

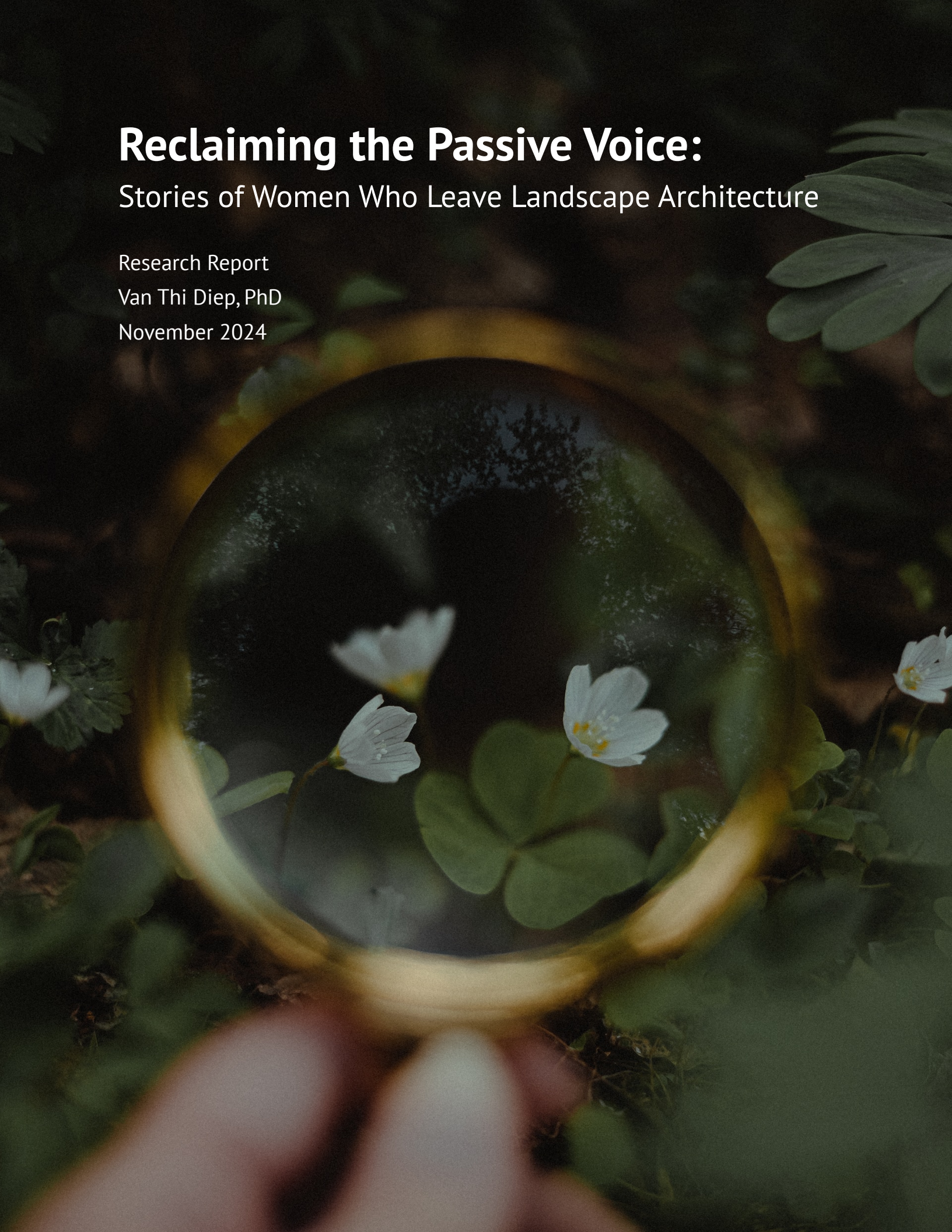
Reclaiming the Passive Voice:

Stories of Women Who Leave Landscape Architecture

Research Report

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Abstract

Inspired by The Missing 32%, a gender equity initiative created by the AIA in 2012, this project explores the missing voices of women in landscape architecture. These voices are not found in statistics or equity campaigns but in the act of giving space to the stories of women who have left, questioned their careers, or found alternative paths beyond the traditions of the profession. In a patriarchal society, what is deemed “valuable” feeds a cycle of normative conditions, but by seeking out the most “unvaluable” stories in the eyes of a wounded system (i.e., the neglected, mundane, or unorthodox), we make these stories invaluable and heal an old paradigm of conditional worthiness.

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Purpose: Shifting the Margins

Human beings are social creatures. While we lived as separate tribes via different cultures across the world historically, the similarities found in mythology, religion, art, and social practices reveal that we share a collective unconscious. In recent history, globalization has made our shared unconscious beliefs more apparent through patterns of a mainstream culture. This meta-society, also known as the hegemony, can be considered a psychological and behavioural system based on evolved norms of historical patriarchy and related practices of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Characteristics that support this system include competition, empiricism, and rationality. From the dominant worldview of this meta-society, everything outside of its system does not exist. What lives at its edges, or in its margins, is projected as marginalized.

