presented several design concepts for the site, conceived in association with architect Shoji Sadao, with whom he also worked at the Noguchi Museum. Construction began in 1984. The design consists of a simple palette of white concrete walls, brown paving, arcs of grass, and dozens of varieties of trees (selected in association with Houston landscape architect Johnny Steele). (Figure 8) The walls help muffle the sounds of traffic passing by the site, but also define spaces on the interior. The combination of walls and curving paths create a variety of views of the roughly thirty works on display in the 1.5-acre site, as well as the trees, which are displayed singly, like the sculptures, growing from the grass panels or from the pavement. As Francesca Cigola notes, “The geometry is complex but not invasive.”<sup>34</sup> The relatively small number of works and curving paths provide views of individual sculptures against white walls, overlapping views of multiple works, and sculptures juxtaposed against nearby trees.

*Charles W. Ireland Sculpture Garden:* Opened originally in 1959 and subject of four renovations and additions by the original architects, Warren, Knight & Davis, the Birmingham Museum of Art was expanded again and its garden increased in size and renovated in 1993, this time in a collaboration between architect Edward Larrabee Barnes and sculptor Elyn Zimmerman. (Figure 9) The sculpture garden, named after benefactor Charles W. Ireland, incorporated the existing Red Mountain Garden Club Memorial Garden, which had been designed, funded, and installed by the club for the museum’s 1959 opening. The symmetrical, shady memorial garden originally acted as the forecourt to the museum entrance. After the 1993 renovation, it became the first space visitors experienced when they entered the sculpture garden from the museum. At the center of the Ireland Garden is a sunken sculpture court, used for changing displays of art and “art-making activities,” such as a graffiti exhibit. The gravel surface of the court includes drains, water taps, and

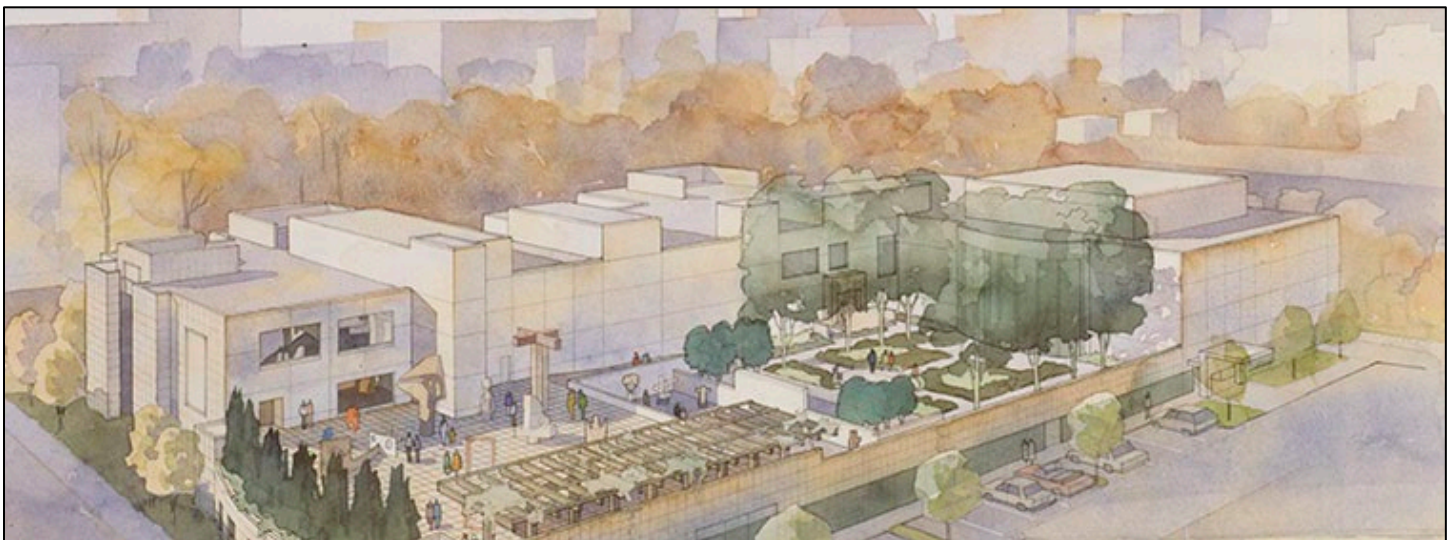


Figure 9 – The Charles W. Ireland Sculpture Garden consists of three parts – the Upper Plaza (left), sunken Sculpture Court (center), and Red Mountain Garden Club Memorial Garden (right). (Birmingham Museum of Art)

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<sup>34</sup> Cigola, 133.



electrical outlets for use in installations, and its walls can be repainted or resurfaced as the exhibits and activities change. The Upper Plaza, at the far end of the sculpture garden opposite the original building was designed for the installation of monumental sculpture from the permanent collection. (Figure 10) The plaza uses an oversized pergola and granite pavers to accommodate the scale of the works installed there, but its focal point is Zimmerman's *Lithos II*, which was designed for the site. It consists of a curved, granite waterwall, 12 feet high and 32 feet long, with an 8-foot-wide granite pool beneath. Leyland Cypress trees form a backdrop for the wall, which abstractly references the area's geologic stratigraphy. The murmur of the moving water also masks traffic noise from a nearby highway.<sup>35</sup>

*Nasher Sculpture Center Garden*: Peter Walker (1932- ) and Partners (PWP) designed the sculpture garden for architect Renzo Piano's Nasher Sculpture Center, which opened in 2003. Walker received his undergraduate degree at the University of California at Berkeley, studying soils, plants, and natural systems, as well as design. He received his master's degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and worked for two years with Lawrence Halprin before partnering with Hideo Sasaki for twenty years, beginning in 1957.<sup>36</sup> Like most of the other sculpture gardens in this review, the Nasher garden is entered from the museum, rather than from the street, and functions as an extension of its galleries. (Figure 11) "The garden, enclosed by travertine walls and set a little below street level to create a sheltered



Figure 10 – The Upper Plaza, with Elyn Zimmerman's *Lithos II* at the far end. (Birmingham Museum of Art)

<sup>35</sup> Cigola, 117; "The Charles W. Ireland Sculpture Garden." Birmingham Museum of Art website, <https://www.artsbma.org/the-museum/gardens>, accessed September 5, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Jane Gillette, "Walker, Peter E. (1932- ), Landscape Architect, Educator, Author," *Shaping the Postwar Landscape: New Profiles from the Pioneers of the American Landscape Design Project*, Charles A. Birnbaum and Scott Craver, editors (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), 201-203.





Figure 11 – Peter Walker’s design for the Nasher Sculpture Garden created a linear landscape, the space of which is separated by parallel rows of oak trees. (Andreas Praefcke, Wikimedia Commons, 2008)

Space with an intimate feeling,” writes Cigola, “has a spare and linear design.”<sup>37</sup> Due to the relatively small space encompassed by the garden (1.5 acres) and the “reticent” architecture of the building, Walker avoided complicating his design and did not attempt to subdivide the space into discrete outdoor rooms, according to Peter Reed. Rather, he used rows of oak trees across the garden’s lawn and rectangular pools to articulate separate spaces. By refraining from the use of cross axes, he provided for longitudinal views across the entire garden space from the sculpture center building.<sup>38</sup> The resulting garden “represents the mature synthesis of Walker’s dual interests in minimalism and classicism as the underpinnings of modern landscape design.”<sup>39</sup>

*Analysis:* This review of American sculpture gardens from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries turns up commonalities as well as differences among the spaces. Seven of the ten gardens cover 0.5 to 1.5 acres of ground, with four between 1.1 and 1.5 acres. The largest (the Kreeger) encompasses 5.5 acres, but some of that space is wooded and

<sup>37</sup> Cigola, 127.

<sup>38</sup> Reed, 136.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 140.

without artwork. The area of the Kreeger display spaces is closer to the Hirshhorn Plaza's 2.7 acres. At 0.23 acres, the Noguchi Museum is the smallest in the group. Five of the ten display 10 to 20 works at a time, with another offering 25 for viewing. Only two, the Wurtzburger Sculpture Garden at the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) and the Cullen Sculpture Garden at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston showcase more than that – around thirty-five works each on 1.1 and 1.5 acres respectively.<sup>40</sup>

The display areas are divided by walls, plantings, and grade changes, sometimes combining two or all three of these features. Water features also help break up the space at the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) and the Nasher Sculpture Garden. Moving water in the form of waterwalls or fountains helps to mask the sounds of traffic at the DMA, Nasher, BMA, Ireland, and Hirshhorn. Walls, which surround all or parts of all the sculpture gardens, perform multiple functions. In addition to subdividing the spaces to create views of individual artworks, they help to block street noise and create distinct outdoor spaces separated from the urban setting conducive to the contemplation of the art on display. The walls and the buildings themselves prevent casual use of the outdoor spaces by pedestrians with two exceptions – the Oakland Museum of Art and the Hirshhorn. As has been mentioned, the walls at the Oakland Museum were opened to the street as part of the 2021 renovation of the gardens. The Hirshhorn walls have always been open to Independence Avenue SW on the south and Jefferson Drive SW and the National Mall on the north. The openings provide access to the sculptures on the Plaza independent of visiting the museum. While all the outdoor display spaces function as extensions of museum gallery space, three emphasize this relationship visually through their architecture. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden at MOMA, the Noguchi Museum in Long Island City, and the Nasher Sculpture Garden all employ broad expanses of glass walls so that visitors can see, and be drawn toward, the outdoor galleries from inside the museums.

The Hirshhorn holds a unique position among the ten museums reviewed in the relationship of its adjacent outdoor display space (the Plaza) to museum building. In all the other museums, with the possible exception of the Noguchi, the museum building is clearly separated from the outdoor display spaces, although in several they can be seen from inside the museum. At the Hirshhorn, the Plaza is invisible from the building itself except for views from the galleries to the area around the fountain and from the north balcony toward the Plaza's northern edge. And yet the Plaza interpenetrates the space of the Hirshhorn building, its paving running through and around the piers that elevate the museum above the ground, providing additional display space. The plaza and its surrounding walls also frame Bunshaft's museum building in plan, elevation, and perspective. The Hirshhorn Plaza is also unusual – comparable only to the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden and the Oakland Museum of California – in that it constitutes a renovation of the original space. The garden at MOMA has actually been renovated twice – once expanded and once replacing much of the original materials - but retaining the same Modernist spirit of the original. By changing the materials of the Hirshhorn

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<sup>40</sup> At the time of this report artworks had been removed from the Hirshhorn plaza. The number typically displayed there is therefore unknown.

Plaza from exposed aggregate concrete to granite paving and green outdoor rooms, the 1993 renovation fulfilled architect Bunshaft's original intent of using a stone surface (although granite instead of travertine), but altered his spare use of plant materials and omnidirectional space while maintaining the original design's geometrical rigor.

Stylistically, nine of the ten rely on Modernism for at least some of their formal, spatial, and material characteristics. The Noguchi Museum relies more heavily on Zen garden principles than on Modernism. Six of the remaining nine gardens retain strict adherence to Modernist tenets of omnidirectional space, material expression derived from conditions created by industrial society, and lack of a dominant axis. The three outliers in this regard – the Cullen Sculpture Garden in Houston, the Kreeger Museum Sculpture Terrace and Garden in Washington, and the Charles W. Ireland Sculpture Garden in Birmingham – combine Modernism with other design ideas. In the case of the Kreeger and the Ireland, the differing approaches are spatially separated. The Kreeger's sculpture terraces are integrated into the modular concept of Philip Johnson's Modernist house design, while the garden sculptures are placed informally around the grounds. The Ireland Sculpture Garden consists of three separate spaces – a symmetrical, classically inspired garden closest to the museum and two severe, geometrical but asymmetrical spaces. Noguchi, at the 1986 Cullen Sculpture Garden, attempted an integration of compatible Modernist and Asian design concepts, using freestanding walls in the manner of Mies van der Rohe to divide space while also employing curving paths that alter views as one moves through space, an approach to circulation common to both Chinese and Japanese gardens.

Size, density, and design approach affect the manner in which sculpture is displayed in the gardens and the views provided to visitors.<sup>41</sup> Of the sculpture gardens comparable to the Hirshhorn, only those of the Oakland Museum of California and the Dallas Museum of Art – both with Dan Kiley having been involved in their design – focused attention on individual works or small groupings of sculpture. Most other spaces included both views of individual works (in the round as well as head on) and overlapping views that encompassed multiple works. Continuous spaces with fewer screening devices, such as walls or plantings, created more overlapping views, and the density of the works and size of the spaces influenced the type of views on offer as well. Not surprisingly, smaller, denser spaces, especially those small enough to be viewed in a single glance, such as the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, provided a greater percentage of overlapping views than larger, less dense spaces, like the Cullen in Houston. Changes in elevation also affect viewing experiences. The multi-level Wurtzburger garden, for example, is divided in such a way as to create direct views of individual works, despite its small size and comparatively dense concentration of sculpture.

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<sup>41</sup> The impressions conveyed in this paragraph are based on plans and photographs of the gardens reviewed during research for the study, rather than on on-site experience. The conclusions should therefore be viewed with some caution.



## James Urban, Landscape Architect and Arboriculturist

James R. Urban (1948- ) received a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, New York, in 1971. (Figure 12) His undergraduate years included travel in Guatemala, and he also visited Iran after graduation while in the Peace Corps. Urban's professional career began at the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, in Prince George's County, as a staff landscape architect. He moved on to the Washington office of the large, well-known architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), for which he acted as landscape architect, site planner, and project manager. In his three-and-a-half-year stint with SOM, his work included design of large-scale commercial, office, industrial, and residential complexes. He left SOM to start his own firm, Urban & Associates, in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1978. The firm name altered slightly over the next few years as its organizational structure changed. When Urban



Figure 12 – James R. Urban, ca. 1998.  
(ASLA)

& Associates competed for the Hirshhorn Plaza rehabilitation in 1985, the firm consisted of two principals – Urban and David C. Duclos – as well six other landscape architects. By the time the design was refined and implemented, beginning in 1989, Urban headed a sole proprietorship, James Urban, ASLA. He has continued in that capacity since, altering the

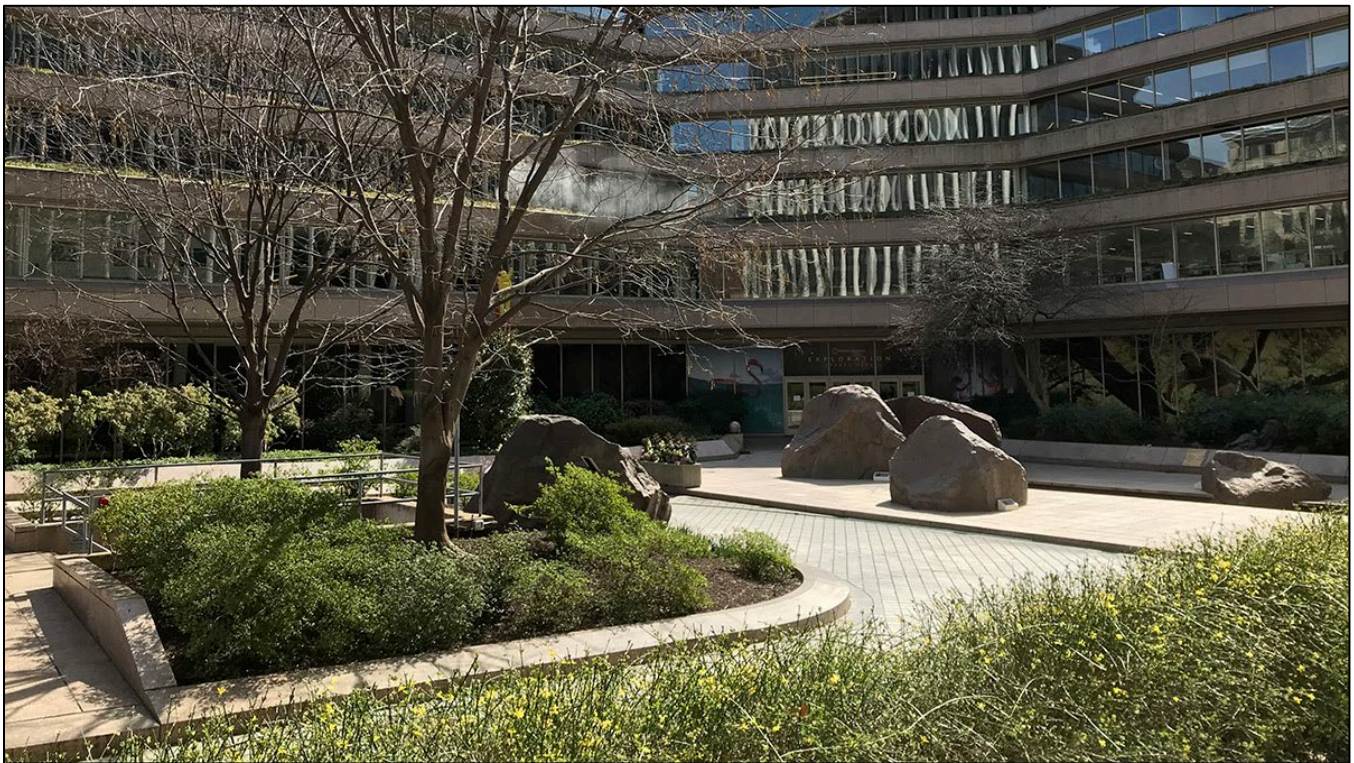


Figure 13 – Urban designed the landscape for SOM's National Geographic Society courtyard, including the setting for sculptor Elyn Zimmerman's *MARABAR* (Charles A. Birnbaum, The Cultural Landscape Foundation, 2020)

business name to James Urban, FASLA, after his election to the American Society of Landscape Architects' Council of Fellows in 1998.<sup>42</sup>

Urban & Associates' work in the 1980s continued, in part, the type of projects Urban himself had participated in at SOM, sometimes with his former firm. In 1984, Urban was the landscape architect for SOM's addition to the National Geographic Society campus along M Street NW in Washington between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> streets. The ribbon-windowed office building completed the Society's group of four structures in widely varying styles, and its L-shaped footprint created an entrance courtyard for the ensemble. In addition to the building landscaping, Urban worked with sculptor Elyn Zimmerman to create the setting for her work, *MARABAR*, which the head of SOM's Washington office, David Childs, commissioned for the courtyard. (Figure 13) The courtyard also functioned as a green roof, standing atop the underground structures of the campus.<sup>43</sup> Zimmerman's work has been removed and reinstalled on the campus of American University, while Urban's landscape will be demolished to make way for an entrance pavilion and new public plaza.<sup>44</sup>

Additional city designs from Urban's firm included the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's Metro station entrances in Friendship Heights; street trees, outdoor restaurant setting, and fountain landscaping for the Park Hyatt in Washington's West End (also with SOM); and streetscapes and small parks in Bethesda, Maryland, encompassing sidewalks, utility coordination, grading, streetlights, street trees, and furnishings. Urban also acted as landscape architect for master planning the 2,600-acre Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland, on the Rhode River in Anne Arundel County. The work included site selection for facilities expansion, coordinating site specialists, such as civil and environmental experts, and program-related issues.<sup>45</sup> At the time of his submission to the Smithsonian for the plaza competition, Urban was the project director for the National Sculpture Garden, to be located along the 8<sup>th</sup> Street axis across the National Mall from the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. In that capacity, and working for the National Park Service, which held jurisdiction over the property, he provided preliminary construction drawings, cost estimates, and construction review services. Although the plans were approved by review agencies, the project was not built; in 1991, the land was transferred to the National Gallery of Art, which hired

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<sup>42</sup> Urban & Associates, "Hirshhorn Plaza, Washington, D.C., Technical Qualifications," August 26, 1985, accession no. 92-138, box 2, Smithsonian Archives, Washington, D.C.; "Urban, James R.," ASLA Fellows Database, American Society of Landscape Architects website, <http://aslafellows.org>, accessed July 25, 2022.

<sup>43</sup> G. Martin Moeller, Jr., *AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 195-196; "Urban, James R.," ASLA Fellows Database; Urban & Associates, "Hirshhorn Plaza, Washington, D.C., Technical Qualifications."

<sup>44</sup> Rebecca J. Ritzel, "National Geographic Plan to Dismantle Granite Sculpture Hits Snag," *New York Times*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/arts/national-geographic-plan-hits-snap.html>; Ritzel, "They Have Finished Moving 225 Tons of Reimagined Art," *New York Times*, April 3, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/03/arts/marabar-sudama-sculpture-tons.html>; "National Geographic Pavilion," Hickok Cole website, <https://hickokcole.com/project/national-geographic-pavilion>, accessed July 13, 2023.

<sup>45</sup> Urban & Associates, "Hirshhorn Plaza, Washington, D.C., Technical Qualifications."



landscape architect Laurie Olin to redesign what is now known as the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden. It opened in 1999.<sup>46</sup>

As a corollary of his design work, Urban delved deeply into the subject of planting in urban areas. The interest arose due to the lack of readily available current information on the problems of urban vegetation, especially trees, and workable solutions. The knowledge required, Urban came to understand, encompassed the biology of trees; the manner in which they are grown for sale; soil composition, structure, and the volume necessary for proper growth; drainage, fertilization, and maintenance; and a dozen other issues. Landscape architects, he contended, were working from outmoded standards based on rural or suburban settings and not appropriate for the densely built, hardscape-constrained, shallow, disturbed soils of late twentieth-century cities. Increasingly dense urban construction had helped give rise to what came to be known as the Urban Forestry Movement in the mid-1960s. As a result of the loss of open space and intense building, scientists, researchers, and foresters interested in sustaining parks and municipal trees in America's cities began to study trees in urban habitats more closely. As a recent movement, however, urban forestry did not have either an organized communication network or widely known outlets for the dissemination of information being developed, and the scientists and professionals involved in the field came from widely different backgrounds. The first national conference on the topic of trees in the urban environment was held at the University of Massachusetts in 1971, although the conference did not receive the urban forestry label. That honor went to a conference sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service and produced by Urban's alma mater, SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry. It was held in Washington, D.C., in 1978. The Forest Service's purpose in sponsoring the event was to begin to unify the fragmented body of knowledge that plagued urban forestry scientists and professionals. The Forest Service conceived of the conference as a means to bring together the disparate practitioners of urban forestry and their knowledge. The four-day event brought 450 delegates from the U.S. and Canada to Washington. "The conference was a landmark in the development of urban forestry," according to urban forest historian Mark Johnston, "because it undoubtedly achieved its aim of bringing together large numbers of researchers and practitioners and firmly established the concept in the United States." A year later, 120 papers from the conference were published.<sup>47</sup>

Urban came to understand that the successful practice of landscape architecture could benefit from the Urban Forestry Movement's developing body of knowledge. He also concluded that landscape architects either did not have access to such information or were not aware of its importance. Urban had noted publicly the difference between planting trees in the urban context, as opposed to the suburbs or rural areas, in a letter to the editor of *Landscape Architecture*

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<sup>46</sup> "Urban, James R.," ASLA Fellows Database; Urban & Associates, "Hirshhorn Plaza, Washington, D.C., Technical Qualifications"; "National Gallery History," National Gallery of Art website, <https://www.nga.gov/about/gallery-history.html>, accessed September 7, 2022; Judith H. Robinson & Associates, Inc., National Register of Historic Places Nomination: The National Mall, prepared for the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2016, 7:27; EHT Traceries, James Urban Questions and Notes, ca. 2015, provided by the Smithsonian Institution, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Johnston, "A Brief History of Urban Forestry in the United States," *Arboricultural Journal* 20 (1996), 258, 261-262. The quotation can be found on page 261.

*Magazine* in March 1976.<sup>48</sup> The problem, as urban foresters had begun to realize, was that the increasing density of construction in the nation's cities – with underground structures and greater space required for utilities, parking, and other built features – impinged on the space trees needed, both above and below the ground. At the same time, Urban concluded, landscape architects devoted more time in school and on the job to design issues and less to horticultural ones.<sup>49</sup> “There is something wrong with the way we are practicing our profession,” Urban wrote in 1989. “We have shut off the communication with the horticultural community and there is a lot we need to learn from them.”<sup>50</sup>

As a result of this situation, Urban followed a three-pronged approach to landscape architecture throughout his career, with the goal of resolving the situation: he developed his own research into successful tree planting; he compiled and disseminated information from his own research and the work of others through books, magazine articles, and conference lectures and papers; and he incorporated the knowledge he had compiled into his own work. The National Geographic Society, for instance, funded research on the relationship of plant growth to drainage media, leading to the use of the first large-scale application of a recently developed drainage system beneath Urban's courtyard garden at the SOM building.<sup>51</sup> “In order to further the knowledge base on urban forestry,” according to Urban's ASLA Council of Fellows profile, “Jim began a personal search for data and research. The search included the tree case study, the soil volume statistical analysis, a planting details study, a root excavation study, planting soil specifications, design protocols, root barriers, and environmental value of trees. The results of his work have been reported in papers and articles, workshops, and lectures. Design requirements, details, and specifications he developed or assisted in developing are becoming standards of knowledge in the profession.”<sup>52</sup> By the 1980s he had become a frequent contributor to *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, *Landscape Journal*, and *The Journal of Arboriculture*. Other publication credits include the tree preservation, planting, and urban tree planting section of *Architectural Graphic Standards* and his 2008 book *Up by the Roots*, a comprehensive distillation of scientific knowledge of trees and soils. Urban was visiting lecturer on urban soils and urban tree planting at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and lectured at the University of Virginia and the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>53</sup>

The landscape architecture community has recognized Urban's contributions to urban forestry and arboriculture and its importance to landscape design. The American Forestry Association honored Urban in 1989 with its National Professional Urban Forestry Award, and the National Endowment for the Arts awarded him an Individual Design Arts

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<sup>48</sup> James Urban, “No Forest Except the One We Plant,” *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 66:2 (March 1976), 108.

<sup>49</sup> James R. Urban, *Trees in Urban Design* by Henry F. Arnold (review), *Landscape Journal* 13:1 (Spring 1994), 64-65.

<sup>50</sup> James Urban, “New Techniques in Urban Tree Plantings,” *Journal of Arboriculture* 15:11 (November 1989), 281.

<sup>51</sup> Urban & Associates, “Hirshhorn Plaza, Washington, D.C., Technical Qualifications,” Section 10.

<sup>52</sup> “Urban, James R.,” ASLA Fellows Database, American Society of Landscape Architects website, <http://aslafellows.org>, accessed July 25, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> Dennis Carmichael, EDAW, to Board of Trustees, American Society of Landscape Architects, ASLA Medal of Excellence nomination letter, ASLA website, <https://www.asla.org/AwardRecipient.aspx?id=3206>, accessed July 29, 2022; Citation, ASLA 2009 Professional Awards: Communications Category, Honor Award, *Up by the Roots*, by James Urban, ASLA website, <https://www.asla.org/2009awards/007.html>, accessed July 29, 2022.

Grant in 1998.<sup>54</sup> Skip Graffam, director of research at Laurie Olin's current firm, the OLIN Studio, identified Urban as one of three "pioneers" who "were critical in transcending the traditional view of soils and construction in urban environments and bringing that soil knowledge to landscape architects."<sup>55</sup> By the time that article was published, in 2010, the American Society of Landscape Architects had honored Urban with four awards. In addition to his election to its Council of Fellows in 1998, Urban received the ASLA Merit Award in Research in 1996 (for his publication *The Design and Installation of Trees*) and the society's Honor Award in Communications in 2009 for *Up by the Roots*.<sup>56</sup> The ASLA also awarded Urban its Medal of Excellence in 2007 for "his significant contributions to landscape architecture policy, research, education, project planning, and design." The citation for the award elaborated: "Since 1982, his extensive research, articles, and lectures have built invaluable industry knowledge about planting urban trees in a variety of landscapes – ranging from suburban lots to difficult downtown streetscapes. His efforts have led to testing of new urban tree systems, planting concepts, and innovative approaches to landscape architecture design, detailing, and specifications."<sup>57</sup> The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) gave Urban its Award of Achievement in 2013 for his "sustained efforts and contributions to the advancement of the ISA."<sup>58</sup>

Urban's built designs have also been recognized. The National Geographic Society landscape and the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, also in Washington, D.C., have each earned multiple honors. Urban's work at the National Geographic Society resulted in a Grand Award from the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA, now the National Association of Landscape Professionals) in 1985 and a National Landscape Award from the American Association of Nurserymen in 1986. The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial on Judiciary Square in Washington was authorized by Congress in 1984 and opened in 1991. (Figure 14) Designed by architect Davis Buckley, its lion and lion cub sculptures were modeled by Raymond Kaskey and George Carr. The memorial received a Grand Award from the ALCA in 1992, a National Landscape Award from the American Association of Nurserymen in 1994, and a Federal Design Achievement Award from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1995.<sup>59</sup> The Hirshhorn Plaza also won a Federal Design Achievement Award from NEA in 1995. The honors constitute "merit awards given by the National Endowment

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<sup>54</sup> "Urban, James R.," ASLA Fellows Database.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Jost and Baldev S. Lamba, *Making Research Matter*, *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 100:1 (January 2010), 60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44794300>, accessed July 29, 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Honors & Awards: 1996 ASLA Professional Awards Recipients, American Society of Landscape Architects website, <https://www.asla.org/AwardRecipient.aspx?id=4962>, accessed September 8, 2022; Citation, ASLA 2009 Professional Awards: Communications Category, Honor Award, *Up by the Roots*.

<sup>57</sup> ASLA 2007 Honors, James R. Urban, FASLA, Landscape Architect Medal of Excellence, <https://www.asla.org/awards/2007>, accessed July 29, 2022.

<sup>58</sup> "James Urban, FASLA: About," James Urban, FASLA website, <https://www.jamesurban.net/about>, accessed September 8, 2022; "Past ISA Award Recipients," International Society of Arboriculture website, <https://www.isa-arbor.com/Who-We-Are/Our-Organization/Our-History/Past-ISA-Award-Recipients>, accessed September 8, 2022.

<sup>59</sup> "Urban, James R.," ASLA Fellows Database; Benjamin Forgey, "Lions of Valor: The Officers' Memorial," *Washington Post*, October 12, 1991, Proquest Historical Newspapers, accessed July 29, 2022.

as its highest recognition of quality design.” The Law Enforcement Memorial and the Hirshhorn Plaza were two of the seventy-five projects across the country to receive this recognition in 1995.<sup>60</sup>

Urban opened a consulting service in 2004, known as Urban Trees + Soil, advising landscape architecture and architecture firms in his specialized area of expertise. With his knowledge of structural planting soils, micro root paths, and macro soil trench techniques, among other minutiae of urban tree planting, he also played an important role in the development of structural cells, such as Silva Cells, a paving system that provides room for soil volumes conducive to urban tree growth.<sup>61</sup> Urban employed this knowledge of trees and this type of paving system at the North Plaza of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York, part of a revamping of all of the center’s public spaces. Urban Trees + Soil’s work consisted of designing a new bosque of trees over an existing structure for the project, the center’s public spaces. Urban Trees + Soil’s work consisted of designing a new bosque of trees over an existing structure for the project, headed by architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro and Beyer Blinder Belle and Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects, all of



Figure 14 – The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial received three national awards. (Visit DC website, n.d.)

<sup>60</sup> *Presidential Design Awards* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, Design Program, 1995), 2, 3. The quotation can be found on page 2.

<sup>61</sup> “About,” James Urban, FASLA website, <https://www.jamesurban.net/about>, accessed September 8, 2022.





Figure 15 – Urban designed the tree bosque on the North Plaza of Lincoln Center. (Eddie Marritz, James Urban, FASLA, ca. 2015)

New York. (Figure 15) The Lincoln Center Public Spaces project as a whole won the 2011 Best in Show Award from the New York Chapter of the American Society of Architects.<sup>62</sup>

Urban continued his contributions to plant growth in American cities into the second decade of the new century. Beginning in 2010, he was a consultant on a team headed by the architecture firm HOK that was hired by the National Park Service to rescue the turf on the National Mall in Washington, which welcomes 25 million visitors a year and had suffered the consequences. The first phase of the project was completed in 2013, the two remaining phases by 2016.<sup>63</sup> Urban wrote a letter to *Landscape Architecture Magazine* in 2013, calling attention to the importance of the soil mixture to the success of the new turf, but reserving judgment on its ultimate success until ten years had passed.<sup>64</sup> For the city of Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2016, Urban produced a report designed to improve the health of the bosques of willow

<sup>62</sup> “Projects: Lincoln Center, North Plaza,” James Urban, FASLA website, <https://www.jamesurban.net/lincoln-center-north-plaza>; “Project: Lincoln Center Public Spaces,” Diller Scofidio + Renfro website, <https://dsrny.com/project/lincoln-center-public-spaces>; “Projects: Lincoln Center Public Spaces,” Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects website, [https://www.mnlandscape.com/projects/lincoln\\_center2](https://www.mnlandscape.com/projects/lincoln_center2), accessed September 8, 2022; Philip Kennicott, “Kennedy Center and Others Should Take Note of Lincoln Center Redesign,” *Washington Post*, December 29, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Linda McIntyre, “The Green Carpet,” *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 103:8 (August 2013), 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44794989>, accessed September 8, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> James R. Urban, “How Will the Carpet Wear,” *Landscape Architecture Magazine* 103:10 (October 2013), 32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44794576>, accessed September 8, 2022.

oaks that grace the Lawrence Halprin-designed Downtown Mall. The report, “Charlottesville Main Street Tree Assessment and Management Recommendations,” advises the city to undertake a number of measures to care for the willow oaks, including removing the grates added in a recent renovation, using compressible foam to protect roots from brick paving, testing and modifying soils in the tree pits, and other amendments.<sup>65</sup> In an interview, Urban told landscape architect Faye Harwell in 2019 that he was “mostly retired,” but has made himself available to colleagues and clients for continued consultation.<sup>66</sup> He has also continued writing on the subject of healthy vegetation in the urban environment, having contributed to an article in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* called “Winter Climate Variability, De-Icing Salt and Streetside Tree Vitality” in March 2022.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Judith H. Robinson & Associates, Inc., and Laura L. Knott, Historical Landscape Architect, “Charlottesville Downtown Mall Final Survey Report,” prepared for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the City of Charlottesville, May 4, 2022, 51.

<sup>66</sup> Faye Harwell, telephone conversation with James Urban, FASLA, August 15, 2019, provided by the Smithsonian Institution, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation.

<sup>67</sup> Justin Miron, Andrew Millward, Maryamsadat Vaziriyeganeh, Janusz J. Zwiazek, and James Urban, “Winter Climate Variability, De-Icing Salt and Streetside Tree Vitality,” *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* 10 (March 2022), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fevo.2022.749168/full>, accessed September 8, 2022.

#### **IV. CHRONOLOGY OF DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION**

##### The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza in the Design of Gordon Bunshaft, 1966-1974

Prior to the establishment of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the entrepreneur, financier, philanthropist, and art collector Joseph H. Hirshhorn displayed approximately 144 sculptures (of the 2,650 in his collection) outdoors on the grounds of his 22-acre estate in Greenwich, Connecticut, known as Round Hill. Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution S. Dillon Ripley, with help from President Lyndon B. Johnson and his wife, Lady Bird Johnson, convinced Hirshhorn to donate his world-renowned collection to the museum that would bear his name in May 1966. Both the secretary and the collector stipulated at that time that a sculpture garden would be part of the museum so that outdoor display could continue.<sup>68</sup> The establishing legislation passed by Congress on November 7, 1966, gave that stipulation the force of law. The act states that “The area bounded by Seventh Street, Independence Avenue, Ninth Street, and Jefferson Drive in the District of Columbia is hereby appropriated to the Smithsonian Institution as the permanent site of a museum and the area bounded by Seventh Street, Jefferson Drive, Ninth Street, and Madison Drive in the District of Columbia is hereby made available to the Smithsonian Institution as the permanent site of a sculpture garden, both areas to be used for the exhibition of works of art.”<sup>69</sup>

The legislation does not specifically call for the outdoor display of sculpture on the southern block of the property, reserved for the museum building, but neither does it preclude such display. From his earliest concepts, Gordon Bunshaft, of the multi-office architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), incorporated outdoor sculpture in the nearly square Plaza around the raised, drum-shaped building he designed for the Hirshhorn Museum. In the 1967 model for the project, presented to the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts in June, a few pieces of sculpture are depicted on the bare paving of the Plaza, as well as in the Sculpture Garden across Jefferson Drive. (Figure 16) While there would be changes of greater and lesser significance to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden as it was built, the relationship between the museum building and the Plaza immediately surrounding it and the purpose of the space remained constant.<sup>70</sup>

As seen in the model, Bunshaft’s design envisioned a Mall-wide sunken Sculpture Garden along the Eighth Street axis. SOM’s 1966 master plan for the Mall suggested this arrangement, and the museum legislation provided for it, but the cross-Mall sunken garden proved to be the design’s most controversial aspect and became its biggest casualty. The Hirshhorn was designed, approved, and built during a period in which the Smithsonian embraced Modern architecture

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<sup>68</sup> Fletcher, *A Garden for Art*, 8-12, 30 n. 2.

<sup>69</sup> Public Law 89-788, An Act to provide for the establishment of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and for other purposes, 80 Stat. 1403.

<sup>70</sup> EHT Tracerics, Inc., “Smithsonian Institution, South Mall Campus Cultural Landscape Report,” prepared for the Smithsonian Institution, February 2018, 87.



Figure 16 – SOM's 1967 model for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden included a few artworks on the Plaza. (SI Archives)

for its new buildings on the National Mall. The museum and sculpture garden, based on Ripley's suggestion of a circular-plan museum,<sup>71</sup> exemplifies these twin movements and reflects the battle the Smithsonian and advocates of contemporary architecture fought against supporters of traditional design in Washington. The resolution to the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden struggle took the form of a proposal by *Washington Star* art critic Benjamin Forgey that the garden, rather than crossing the Mall, could be placed within the tree panel north of the museum at the Mall's southern edge, lowered below ground level but maintaining the forms of contemporary landscape architecture. The Smithsonian accepted this idea, and Bunshaft and SOM designed the smaller garden based on Forgey's suggested location. The new design received approval from the National Capital Planning Commission and CFA in the summer of 1971.<sup>72</sup>

Construction on the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden began in 1969 and was completed in 1974. The museum building took the form of a drum with an off-center cylindrical void within. The diameter of the drum was 231 feet, of the void, 115 feet. Piers raised the building 14 feet above the Plaza beneath, and the whole stood 81 feet high. Bunshaft employed concrete construction and clad the outer façade in precast concrete panels with exposed Swenson Pink granite aggregate. He had originally proposed travertine, available in Italy, for the cladding, but Congress and the American Marble Industry raised objections based on the Buy American Act of 1933, which privileged domestic

<sup>71</sup> Nicholas Adams, *Gordon Bunshaft and SOM: Building Corporate Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 199. Other collaborators on the design include SOM architects Sherwood A. Smith (senior designer) and Leon Moed (job captain). (Adams, 204)

<sup>72</sup> The story of the design and approval process for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden is told in several places, including EHT Tracerics, Inc., SurfaceDesign, Inc., and BIG Architecture, "Smithsonian Institution South Mall Campus Cultural Landscape Report," prepared for the Smithsonian Institution, February 2018, and EHT Tracerics, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (draft), U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, n.d.



construction materials in government buildings. Cost estimates for two domestic marbles as well as Italian travertine proved much higher than the construction budget provided for, resulting in SOM and the Smithsonian's determination to use less expensive concrete panels instead. The only opening in the outer façade was a rectangular ribbon of glass on the north, fronted by a cantilevered balcony. Rows of windows lined the galleries along the inner façade on each of the three above-grade floors. Glass also walled the lobby on the south side at Plaza level. Bunshaft included a basement level beneath the Plaza for additional gallery space, storage, offices, and mechanical equipment.<sup>73</sup>

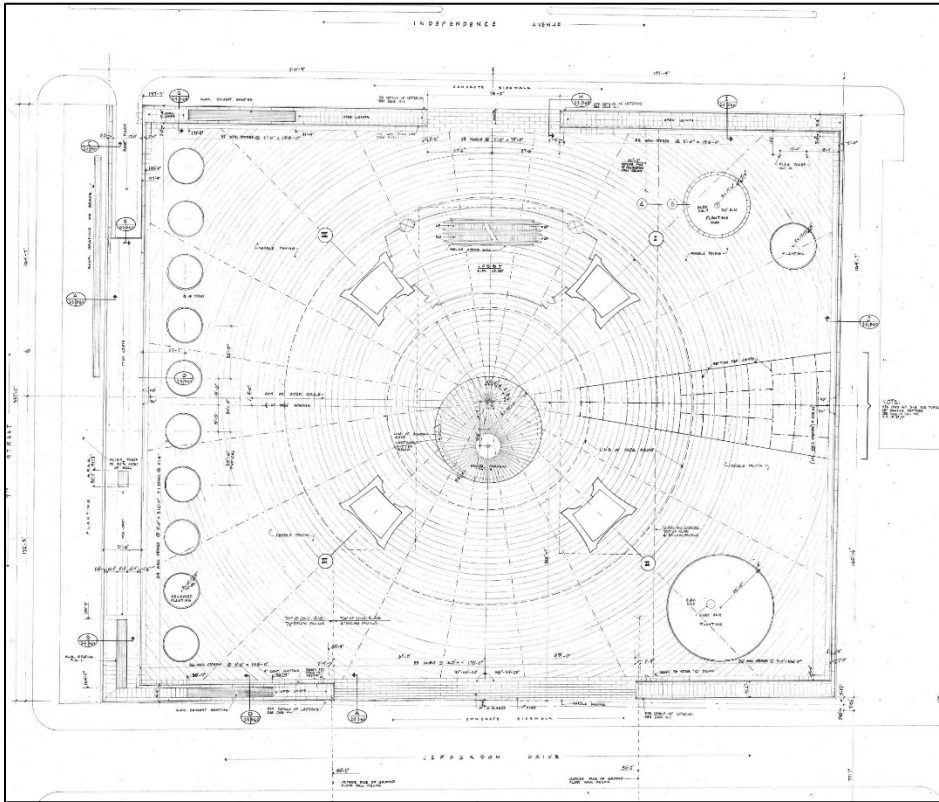


Figure 17 – The Hirshhorn plaza featured a paving pattern radiating from the center of the building circle. (SOM Archives)

As built, the Eighth Street axis across the Mall bisected both the outer circle of the museum footprint and its inner void, and the building was set at the center of its rectangular Plaza (360 by 302 feet) on this axis. (Figure 17) Eight-foot-high, cast-in-place concrete walls with exposed Swenson Pink granite aggregate bounded the Plaza, with an opening on the south along Independence Avenue (78 feet) and a larger opening on the north, along Jefferson Drive. The opening on the south was at street level; steps descended to the street on the north. The walls enclosed ventilation ductwork and mechanical systems. An opening in the Plaza on the north

accessed steps leading to a tunnel to the Sculpture Garden beneath Jefferson Drive. A ramp just outside the Plaza's east wall, along 7<sup>th</sup> Street, provided access to the loading dock at the basement level. As with the cladding of the building, SOM's early drawings for the Plaza specify stone paving. And as with the museum itself, the high cost of stone nixed that intention. The Plaza was instead paved with the same Swenson Pink granite aggregate concrete panels as the façade.

<sup>73</sup> EHT Tracerics, Inc., National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (draft), prepared for the Smithsonian Institution, January 30, 2018, 7:3-7:4, 8:26; EHT Tracerics, Inc., "Smithsonian Institution, South Mall Campus Cultural Landscape Report," prepared for the Smithsonian Institution, February 2018, 90-91; Adams, 204.



Figures 18 and 19 – The plantings along the west wall were changed between October and November 1974. (Smithsonian Gardens)

The panels were laid in a circular pattern radiating away from the center of the circle formed by the museum's exterior facade. On the east and west edges of the Plaza, gravel-covered strips functioned as planting areas.<sup>74</sup>

Bunshaft's Plaza was austere. Relief from the paving took the form of a circular fountain within the cylindrical void of the drum (also off center but bisected by the Eighth Street axis), retention of an existing elm tree in the southwest corner, a group of three magnolias in the northwest corner (which replaced an existing elm planned for preservation that had been removed during construction), and vegetation in the gravel strip along the west wall. The east side of the Plaza was devoid of greenery. The elm and the magnolias grew from circular wells. Street trees (elms) were also located outside the Plaza walls on the east, south, and west.<sup>75</sup> Photographs from 1974 indicate that the plantings along the west wall were changed late in the construction process. In one, taken in October, a variety of evergreens and deciduous trees, of different heights, shapes, and shades of green, stand along the wall. (Figure 18) A photograph from a month later shows a stretch of dark green trees or shrubs forming a hedge along the center of the wall. (Figure 19) Research for this study did not uncover a reason for the change, but it might be imagined that the variety of the October plantings would have displeased both the architect, whose design exhibits a geometrical rigor, and Hirshhorn exhibit staff, which would likely have desired a backdrop consistent in shape, size, and color for the display of pieces from the museum's collection.

The design of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden represented an evolution of Bunshaft's architecture. By the time SOM had won the commission for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 1966, Bunshaft had, like many of his contemporaries, turned away from the orthogonal glass-and-steel or glass-and-concrete boxes of Mid-Century Modern architecture, on which he had built his reputation. Some of these architects, including Bunshaft, began to explore the structural and expressive potential of concrete, inspired by works such as Le Corbusier's Notre-Dame-du-

<sup>74</sup> Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, "Site Plan," drawing 2-3, March 10, 1969, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill archives, courtesy Smithsonian Institution, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation.

<sup>75</sup> EHT Tracerics, Inc., "Smithsonian Institution, South Mall Campus Cultural Landscape Report," 88-94; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, "Site Plan," drawing 2-3.