Contemporary social justice movements are very dedicated to representing the marginalized, and yet, standing from the dominant worldview, the margins remain. However, if we were to shift our place from what was once dominant to what was once at the margins, the margins no longer exist. We are now at the centre of another world. From this centre, what was once dominant is just another perspective amongst other worldviews. If we moved our place in the world again, stepping back and broadening our vision as far as it can from a place of expansion, what is social, dominant, or marginal no longer matter. What remains is only the gratitude that we can co-exist together within the vastness of space and time. This shift is psychological and described metaphorically, but on Earth, we are always emplaced in a landscape. So, the monumental question is, how can we create landscapes that inspire us to make these paradigm shifts and ground them into reality?

There is no landscape architecture, no knowledge production, and no social change without humans. So, the first place of focus in every human endeavour must be the human beings who make up the system, otherwise, we are just marginalizing ourselves in favour of the historical hegemony that runs the show. Therefore, my approach to social change is to use research to initiate subconscious shifts in personal and collective perspectives by taking mainstream research and turning it on its head. Instead of seeing research as a means to an end towards the goal of finding new knowledge, I use the research process as an unfolding experience to recover an intuitive knowing that we have forgotten or neglected to prioritize. This knowing is that each person, each life story, and each life purpose is equally and intrinsically worthy.

Project Theory: Patriarchy as the Wounded Father

To address the deeper psychological patterns, I look at archetypes. The concept of archetypes may seem esoteric for many people, but from a pragmatic perspective, archetypes are simply the basic building blocks of human relationality. Everything in the universe starts from the unity of the dualities in a relationship, such as light and shadow, the 1s and 0s in a computer's binary system, and a quantum particle's ability to be in two places at the same time. The primary relationship in human nature is the duality of the feminine and masculine archetypes. The Feminine, also known

similarly as Yin in Daoism, Shakti in Hinduism, Gaia in Ancient Greek, and the Anima in Jungian psychology, is characterized by receptivity, intuition, nurturing, flow, embodiment, and groundedness. The Masculine, also known similarly as Yang in Daoism, Shiva in Hinduism, Uranus in Ancient Greek, and the Animus in Jungian psychology, is characterized by action, reason, structuring, protecting, doing, and envisioning. Parallel to this dynamic is the primary duality of our subjective experience of life: the moderation of our inner and outer worlds.

Landscapes are the meeting grounds between these two primary dynamics: the external union between sky and earth (Uranus and Gaia) and the internal mediator between our perception of the world and the meaning we make of it. Since Mother Earth or Gaia is the embodiment of the planet's feminine archetype, we often mistakenly refer to nature as "she." However, let's not forget all the nature that comes from Father Sky! Therefore, nature is the balance of the feminine and masculine from the archetypical, energetic, and creative/productive sense. Since humans are nature, we also have a balance of feminine and masculine energies. This duality is not to be conflated with the biological classifications of men and women, and the gender roles that have been practiced throughout history. When we mistake the need to balance the duality of nature with splitting nature into binaries, we get into polarized patterns of nature-worshipping and nature-rejection. The result of either polarity is the same: the denial of human nature. We see external nature (e.g., forests, lakes, meadows, and other species) as good, while our vulnerabilities (e.g., emotions, bodily functions, death, and sickness) as bad. So, instead, we focus on intellectualism, technology, and status.

The collective imbalance of human nature at a societal level becomes patriarchy. To cope with the threat of disempowerment, the Wounded Father, who sees vulnerability as weakness finds justification to marginalize another by dismissing and denying the value of a person, group, or idea. Since vulnerability is part of nature, patriarchy is a state created out of a psychological fallacy, or in other words, a false belief. The implication of this false belief is the formation of hierarchical civilizations such as colonialism, imperialism, and caste-based systems. Even though civilizations based on ideologies such as communism, religion-states, and capitalism are not patriarchal in theory, when they depend on or maintain the imbalance of patriarchy, they are also doomed to be destructive in some way.

The target of patriarchy's marginalization is anything related to the feminine: the objectification of women; the dismissal of traditional wisdom practiced by women; the denouncing of the Earth's authority; and the devaluing of Earth-based cultures and spiritual practices. The effect is a spectrum of social and environmental issues ranging from misogyny and domestic violence, to seeing the Earth as inanimate and merely a "resource", to treating humans as competitors in economic, labour, and attention-seeking markets. Just like how the categorization of the good will give birth to the bad, wounded masculinity will also be accompanied by the patterns of wounded femininity.

Methodology and Method: Disrupting Definitions of Success

To break through the larger social dynamic of dominance and marginalization, this project inverts the traditional research process into an inclusive purpose. Research becomes neither a deterministic tool for facts or conclusions nor a route to leverage knowledge for something else. The goal of the project is simply to use research as a process of healing patriarchy and to recognize that every human, despite their social identity, has a worthy story to tell.

The main method used was interviews. The parameters of the participant's involvement with the profession were kept flexible to increase the potential participant pool. In summary, ten women who graduated in landscape architecture and either 1) have left landscape architecture, 2) are questioning their career paths in the profession, or 3) have found alternative paths within a broader definition of landscape architecture, were asked to share their experiences in their careers, reflect on their life choices, and ponder over their future. (See Appendix for interview questions.) The core project theme of women leaving landscape architecture was chosen to specifically disrupt the standard patriarchal worldview of success: to be seen, heard, acclaimed, and thriving in the profession. This is not to say that the women involved in this project do not demonstrate this definition of success in their careers or lives in general, but they are much more than that. The error of patriarchy is to not see value beyond the constraints of the system.

Legally, some parameters define being a part of the profession of landscape architecture in North America. These considerations involve being a member of a professional association and a combination of requirements such as paying annual fees, an internship period, passing licensing exams, continuing education, and employment (including self-employment). Research participants embody varying statuses related to these parameters (see Table 1), blurring the lines between what it means to stay or leave the profession. Therefore, with the imprecision of the definition of success as well as what it means to be (or remain as) a landscape architect, this project reveals a larger philosophical question for landscape architecture: *Without the constraints of its social system, what does it still mean to be successful within the essence of landscape architecture?*

This rhetorical question is never completely answered by the project but makes itself relevant to the target audience as a point of reflection.

Table 1: Participant summary

# of Participants	Landscape Architecture Association Status	Work Status
1	Never a member	Never worked in landscape architecture
2	Never a member	Currently working in an adjacent profession (e.g., urban planning)
3	Currently Inactive	Currently not working in the profession but previously worked in traditional landscape design
1	Currently Full Member	Currently in a specialized interdisciplinary role in the profession and previously worked in traditional landscape design
3	Currently Full Member	Currently working in traditional landscape design, either questioning their role or have a career path of interest to the project themes

Discussion: Beyond Representation

Qualitative research in the social sciences has often been motivated by a researcher's desire to help and represent less-privileged groups, which has historically led to conscious and unconscious power dynamics in the research process. This dynamic arises out of the hierarchal (patriarchal/colonialist) worldview that Western academia has been born into. An intention for this project is that it goes beyond representation—for either the research participants or the system they are involved with. Therefore, this project recognizes that participants have agency in the choices they make for their lives and careers. They are neither victims nor superiors who need this project to advocate for their grievances or agendas. Also, this project does not advocate on behalf of the profession for any agendas related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, because to focus on the needs of the system is to prioritize an existing mainstream paradigm, which consequently, reinforces the dynamic of patriarchy and marginalization. Instead, I look at the parallels between gender inequality and the misplaced opportunities within landscape architecture.

The Self-aware System

Landscape architecture, a career that combines structure-building, creativity, empathy for others, and relating to the Earth's processes, ideally, would be one of the most archetypically balanced vocations that could exist. But as a profession within mainstream society, it inevitably has also not escaped the gender inequality of its bigger social system (see Appendix for sources). However, no other profession, in my opinion, is as perfect as landscape architecture to hold space for our shift in the collective consciousness. Carrying the self-proclaimed responsibility as stewards of the land, and yet insecure in comparison to more seemingly authoritative, glamorous, or prestigious professions, landscape architecture has just enough vulnerability in its professional identity to find space within its own patriarchal system to question itself.

The core principles from the Canadian Landscape Charter can be used to support a paradigm shift. Although these principles are meant to be applied in the work of landscape architecture towards society and external landscapes, therapists and coaches alike would acknowledge that the place to start practicing new principles is within. Therefore, this project is as much reflective for participants as it is a pursuit for landscape architecture to embody its own intentions (see Table 2).

Table 2: How the principles of the Canadian Landscape Charter can support paradigm shifts

CLC Principle	Approach supported by project goals
Recognizing landscapes as vital	To contribute to the healing of our society's wounded relationship with nature
Considering all people	To radically consider all people affected by its own system
Inspiring stewardship	To inspire a holistic approach as a profession
Expanding knowledge	To not only expand knowledge but also breakthrough outdated paradigms
Showing leadership	To show a new kind of leadership to the world that is embodied (and not just talk)

By supporting nonconformist projects such as this one, landscape architecture is contributing to the healing of our society's wounded relationship with nature, a dynamic created by our cultural dependency on patriarchal ideals. However, transcending the binary between nature and culture is already the essence of any kind of landscape work. Therefore, there is no need for landscape architecture to be better leaders in the eyes of society. A quiet, sacred, and embodied leadership role is already built into the essence of landscape architecture. But amidst the profession's concerns for self-advocacy (such as through legislative stature, social-political value, and technological advancements), can landscape architects still recognize their spiritual roles?