Haut chapel in Ronchamp, France, from the first half of the 1950s.<sup>76</sup> Nicholas Adams, in *Gordon Bunshaft and SOM: Building Corporate Modernism*, an assessment of the architect's career, traces Bunshaft's evolution to his growing interest in sculpture, especially his relationship with Henry Moore, several of whose works he owned. He also obtained commissions for Moore works at some of the corporate headquarters that SOM designed. Adams points to the Hirshhorn as an example of Bunshaft's sculptural and monumental thinking at this point in his career. "It is not just that the building appears to be a work of sculpture, standing isolated on its prominent Mall site," Adams writes, "but that Bunshaft commented on the experience of the visitor at the museum as being comparable to an encounter with a three-dimensional work of art." As with many of Bunshaft's works, structural engineer Paul Weidlinger helped the architect achieve the effects he sought in this medium.<sup>77</sup>

At the Hirshhorn, Bunshaft himself made the connection between architecture and Moore sculpture. In December 1970, he corresponded with the British artist on the possibility of commissioning a work from him for the entry to the museum from Independence Avenue. The piece would be a 17 to 18-foot version of Moore's *Square Form with Cut*. (Figure 20) Bunshaft and his wife Nina owned a small bronze version of the piece, which they displayed outside their weekend home at East Hampton, New York.



Figure 20 – A marble version of Henry Moore's *Square Form with Cut* in Prato, Italy. (Wikimedia Commons)

The decision on a larger version for the museum had still not been made by the following summer, when Bunshaft sent Moore a sample piece of granite that he thought might be appropriate for the Hirshhorn entrance work. The architect noted that the granite was slightly lighter in color than the granite being used for the exposed aggregate facing of the museum, meaning that the sculpture would stand out against it. Whether Moore thought the color appropriate or not, Bunshaft wrote that he hoped Moore would lean toward a grey or white stone rather than shades of tan or red. The architect also asked the sculptor to obtain an estimate the weight of the work, since the engineers would have to design reinforcement of the already completed underground structure beneath the Plaza. He noted that, because of the need to build extra structural support for the

<sup>76</sup> Peter Gössel and Gabriele Leuthäuser, *Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Köln, Germany: Benedikt Taschen, 1991), 249-253; Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture, a Critical History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 224-230.

<sup>77</sup> Adams, 198.

sculpture, Joseph Hirshhorn would need to decide by the fall whether he was willing to acquire the piece in order to keep construction on schedule.<sup>78</sup> As the piece was not acquired, it appears that Hirshhorn decided against the expense.

The Hirshhorn did have a Henry Moore sculpture at its entrance, however, upon its opening in October 1974. In his review of the building on October 2, *New York Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger noted that the Moore sculpture at the opening in the walls on Independence Avenue was the only work of art visible from the street.<sup>79</sup> The work was Moore's *Two-Piece Reclining Figure: Points* (1969-70). As the figure was cast in 1973, it may be that Bunshaft and Hirshhorn agreed on a smaller substitution (7 ½ feet high) for the proposed monumental work.<sup>80</sup> The precise number of works displayed on the Plaza at the Hirshhorn opening is not clear from research. In early aerial photos, approximately a dozen works, both monumental and smaller pieces, can be seen, as well as pieces in the niches formed by the four piers supporting the museum's drum. Photographs do not indicate the number of works displayed on the Plaza beneath the building or around the fountain. A number of the monumental works displayed on the Plaza in 1974 came to be associated closely with the Hirshhorn. These included Kenneth Snelson's *Needle Tower* (1968), Alexander Calder's *Two Discs* (1965), and Claes Oldenburg's *Geometric Mouse: Variation 1, Scale A* (1971).<sup>81</sup> The Hirshhorn exhibit staff added to the works displayed on the Plaza in the years after its opening. Two drawings from the summer of 1981 each identify forty individual works of art located within the concrete walls around the museum.<sup>82</sup>

The combination in the Plaza of unadorned enclosing walls, uniform ground plane with a gravel-like surface, limited palette of materials, minimal plantings, and sculptural forms recalled, for several commentators, Japanese Zen gardens, which employed a similar composition and narrow range of materials. The Sculpture Garden at the Hirshhorn across Jefferson Drive from the Plaza followed the same pattern. Zen gardens developed as a means of facilitating meditation associated with the Ch'an sect of Buddhism, introduced into Japan from China in the twelfth century. The practice emphasized austerity, simplicity, discipline, and meditation as paths to enlightenment. Zen Buddhism influenced a type of garden making, often associated with monasteries, that simplified outdoor spaces, reduced them in size, and limited the palette to a small number of materials, most often gravel, moss, and stones held within a simple rectangular wall. The stones were intended to be suggestive, rather than referential, and the relationships among the elements an important consideration. Early Zen gardens were designed to be viewed from a small number of positions, often from a raised veranda.<sup>83</sup> Bunshaft may have been drawn to the Zen garden model through his work with Japanese American artist and landscape architect Isamu Noguchi. Noguchi designed spaces based on such gardens for Bunshaft's Beinecke

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<sup>78</sup> Gordon Bunshaft to Henry Moore, December 1, 1970; Bunshaft to Moore, July 28, 1971, Gordon Bunshaft Architectural Drawings and Papers, 1909-1990, Series I: Correspondence, Avery Drawings and Archives Collection, Columbia University Libraries.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Goldberger, "A Fortress of a Building that Works as a Museum," *New York Times*, October 2, 1974.

<sup>80</sup> Fletcher, *A Garden for Art*, 72.

<sup>81</sup> Valerie Fletcher to James Demetron, "Relocation of Plaza Sculptures (July-August 1990)," March 9, 1990, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149, box 3.

<sup>82</sup> Untitled drawing, June 26, 1981; Untitled drawing, July 13, 1981, Smithsonian Archives, Record Unit 516, box 10.

<sup>83</sup> Treib and Herman, 13-14.

Library at Yale (1963) and the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York (1961). A photograph exists of Bunshaft, his wife, and Noguchi at the Ryoan-ji Temple garden in Kyoto, one of the exemplars of the type.<sup>84</sup>

As designed, Bunshaft's Plaza might have seemed suited to the Zen model. The museum was itself a sculptural object, and its size and dominance provided a scale against which to consider other objects in the visitor's field of vision – figural sculptures just larger than life size, monumental abstract works, and individual specimens of greenery from the natural world. Unlike a Zen garden, however, circulation was omnidirectional on the Plaza, and the design designated no places where the visitor might come to rest and contemplate individual artworks or the relationships among them. Further, except for the Henry Moore sculpture at the entrance, Bunshaft, who was notoriously reticent about discussing the reasons for his design decisions, either in written or verbal form, does not seem to have been involved in the selection of pieces of Hirshhorn's collection to display on the Plaza nor where to place them. No correspondence from the architect was discovered in research that suggests such involvement, and we know that museum staff made a model of the Sculpture Garden on which they placed scaled-down representations of certain works, as well as full-size foam models that they moved around the Plaza to find appropriate locations.<sup>85</sup> Whether Bunshaft intended the Plaza as a Zen garden-like space of contemplation or as a suitable base for his mammoth sculpture of a building, or both or neither, is not known.

#### Deterioration of the Plaza and Rehabilitation under James Urban, 1975-1993

An early modification to the Plaza addressed food service for visitors. One of the summer 1981 plans showing the locations of the Plaza sculptures also depicts the footprint of what it labels as a trailer adjacent to the northwest pier supporting the museum building. This represents an earlier version of the existing trailer used for food service, which was placed on the Plaza around 2017.<sup>86</sup> A year before the 1981 plans, Stephen E. Weil, deputy director of the Hirshhorn, indicated that such a facility (known as the "Marriott stand," after its operator) was being built and that tables and chairs had already been placed on the Plaza for the use of visitors, who were purchasing food from street vendors. Weil asked for large trash cans to be installed on the Plaza near the site of the stand to take care of the garbage already being generated.<sup>87</sup> Plans for upgrading the Hirshhorn's dining facilities were found among Smithsonian Archives records, including a 1985 proposal for curved banquette seating, individual tables and chairs, and a platform or stage at the center of what became known as the Full Circle Café.<sup>88</sup> No evidence was found that such a proposal was implemented.

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<sup>84</sup> Ottesen, 75; National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (draft), 8:48-49.

<sup>85</sup> Fletcher, *A Garden for Art*, 20-21.

<sup>86</sup> Carly Bond, Smithsonian Institution, Architectural History and Historic Preservation, communication with the authors, November 7, 2022.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen E. Weil, Deputy Director, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, to Nancy Kirkpatrick, Executive Officer, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, April 4, 1980, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149, box 3.

<sup>88</sup> WalkerGroup/CNI, "Preliminary Plan, Hirshhorn Museum, 'Full Circle @ the Hirshhorn'" (drawing), March 28, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 89-030, box 17.

More pressing concerns likely derailed improvements to the dining facilities at this time – the Plaza’s physical deterioration and the museum’s need for additional space to house its growing collections. The deterioration issue was known as early as 1978, when repairs were made for the first time. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Director Abram Lerner requested funding for a comprehensive improvement of the Plaza the following year.<sup>89</sup> Such funding apparently was not immediately forthcoming – not surprising given the necessity of applying to Congress for an appropriation large enough to cover the work – because Phillip Reiss, director of the Smithsonian’s Office of Design and Construction, wrote to Tom L. Leyton, the Institution’s director of Facilities Services, on June 8, 1981, regarding a scope of work for a Plaza repair feasibility study. Reiss contacted Bunshaft in August to tell him that the Smithsonian was considering replacement of the Plaza paving and to ask for his assistance. The architect, who had retired in 1979, called Reiss to offer his advice on the Plaza and to say that SOM would be happy to consult on issues such as structural engineering, plumbing, and other technical aspects of the planned replacement. Leon Moed, who had been Bunshaft’s job captain on the Hirshhorn’s construction, wrote to Reiss in September pledging SOM’s assistance.<sup>90</sup> The parallel problem of additional space needs resulted from Joseph Hirshhorn’s bequest of additional works of art in his will, which was executed upon his 1981 death. According to a 1985 statement of work for a “Space Use Master Plan Study,” storage and display space were already in short supply prior to the bequest, and the additional Hirshhorn holdings would double the number of works in the museum collection. The number of sculptures topped out at 2,650 works.<sup>91</sup>

Reiss, Weil, Lerner, Hirshhorn Executive Officer Nancy Kirkpatrick, and others met with Bunshaft on June 21, 1982, to discuss both issues. Since the Plaza surface material would have to be replaced, Bunshaft suggested doing the job with stone (marble or granite), as had originally been intended, although he acknowledged that such an approach would be expensive. To create additional space, the idea of further excavation beneath the building (not all the area beneath the Plaza had been excavated for the original construction) was discussed. The group made two decisions at the meeting: 1) continue to repair the Plaza’s exposed aggregate concrete surface, as the Smithsonian had already begun doing, and 2) explore additional underground space. Tasks for the latter included preparation of a list of requirements for additional space, investigation of the effects of further excavation, and an attempt to find funds for a feasibility study of underground expansion.<sup>92</sup>

The problems with the Plaza paving were two-fold: 1) the concrete had begun to deteriorate, resulting in loose gravel and tipped panels that were dangerous for pedestrians, and 2) a failure of the original waterproofing membrane that

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<sup>89</sup> Robert P. Dillman, Director, Office of Design and Construction, to Richard L. Siegle, Director of Facilities Services, March 20, 1991, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-153, box 1.

<sup>90</sup> Phillip K. Reiss, Director, Office of Design and Construction, Smithsonian Institution, to Tom L. Leyton, Director, Office of Facilities Services, Smithsonian Institution, June 8, 1981; Reiss to Gordon Bunshaft, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, August 7, 1981; Reiss to Abram Lerner, Director, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, August 24, 1981, Smithsonian Archives; Leon Moed, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to Reiss, September 21, 1981, accession no. 98-130, box 52.

<sup>91</sup> Smithsonian Institution, Statement of Work [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Space Use Master Plan Study], May 8, 1985, revised October 2, 1985, revised April 11, 1986, Smithsonian Archives, accession 91-006, box 2.

<sup>92</sup> Reiss, for the Record, June 21, 1982, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.



resulted in water leaking from the Plaza into the museum's basement spaces, threatening artworks as well as causing other maintenance issues. Cycles of freezing and thawing had led the concrete to deteriorate, causing spalling of the surface aggregate, according to a 1983 scope of work for a Plaza resurfacing study. Poor drainage on the Plaza also led to ponding in the summer and patches of ice in the winter. By 1983, repairs had been made to the Plaza twice by outside contractors and several other times by Smithsonian staff.<sup>93</sup> Lerner, as well as other Smithsonian reviewers of the scope of work, considered the study unnecessary, given what was already known about the problem. The point became moot in September 1983, when funding for the study was used to make emergency repairs to the Plaza.<sup>94</sup>

As the problems continued into the following year and funding for a comprehensive replacement of the Plaza surface was not scheduled to be received until fiscal year 1989, Lerner proposed replacing the concrete paving with grass and pathways, in lieu of complete replacement.<sup>95</sup> By the middle of April, Hirshhorn administrators had discussed "the possibility that the Plaza might be designed in a pattern of paths and lawn similar to the Sculpture Garden."<sup>96</sup> Before the month was out, Reiss had spoken to the landscape architect of the 1981 Sculpture Garden rehabilitation, Lester Collins.<sup>97</sup> Reiss, Lerner, Kirkpatrick, and Weil met with Collins on April 27, 1984, to discuss the project, and Reiss sent him microfilmed images of the Plaza plans and asked for a proposal in early May. Reiss requested a feasibility study from Collins that would examine the structural aspects of the work, as well as plumbing and mechanical analyses. The proposal would also require cost estimates and a list of consultants. Collins responded by suggesting that he could work on an hourly basis, with a maximum amount set, until "a pleasing solution" was found, at which time the team of engineers, architects, and other specialists could be put together. This was the arrangement that obtained for his work at the Sculpture Garden.<sup>98</sup>

Reiss did not appear to have a problem with Collins's approach because he asked the landscape architect for his rate of payment, the number of hours required for the job, and other costs on May 21. Collins had sent two potential schemes (A and B) for the revised Plaza on the same day. Both schemes used raised grass panels to replace paving and divide the space, as well as ginkgo trees, weeping willows, and vines to soften the hardscape. Scheme A's outdoor rooms employed a curved edge adjacent to the building façade and positioned a grove of columnar ginkgoes on the west, radiating from

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<sup>93</sup> Roy E. Buhl, Chief, Planning Division, Smithsonian Institution, to Abram Lerner, Subject: Plaza Resurfacing Study, August 23, 1983, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.

<sup>94</sup> Buhl to Reiss, September 27, 1983; Reiss to Lerner, September 30, 1983, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.

<sup>95</sup> Phillip K. Reiss, to the Record, Quarterly Meeting, HMSG, January 10, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 99-011, box 5.

<sup>96</sup> Weil to William N. Richards, Acting Assistant Secretary for Museum Programs, Smithsonian Institution, April 17, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4.

<sup>97</sup> Reiss to Lester Collins, May 1, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4.

<sup>98</sup> Reiss to Collins, May 3, 1984; Reiss to the Record, May 3, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4; Lester Collins to Reiss, May 9, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.

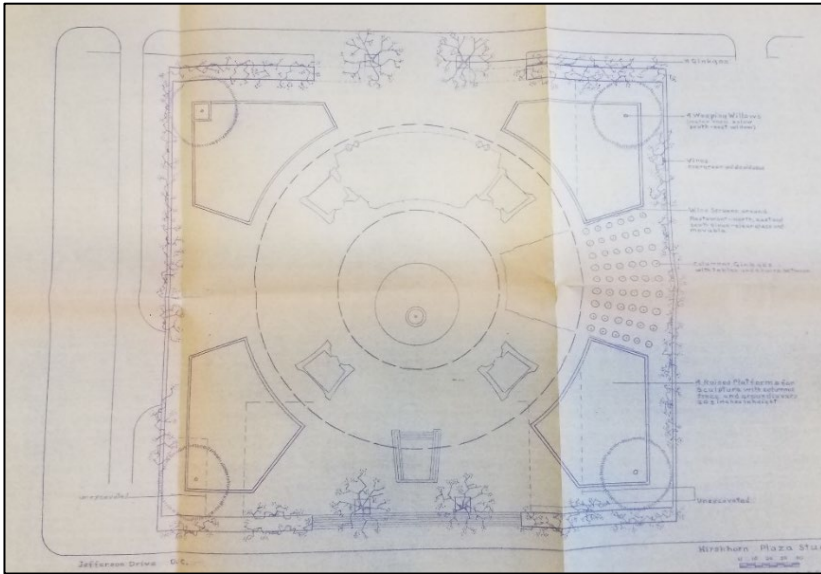


Figure 21 – Lester Collins’s Scheme A for the Plaza, May 21, 1984.  
(Smithsonian Archives)

the building’s circular form. (Figure 21) Tables and chairs would be located within the ginkgo grove to serve the adjacent food service trailer. Scheme B bracketed the building with rectangular display spaces, leaving more of the area paved.<sup>99</sup>

Discussions continued through the late spring and summer, and Collins met with Kirkpatrick, Lerner, Weil, Reiss, Director of Horticulture James Buckler, and Exhibits Director Joe Shannon on May 31. On June 13, Reiss recommended hiring Collins to develop a conceptual approach for the Plaza redesign, rather than the full

feasibility study he had originally requested. By the end of June, Reiss had asked Collins for another iteration of the concept with columnar ginkgoes on the west side of the Plaza (Scheme A). Reiss seems to have obtained some kind of cost estimate for Collins’s plan by the end of July because he wrote to Kirkpatrick on July 24 that the \$3 million estimated to replace the concrete surface of the Plaza with granite would not be needed to execute the Collins design.<sup>100</sup>

At that point momentum on the Plaza replacement project faded as a result of Director Lerner’s poor health and subsequent retirement and the determination to wait until the Hirshhorn’s new director, James Demetrian, came on board before making any decisions. Reiss kept Collins in the loop, and the landscape architect recommended extending the performance period of his contract beyond the December 31, 1984, closing date. Demetrian also knew about Collins’s proposal, and Kirkpatrick planned to set up a meeting at the end of November or in early December with herself, Reiss, and Demetrian to discuss the situation. A decision had not been made by the beginning of the new year, when Reiss wrote Demetrian a long memo describing the history of problems with the Plaza and efforts to repair it, while also laying out the case for devoting immediate attention to the Plaza, whether following the Collins design or that

<sup>99</sup> Reiss to Collins, May 21, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52; Lester Collins, Hirshhorn Plaza Study, Schemes A and B, May 21, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 89-030, box 17.

<sup>100</sup> Reiss, to the Record, Quarterly Meeting, HMSG, May 25, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149, box 3; Reiss to Robert Perkins, Director, OSS, Smithsonian Institution, June 13, 1984; Reiss to Collins, June 25, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 89-030, box 17; Reiss to Kirkpatrick, July 24, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.



of another landscape architect. A meeting was set for February 8 to determine whether to continue with Collins as the landscape architect.<sup>101</sup>

No further correspondence with Collins or regarding his design was found in research, but, under Demetrian, the Hirshhorn clearly determined to head in a new direction. By May 1, the director and Kirkpatrick had already invited two landscape architecture firms, Oehme, van Sweden & Associates of Washington, D.C., and Urban and Associates of Annapolis, Maryland, to participate in a limited competition for a new plan for the Plaza. In the meantime, another \$51,000 was devoted to Plaza repairs.<sup>102</sup>

Wolfgang Oehme (1930-2011) and James van Sweden (1935-2013) formed their company in 1975. They quickly gained notoriety for their residential as well as their institutional work, developing an approach to garden design that emphasized massed plantings of indigenous species and appropriate introduction of non-indigenous varieties, overlaid on a strong architectural framework.<sup>103</sup> An early institutional success came at the William McChesney Martin Building of the Federal Reserve Board in Washington in 1977. The Federal Reserve garden was the first expression of the principles that formed the foundation of their later work. They subsequently earned several government commissions, notably adding plantings to the Modernist and Postmodernist parks along Pennsylvania Avenue that were part of the work of the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>104</sup> In an interview for this study, James Urban recalled that Oehme and van Sweden “were the best known landscape architects in the city” at that time. Their reputation, as well as their work with institutional landscapes of the 1970s, might have made them seem natural choices for the competition. Urban suggested that his firm may have been mentioned to the Smithsonian by someone from SOM, with whom the Institution had already consulted on the Plaza. Urban, of course, had worked with SOM both as an employee and as a consultant, and their collaboration on the National Geographic Society building had recently been completed. David Childs, who had been head at the Washington office of SOM and then moved on to New York, was the partner in charge of the National Geographic project and would have been well positioned to mention Urban’s name.<sup>105</sup> Urban would also have been familiar from his work at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center.

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<sup>101</sup> Reiss to the Record, September 19, 1984; Collins to Reiss, November 16, 1984; Kirkpatrick office [?], two handwritten notes, November 27, 1984, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 89-030, box 17; Reiss to James Demetrian, Director, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, January 28, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2.

<sup>102</sup> Kirkpatrick to Reiss, May 1, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2; Requisition for Supplies or Services, For Emergency Repairs to Plaza of Hirshhorn Museum, April 26, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 87-113, box 5.

<sup>103</sup> Wolfgang Oehme, and James van Sweden, with Susan Rademacher Frey, *Bold Romantic Gardens: The New World Landscapes of Oehme and van Sweden* (Reston, Virginia: Acropolis Books, 1990), 39-51; Phillip Kennicott, “Wild Gardens that Grew Out from Washington.” *Washington Post*, October 19, 2015; “The New American Garden: The Landscape Architecture of Oehme, van Sweden” (exhibit), National Building Museum and the Cultural Landscape Foundation, <http://www.nbm.org/exhibitions-collections/exhibitions/new-american-garden.html>.

<sup>104</sup> Kennicott; National Park Service, National Mall and Memorial Parks, “Cultural Landscape Inventory: Pennsylvania Avenue, NW – White House to the Capitol,” 57.

<sup>105</sup> Bonnie Urban; Melissa Chiu, Al Masino, and Kevin Hull, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Carly Bond, Smithsonian Institution, Interview with James Urban regarding the Hirshhorn Plaza Modifications (transcript), September 6, 2022, 1.

Reiss sent the Smithsonian's request for a proposal for "concepts for the redevelopment of the museum's Plaza" to Urban on June 25, 1985. The letter summarized the concept for the project, as understood by the new Hirshhorn director: "As envisioned by Mr. Demetrian, we foresee the need to soften the Plaza space to provide an informal setting for sculpture and visitors. The redeveloped space should provide its own statement in contrast to other garden spaces.

It's recognized that the museum has a certain bold strength; however, the Plaza must seek to invite the visitor to partake of its wealth." The request stated that the proposal should consider such aspects of the project as locations for the artworks, plantings, walks, lighting, and summer dining facilities. A list of consultants to perform the work was also required.<sup>106</sup> Urban wrote back with multiple questions the following day, asking for drawings, budget, starting date, and information about the site, as well as the potential for a meeting with Demetrian and Kirkpatrick.<sup>107</sup> The competitors were to be paid \$2,500 for their proposals, which were to be presented to the Smithsonian in just thirty days.<sup>108</sup> Urban recalled that he had planned a week at the beach during this time, so the entire office of six people spent one day on the beach building concepts in the sand. They built a model of the Hirshhorn using a crab pot filled with sand for the building and making Plaza walls out of sand. Rocks, sticks, and feathers substituted for the Plaza sculptures.<sup>109</sup>

In fact, the presentations did not take place until August 26. The reasons for the delay are not clear from the documents reviewed for this study. Oehme, van Sweden went first at 10 a.m. in the Hirshhorn Board of Trustees conference room, with Urban & Associates following at 2:30 p.m.<sup>110</sup> The two teams took different approaches to their presentations, Oehme, van Sweden, with James van Sweden leading a three-person delegation, showed slides of various projects undertaken by the firm to illustrate their qualifications and employed a model and boards to illustrate their site analysis and proposed solutions.