For example, in everyday practice, how often does one acknowledge the authority of the Earth and connect with the "spirit of the place"? How often does one acknowledge the validity of the feminine archetype and listen to their intuition for what a place needs, what users are not saying or saying between the lines, and what higher wisdom the flora and fauna of a project site has to share? How often does one acknowledge their own nature to trust their gut, honour their emotions, and respect their vulnerabilities in the workplace and when making career decisions? And lastly, are these ways of being recognized and supported in education, the workplace, and by the professional body? This project's title *Reclaiming the Passive Voice* juxtaposes the aversion to the passive voice in English grammar with the revered receptive passivity in Daoism, but in the context of landscape architecture, the shifts in the way we perceive and relate to our inner nature and outer environment, as previously suggested, is the embodiment of the passive voice.

Result: Learning from the Constellation of Multi-faceted Women

Admittedly, from a personal standpoint, commitment to the purity of non-hierarchy, and non-representation is challenging. Despite the doctrine that research is objective, researchers are human beings after all. Like any human being, I also share the same social conditioning as the mainstream culture with its collective unconscious patterns to over-empathize or over-control. But without the need to carry a burden of responsibility to represent, I can also learn to receive and work with the collected stories of life experiences as gifts. I become the observer and storyteller. Metaphorically, I describe this research process as stargazing with human stories because in the observed constellation, we can see both the singular and the group as radiant and valuable.

You can observe this constellation yourself in the next section of this report as a selection of quotes compiled from the interviews. The curation showcases the participants' multi-faceted nature as women. Together the quotes suggest a shared journey of growing through and beyond landscape architecture, yet through each quote, you will find a fully spirited human being. Learn what you will from how these women have grown as human beings—*as they learned from their suffering, followed their passions, surrendered to life, entertained their imaginative fancies, became humbled by their vulnerabilities, questioned their purpose, allowed themselves to be touched by their connections, and opened their hearts*—and hopefully, when we can see a woman in her fullness, we can also see any person, species, being, place, and experience in fullness as well.



Ambivalent Beginnings

“ I appreciated the freedom, the academic freedom, to explore things you were interested in. I was very much interested in thinking about the landscapes of cities. I liked that about my program, that there was this emphasis not just on regional landscapes but also on urban landscapes.

“ I really loved the program. I was so glad I chose to go there. I had a very lovely experience with all the faculty. I really liked that part. I was really inspired. I was in the master's program, and half the class was from outside of Canada. So, it was eye opening in that sense. I met a lot of motivated, creative, but also logical and practical people. I always felt like it blended these worlds of logic and creativity, which is another thing that really attracted it to me.

“ I met amazing, amazing friends who I still speak to today. I felt like this was home. This feels like belonging. I felt comfortable with the people that I was working with, most people, that is. I felt a sense of pride in the work that I was doing and that I will pursue because it not only helps people get outside but also helps the environment. So, for me, that's kind of a great goal to have in a career, that you're servicing people, you're servicing the public and the environment. If I could make money doing this, fabulous!

“ When we were at school, we had our studio crits. We would come up with designs and go up front. You're scared as hell, and you know you're going to be criticized, but in a way, you had that moment where you can just talk about what you were thinking. I was always so nervous going upfront because [I was] always so conscious. It's like, my stuff doesn't look as good as everyone else's; I wish I had more time; I rushed through or I didn't prepare my notes fast enough or well enough. You're always second guessing yourself. Then the relief you had afterwards. You're like, 'Oh, my God! I got all this together and did it!' Now we're done and you felt happy that you went through it. It's always such a big learning experience.

“ I felt like of all the things I could be studying, it was somewhat of an okay fit, but I still dreamt of getting out. While I was in school, I took a lot of other courses aside from our regular requirements. I took a lot of French classes, and I took a lot of studio art classes. I took an art history course. I felt that I was never fully committed while I was in landscape architecture school. I was not really 100% there. My mind was in other places, exploring other things, wishing that I could weave it into what I was doing in school.

“ I never really thought about the future at that time. I didn't think of it that seriously. I just chose one. My boyfriend at the time was a student of architecture. I just wanted to be away from home and since somebody was there already, I just took the move. I did find it fun sometimes but not all the time. When I got to the design and drawing parts, those were the things I liked. I found it kind of fun but that's it. I didn't have much of a futuristic enthusiasm for landscape architecture.

“ It was a bit over my head because I didn't have any soft sciences background whatsoever. And math is not my forte. So the whole engineering side was like a steep learning curve for me. I would say, I did pretty well despite my handicaps and finished in the top few of the class.

“ I was really intimidated by math, so I didn't go into landscape architecture. I went into urban planning instead. I worked as an urban planner for two or three years. I was always fascinated by the streetscape projects and the projects that the landscape architects were working on. I was fascinated by the park planning projects. Then I was like, 'Just go back and do it. This is what you want to do. You can do math.' It was just that sort of intimidation I had. I went back and I was able to do the math. I graduated. It was fine. It was only just the perception of I'm not good at math, so I can't do landscape architecture, even though I was interested in it.