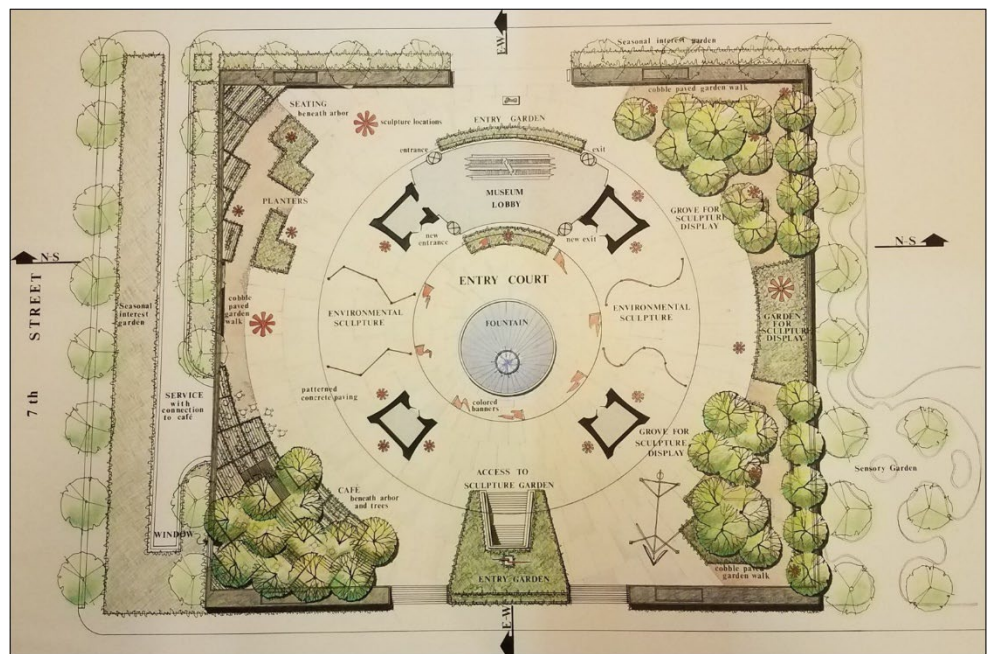


Figure 22 – Oehme van Sweden's concept plan for the Plaza rehabilitation, presented on August 26, 1985. (Smithsonian Archives)

<sup>106</sup> Reiss to James R. Urban, Urban & Associates, June 25, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2.

<sup>107</sup> Urban to Reiss, June 26, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2.

<sup>108</sup> Reiss to Urban, July 25, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with James Urban, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Reiss to Urban, July 25, 1985.

The firm explored multiple options to address categories such as circulation, sun and shade, restaurant locations, sculpture locations, and geometric structure. The boards included sections, illustrative plans, and garden views. (Figure 22) They did not include a cost estimate, and it is not clear whether other team members were designated.<sup>111</sup>

Urban & Associates, represented by James Urban and landscape architect Ellen Barth, had prepared a spiral-bound “Design Proposal” that included pages of resumes for the design team, relevant recent projects, illustrations of multiple options addressing five areas of concern (circulation, massing, sculpture locations, restaurant, and geometric structure), a chart explaining the proposed placement of walls, trees, and radial accents, a narrative description of the design, and a cost proposal.<sup>112</sup> The design team assembled by Urban & Associates included SOM as architects, structural engineers KCE, the mechanical and electrical engineering firm Dewberry & Davis, and lighting consultant Claude R. Engle. Urban

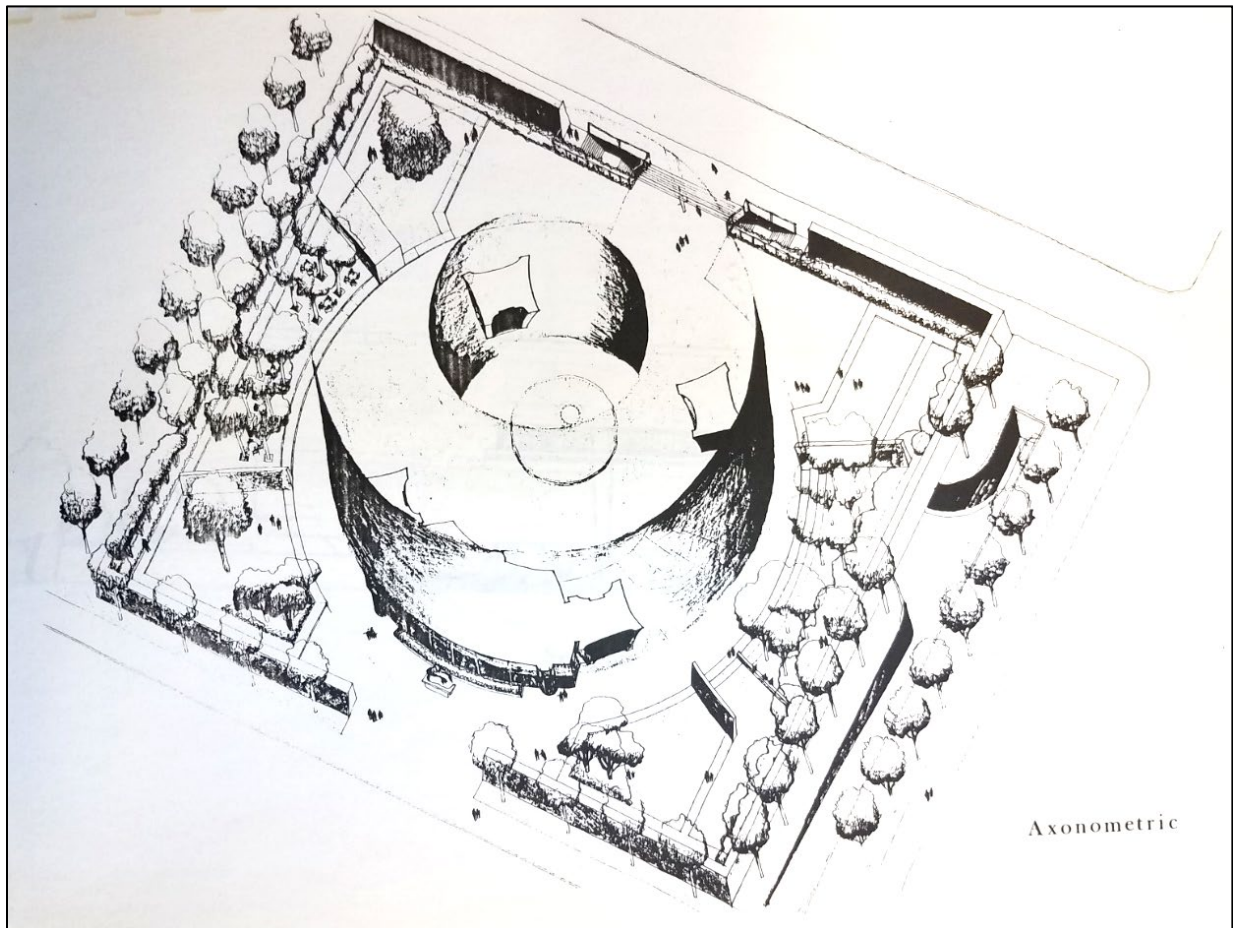


Figure 23 –Urban & Associates’ 1985 proposal includes many of the features that were ultimately built. (Smithsonian Archives)

included a resume for himself and three other landscape architects with his firm. The only resumé presented for SOM was that of David Childs. As relevant projects, Urban cited the National Geographic and Park Hyatt buildings with SOM,

<sup>111</sup> Carol Parsons, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Memorandum, August 26, 1985, Smithsonian Archives accession no. 04-149 box 4. The Parsons memo is the only written description of Oehme, van Sweden’s presentation found in research. Boards reviewed for this study mentioned no other firm besides the landscape architects.

<sup>112</sup> Parsons, Memorandum, August 26, 1985.



the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, and his current work at the National Sculpture Garden across the Mall, among others.<sup>113</sup> Urban & Associates' proposed design at this early stage, illustrated with black and white drawings, included many of the features that would ultimately be built. (Figures 23 and 24) "The proposed design," Urban's submission states, "creates a diverse series of green spaces for the display of sculpture. Accomplished primarily through a series of walls, these rooms, varying in size to accommodate medium sized sculpture as well as monumental sculpture, provide a diversity of color and texture. . . . Large trees at the center of the east and west spaces create two cool central spaces, extending the canopy of the drum out onto the Plaza along an east/west axis." Changes of level were proposed to allow for sufficient soil to support the plantings. Walls or trees created eight outdoor rooms for the location of sculpture. Urban proposed locating the restaurant in one of the rooms and identified locations for one artwork in each

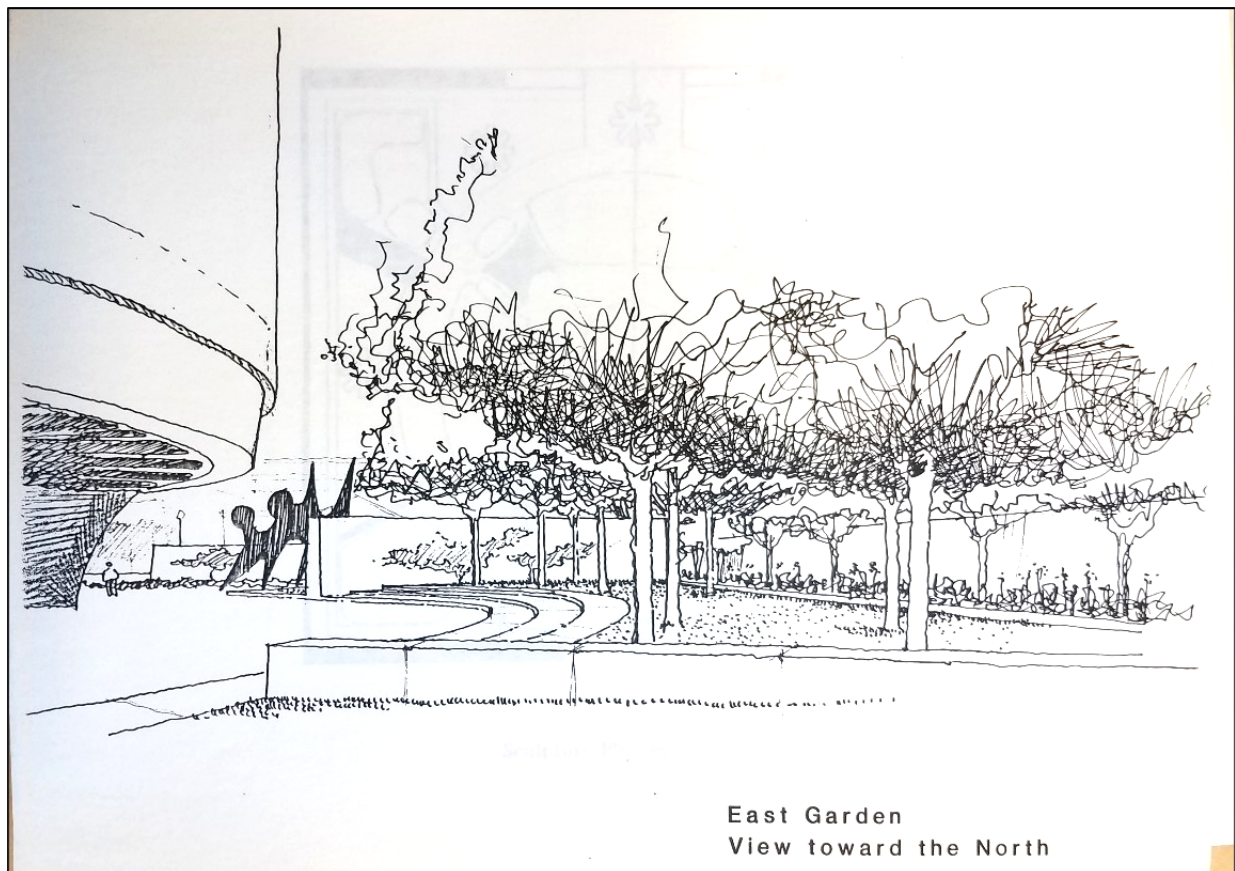


Figure 24 – Urban & Associates' proposed east garden, with Calder's *Two Discs* in the background.  
(Smithsonian Archives)

of the remaining spaces. The design extended the Plaza paving 16 feet beyond the building façade to provide for maintenance vehicles and equipment access. Materials for paving, walls, and walks were suggested, and the proposal

<sup>113</sup> Urban & Associates, "Hirshhorn Plaza, Washington, D.C., Technical Qualifications," August 26, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2. Parts of Urban & Associates' proposal were found in different Smithsonian Archives accessions. References to them will therefore identify the specific section of the proposal cited, as well as its location within the archives.



described the plantings, rather specifying species: large deciduous trees with open canopy and fine texture, for instance, and deciduous medium trees with coarse texture and broad crowns. Structural modifications were also discussed.<sup>114</sup>

Based on materials reviewed for this study, Urban and Barth's proposal seems more complete than Oehme, van Sweden's, but, if that was true, it was not mentioned in subsequent correspondence on the presentations. Demetron, Kirkpatrick, Reiss, Weil, and Carol Parsons of the Hirshhorn met the day after the presentations to make their decision on which firm to move forward with. The positives for the Urban design included its "compartmentalization" of space and his design's "relative restraint." Urban also seemed to the reviewers to be more flexible in his approach. Presentation attendees thought van Sweden's design made the sculpture secondary to the plantings. The group decided to have another meeting with Urban the following week. That meeting took place on September 6, during which Hirshhorn staff made suggestions for changes to Urban's design, including the use of lower seating walls and plantings to divide the space and relocation of the restaurant to the northeast corner of the Plaza. Urban incorporated these changes. The next steps in the process were outlined – fee proposal, schedule, contracting, and so forth – with ODC Director Reiss making the final decision. On December 6, 1985, Reiss sent Urban a scope of work for the project and asked for a price proposal.<sup>115</sup>

Reiss's request for a proposal pointed out that a master plan for the Hirshhorn would be undertaken at the same time as design development for the Plaza and that coordination between the master planning team and the Plaza rehabilitation team might be necessary. The master plan referred would become the "Space Use Master Plan Study" carried out by The Architects Collaborative (TAC) of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its purpose was to address the Hirshhorn's space needs, both short- and long-term. A statement of work (SOW) for the study had been produced in the spring of 1985, at about the time the Hirshhorn decided to move away from Lester Collins's plans for the Plaza rehabilitation. The SOW was revised twice, in October 1985 and in April 1986, and the Smithsonian contracted TAC for the work in May. As revised in April 1986, the statement of work asked the contractor to, among other things, "Prepare alternative plans for creating new space within the site boundaries of the HMSG Mall facility (both below and above the Plaza level)."<sup>116</sup> Hirshhorn and Smithsonian officials realized the implication of this requirement for the Plaza rehabilitation project – since construction on or below the Plaza was being considered, the Plaza work could not proceed until the space use study was complete. Reiss called Urban & Associates on March 4, 1986, to inform them of this development and confirmed with a letter the following day. In the letter, Reiss anticipated revising the scope of work for the Plaza rehabilitation once "a definitive concept for the use of the Plaza space" is confirmed by the study.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> James Urban, Urban & Associates, to Reiss, August 26, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.

<sup>115</sup> Parsons, Memorandum, August 27, 1985; Parsons to Demetron, et al, September 9, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4; Reiss to Urban, December 6, 1985, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2.

<sup>116</sup> Smithsonian Institution, Statement of Work [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Space Use Master Plan Study], Part I, May 8, 1985, revised October 2, 1985, revised April 11, 1986, Smithsonian Archives, accession 91-006, box 2.

<sup>117</sup> Reiss to Urban & Associates, March 5, 1986, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2.

As it turned out, a major scope revision was not necessary to account for direction from the space use study. TAC prepared several iterations of the study over the next two years, examining eleven possibilities and refining six of those. The firm prepared cost estimates and drawings for alternatives warranting further examination. The first three options prepared – one below ground, one both above and below, and one completely above ground – ranged in estimated cost between \$25.5 million and \$34.1 million.<sup>118</sup> In the summer of 1988, the Smithsonian and TAC presented three developed schemes to the National Capital Planning Commission: a “wrap-around” addition that engaged with the museum building on the south, a “bookend” plan consisting of two separate buildings on the east and west sides of the museum, and a combination of those two schemes. After meeting, the Smithsonian and the Hirshhorn agreed to move forward with the wrap-around scheme.<sup>119</sup> By the end of September, however, efforts to advance the Space Use Master Plan’s recommendations were suspended. The reasons for the move are not clear from documents reviewed for the study, but a revised statement of work issued for the Plaza rehabilitation at that time states that the master plan recommendations were neither approved nor funded. The Smithsonian therefore determined to move forward with the Plaza rehabilitation, although the SOW, issued on September 29, 1988, required a flexible approach to the project in case the expansion of the Hirshhorn resumed in the future. The statement of work noted that Urban had contributed two Plaza plans to the Space Use Study. He had also submitted a proposal based on the December 6, 1985, statement of work on January 27, 1986, before the space use study delayed further work. All three plans were to be considered as part of the new work.<sup>120</sup>

By this time, Urban’s circumstances had changed. He no longer ran a two-principal, six-member office. Rather, he was the sole proprietor of “James R. Urban, ASLA” – a one-man firm with part-time employees to handle administrative tasks. The September 1988 statement of work required Urban to “present convincing evidence that he can satisfactorily complete the required work with the team he assembles.” Two weeks earlier, Urban had written to Reiss, apprising him of his current circumstances and workload, which included six projects. Urban must have been convincing because Executive Officer Nancy Kirkpatrick reported at a quarterly meeting on November 30, 1988, that “the Museum is moving forward on the Plaza Design with Jim Urban as architect.”<sup>121</sup>

Urban also gathered a new team for the project, with the exception of lighting designer Claude Engle, a holdover from the 1985 team. The reasons for the unavailability of the other team members is not clear. The new team consisted of Washington architects Cannon/Faulkner, structural engineer James Madison Cutts, the engineering firm Shefferman &

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<sup>118</sup> “Office of Design and Construction Status Brief: Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden (HMSG) Space Use Master Plan,” ca. November 1986, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2.

<sup>119</sup> The Architects Collaborative, HMSG Space Use Master Plan Study: Meeting Notes, meeting nos. 60-63, July 26 and 28, 1988, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 97-044, box 1.

<sup>120</sup> Douglas Wonderlic, Planning Division, Office of Design and Construction, Smithsonian Institution, “Statement of Work: Plaza Resurfacing and Landscaping,” 1-2, ODC Project No. 8245104, August 24, 1988, revised September 29, 1988, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.

<sup>121</sup> Robert B. Burke, Quarterly Facilities Group Meeting, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, November 30, 1988, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.

Bigelson, and cost estimator James Peacock, along with Urban and Engle. After development and submission of a price proposal that responded to the scope, contracting, transmittal of previous documentation, and other issues, work on the new design began in the summer of 1989, and regular meetings began to take place to review the design's progress. "Refinements," as they were called in the minutes of the August 23 meeting, included such items as a decision to keep the food service facility in its current location next to the northwest pier. A six-foot-wide walk around the perimeter of the Plaza, composed of asphalt with a gravel surface, was also added. Other refinements discussed during these meetings included the type of plants to be used to divide the outdoor rooms and to otherwise soften the hardscape features, whether intermediate terraces would be used or single raised planted areas, and the size of the open space designated for display of sculpture. The Hirshhorn and the Office of Design and Construction accepted the revised design on September 14, 1989, with some small details still to be resolved.<sup>122</sup>

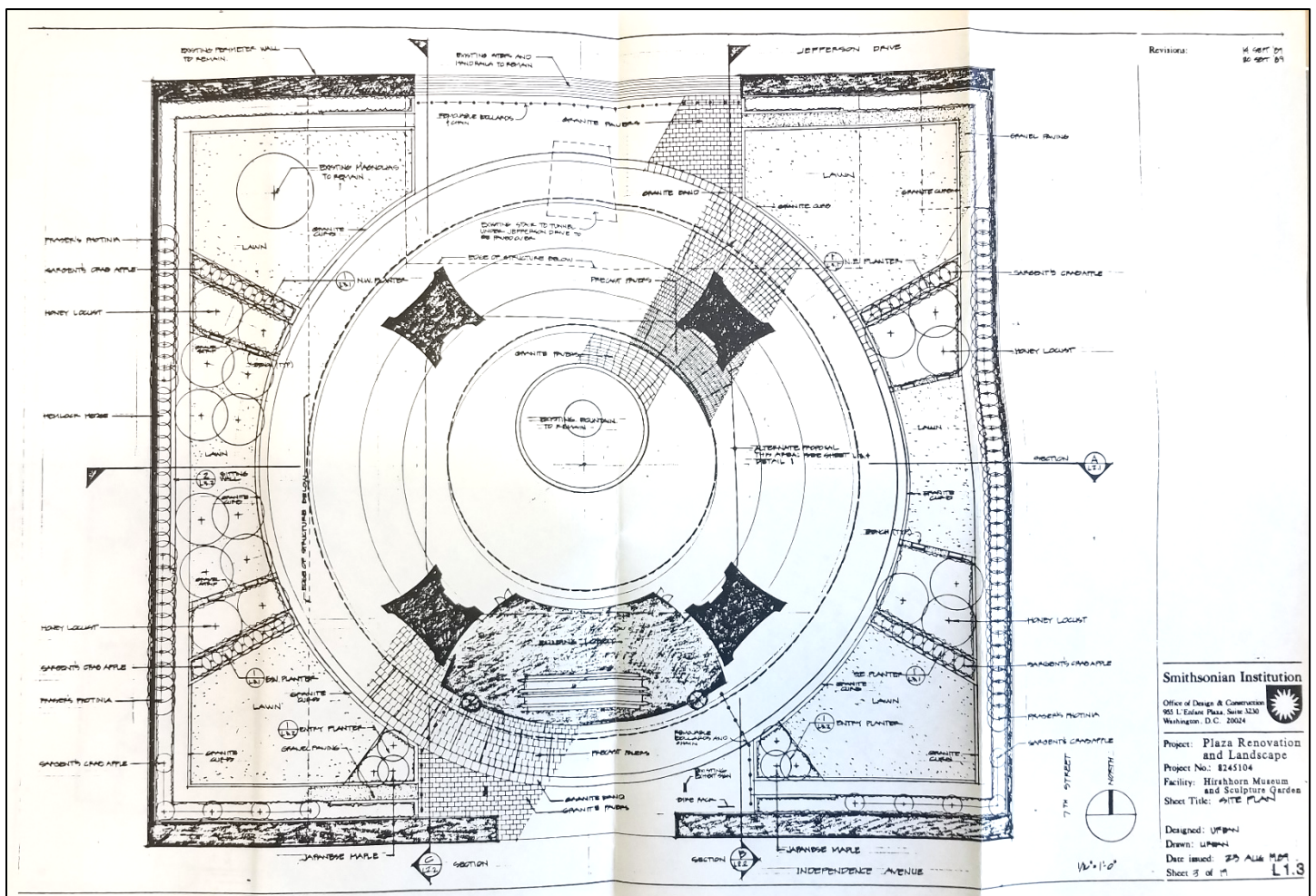


Figure 25 – Urban presented this plan on August 23, 1989, to Hirshhorn and Smithsonian staff. (Smithsonian Archives)

<sup>122</sup> James Urban, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation, Meeting Minutes, August 23, September 12, September 14, 1989, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149, box 4.

The late-summer 1989 design for the Plaza evolved directly from the August 1985 design and looks much like the Plaza as it was built. (Figure 25) A circle of paving lay beneath the museum building and extended sixteen feet beyond its façade. The paving surrounded the existing fountain and closed the former opening that led to the tunnel below Jefferson Drive, as required by the SOW.<sup>123</sup> Green space replaced paving on the east and west sides of the Plaza, and, as suggested by Smithsonian and Hirshhorn reviewers, vegetation (in this case Sargent crabapple trees) functioned as walls between the three rooms established on each side. The center panels on each side combined honeylocust trees with lawn, while lawn constituted the primary plant material in the corner rooms. Urban retained the three magnolia trees in the northwest room and placed three Japanese maple trees in what he termed “entry planters” in the southeast and southwest corner rooms on either side of the paving leading from Independence Avenue to the museum lobby. A perimeter path bordered each of the green spaces along the boundary walls, and Urban located a granite seating wall in front of hemlock trees at the center of the west wall. Photinia anchored the hemlocks on the west and stretched along the east perimeter wall. Granite-faced curbs ringed the planted areas, and granite-faced walls bordered the raised planting beds. Benches were to be placed on paved radial strips bordering each of the central panels.

The Commission of Fine Arts approved the design on October 19, 1989, with the proviso that the photinia trees along the east and west walls be extended to the corners, rather than covering only the center stretch of the walls. The National Capital Planning Commission approved the preliminary site and building plans at its meeting on November 2. Cynthia R. Field, the director of the Smithsonian’s Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, wrote to the District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer, Carol B. Thompson, on October 26 to state the Institution’s position that the new Plaza would not affect the historic characteristics of the National Mall. Thompson concurred on November 27.<sup>124</sup>

One element in the built design not included in the 1989 drawings was an accessible entrance on the north. The street level entrance to the Plaza on the south was already accessible, and it may have been thought that this condition satisfied the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, which was a condition of the September 1988 statement of work for the Plaza project. The issue was raised in a May 7, 1990, meeting on the development of the design. Urban responded with a suggestion to locate the entrance at the northwest corner of the site, but concern was raised as to whether this location, away from the primary street entrance, would be objected to. Four different approaches were discussed in a September 12, 1990, design meeting, including a double ramp along the stairs on the north side of the Plaza and three schemes to

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<sup>123</sup> A decision had been made during the summer of 1980 to close the tunnel between the plaza and the garden. It had been used for sculpture storage since that time. (Weil to Nancy Kirkpatrick, July 10, 1980, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-149, box 3.) In his interview with Hirshhorn staff, Urban recalled that security issues in an open below-ground space, hidden from public view, may have led to its closure. He also noted that the “sold” the idea of not closing the tunnel permanently to the Smithsonian during his rehabilitation of the plaza, in case they might wish to reopen it in the future. (See interview with Urban in the appendix to this report.)

<sup>124</sup> Reginald W. Griffith, Executive Director, National Capital Planning Commission, to Reiss, November 8, 1989, Smithsonian Archives, Accession no. 92-138, box 2; Cynthia R. Field, Director, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation, to Carol B. Thompson, District of Columbia Historic Preservation Officer, October 26, 1989, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 92-138, box 2.



enter through the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden west of the Plaza. Landscape architect Paul Lindell, in the Smithsonian's Horticulture Services Division (now Smithsonian Gardens), proposed a fifth alternative along the inside of the boundary wall. Discussion continued throughout the fall and into the winter. On January 28, 1991, the Hirshhorn determined to proceed with a scheme that consisted of a ramp entering the site from a new opening in the west Plaza wall from the Ripley Garden and linking with the Plaza's perimeter walk.<sup>125</sup> As the Ripley Garden had been named for the wife of the Secretary of the Smithsonian institution, S. Dillon Ripley, Smithsonian officials urged that great care be taken with any alterations made to accommodate the accessible entrance. Mrs. Ripley was a horticulturalist who had accompanied her husband on entomological and ornithological research expeditions to India, Bhutan, and Indonesia. She was named an honorary life member of the Smithsonian Women's Committee and had donated plants and seedlings from her own home for the garden named in her honor. Hirshhorn officials made certain that the Women's Committee, which had funded the garden, was kept informed of the changes. As designed by Urban, the accessible entrance included brick paving from the sidewalk to a granite ramp and granite framing of the new opening in the west Plaza wall at its north corner.<sup>126</sup>

Plaza accessibility also led to a change in the material planned for use in the perimeter walks. Urban's design had specified an asphalt walk with a gravel surface, intended to resemble the surface of the gravel walks on the National Mall. Urban noted that the specified walks – called “special asphalt paving” in drawings and correspondence – were used in Colonial Williamsburg. Mock-ups of a section of the walk were attempted, and different aggregates were tried. The attempts did not, however, satisfy requirements for the smooth surface needed for accessibility due to loose aggregate and unevenness. Urban redesigned the paving using 4 by 4-inch, square granite blocks set in concrete.<sup>127</sup>

A second paving issue that extended design development was the material to be used in the paved area beneath the museum and at its entrances from Jefferson Drive and Independence Avenue. The approved concept design for the Plaza replacement employed both granite (around the fountain) and precast concrete paving. By the time the Smithsonian went before the agencies for approval of its 50% drawings in the fall of 1990, the granite had been scrapped in favor poured in place, exposed aggregate concrete. The Smithsonian had determined that even the limited amount of granite proposed at the concept stage could not be covered by the project's budget. At its October 25, 1990, meeting, the Commission of Fine Arts objected, stating in its follow-up letter to the Smithsonian that the concrete was

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<sup>125</sup> Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation, Meeting Minutes, May 7, September 12, November 7, December 14, 1990; January 28, 1991, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4; Tom Freudenheim, Assistant Secretary for Museums, Smithsonian Institution, to Demetron, October 5, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 94-117, box 6.

<sup>126</sup> Kirkpatrick to Demetron, May 1, 1991, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation, Meeting Minutes, May 30, 1991, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 087-040, box 5.

<sup>127</sup> Urban to Mario Ferris, Office of Design and Construction, Smithsonian Institution, September 2, 1992, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 103; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation, Meeting Minutes, May 30, 1991; David Jenkins, Hyman Construction Company, to Stephanie Stefanik, Contracting Officer's Technical Representative, Smithsonian Institution, May 8, 1992; Stefanik to Jenkins, July 21, 1992, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 103; Mary Livingston Ripley, Horticulturalist, “*Hartford Courant*, April 18, 1996, *Hartford Courant* website, <https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-xpm-1996-04-18-9604180311-story.html>, accessed November 3, 2022.

“unacceptable” in color as well as texture. To comply with CFA and stay within the budget, the Smithsonian determined to switch to precast, exposed aggregate concrete pavers with a sandblasted finish and return to the commission in December.<sup>128</sup>

On the day of the December meeting, commissioners and staff visited the Hirshhorn to review material samples for the paving. Urban presented at the meeting itself, enumerating the difficulties with the site, especially its condition as the roof of a basement space, the shallowness of the space between the surface of the Plaza and the roof structure below, and the constraints on sculpture installation due to these factors. He also described the various options for surface materials, noting the \$2 million extra cost of using granite. The Smithsonian had settled on lightly sandblasted, precast concrete panels that could be cut into shapes that, when installed, would echo the radial design of Bunshaft’s original Plaza. Despite Urban and the Smithsonian’s best efforts, however, the CFA rejected their latest proposal and again urged granite paving. Chairman J. Carter Brown stated that the commissioners could not approve a proposal that it thought was wrong, whatever the immediate cost implications. Given the inevitable need for repairs and later replacement, using concrete might cost more in the long run. “That’s the nicest thing we could have done for the Smithsonian,” Brown said, “but you just [don’t] realize it.”<sup>129</sup> The chairman wrote in his official letter relaying CFA’s decision that “the Commission has determined that concrete in any guise is a short-term expedient and, therefore, inappropriate to a major national museum in general as well as this building in particular.” Further, he wrote, “it seems in the best interest of all concerned, including the long-term economy of maintenance for the U.S. Government, to hold the project in abeyance until funds are available for providing the Hirshhorn with the appropriate paving material.”<sup>130</sup>

The issue delayed the start of construction, since the ODC couldn’t release the project for bid if it exceeded the agreed-upon budget. The Smithsonian considered its options and concluded that it had the authority to move money planned for other projects to fund replacing the Plaza surface with granite, and ODC Director Dillman recommended that course of action on March 20, 1991. Assistant Secretary for Finance and Administration Nancy Suttentfield approved reprogramming funding from planned Hirshhorn facade repairs to execute the Plaza replacement on March 25. By that date, the Smithsonian had already arranged to put working drawings for the Plaza on the agenda for the April 18 meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts. The use of granite led to CFA approval.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation, Meeting Minutes, October 31, 1990, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4; J. Carter Brown, Chairman, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, to Robert P. Dillman, Director, Office of Design and Construction, Smithsonian Institution, November 5, 1990, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-153, box 1.

<sup>129</sup> U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, meeting transcript, December 13, 1990, 101-119, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4. Brown’s quotation can be found on page 119.

<sup>130</sup> Brown to Dillman, December 17, 1990, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-153, box 1.

<sup>131</sup> Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation, Meeting Minutes, January 28, 1991, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-149 box 4; Siegle to Dillman, March 25, 1991, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-153, box 1; Dillman to Charles Atherton, Secretary, CFA, February 25, 1991, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-153, box 1.

George Hyman Construction Company of Bethesda, Maryland, received the contract to complete the project. The notice to proceed was dated December 2, 1991, with construction slated to begin on December 17. The work was to include, among other things, “removing existing paving and landscape materials, and installing a new heavy duty membrane waterproofing system above the existing occupied basement spaces, close the tunnel below Jefferson Drive; improve perimeter concrete garden walls and plenums; while providing patterned granite pavers surrounded by granite faced planter curbs and walls. Sculpture spaces receive lawns divided into rooms by radial divider elements containing decorative plantings, primarily trees planted as groves, borders, and visual separators. . . . [adding] Building lighting and support power systems . . . , installing additional and replacement terrace and planter drains, in conjunction with sub-surface planter drainage and lawn sprinkler systems. A mobile food service operation is accommodated with building utility connections built into the structural pier . . .”<sup>132</sup>

Some details were still being worked out as the selection of a construction firm advanced during the fall of 1991. The granite to be used on the Plaza floor and facing details such as curbs and walls was an important one. While always intended for the facing of planter walls and curbs, the use of granite for all of the Plaza paving and the substitution of granite blocks in the perimeter walks increased the amount of granite required substantially.<sup>133</sup> During the summer of 1991, Urban and the Smithsonian began a search for a quarry that could supply the required amount of Cedar Rose granite that had been selected for the work. After a trip to a North Carolina Granite Corporation (NCGC) quarry in August, Urban determined that it could not provide sufficient quantities of the specified stone, but could provide sufficient quantities of a different color that had been previously reviewed for the project. Alternative granite types were also considered. After a November trip to the NCGC quarries in Mount Airy and near Charlotte, which included Stephanie Stefanik, the Smithsonian contracting officer’s technical representative (COTR), Hyman’s project manager David Jenkins, and representatives of firms that would be cutting and installing the stone, Urban and Stefanik concluded that NCGC could not supply sufficient quantities of the granite that also met its quality standards. At the end of December, Urban traveled to Quebec, Canada, to visit two quarries, along with Flavio Patuelli of MX Marble and Granite of Landover, Maryland, who would do the field cutting of the stone, and Hank Kramer of Hyman. The decision was made to contract with Granit Bussière to supply Ash Rose granite as a substitute for Cedar Rose and to contract with Lacroix et Fils to supply Atlantic Black granite. The Ash Rose would pave the Plaza below the building and around the fountain, the Atlantic Black granite for a ring at the edge of the circular Plaza and at the street entrances.<sup>134</sup>

As one of the most costly features of the new Plaza, the granite paving received careful attention from Urban and the Smithsonian. The landscape architect reported his dissatisfaction with its installation and with expansion and mortar

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<sup>132</sup> Paul Lindell to Horticultural Services Division Staff, October 18, 1991, Smithsonian Gardens Records.

<sup>133</sup> Urban to Reiss, February 16, 1990, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 98-130, box 52.

<sup>134</sup> Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation, Meeting Minutes, August 12, 1991; Urban to Stefanik, November 27, 1991, Accession no. 04-149 box 4, Smithsonian Institution, accession no. 04-149 box 4; Urban to Stefanik, December 30, 1991, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 104.

joints on more than one occasion. At one point, work stopped until improvements to the stonework were made. Contractors were required to redo caulking more than once. While most of the cutting and finishing of the granite panels was done off-site, some of the stones needed hand-finishing by MX Marble at the work site. This was true mainly for swales providing drainage for the Plaza. In July 1992, a summer storm sent water flooding into the Hirshhorn lobby at the north doors. Urban concluded that the granite had not been set or cut properly and that smaller drainpipes had been used than were shown on the drawings. The swale was one of the last major projects completed, continuing into October 1992.<sup>135</sup>

A late change in the plantings for the Plaza took place in August 1992. George Killian, the Maryland branch manager of the landscaping company installing the plantings, Chapel Valley, requested that Nellie Stevens holly trees (*Ilex 'Nellie Stevens'*) be used along the east and west walls. Urban had prescribed photinia for those locations in his plans but had determined to substitute cherry laurel or cleyera in discussions with Smithsonian landscape architect Paul Lindell. Urban quickly agreed to the change to the holly species. As might be expected Urban paid close attention to the plantings and took issue with some of Hyman's decisions on when to plant and installation of sod beneath the elm trees outside the Plaza walls along Independence Avenue. Urban noticed a dieback of some of the crabapple trees being used as dividers between the outdoor rooms and blamed the problem on "out of season" planting. By October it was determined that several of the crabapple trees had to be replaced. Nine dead crabapple trees were removed and replaced in the spring of 1993, along with one hemlock tree.<sup>136</sup>

Construction proceeded during the fall of 1992, with Hyman planning to leave the site on October 16 while remaining stonework finishing was completed. Light fixtures – to be placed on top of the perimeter walls and aimed at the building itself, with the Plaza to receive reflected illumination – were not scheduled to be shipped from the manufacturer until November 6. A December 4 "punchlist" of items to be cleaned, fixed, or redone before the work was accepted numbered eighty items, most having to do with the paving. Stefanik increased the number to about a hundred on December 15, adding items such as plaster patching, replacement of a hemlock tree, fixing a sprinkler, and replacement of broken lights on planter walls. Progress on resolving these issues seems to have been rapid, because on January 13,

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<sup>135</sup> Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation, Meeting Minutes, April 10, April 13, July 1, 1992, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 103; Urban to Stefanik, July 15, 1992, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 104; David Jenkins, Project Manager, Hyman Construction, Progress Meeting Minutes, October 14, 1992, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 103.

<sup>136</sup> George Killian, Maryland Branch Manager, Chapel Valley, to Jenkins, August 4, 1992; Urban to Stefanik, August 6, 1992; Hyman Construction, "Plant Schedule for Hirshhorn Museum," August 7, 1992; Jenkins to Killian, October 2, 1992; Stefanik to Underwood, April 23, 1993, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 103; Urban to Stefanik, May 7, 1992; Urban to Stefanik, July 28, 1992 [?], Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 104 [first page missing].



1993, Stefanik informed William Billingsley of the Smithsonian's Office of Environmental Management in Safety that the Plaza would be turned over to the Hirshhorn at close of business on January 15, pending completion of the punchlist.<sup>137</sup>

The formal opening of the Plaza took place in June 1993. As-built drawings and photographs from the time depict a landscape consistent in overall concept with the one developed by Urban eight years earlier, with details refined for the 1989 restart of the project. A new waterproofing membrane resolved the issue of leakage into the basement level when it rained, while additional drains in the paving, grading, and improved piping below carried rainwater away from the Plaza. Ash Rose granite paving extended outward from the fountain to a circle 20 feet beyond the façade of the museum, laid out in a radial arrangement based on Bunshaft's original paving plan. The new paving provided an attractive, even, long-lasting surface. A ring of Atlantic Black granite bordered the circle of Ash Rose paving and led from the entrances on Independence Avenue and Jefferson Drive to museum. (Figure 26) It was also used for the 4-inch



Figure 26 – This 1995 photograph shows the Plaza's circle of Ash Rose granite paving (right) intersecting with Atlantic Black granite in two arrangements – a ring around the circular paving and horizontal rows near the Jefferson Drive entrance to the Plaza. (Smithsonian Gardens)

<sup>137</sup> Jenkins, Progress Meeting Minutes, October 14, 1992, November 18, 1992; Stefanik to William Billingsley, Office of Environmental Management and Safety, Smithsonian Institution, et al., January 13, 1993, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 103; David Jenkins to Stefanik, "Punchlist," December 4, 1992; Stefanik to Jenkins, December 15, 1992, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 104.

square pavers that surfaced the perimeter walks. Ash Rose granite was used to face the concrete curbs edging the planted areas and the accessible entrance in the west Plaza wall and for its ramp. Claude Engle's light solution took the form of banks of circular lamps (four banks on the east and west walls, two on the north and south) mounted on the perimeter walls and focused on the building. Lights were also placed in the low, Ash Rose granite-faced walls bordering the planted areas and bollards at the corners. In addition, lights – level with the ground – were placed in the grass of the central rooms on both sides.

Urban divided the green spaces east and west of the paved circle into three slightly asymmetrical spaces with radial planter walls and paving with benches. The planter walls provided soil, sand, drainage, and an irrigation system to support the trees and other vegetation and created topographical variety across the site. Sod carpeted all of the rooms, with the use of trees varying from one space to another. Sargent crabapple trees planted close enough together to form an aerial hedge filled the radial planters, enhancing the seclusion of the center rooms. (Figure 27) Honeylocusts grew from the sod in these spaces. On the west, twelve honeylocusts in two curved rows filled the space except for an opening at the center intended for sculpture. On the east, two groups of three honeylocusts occupied the corners of the central rooms, with the sodded center section left open for art. No trees grew in the northeast corner room, while the three magnolia trees that had been planted in Bunshaft's Plaza remained in the northwest room. (Figure 28) Urban



Figure 27 – Flowering Sargent crabapple trees and pachysandra in a raised planter faced with Ash Rose granite separate the west central room from the grassy area on the south in this 1998 photograph. (Smithsonian Gardens)





Figure 28– The magnolia trees dating from the Plaza’s original construction in 1974. The accessible entrance to the Plaza (right) is also visible in this 1997 photograph. (Smithsonian Gardens)

placed three green-leafed Japanese maple trees in what he designated “entry planters” near the paving east and west of the Independence Avenue entrance to the Plaza.

At the center of the west wall, along the perimeter walk, Urban placed sixteen Canadian hemlock trees, flanked on each side by Nellie Stevens holly trees. Savin juniper extended from the hollies to the corners. On the south, the juniper turned the corner and ran along the south wall to meet Manhattan euonymus at the Independence Avenue entrance to the Plaza. On the north, the juniper ended at the accessible gate, then picked up again at the end of the ramp and continued along the north wall to the Jefferson Drive entrance. Urban placed Nellie Stevens hollies between the east wall and its perimeter walk, with pachysandra beneath and Savin juniper on both sides. As on the west, the juniper turned the corner on the south and ran toward euonymus at the Independence Avenue entrance. On the north, the juniper turned the corner and continued to the Independence Avenue entrance. Urban also planted the narrow space outside the boundary wall on the north: Sugar tyme crabapple over Savin juniper. Elm trees, the street tree of the Mall area, grew outside the east, south, and west walls.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Smithsonian Institution, Office of Design & Construction, “Planting Plan,” drawing L1.1; “Planting List and Details,” drawing L2.1, June 12, 1991, as-built, Smithsonian Institution, Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation. As noted earlier in the text, the small holly trees planted replaced the photinia that Urban planned to use, per a request from the landscaping company.

Benjamin Forgey, who had suggested the compromise to the Sculpture Garden controversy in 1971 as art and architecture critic at the *Washington Star*, reviewed the new Plaza when it opened in 1993. Now writing for the *Washington Post*, Forgey praised Urban both for what he did and did not do. Forgey mused that Urban knew he could not challenge the simple but bold geometry of Bunshaft's circular building and nearly square Plaza with an abundance of plantings (as Hirshhorn staff had surmised Oehme, van Sweden might do). Instead, he used the existing geometry to provide the sense of scale that the site needed – "something to mediate between huge and human size." "Urban's design," Forgey writes, "provides that something" in the trees, shrubs, and groundcover, as well as in the low walls and walks. As a result, "The sculptures, sparsely distributed, thrive in the new environment," as do people. Forgey notes visitors strolling, talking, reading, and lying on the grass, as well as engaging with the art. The writer also acknowledges the accomplishment in completing this "thoroughly engineered piece of landscape," as Urban called it. He recites the landscape architect's consultations with "'urban ecologists' and golf course specialists" to determine how best to grow grass in the shallow planting areas of the Plaza. The solution required a layer of Styrofoam under 10 to 12 inches of sand, a layer of soil, and grass typically used on golf course greens. "By such means," Forgey writes, "is an urban desert transformed into an oasis."<sup>139</sup>

### The Plaza since 1993

A few fixes or alterations to the initial build-out of the Plaza occurred soon after it opened. In addition to difficulties with the first plantings of crabapple and hemlock trees, a large number of the Savin junipers had died or were missing by the summer of 1993 and had to be replaced under the warranty of the landscaping company that had installed the plants, Chapel Valley. The sod in the northeast room had also turned brown and needed attention. New handrails for the stairs at the Jefferson Drive entrance to the Plaza were installed in April 1994. Hirshhorn Director Demetrios had noticed that the stair handrails did not match those of the accessible ramp; he wanted matching rails that also complied with accessibility standards. The rails and stanchions were produced and installed by Superior Iron Works of Sterling, Virginia. A fix that was not undertaken was the removal of rectangular bollards that Urban had placed at the ends of the paved strips in the center rooms on which benches were mounted. Urban had located the bollards next to the perimeter walks in order to encourage visitors to walk on the grass to view the artworks and reach the benches. Demetrios did not like the bollards and suggested their removal. Since the bollards were not removed, ODC Design Manager Mario Ferris's concerns about the costs of removal and potential damage to the waterproofing membrane beneath may have tabled the idea.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Benjamin Forgey, "Gallery of Greenery," *Washington Post*, June 12, 1993, *Washington Post* Archive website, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1993/06/12/gallery-of-greenery>, accessed July 29, 2022.