Big Dreams and Learned Pragmatism

“ I did my thesis on informal cities, looking at how without a designer, people had formed communities and settlements. I had wanted to continue doing that as research. I thought maybe it'd be great to continue to do this type of work as international development and really push at landscape infrastructure as a way to approach development. Maybe it'd be something with the UN or working at a research institution or a non-profit and to try to push that narrative, thinking that rather than housing and upgrading informal settlements through housing, why don't we take this landscape approach to it by providing water infrastructure, a network of public open spaces, and people could then solve the housing on their own? That's what I thought I would do. That's what I was passionate about and really interested in.

“ I spent a lot of time not doing my coursework, but a lot of time at the library looking at books of landscape architecture projects and architecture projects by renowned designers. And so, for me, what was cool were things that seemed novel, had never been done before, pushing boundaries of what we think is design or materiality. Working in a cool design office abroad, like in Europe or somewhere, that was what I dreamed of when I was in landscape architecture school. Doing cool, public realm projects that would get published and that other people would admire.

“ I really thought that I was going to move out West to Arizona or something. Xeriscaping was the cool thing then. I mean it's still the cool thing out West. But I really thought that I was going to move to Arizona and do super sustainable planning.

“ I envisioned myself traveling a lot, going and working on projects internationally, seeing different parts of the world and working on a project in that part of the world and bringing and learning from that community and that culture, how they approached landscape design and complementing that with our experience in Canada. I envisioned that I would work for a firm that was internationally recognized and had a lot of different projects. That way it would be interesting. You would have a lot of exposure to all kinds of different methods that people were doing in different climates and different parts of the world, and culturally connected with their outdoor spaces. That was my big vision.

“ I was doing fine arts in university, and I was majoring in drawing. It was just me and this other guy who were interested in drawing. It seemed to be a real niche thing. When we finished, I thought to myself, I don't want to be a starving artist. It's just not me. I'm not that kind of person. I didn't want to work in an office, but I wanted to have a team of people. I didn't want to work on my own, basically. Then my brother's friend came over. I didn't really know him, but he said, 'What are you going to do now that you've graduated from university?' I said, 'I don't know. I just like to draw.' And he goes, 'Well, my sister's a landscape architect. She draws all day.' I was like, 'Perfect.'

“ Because I was really good at drawing and math my whole life, people said to me you should be an architect, you should be an architect. So, I was like, 'Fine, I guess I'll be an architect.' I remember the night before I left for college thinking, what am I doing? I don't even want to do this. I've just went with what everybody's told me to do my whole life. Did I ever really think about this?

“ Ideally, I thought I was going to work at a research institute, but the focus was about landscape architecture and the design outside. That was the original idea. But I don't think such a thing exists unless you go to a university and have a university title.

“ You know, my dad was telling me, 'I don't care whatever you want to do. You just give me the certificate or the diploma.' So I just took one and I graduated. Then he just left me alone.

“ Don't think I had any idea [of the future]. I was twenty-four. I had recently moved to Canada, just trying to survive. I didn't have a vision of I'm going to graduate and I'm going to do this or I'm going to do this at that time.

“ The first thing after graduation, I went out West. I went WWOOFing (WorldWide Opportunities on Organic Farms) for a month and a half with close people I knew. That was very restorative for me. Then I came back to my parents, and my dad was like, 'What are you doing? You don't have a job.' So, I managed to just get a job as basically a receptionist at my friend's mechanical engineering office.



Bursted Bubbles

“ I feel like they painted this rosy picture. Speaking to us as a class, 'Oh, you're in the MLA program. You're going to be able to get paid right off the hop. You're going to be so highly sought after. You guys have your undergrad in a separate angle. You're coming in with a unique this and that.' So I pictured myself working in Toronto doing amazing big stuff and pictured myself moving up fast and wanting to be a boss and a leader of a team. Yeah, boy was my bubble busted.

“ The feeling of like you're in a whole office full of creative people, but the real day to day, moment by moment, is so not creative at all. There's just so much mundane stuff you have to deal with which I felt was very draining.

“ I did not enjoy the sort of professional work as a junior landscape architect as much as I enjoyed the student work. A lot of it was just mind-numbing grind and too many hours spent on CAD. The sort of junior landscape architecture tasks that I enjoyed most were just doing renderings. Put me on Photoshop all day. I could do that all day. But I found my job was really just to implement and draw what somebody else did. Do not comment. Do not change. Just do it. That part I found hard because, in school, you get this opportunity to learn, to talk about and, think and develop ideas. As a junior landscape architect, nobody cares about your opinions. Just hurry up and get the drawing done, or just do these red lines.