<sup>140</sup> Stefanik to Tim Hoff, Chapel Valley Landscaping, July 19, 1993, Smithsonian Gardens Records; Stefanik to Frank Underwood, Building Manager, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, April 15, 1994; Beverly Pierce, Director of Administration, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, to Stefanik, November 6, 1992 (annotations by Mario Ferris), Ferris to Urban, November 16, 1992, accession 04-013, box 103.

An ongoing concern in the early years of the new Plaza was its central feature, the fountain. The fountain was operable, but leaked water around the perimeter and below its basin. The Smithsonian hired architrave, p.c., architects and K-LO Plumbing to undertake the repairs in the spring of 1994, and the work continued for more than a year. It was accepted by the Smithsonian on November 13, 1995.<sup>141</sup> The fountain, dating to Gordon Bunshaft's original design, was repaired periodically over the years, according to Smithsonian records.<sup>142</sup>

A change to the Plaza made beginning in 1997 that can still be seen today affects James Urban's original planting scheme. In the spring of that year, Smithsonian landscape architect Paul Lindell initiated "base plantings of the Plaza perimeter," according to a letter to Hirshhorn Administrator Beverly Lang Pierce. The work affected "corner plantings and some of the wood plant materials and low ground covers needed along the north wall." Lindell expected to have the planting done in the weeks around the Memorial Day holiday. He also expected to make more plant purchases after the holiday.<sup>143</sup> When the Plaza opened the areas identified by Lindell had mostly been planted with Savin juniper and euonymus, both low-growing plants. Large numbers of the juniper had quickly died and been replaced just after the Plaza opened. Since no Savin juniper remains on the site, it might be surmised that they didn't thrive on the Plaza and that Lindell replaced them and the euonymus at this time. The plants chosen for the specified locations, judging by the plants located there today, were likely cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerus* 'Otto Luyken' and *Prunus caroliniana* 'Monus'), Torulosa juniper (*Juniperis chinensis* 'Torulosa') and Nootka cypress (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*).<sup>144</sup> These plantings can grow taller than the original Plaza walls and represent an alteration to Urban's concept for the wall plantings, which used a small number of species of varying heights that could be shaped to maintain a geometrical relationship with Bunshaft's Plaza, soften the hardscape features, and yet still reveal the walls and their material and formal relationships to the circular building. A less visible change to the plantings inside the Plaza has been the removal of one of the Japanese maple trees from each of the entry planters. Outside the walls, a variety of low-growing shrubs and flowers have been planted among the elm trees on the south and along the wall on the north. Another change in the vegetation since 1993 has been the replacement of the 'Nellie R. Stevens' holly trees with American holly (*Ilex opaca*). It is not known when this change took place.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> architrave p.c., architects, Construction Progress Meeting Minutes, May 25, 1994; Derek Ross, Contract Officer's Technical Representative, to Demetron, Underwood, John Franklin, architrave architects, John Kaleo, K-LO Plumbing, August 25, 1994; Ross to Demetron, Underwood, September 15, 1994; Joyce M. Regan, Smithsonian Institution, Design and Construction Division, to K-Lo Plumbing, Inc., March 5, 1996, Smithsonian Archives, accession 04-013, box 96.

<sup>142</sup> See, for instance, Demetron to Frank Gilmore, "Hirshhorn Plaza Fountain Operation," May 29, 1997; John Kerns, Assistant Manager, Electrical Systems Shop, to Fletcher Johnson, Facility Manager, April 16, 1999, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-153, box 1; Plaza Fountain Repair, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 95% Submission, 16 drawings, January 10, 2002, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 15-002, box 237.

<sup>143</sup> Paul Lindell to Beverly Pierce, Administrator, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, May 12, 1997, Smithsonian Archives, accession no. 04-153, box 1.

<sup>144</sup> The plant species are taken from "HMSG Plaza Plant List 2023," provided to the authors by Smithsonian Gardens.

<sup>145</sup> Melinda Whicher, Smithsonian Gardens, communication with the authors, August 7, 2023.



In 1999, two sets of bird deterrent devices on the east side of the Plaza were activated to alleviate cleaning issues for sculptures by Claes Oldenburg and Tony Smith. The museum received complaints about the loudness of the sonic devices and lowered the volume.<sup>146</sup>

Alterations have been made to the Independence Avenue entrance to the Plaza during the twenty-first century to improve security against vehicle intrusion. A row of jersey barriers was installed across the opening between the Plaza walls (with gaps for pedestrians to pass through) by 2004. Round, concrete planters filled with vegetation replaced the jersey barriers by 2007. Those planters, located at the southernmost edge of the Plaza paving, remain in place, although the plantings have changed.<sup>147</sup>

Other small changes to the Plaza since its opening have taken the form of additional lighting placed on the underside of the museum building and security cameras. A number of temporary changes have also taken place. This includes the replacement of sod in the southeast corner room with marble chips to accommodate a work by Lee Ufan in his 2019-2020 exhibit, “Open Dimension.” The exhibit placed ten of Ufan’s works throughout the Plaza and marked the first time in Hirshhorn history that nearly the entire Plaza was dedicated to the work of one artist.<sup>148</sup> (Figure 29) The show took advantage of the Plaza sculptures having been removed in anticipation of the planned replacement of the museum’s façade panels. Shortly after the exhibition ended, work began on the façade project. When that work was completed in the winter of 2022-2023, the southeast corner room was returfed. The east side of the Plaza was closed to the public for the duration of the façade replacement, and the northeast corner room functioned as a laydown area for construction materials. With the completion of the façade project, the northeast corner room was also resodded, and new



Figure 29 – A work from Lee Ufan’s 2019 -20 exhibition, “Open Dimension.” (Hirshhorn)

ground cover plantings were installed beneath the trees that separate the rooms on the east side of the Plaza. The west side of the Plaza generally remained free from changes due to the façade project, but sedge, ferns, and other low

<sup>146</sup> Lee Aks, Conservator, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, to Fletcher Johnson, June 1, 1999; Demetrios to Ed Schiesser, Chief, Office of Exhibits and Design, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, June 22, 1999, Smithsonian Archives, Accession no. 04-153, box 1.

<sup>147</sup> Lauren McCunney and Marisa Scalera, Smithsonian Institution, electronic communications with the authors, November 7, 2022.

<sup>148</sup> “Lee Ufan: Open Dimension, Sep 27, 2019-Oct 18, 2020,” Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden website, <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/exhibitions/lee-ufan-open-dimension>, accessed September 16, 2022.

plantings were added to the beds in the vicinity of the accessible entrance in the northwest corner of the Plaza, replacing some shrubbery. A final recent change is the move of several of the art works to the Plaza formerly located in the Sculpture Garden, renovation of which began in the summer of 2023.

### Current Description

The Plaza of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden measures 360 feet along its north and south sides by 302 feet on the east and west. It is bordered by an eight-foot-tall perimeter wall constructed of concrete with a Swenson Pink granite aggregate. (Figure 30) The north and south walls contain ventilation ductwork and mechanical systems, and lighting for the building and the Plaza is mounted on the upper surfaces of all four walls. Access to the Plaza is located at three points along the walls. There is a 75-foot-wide opening on the south along Independence Avenue with planters acting as barriers to vehicular traffic. (Figure 31) Along Jefferson Drive, granite-clad steps rise from the sidewalk to a 170-foot opening in the north wall. (Figure 32) Concrete barriers are located at sidewalk level on the north to limit access to pedestrians. A gated, accessible entrance, framed in granite, is located in the west wall at its northern end. (Figure 33)



Figures 30 and 31 – Concrete wall with Swenson Pink granite aggregate (left) and entrance planters along Independence Avenue. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)



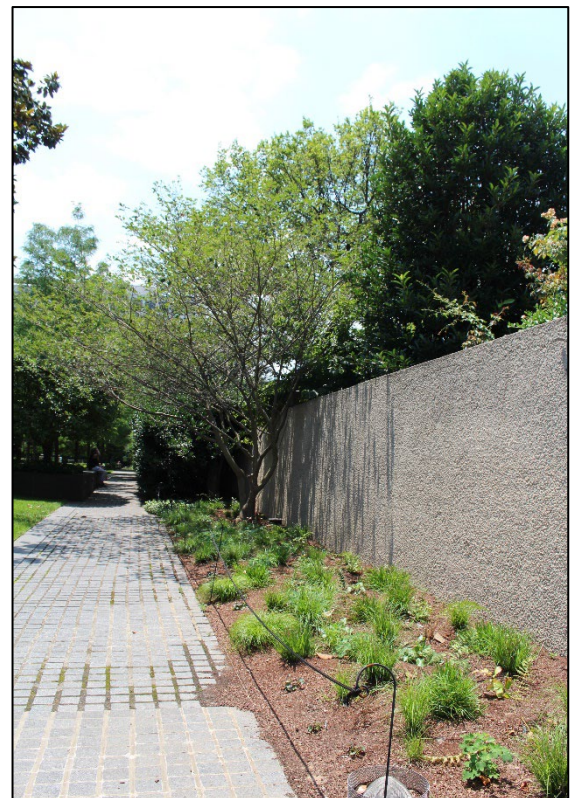
Figures 32 and 33 – Sidewalk barriers on Jefferson Drive (left) and accessible entrance. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)



The circular museum, 231 feet in diameter with a 115-foot-wide void in the center, stands above Plaza level on 14-foot-tall concrete piers. The Plaza contained within the concrete walls and below the concrete museum consists of a circular, bronze fountain at its center (not in operation at the time of the survey), surrounded by a disk of granite paving. (Figure 34) The paving extends 20 feet beyond the circumference of the museum, and granite aprons stretch from the circle to the wall openings on the north and south. Ash Rose granite paves the plaza below the museum and around the fountain, while Atlantic Black granite is employed for a ring at the edge of the circular plaza and for the aprons reaching the street entrances. (Figure 35) The entire arrangement of walls, Plaza, and museum is centered on Washington's 8<sup>th</sup> Street axis.



Figures 34 and 35 – The Plaza fountain (left) and Ash Rose and Atlantic Black granite paving. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)



Figures 36 and 37 – Plantings near the perimeter walls include small trees and shrubs trimmed as hedges (left) and low plantings near the accessible entrance at the northwest corner. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)



The space on each side of the museum between the central paved area and the enclosing walls is composed of plantings, perimeter walks, and outdoor “rooms.” Next to the walls themselves are 7-foot-wide bands of plantings. The primary plant materials in these bands are smaller trees and shrubs that create a soft, green wall within the rigid, concrete boundary walls. In some areas, the greenery completely obscures the concrete walls. (Figure 36) Plants included along the perimeter include cherry laurel, holly, juniper, and hemlock. In the northwest corner of the Plaza, near the accessible entrance, lower plantings such as sedge and ferns have been planted. (Figure 37) The straight, 7-foot-wide walks just inside these plantings are composed of rows of 4-inch, Ash Rose granite squares. The ramp at the accessible entrance, which parallels the perimeter walk along the western segment of the north wall, uses rectangular granite pavers in a running bond pattern. (See Figure 33)

The east and west sides of the plaza, between the central paving and the perimeter, are each divided into three garden rooms by granite-sheathed retaining walls and curbs. The trees, walls, planters, and walks employed in the garden rooms are aligned along radial lines emanating from the center point of the museum, reinforcing the geometrical design of the building. The southernmost room on each side include planters adjacent to the paved apron that hold two Japanese maple trees (*Acer palmatum*) on raised mounds. The planters, mounds, and trees act as a frame for the south entrance to the museum. (Figure 38) Beyond the pairs of trees, the southern garden rooms are covered in turf. All the outdoor spaces, which vary in size, plantings, and character, act as the settings for the display of sculpture. They are separated by 36-inch-tall granite-clad planters that hold a row of tightly spaced crabapple trees that form an aerial hedge acting as a translucent screen between the display spaces. Granite walkways furnished with steel benches further subdivide the rooms. In the central garden room on the east, walkways border an open lawn (Figure 39), separating the central area from two flanking planters, each set with three honey locust trees (*Gleditsia triacanthos var. inermis*) arranged in an L above low-growing juniper, sedge, and ferns. The north room on the east is covered with turf, providing a large area for the display of monumental sculpture. On the west, walkways



Figure 38 – Japanese maple trees near the south entrance to the Hirshhorn. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)



Figure 39 – The lawn of the east central garden room. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)



flank the broad lawn of the central room, which is planted with eight honey locust trees. (Figure 40) The walks separate the lawn from two smaller areas, each slightly raised and planted with two honey locust trees set in Japanese pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*). (Figure 41) As mentioned earlier, the Plaza currently displays artworks from the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden while the garden is renovated. The north room on the west is turfed but also holds three Southern magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora*) planted as part of the Bunshaft design. (Figure 42)



Figures 40 and 41 – Honey locust trees in the west central garden room (left), with a panel of pachysandra and honey locusts to the north. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)



Figures 42 and 43 – Three Southern magnolias from the Bunshaft design (left) and current plantings outside the south wall. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)

A narrow planted area also exists outside the perimeter walls of the Plaza. Along Independence Avenue, flowers, shrubs, and low-growing plants have been planted between the elm trees that are the street trees of the National Mall. (Figure 43) A narrow bed of flowers is located in the sidewalk along Jefferson Drive. Turf borders the exterior face of the east wall, while the Mary Livingston Ripley Garden is located immediately west of the west wall.

## V. EVALUATION OF THE INTEGRITY OF THE 1993 PLAZA

### Introduction

The Secretary of the Interior describes integrity as the ability of a property to convey its significance through its physical resources. Physical integrity is essential in a determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. The Register identifies seven aspects of integrity: *location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association*. *Location* is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred. *Setting* is the physical environment within and surrounding a property. *Design* is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. *Materials* are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. *Workmanship* is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory. *Feeling* is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. *Association* is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.<sup>149</sup>

According to the Register, "To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects."<sup>150</sup> A basic test of integrity is whether a participant in the historic period would recognize the property as it exists today. The following section evaluates each of the seven aspects of integrity through the lens of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza's key landscape characteristics, comparing today's conditions with conditions upon installation in 1993. The key landscape characteristics of the redesigned Plaza were determined by looking at James Urban's design for the site as developed from the summer of 1985 through construction between 1991 and 1993. Urban and his team utilized contemporary design principles, materials, and construction and landscape technology in order to resolve the problems caused by the deteriorating Plaza and to provide an attractive and welcoming space in which modern sculpture could be experienced as individual works, while respecting the Bunshaft design. The key landscape characteristics of the redesigned Plaza therefore focus on Urban's organization of space within Bunshaft's Plaza walls and in relation to his sculptural museum building, his manipulation of topography and vegetation to enhance this spatial organization and to provide comfortable and attractive surroundings, his design of circulation patterns that carried the visitor around the outdoor rooms while giving them opportunities to invade the spaces to get closer to the works of art. The spatial organization, topography, vegetation, circulation, views and vistas, constructed water features, and buildings and structures of the Plaza are evaluated in detail below by comparing the condition of these components in 1993 with their condition today. Each section closes with an evaluation of the effect that the current conditions of the landscape have on the Plaza's integrity to 1993.

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<sup>149</sup> National Register Bulletin 15, "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 1997, 44-45.

<sup>150</sup> National Register Bulletin 15, 44.

Certain features of Bunshaft's original design created the framework within which Urban located and expressed his solutions to the problems the Smithsonian wished to solve on the Plaza. The Bunshaft-designed features that were part of the redesigned Plaza when it opened in 1993 are therefore also important to an evaluation of the garden's integrity. Character-defining features from the 1974 Plaza incorporated into the 1993 design include its 8-foot-high perimeter walls of exposed aggregate concrete enclosing a nearly square space around the circular museum, the drum-shaped museum building itself, the concept of a Plaza paving pattern radiating from the center of the circle, the Plaza fountain, and the alignment of all these elements along the Eighth Street axis crossing the National Mall.<sup>151</sup>

## Comparative Analysis

### *Spatial Organization*

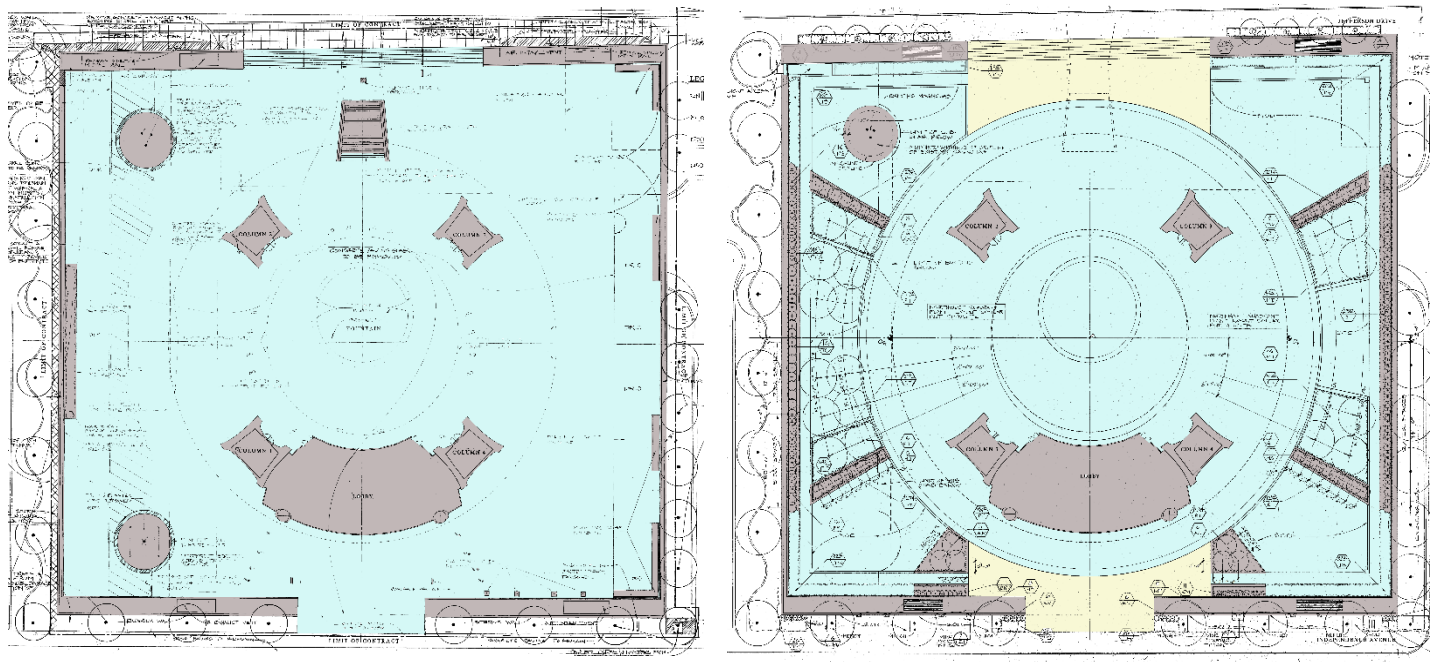
1974: Bunshaft designed the Hirshhorn Museum Plaza as a container for the sculptural museum building, a doughnut-shaped drum clad in exposed panels of Swenson Pink granite aggregate concrete, rising on massive 14-foot-tall concrete piers. The Plaza was bordered by an eight-foot-tall perimeter wall with a 75-foot-wide opening on the south along Independence Avenue and a 170-foot-wide opening on the north along Jefferson Drive. The composition was arranged along the Eighth Street axis as it crossed the National Mall. The Plaza was designed as a single continuous space, divided only by the piers and the two trees or tree clusters in its west corners. Shrub plantings along the center of the west wall had little effect on the overall spatial experience. (Figure 44)

1993: In his redesign of the Plaza, James Urban preserved the spatial relationship of Bunshaft's building and perimeter wall and the simplicity of its paved inner ring around the fountain, focusing instead on the perimeter of the site. There, he arranged a lush composition of trees, shrubs, and groundcover in a series of six garden rooms divided by retaining walls and curbs, which also allowed for sufficient soil depth to support the plantings. Urban's design created a much more complex spatial experience within the museum's Plaza. (Figure 45) He divided the east and west sides of the perimeter into three garden rooms each for sculptural installations that varied in size and character. The garden rooms were separated with 36-inch-tall granite-clad planters aligned on radial projections from the building's center point. Each planter held a row of tightly spaced small trees that formed a 15-foot-tall aerial hedge that functioned as a translucent screen between rooms. The floor of each garden room was outlined with an 8-inch curb and subdivided by granite walkways furnished with steel benches. In the east central garden room, the walkways flanked an open lawn and separated it from two flanking planters, each set with shade trees set in groundcover. In the west central garden room, the walkways flanked a broader lawn planted with eight shade trees and separated the lawn from two smaller areas, each slightly raised and planted with shade trees set in groundcover. The trees were meant to extend the canopy of the building drum onto the Plaza along an east-to-west axis. The northeast garden room was bordered by a low curb and

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<sup>151</sup> A 1974 feature of the plaza hidden by the 1993 work was the tunnel linking the museum to the Sculpture Garden across Jefferson Drive. The tunnel had been closed since 1981 and did not feature in the museum's plans for the plaza's renovations.





### Legend

Open space    Space dividers    Entrance

Figures 44 and 45 – Spatial organization of the Hirshhorn Plaza as designed by Bunshaft in 1974 (left) and redeveloped by Urban in 1993 (right).

planted only in turf so that the largest sculptures of the collection could be displayed. The northwest garden room was similarly treated, but at the center, Urban preserved a clump of Southern magnolias that survived from the Bunshaft era to provide a “dynamic counterpoint to the opposite space.”<sup>152</sup> Two taller planters were created to frame the south entrance and planted with clumps of multi-stemmed trees set on raised mounds. A seven-foot-wide walkway ran between the six garden rooms and a seven-foot-wide planter inside the perimeter wall that was filled with evergreen shrubs. The shrubs varied in height between 4 feet at the four corners to around 15 feet at the center of the east and west walls. The variety in shrub height would have provided a changing sense of spatial opening and closing as one walked through the landscape. Between the north perimeter wall and the public sidewalk, Urban added a narrow planting bed for small trees set in shrubs to flank the north entrance stairs and add texture to the stark wall surface. On the south side of the south perimeter wall, Urban retained an existing row of elms set in sod but added clumps of tall and medium evergreen shrubs to mark the east and west corners.

Existing: Trees, retaining walls, curbs, and mounds created by Urban continue to divide the perimeter space into garden rooms and provide enclosure, although there were seven trees missing in the summer of 2022. (Figure 46) Evergreen shrubs that can reach a mature height of 15 to 25 feet fill most of the 7-foot-wide perimeter planters from the soil

<sup>152</sup> Urban & Associates, “Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation and Landscape Concept Development” (Annapolis MD: James Urban, February 16, 1990), [4].



surface past the top of the perimeter wall. The elms on the south side of the south perimeter wall now grow in a bed of shrubs, grasses, and colorful perennials instead of sod.



Figure 46 – View of crabapple hedge with one tree missing.  
(Robinson & Associates, 2022)

Analysis: The overall spatial organization of the Hirshhorn Plaza has changed little since its renovation in 1993. There has been no alteration in the relationship between the building, perimeter wall, and the granite curbs, retaining walls, and planted mounds that divide the garden rooms. The rows, clumps, and bosques of trees that were planted to enclose the rooms generally retain their spatial character even though a few are missing. The greatest change in the Plaza's spatial character has been to the hedges planted along the north and south walls and portions of the east and west walls. The original four-to-six foot hedges selected by Urban were replaced

in 1997 with a mix of evergreen shrubs that reach a mature height of 15 to 25 feet. Today, they nearly fill all of the seven-foot-wide planters from the soil surface past the top of the perimeter wall. This changes the character of the perimeter space, negatively impacting its integrity to 1993 (Figure 47). By obscuring Bunshaft's original enclosing walls, the taller vegetation also affects the plaza's integrity to 1974.

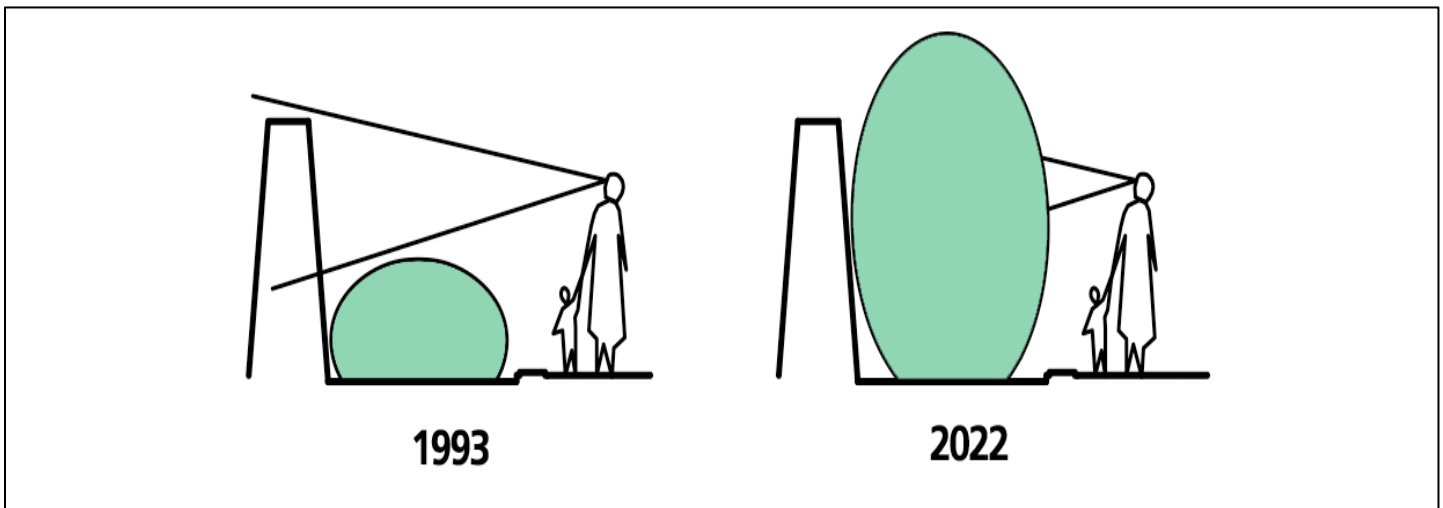
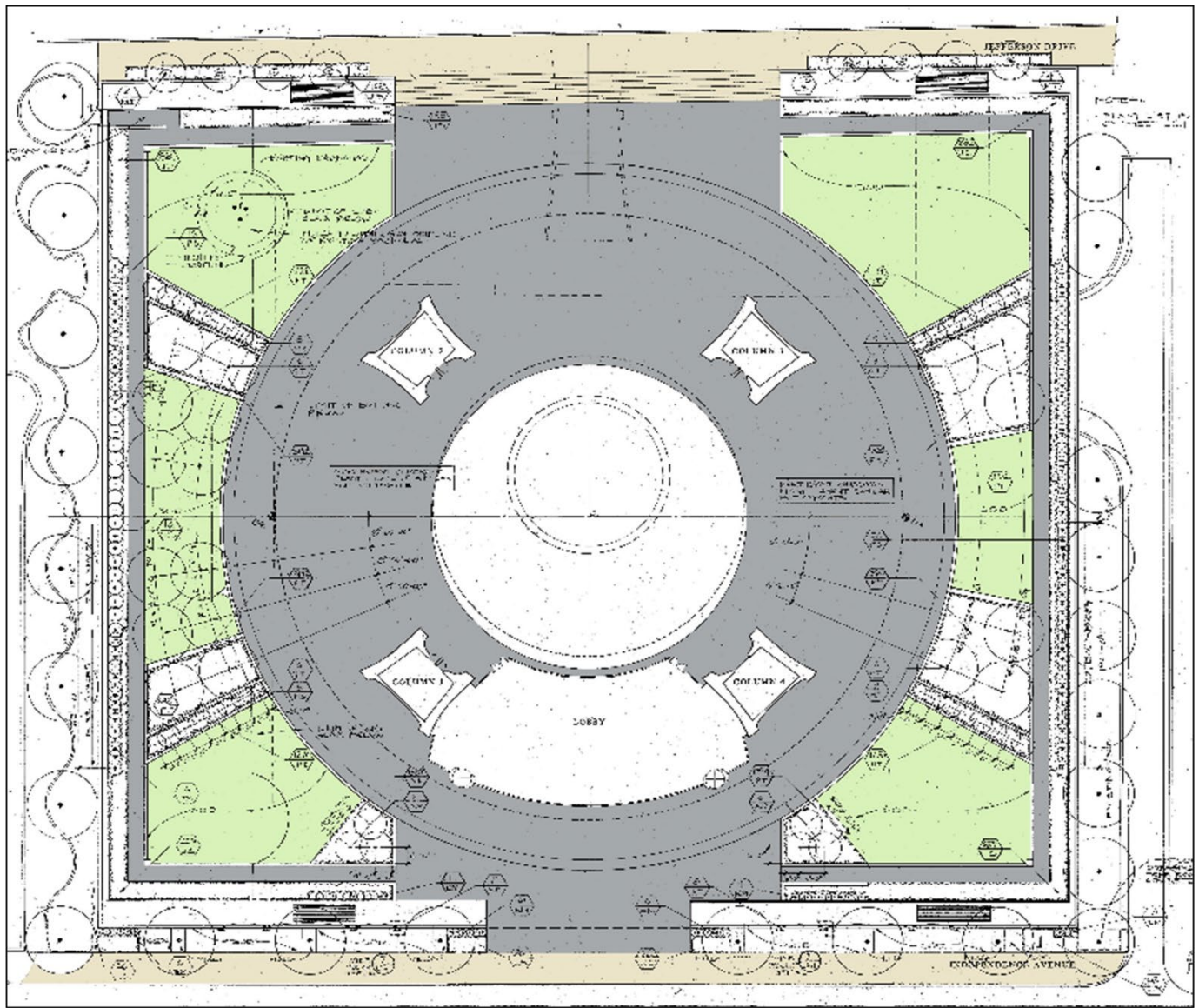


Figure 47 – Vignette showing the difference in the spatial effect of the boundary hedges in 1993 to 2022. (Laura Knott)

### *Circulation*

1974: Bunshaft's Plaza design allowed visitors to circulate freely within the open expanse of paving, hindered only by the massive piers, the fountain, two tree planters, and the glass-enclosed lobby. (See Figure 44.) For the Plaza's walking surface, Bunshaft had originally specified stone paving, but because of budget concerns during construction, exposed



#### Legend

Turf Path
  Paved Path
  Public Walk

Figure 48 – Pattern of circulation from Urban's 1993 design.

aggregate was used instead. The exposed aggregate paving eventually failed along with the waterproofing membrane, allowing rainwater to leak into the building's finished basement.

1993: For the 1993 renovation, the Urban team installed a new waterproofing membrane and replaced, at the behest of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the exposed aggregate paving with massive granite pavers arranged in a radial pattern similar to Bunshaft's. The granite pavers extended to the east and west 135 feet, 3 inches from the building's center point and to the north and south to meet the public sidewalk. This distance allowed for a 20-foot-wide fire lane around the entire building. Urban designed the areas outside the fire lane to the east and west as garden rooms outlined with perimeter walkways and featuring lawns that pedestrians were invited to walk on. (Figure 48) Hard-surfaced paths outlined each lawn and provided a base for two benches each. Urban had originally specified a "chip-seal" asphalt using

buff-colored aggregate for the perimeter walkway, but the implementation was so problematic that the paving was changed to a grid pattern of 4-inch square granite pavers mortared in place. After Hirshhorn and Smithsonian officials looked at several options, Urban also added a wheelchair-accessible entrance at the northwest corner of the Plaza leading to the perimeter walks that encircled the outdoor rooms and to the paved Plaza.

Existing: The granite paving within the central area of the Plaza is in good condition. Most of the perimeter walkways are also in good condition except for two instances where tree roots have raised the paving. The lawn in the southeast corner of the Plaza was replaced with a bed of marble chips in 2019 to accommodate a work by Lee Ufan in his 2019-2020 exhibit, “Open Dimension.” The northeast corner lawn also served as a construction staging area during the façade replacement project. Both lawns were restored in the spring and summer of 2023.

Analysis: The condition issues and temporary changes to circulation patterns and materials since 1993 are easily reversible and do not affect the Plaza’s National Register integrity.

### *Topography*

1974: Bunshaft originally designed the Plaza to appear completely flat, although it was subtly graded so that its high points at the center-side bases of the four piers were hidden in the shadows of the building above. The lowest point in the interior ring was located immediately around the fountain. From the piers outward, the Plaza drained to its four corners and out through its north and south entrances.<sup>153</sup> (Figure 49)

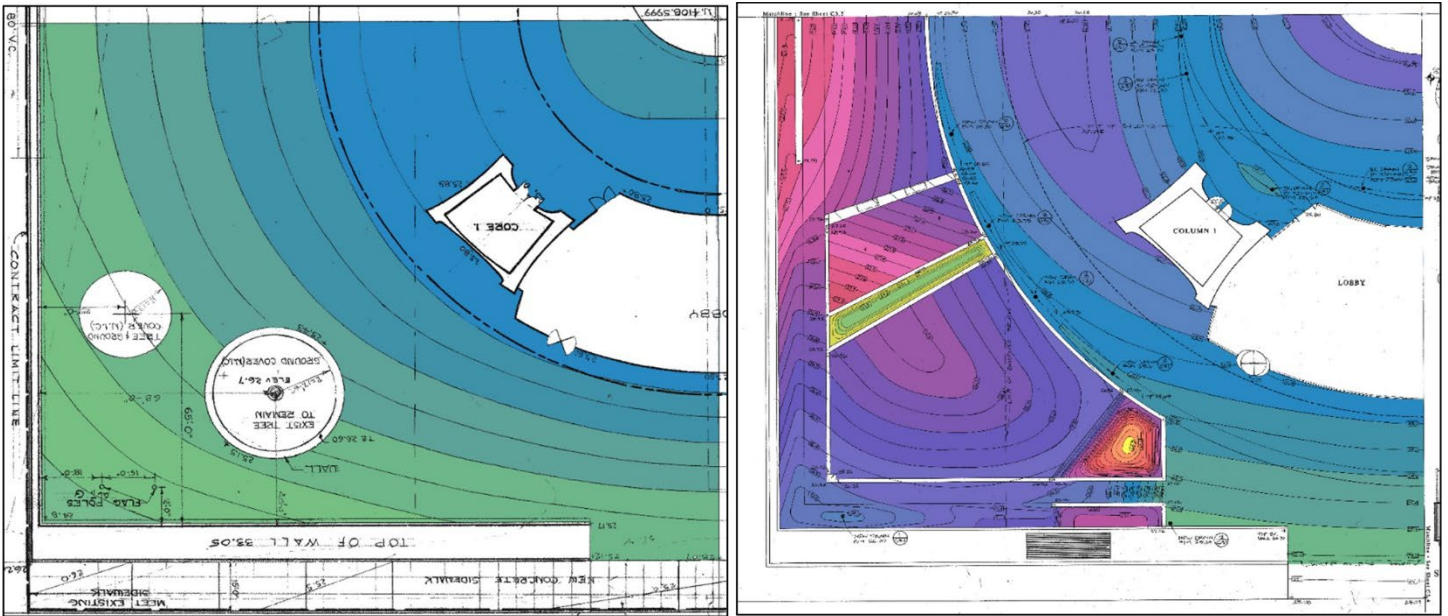
1993: In his design, Urban preserved the flat appearance of the Plaza from the center to the outside of the fire lane but altered the grading to eliminate ponding and improve drainage. The high point of the inner ring ran along the south edge of the fountain; from there, the Plaza sloped down to inlets set about 10 feet inside the piers. From this point, the Plaza sloped up to high points at the east and west outside faces of the piers and to high points aligned with the north and south centers of the flanking piers. From the east and west high points, Urban sloped the Plaza to inlets set just inside perimeter garden, and from the north and south high points, he sloped the Plaza towards the public sidewalk.

On the east and west sides of the Plaza, Urban incorporated retaining walls, curbs, and earthen mounds to add variety to the Plaza’s topography and to raise some areas up to improve soil depth. This variation supports the sense of enclosure provided by the four diagonal planters: the corner lawns slope upward toward the planters, as do the beds of pachysandra on the inside of the central lawns. The east and west center gardens and the inside halves of the corner gardens slope toward the inlets just inside the perimeter curb. The perimeter hedge, perimeter walkway, and the outside halves of the corner gardens slope toward drains set at the south corners of the hedge planting bed. (Figure 50)

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<sup>153</sup> Skidmore, Owings & Merrill Architects, Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, “Site Plan Building, Architectural, 2-1B,” June 25, 1971.





Figures 49 and 50 – Studies showing the simple topography of the Bunshaft plan (left) and the complex grading introduced by Urban (right). Each color represents a change in 1/10 foot with cooler colors representing low areas and warmer colors representing high areas.

Existing: The topography of the Hirshhorn Plaza has not changed since its completion in 1993. The subtle variations continue to highlight the divisions of the landscape into garden rooms.

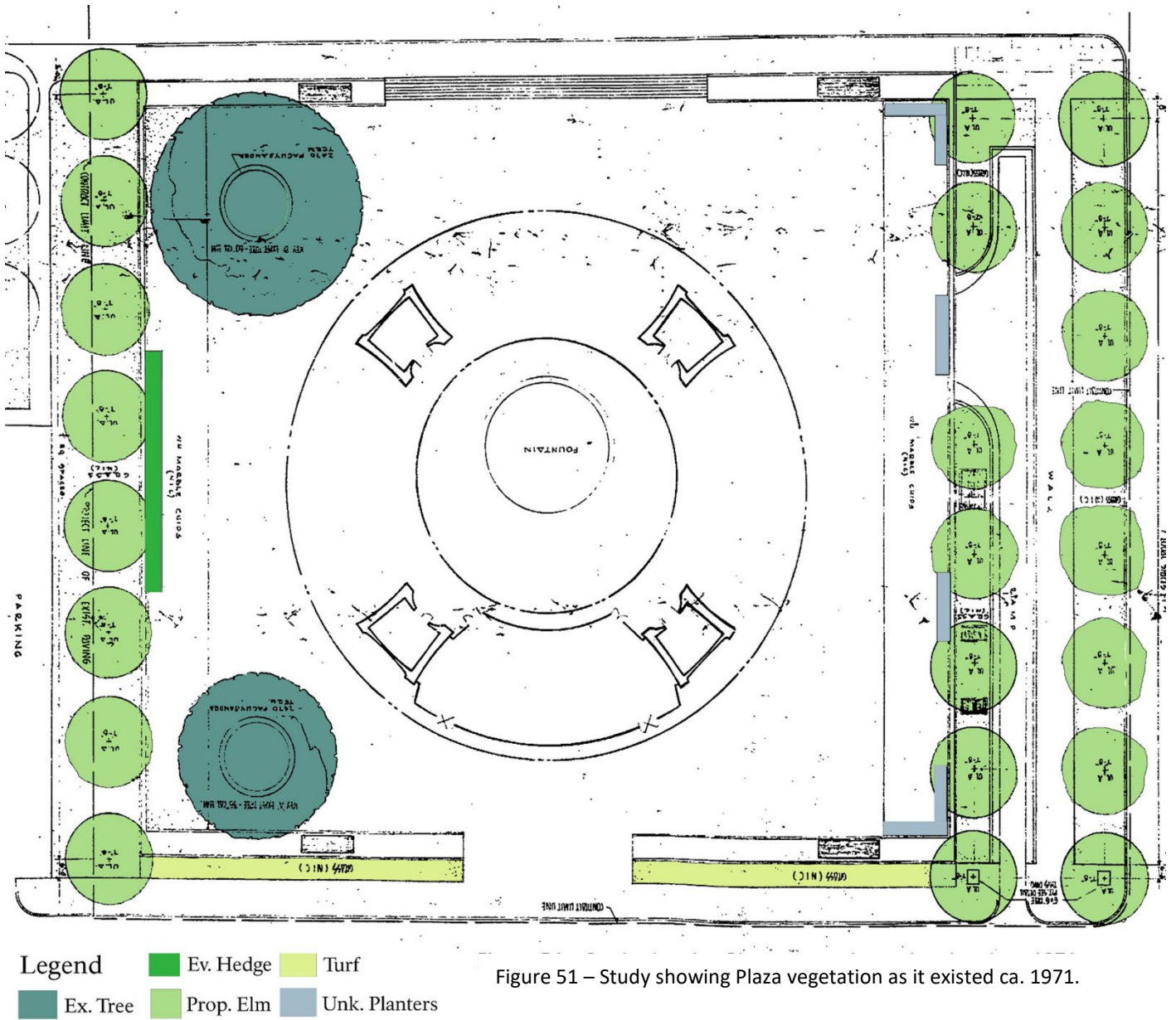
Analysis: Because its topography has not changed since 1993, this characteristic supports the Plaza's continuity with the Urban rehabilitation.

### *Vegetation*

1974: In his design for the Hirshhorn Plaza, Bunshaft preserved two elms (*Ulmus* sp.) that had stood on the west side of the Army Medical Museum, which was demolished in 1969 for the construction of the new museum. (Figure 51) One was preserved in the southwest corner of the Plaza and the other in the northwest corner. Bunshaft added curbs around the trees to create 35-foot-wide planters that were then filled with pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*). The elm in the northwest corner was removed during construction, and Bunshaft replaced it with a cluster of three Southern magnolias (*Magnolia grandiflora*). Bunshaft also added a double row of sixteen American elms (*Ulmus americana*) that flanked the loading dock driveway outside the east wall of the Plaza and another row on the outside of the west wall.<sup>154</sup> Within the Plaza, he designed a narrow planter containing four deciduous trees and several evergreen shrubs along the center third of the inside of the west wall. Photographs from the 1970s suggest that the evergreen shrubs included varieties of yews (*Taxus* sp.), spruce (*Picea* sp.), and juniper (*Juniperus* sp.). These were later replaced with a hedge of

<sup>154</sup> Skidmore, Owings & Merrill Architects, n.d., drawing roll no. 1, 17-1\_2.





what appears to be upright yews (*Taxus x media* 'Hicksii'). In addition to this hedge, although they do not appear in the earliest photographs of the Bunshaft design, Urban's demolition plans also refer to four narrow planters along the inside of the east wall in the marble chip bed, but it is not clear what, if anything, had been planted there or when.

1993: For the Plaza redevelopment, Urban proposed a new planted landscape for the area between the paved inner ring and the perimeter wall. (Figure 52) The garden rooms were divided by granite-clad planters, each of which held a row of eight tightly spaced crabapple trees (*Malus sargentii*) that formed an aerial hedge reaching to around 15 feet in height and acting as a type of translucent screen between rooms. The elm that Bunshaft had preserved in the southwest corner eventually died, and its planter was paved over in the 1993 renovation.

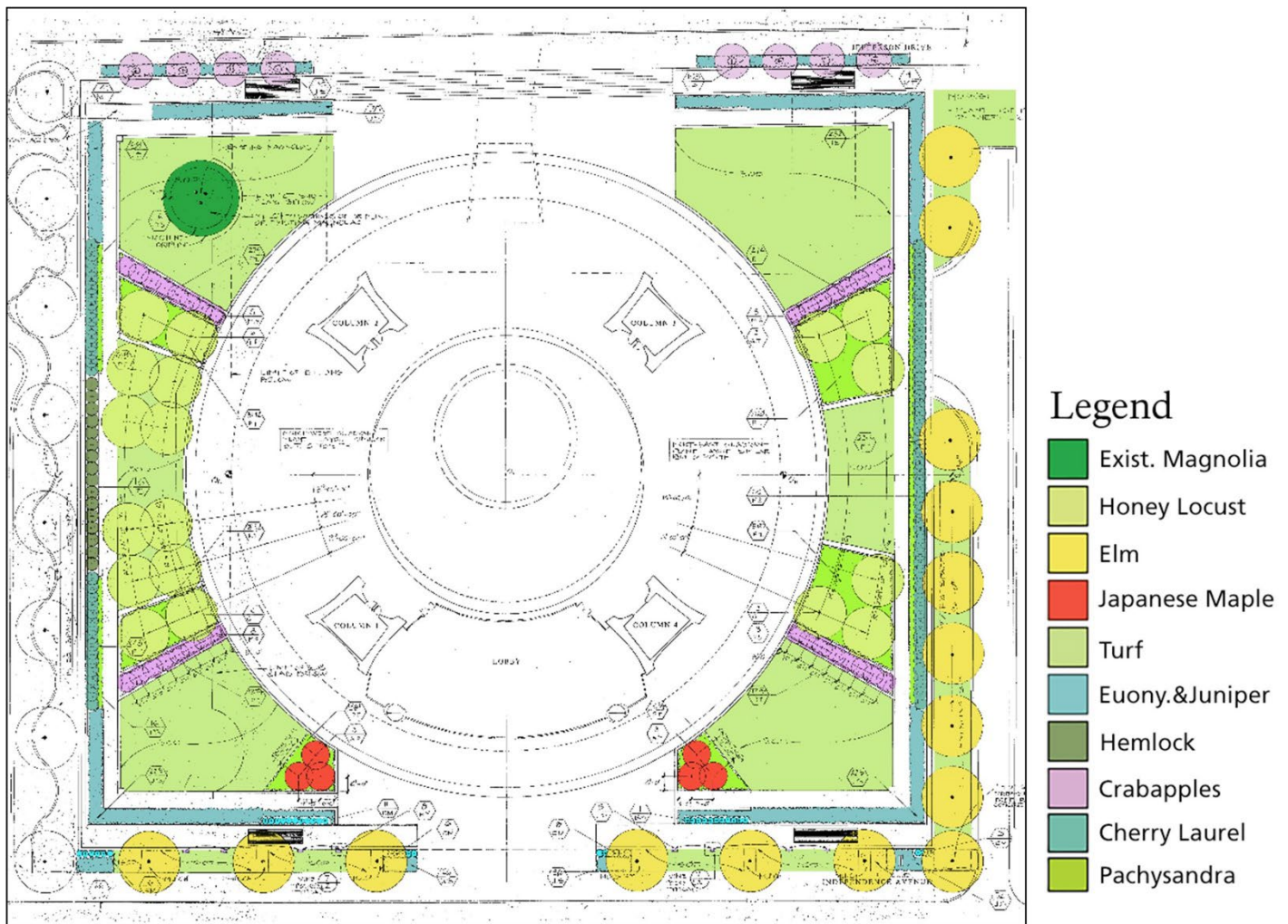


Figure 52 – Study showing Urban's 1993 as-built planting plan.