“ I don't like doing things the same all the time. I left my job because it was probably the same reason I got the job. You go in at 9. You get off at 5. That kind of routine. I finally realized that I didn't like it anymore.

“ I ended up getting a job in cemetery design. It wasn't what I wanted. It was just the only job posting there was of someone who would interview me. It ended up being a super boring job because it wasn't fast paced at all. But we got to work on big sites, like hectares and hectares. We got to do road layouts like subdivision design, but the lots are smaller, and we were the prime consultants.

“ I think I idealized the idea of being in a design studio, working on a drafting table, and drawing by hand. I idealized that area of private practice and working very much in a design role. I never really liked the technical drawings. When I worked in offices starting out, I was kind of pigeonholed into the concept development sort of stuff, but I dreamed of being the designer.

“ I wanted to design. I wanted to get into the concept design, but that was left for the partners and the associates. I was there to do that technical piece. I felt like there was a disconnect between the way we were trained and once we entered into the profession. To enter into the profession, they were asking for somebody with a master's degree in landscape architecture, but our skills weren't used. I was drafting all day, and I don't know how unique my experience was.

“ I didn't like sitting in front of my desk and doing AutoCAD all day long. I didn't like doing that. I love coordinating. I love coordinating between people. Talking to people. I love coordinating between all the subconsultants. That was just a joy. But I didn't like having to AutoCAD endlessly. I have a really good friend who has really good design eyes. She would always ask me which shade of green or pink would look good on this poster, but they would look the same to me. Whatever she does, it looks fabulous. So, for me to be so critical about a shade of colour and how that appears on a poster, I think that could be someone else's job. I think it's important in a sense, but it's not where I want to spend my focus.

“ When you study, you're so naïve. You think that you can design anything that you want. But when you are in the world, there are a lot of regulations and limitations. The limitations come from the developers, the owners. Usually, they want to go the bare minimum to meet the requirements for the city. At the end of the day, the design is not really what you thought it's going to be. When you study in university, it would be helpful—or maybe not—to just let the student think anyway that they want. Let them go with their imagination. They just grow. Don't limit them with the limitations outside.



Internal and External Challenges

“ From before I even entered the field, there was the idea that girls aren't good at math. As a girl, I always felt like, 'Oh, I'm not good at math.' But it's really been about science and having to dispel that. I'm like, 'No, you can do math. You can do numbers. You can do this. You can do science.'”

“ They don't even teach you how to use AutoCAD [in school]. So I had no idea that's what you do most of the day. I remember at my first job, and it was the first week. I walked up, and I stood behind my chair. Your muscles have to start to adjust to sitting there doing that all day. And I thought, 'This is just what we do. We sit and do AutoCAD.' That became my arc nemesis because I knew enough. I knew a little bit because they trained me at the job how to use it. But then, any other place I went, I needed a technician to work for me. Otherwise, I'd be caught in the weeds trying to do these drawings and link them.”

“ I'm the only person in private practice in the location that I'm in. There are lots of landscape architects that do work here, but because I was kind of the only local person, initially, at least, I got flooded with work. I've taken on everything. I've had trouble with defining what type of work I do. I've just said yes to a lot of things that's obviously not gone well.”

“ I felt while working as a landscape designer or architect in the industry, we spend so much time talking about using our images and design to communicate. That led me to not knowing how to communicate verbally. I hated that. I absolutely hated that. I realized that I'm communicating so much visually that I acknowledged there was something missing. I couldn't communicate as well verbally or through written words.”

“ I would've liked to change my personality. I am an 'I' person [in the MBTI]. I wanted to become an 'E' person who's more open and have more curiosity about others, have a social life and other kinds of stuff. That's what I wanted. It's not that I can change it and go back in time. I don't think it could happen. I wanted to be a different kind of person so that I can make different kinds of choices. I mean, if I wanted to have different choices, and I choose different ones, I have to be different. But I was not. I might have many, many thoughts of the future, or I might've been very courageous and outgoing, and I would want to try different kinds of things. But at that time, I just didn't want to. I didn't know what I liked, and what I didn't like.”



Beyond the Box: Searching for Purpose

“ There’s this children’s story I read to my son. It’s quite cute. It’s about a penguin, Bob, who lives in a box. The box is great. It has everything he wants. He plays in the box. He reads a lot of stories. But one day, he hears about the world outside of the box. But then he gets scared. What if it’s scary? But he can’t stop thinking about it. At the end of the day, he climbs out of the box, and the world is beautiful. I think I was sort of like a Bob in the Box. Like I was just in a box, not pausing and thinking.

“ There was a guy doing his MFA where I had done my fine arts undergrad. He was an architect, but he was doing an MFA. Somehow, he found out about me. Anyway, he got in touch with me. He was doing performance art. He would architect a whole space, and we would dance inside of it. That was part of my thesis. In those days, I was already overlapping and thinking outside the box. Was it Anna Halprin? She was Lawrence Halprin’s wife. He was designing all those parks. She was a dancer. She would help him design by dancing in a space, and then they could figure out the genius loci of it. I thought, maybe that’s what I’ll do.