In the east central garden room, granite walkways flanked an open lawn and separated it from two smaller areas, each planted with three honey locusts (*Glenditsia triacanthos* var. *inermis* 'Shademaster') set in a bed of pachysandra (*Pachysandra terminalis*). In the west central garden room, granite walkways flanked a broader lawn planted with two groups of four honey locusts each. The walkways separated this lawn from two smaller areas, each planted with two honey locusts set in a bed of pachysandra. The lawns were specified as K31 or Alta fescue (*Festuca arundinacea* 'Kentucky 31' or *F. elatior arundinacea*), common Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), and creeping red fescue (*F. rubra*) sod.<sup>155</sup>

The northeast garden room was also planted in sod only to provide room for displaying the largest sculptures of the Hirshhorn collection. The northwest garden room was planted in sod, but at the center, Urban preserved the clump of

<sup>155</sup> Urban & Associates, "Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation and Landscape Concept Development" (Annapolis MD: James Urban, February 16, 1990), Cannon/Faulkner specifications, 4.

three Southern magnolia that survived from the Bunshaft era as a “dynamic counterpoint to the opposite space.”<sup>156</sup> The corners of the southeast and southwest garden rooms that flanked the south entrance each contained a trio of Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) set on raised mounds in eight-inch-tall planters. The specific variety of these maples is not known, but the species can reach between 15 and 25 feet in height and spread.

Urban originally proposed beds of flowering perennials for the perimeter of the Plaza to recreate the character of Hirshhorn’s estate, where sculpture was displayed in beds of flowers. Museum director James Demetrian, however, asked Urban to substitute an evergreen hedge so that the flowers did not take focus away from the outside sculptural exhibits.<sup>157</sup> Urban designed the hedges on the north and south walls to turn the inner corner to reach the outside end of the crabapple planters. Two groups of eleven ‘Manhattan’ euonymus (*Euonymus kiautschovicus* ‘Manhattan’), an evergreen shrub that grows to 6-8 feet tall and 5 feet wide, flanked each side of the south entrance. A row of Savin juniper (*Juniperus sabina*), a vase-shaped shrub that grows four to six feet tall and up to 10 feet wide, was planted at the base of the euonymus. Past the euonymus, the Savin juniper filled the planter and extended east and west to the inside wall corners, where it turned to extend north. Savin juniper also filled the northeast and northwest planters to the inside corners, where it turned to extend south. Each Savin juniper hedge ended at the outside edge of the crabapple planters.

Opposite the east central garden room, Urban originally chose red tip photinia (*Photinia serrulata* x *fraseri*, now known as *Photinia* x *fraseri*) to form a continuous hedge. This shrub, called “red tip” for its bright red new leaves in the spring, grows to around 10 to 15 feet in height and almost as wide. Opposite the west central garden room, Urban also chose red tip photinia, but in two rows flanking a central hedge of sixteen Canadian hemlocks (*Tsuga canadensis*). This hemlock species typically grows as tall as 40 to 70 feet and 25 to 35 feet wide.

Although no documentation has been found to explain the difference between the east and west plantings, Urban may have intended to shield the west side of the building and Plaza from the heat of the afternoon sun. This could explain why the west side has double the number of honeylocust trees, as well as the row of eighteen hemlocks along the central part of the wall. These would be more effective in providing shade than the solid wall of photinia on the east side. The east side would have also received shade from the row of trees along the loading dock driveway. As part of the interview conducted with Urban as part of this project, the landscape architect stated that he selected tree species based on tree form, horizontal branching patterns, branches that that grew together to form a joint canopy, creating a diffused light pattern.<sup>158</sup>

During the course of constructing the new Plaza, Paul Lindell of the Smithsonian’s horticulture group asked Urban to change the proposed photinia hedge to either cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) or cleyera (probably *Ternstroemia*

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<sup>156</sup> Urban & Associates, “Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza Renovation and Landscape Concept Development” (Annapolis MD: James Urban, February 16, 1990), [4].

<sup>157</sup> 2018 South Mall CLR.

<sup>158</sup> Scalera, electronic communication with the authors, November 7, 2022.

*gymnanthera*), both of which are less susceptible to disease than photinia.<sup>159</sup> Within two months, Urban had agreed to substitute ‘Nellie R. Stevens’ holly (*Ilex* x ‘Nellie R. Stevens’) for the photinia instead.<sup>160</sup> The Nellie R. Stevens holly grows to a height between 15 and 25 feet and eight to 12 feet wide. In October 1992, Jean Smith of The George Hyman Construction Company submitted a plant maintenance plan specifying that the hemlocks were to be pruned to 14” above the top of the west wall, and the hollies to 24” above the top of the west wall and 14” above the top of the east wall.<sup>161</sup> It is not known if this pruning plan reflected the intent of Urban’s design or was implemented to avoid blocking building lighting.<sup>162</sup>

In 1997, Paul Lindell renovated the perimeter hedge, removing the euonymus and juniper and replacing them with other plants. It is likely that this was when the cherry laurel (*Prunus caroliniana* ‘Monus’), Nootka cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa* ‘Gracilis’), and Torulosa juniper (*Juniperus chinensis* ‘Torulosa’) that dominate the four corners of the boundary hedge today were planted. Monus cherry laurel grows to a height of 25 to 35 feet and a spread of 15 to 25 feet. Nootka cypress grows to a height of up to 35 feet with a spread of up to 12 feet, and Torulosa juniper to a height of 15 feet and a spread of 10 feet. These choices represent a dramatic change from the Savin juniper, which might reach halfway up the perimeter wall to large shrubs or small trees that must be pruned to stay one-to-two feet above the perimeter wall.

A 1997 memo from Lindell to Beverly Pierce reported that planting would start soon “for the corner plantings and some of the woody plant materials and low ground covers needed for along the north wall.”<sup>163</sup> It is possible that this was also when the ‘Otto Luyken’ cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus* ‘Otto Luyken’) on the northeast wall was planted. The ‘Otto Luyken’ cultivar is smaller than the ‘Monus’ cherry laurel – 6-10 feet in height with a spread of 6-8 feet. It is not known when the Japanese cherries and other assorted species in the northwest corner were installed. It appears that the northwest corner, which also flanks the accessible entrance ramp, was planted with an ever-changing variety of flowering and deciduous species over the years, perhaps in experimentation or even to reference the variety of plantings in the adjacent Mary Livingston Ripley Garden to the west.

Existing: Vegetation existing within the Plaza today is similar in general layout to Urban’s final design, despite incremental changes. (Figure 53) The lawn in the southeast corner garden was replaced temporarily with marble chips for the 2019 Ufan exhibit, and the lawn in the northeast garden was removed for construction staging during the façade replacement. Both have been returned to sod. Sixteen trees were missing in 2022, including five crabapples and two Japanese maples within the perimeter walls, eight crabapples that stood in the north sidewalk planter and were

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<sup>159</sup> Letter from James Urban to Stephanie Stefanik, May 7, 1992.

<sup>160</sup> Notes faxed from Urban & Associates to Smithsonian, July 29, 1992 (accession no. 04-013 box 104); Letter from George Killian of Chapel Valley Landscape Company to David Jenkins of The George Hyman Construction Company, August 4, 1992.

<sup>161</sup> Jean E. Smith, “Pruning Trees @ Hirshhorn,” October 9, 1992.

<sup>162</sup> 1990.09.26\_meeting minutes.

<sup>163</sup> Memo from Paul Lindell to Beverly Pierce, May 12, 1997.



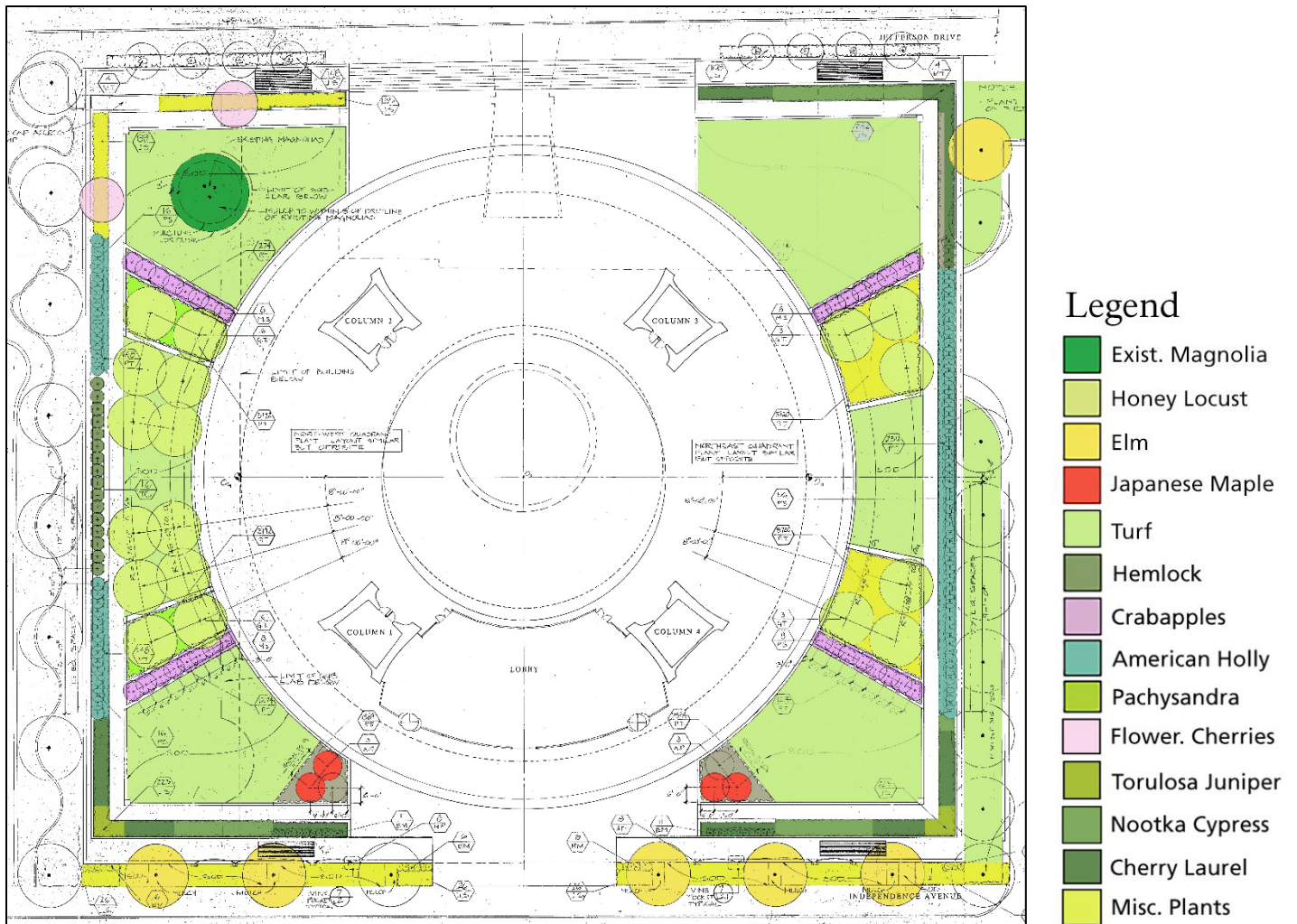
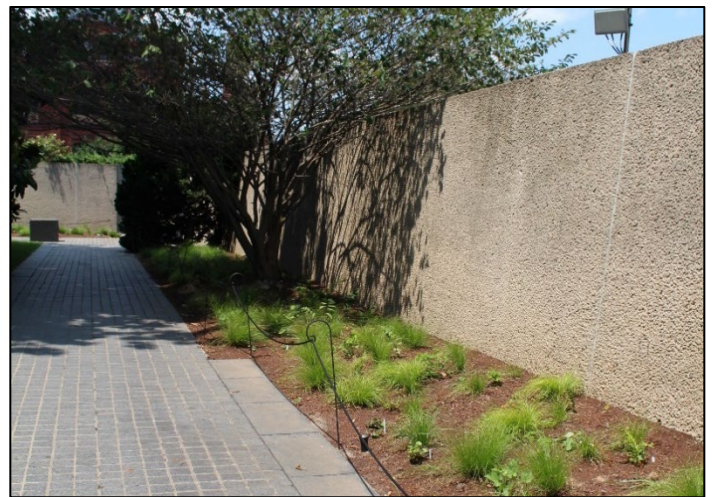


Figure 53 – Study showing Hirshhorn Plaza's existing vegetation in 2023. (Laura Knott)

removed for construction access. Smithsonian Gardens identifies the current crabapples as *Malus* 'Cotton Candy.' An elm that originally stood along Independence Avenue at the southeast corner has been replaced with a weeping redbud. 'Nellie R. Stevens' hollies on either side of Eastern hemlocks formed the east and west hedges in 1993, according to documentation; American hollies (*Ilex opaca*) have taken the place of the 'Nellie R. Stevens' cultivar. The corner hedges, except for the northwest corner, are generally as installed in 1997. (Figure 54) The northwest corner contains a variety of species, among which are Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), two Japanese flowering cherries (*Prunus serrulata*), sedge, and ferns. (Figure 55) Sedge, ferns, and Blue Pacific juniper are also used as ground cover below the trios of honey locusts on the east side of the plaza.

Analysis: The gradual change in the planting plan – adding a greater variety of plants that vary widely in their shapes and sizes – has altered the character of Urban's 1993 design. If continued, this variegated planting scheme could also affect the understanding of what remains of Bunshaft's landscape design, which include the enclosing walls and their relation to the museum building itself, as well as the intended geometrical forms of his vegetation.



Figures 54 and 55 – Southwest corner of the Plaza (left), showing (l-r) cherry laurel, Torulosa juniper, and American holly. (Laura Knott, 2022) Northwest corner (right), showing sedge and ferns planted in 2023. (Robinson & Associates, 2023)

### *Views and Vistas*

1974: As designed by Bunshaft, the museum provided only limited views of the Plaza from the interior. Bunshaft provided a vista to the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden from the north balcony, but visitors could only see the northern edge of the Plaza. From the windows that line the second and third floor galleries, visitors could only see the inner ring. At the Plaza level, however, visitors had a sweeping view of almost the entire Plaza from any viewpoint. The only elements that could block this view were the four massive piers, the clump of magnolias, and solid sculptural pieces. The constantly changing display of sculptural works could be experienced in a series of overlapping views.

1993: Urban's design introduced elements that created a much more complex visual experience within the museum's Plaza. While the inner ring continued to offer locations for sculpture to be experienced in overlapping views, each of the garden rooms provided a place where sculptures of varying size could be displayed for focused views from the perimeter walkways and the four benches that flank the center lawns. The perimeter walkways also invited visitors to move from room to room in an ever-changing experience much like an outdoor gallery. The addition of enclosing elements such as walls, clumps, and bosques helped focus attention on the building itself as a sculptural work.

Existing: The Hirshhorn Plaza continues to provide the complex visual experience designed by Urban, including the garden rooms, where sculpture is displayed for focused views, and the open inner ring, where sculptures can be seen in overlapping views.

Analysis: The continued preservation of the open inner ring and the six garden rooms supports the continuity of the Plaza with Urban's 1993 design.



## *Small-Scale Features*

1974: Bunshaft's original design for the Hirshhorn Plaza included no small-scale features except for the sculptures themselves. There were no benches, trash receptacles, path lights, ash cans, signs, or any other smaller object added for the comfort and convenience of the visitor.

In 1993, Urban added seating to the overall composition, providing some granite walls at seat height and four steel benches, two each flanking the lawns in the central east and west gardens (Figure 56). However, the focus remained principally on the sculpture displayed in the six gardens. Otherwise, as with the Bunshaft design, Urban provided no other site furnishings other than the restrained seating.



Figure 56 – View of metal benches in the east central garden, looking south. (Laura Knott, 2022)

Existing: Today, the museum has continued to keep the Plaza relatively uncluttered by site furnishings, except the small building and furniture in the seasonal outdoor dining area, which is neatly tucked under the northwest quadrant of the building. Urban's four benches remain in place. Recent small-scale elements added to the site that impinge of the Plaza's openness include garbage and recycling cans, signage, and planters acting as security barriers at the south entrance to the Plaza. The only other items that have the potential to clutter are the irrigation controller box, a stainless steel object that stands in the southern third of the west wall, and temporary fencing and barriers remaining from the façade replacement project. (Figures 57 and 58)

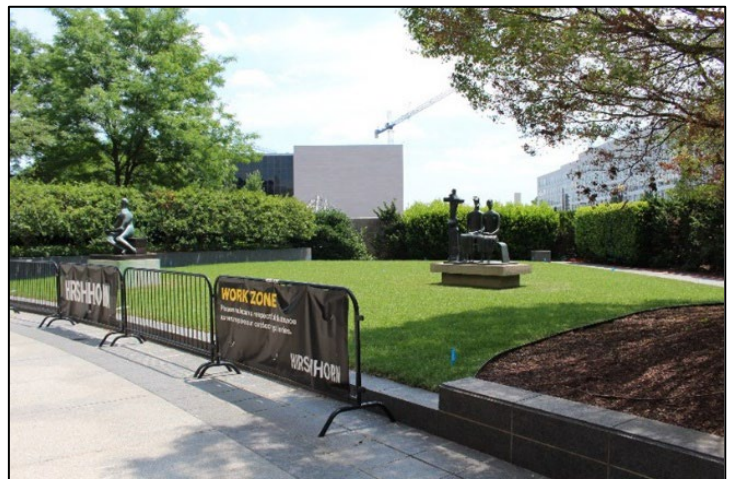


Figure 57 and 58 – View of the irrigation controller box (left), looking west. (Laura Knott, 2022) Fencing and signage protecting replacement turf (right). (Robinson & Associates, 2023)

Analysis: The four steel benches remaining from the Urban design support the Plaza's integrity to 1993. Simple management changes can control the visibility of items like the controller box.

#### Integrity Summary

Based on the comparative analysis and evaluation of the landscape characteristics presented above, this study finds that the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Plaza possesses integrity to its date of its rehabilitation to James Urban's design (1993) and still conveys its association with the remaining character-defining features of the Gordon Bunshaft design of 1974. Among the Bunshaft-era character-defining features that remain are the circle-in-a-square geometry, the enclosing Swenson Pink granite aggregate enclosing walls, the openings onto Independence Avenue and Jefferson Drive, the radial pattern of the plaza paving, and the magnolia trees located in the northwest quadrant of the Plaza. Very few permanent changes or additions to the Plaza have been made since the Urban-designed rehabilitation. The only consistent alteration that could affect the Plaza's integrity to both 1974 and 1993 are the substitution of and addition to plantings along the interior of the Plaza walls that are somewhat out of character with the size and type of plantings installed in 1993. These plantings obscure the exterior walls of the Plaza and the precise ranking of plant materials that characterized the Urban design. The plantings of the outdoor rooms, however, remain faithful to the original design, although there are a few missing individual plants. The fountain, paving, curbs and low walls, walks, size and shape of the rooms, perimeter walls, lighting – all remain consistent with Urban's original design.



## **VI. EVALUATION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HIRSHHORN MUSEUM PLAZA**

James R. Urban practiced landscape architecture for more than forty years before recently entering semi-retirement. His work can be found all over the Washington, D.C., area, including the Hirshhorn Plaza and the Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. He has worked throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, as well as in New York City at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, in Charlottesville, Virginia, on the Downtown Mall, and in Des Moines, Iowa, at Cowles Commons. Washington clients have included the National Park Service and the National Gallery of Art, and he has been employed by such internationally known architects as Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and Diller Scofidio + Renfro. His designs have won awards from organizations such as the American Association of Nurserymen and the National Association of Landscape Professionals, and project teams of which he was a member have won awards from the National Endowment for the Arts (the Hirshhorn Plaza and the Law Enforcement Officers Memorial) and the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (Lincoln Center Plaza).

Moreover, Urban has acted as a significant bridge between landscape architects and practitioners of arboriculture and horticulture, striving alongside his design business to bring the latest scientific information on soils, drainage, planting, and sustaining vegetation in the urban environment to the design community. Through his own research and the dissemination of research of others in journal articles and books, Urban has become an expert in the field of arboriculture and is recognized by both landscape architects and arborists as a significant contributor to the spread of horticultural and, especially, arboricultural knowledge. For this work, the American Society of Landscape Architects made him a member of its Council of Fellows, gave him a research grant, honored him for two publications, and awarded him its Medal of Excellence in 2007 for “his significant contributions to landscape architecture policy, research, education, project planning, and design.” The International Society of Arboriculture gave him its Award of Achievement in 2013 for his “sustained efforts and contributions to the advancement of the ISA.”

Clearly, contemporaries recognize the importance of the work Urban has accomplished over his long career. Scholars, however, have not yet undertaken a broad review of the landscape architect’s accomplishments. Individual Urban designs have been reviewed in newspapers where the landscapes were installed and received praise. The *Washington Post*, for instance, reviewed or mentioned Urban’s contributions to the Hirshhorn Plaza (twice), the National Geographic Society Headquarters, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, and the Washington Park Hyatt, among other works. The importance of practical urban horticulture in his designs has been recognized by *Landscape Architecture Magazine* (at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington) and by Benjamin Forgey in the *Post* (for the Hirshhorn Plaza). In publications taking a longer as well as a broader view of historical achievements in landscape architecture, however, Urban’s name is largely, thus far, absent. None of the four volumes in the Cultural Landscape Foundation’s series, “Pioneers of American Landscape Design,” mention Urban, including the most recent, published in 2018. Neither does the online version of “Pioneers” mention Urban, although the TCLF website does mention his work at the National Geographic Society and at Cowles Commons on pages related to those designs. The foundation’s online *What’s Out*

*There Washington D.C. Guide* does not cite any of Urban's work. Nicholas Adams does not mention Urban in his 2006 book on Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (for whom he once worked and with whom he later collaborated), nor does Francesca Cigola mention the Hirshhorn Plaza redesign in *Art Parks*.

Due to the lack of significant evaluations of Urban's career and his place in the landscape architecture and the urban forestry movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this study concludes that the 1993 Plaza cannot yet be said to satisfy Criterion Consideration G of the National Register of Historic Places, which sets standards for the significance of properties less than fifty years old. At this point in time, it therefore cannot be said to contribute to the significance of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. It should be noted that this conclusion is not based on any lack of aesthetic appeal, functionality, or sustainability of the design as implemented, nor on a lack of regard for its designer's work by his contemporaries. Rather, it is based on a lack of sufficient scholarly assessment of the career of a still-living practitioner of landscape architecture and arboriculture and of the Hirshhorn Plaza's place within that career. This deficiency may be rectified with time, given regard for Urban's work in spreading an understanding of the requirements of trees and other vegetation in urban settings and his use of this understanding in designed landscapes. As an important work in Urban's career in a prominent location, as a highly successful design, and one that retains a high degree of integrity, the Hirshhorn Plaza may contribute to the Hirshhorn's design significance once fifty years have passed or once sufficient scholarly assessment of Urban's career has been accomplished. It is recommended that scholarship on Urban be reviewed again before any substantive changes to the Plaza design are undertaken in the future.

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