“ I was in a position that wasn’t the place that I wanted to be, but for some reason, I kept continuing, and I kept ignoring what I wanted to do. I kept postponing. I was thinking, ‘I’m not ready. I’m going to get ready, and I’m going to go out, and I’m going to [work on my own startup] –until I got laid off. I got another offer the same month from a different firm to go and join them with the same benefits, which I rejected. Then I got another offer, and their benefits and compensation were much higher than what I got. But I decided to refuse that, to reject that. Then I decided, no. It’s not what I want to do. Yeah, I’m glad that I got laid off.

“ I much prefer being creative in the sense that I create something, and whoever responds to it, great. I’m glad you liked it. But I find it more challenging when I have to fit your vision. What do you call that? Not custom work. Commissioned work. Like an artist who paints a painting just for the sake of what comes out of them versus they’re commissioned to do something that has to fit this kind of thing. I feel like my creative flow has slowed down when I’ve had to be under all these kinds of constraints, especially in commercial, institutional kind of things, where it really gets totally shot down.

“ When I was young, my mom always told me that you have to work right after your graduation. You cannot leave your work without finding another one. That made me very tense. A lot of pressure. Then I started to think, 'Is she really right about this?' A lot of things went on. I got divorced. I quit my job. But I did not quit my job and just totally release it. I still had some part-time jobs, some take-home cases. I still had some little income at the time. Then, I started to try different things. I felt like I just didn't want to work. [...] Do you know those people who think they have to work to get a living? They have to work hard so they can get more money? Those thoughts were implanted by this society. It's not true. But your thinking makes what comes true. That's what their reality is.

“ My last job was not in a design office. It really opened my eyes to the broader issues around parks, how decisions are made, and how power operates. After that experience, I could never go back working in an office again. It seemed too, what's the word? Maybe blind to the bigger picture of things. I guess it's just for me, but for other folks, it's like a whole [different] constellation, a whole [different] world doing these. But for me, my brain shifted. I was like, I don't care to design paving patterns anymore. I used to care a lot, but after working in government and seeing how the bigger machinations of public space work, I just didn't care anymore.

“ You're on autopilot for a good, I don't know. I started my career, learning, learning, gaining experience, and living life on the side too. In the past 15 years, I got married, and I had a kid. I think at one point, I wanted to know how I'm contributing, just in general, not landscape architecture per se but as a human. I think I paused. At the time, I was working 12 or 13 years at the same firm.

“ I'm not actually working in nature. I'm on a computer. I love being outside. That's what I really loved about farming. I was witnessing it with my own eyes. Feeling it with my own hands. Engaging with it on the daily. That part of the job I absolutely loved. It spoke to my soul. I don't get that with landscape architecture, even if I do the odd site visit.



Doses of Reality

“ I never went back to traditional practice for a number of reasons. When I was tired and burnt out from my landscape architecture job, I was like, oh, let me just take a break and do something on my own. I was longing to have more freedom and control of my own time. It was fun, but I needed the stability of a regular paycheck rather than running a non-profit. And mostly living in the States, I needed health insurance. So that's the main impetus for getting paid employment. It's through a job. I have to find a full-time job that would give me health insurance. Then I found I was able to earn more as a planner [than a landscape designer] when I considered the number of hours I was working.

“ I was really a product of circumstance with the 2008 recession. Then with my next boss wanting to sell his business. I had to make those changes. I guess what I'm thinking is, it would have been nice to work a long time at one place and see the fruits of your labour. See stuff get built and move up with stature within, as opposed to trying to move to different companies to get your stature. That's how people work nowadays. It used to be you could put in your 30 years somewhere, but now it's like you skip from company to company, and each time, you try and lift yourself into a new pay grade and all that.

“ My plan had been to work for myself. In 2010, I had started an LLC and done just maybe one or two projects a year while I taught. My husband said, 'Just leave teaching. They're never going to let you be as good as you can be. You should just work for yourself.' So, I had planned to take that LLC and make it my full-time job. Three months later, I got really sick and became disabled. So, all of 2020 was just me trying to figure out how to stay alive, basically.

“ It doesn't pay well. I mean, it's common in architecture and landscape architecture. It's generally not appreciated for what they do. Their contributions are just not, in a way, materialized. I mean, I don't think it would have made a difference or it would have changed, but I think a lot of people getting into architecture and landscape architecture, they're not aware of how salaries work. Fortunately, that has changed a little bit in the past few years. We can see with grads starting, their expectations are just a lot more than our generation and our expectations.

“ Even what I'm doing right now, I don't really need to be a landscape architect to do it. With the age of AI, a lot of disciplines are going to be omitted in the future. [In my business], we work on the AI part more than the design part. I don't need the title. I don't need the landscape architect title to be able to do what I'm doing right now.

“ I keep going every year, should I pay for this [association membership], or am I out? People would say you got to keep those credentials behind your name even if you're volunteering somewhere. Just the other day, I had to write a letter for my mom to stand up for what was happening at her condo. 'I'm going to write the letter and put my credentials behind it, and that'll be worth something.' I mean, there's more to it than just paying the annual fee. I keep thinking I'm going to get out of this and just want to wash my hands of it. I was out in 2016. So, eight years. For half of that time, for four years, I was just trying to get out, out, out. Trying to convince myself I didn't need it anymore, and I was never going to do it again.

“ I wish I took more business-related courses to complement the creative side. Even if you run your own landscape architecture firm, you need to have some kind of business background to help make it. It's still a business. You still have clients. You still have to balance your books. You still have to pay your overhead and manage people. You have so many taxes and all kinds of things to consider. I kind of wish I did some more business-related studies to complement the design work just so I have a bit more insight because a lot of people, in my world at least, seem to be very effective [with having both].

“ I work from home. It's part of my accommodation that I don't work more than about 20 hours a week. Everybody knows not to bother me before 10 am or after 3 pm. My coworkers are super good about it. I don't know that I could have as good a work-life balance as I do if I was physically in the office with the rest of them because my coworkers, who are at the same levels as everybody else who's in senior management, they all work over 40 hours. They're all there at 6 or 7 o'clock. Often, they take their laptops home and work on the weekends.

“ I thought, I’m going to go on my own. I started to work for myself. I did a little bit of stuff here and there, but mostly just trying to set up a business and meet people and try and learn how to golf so I can meet this architect and that developer. Then I thought, ‘Now, I haven’t only got one terrible boss. I’ve got, like, all these architects and developers who are my bosses, technically. This is just crazy.’

“ This is not necessarily from my own personal experience, but I know from other people the challenges being in architecture and landscape architecture, especially in the beginning, are the long working hours. I’ve never done it. It’s not common practice in our office that you’re expected to do that. But it’s common practice in many other offices. I would say that would be an issue, especially as a woman, but generally an obstacle too. I’ve heard from others, this particular girl, who actually left landscape architecture because of long hours. She had three kids and couldn’t do it.

“ The pressure of deadlines. Like, oh, my God! We have another one! It was just so stressful from SDs on to final CDs. The stress, I couldn’t take it. And it was like everyone was stressed in the office. That’s the part I disliked [about working in a design office].



Gender Politics

“ I don't think landscape architecture is any different from any other discipline in the experience as a woman doing anything in a hierarchical society.

“ My first job out of college, I had a boss who would mess up things on his own projects and then blame the mistakes on me to his boss when I had never worked on those projects. I had never billed an hour to them. He would use me as a scapegoat so that he didn't get in trouble for messing up stuff. When I would try to ask him about it, he would scream at me. He'd pull me in his office and shut the door and scream at me. I got to the point where I stopped wearing makeup to work because I knew I would cry it all off by lunch and I have to go put it on in the bathroom again. There's no way that I would put up with that in my 30s, but as a 23-year-old kid living in [a place] where I didn't know anybody and didn't have any friends, and this being my first job out of school, I just thought I had to take it.

“ I used to be like a raging feminist, and I just couldn't get my head wrapped around the idea of having to submit to a male boss. It just always irked me. So that's fine. That was my handicap. But I do feel like these bosses were taking their role for granted. For example, one boss I had was like, 'We're going on a conference, but I can't afford to get separate hotel rooms, so you're going to share my hotel room.' I said, 'I'm not going on the conference. Thank you. No.'

“ I had a situation where my boss actually suggested I sit on his lap when we had to get in a car to go somewhere. It was with a group of all men, and they were making sexual jokes the whole time. It was definitely sexual harassment in the workplace, but at the time, I was too timid and had too low confidence to even acknowledge that and say anything. I don't know how much that is about landscape architecture. I think that was just the era of the times.

“ I’ve spoken with other friends about this too. There are people trying to hit on you, and you don’t know. You’re young. You don’t know whether you’re supposed to just go along with it. The boss really likes this client. We got to get the work. If he wants to sit with me in the back and chat me up about his dog, okay, I got to let him do that. Or if this one wants to shake my hand every day and hug me, I got to [let him]. You don’t know. Then you come to a point where you’re like, I’m not doing that anymore. This doesn’t belong here. Then that’s when you start to get pushback.

“ I’m working less on the construction side of things, but I do know that it’s very masculine. Landscape architecture, architecture, it doesn’t matter. At the end of the day, you’re working with contractors, construction workers, and developers who are all men. Yes, there’s been instances of thinking the contractor is talking to you as if you’re the little flower girl who picks flowers but knows nothing about concrete, for example. I think that happens to all women in the construction industry that we just not take it seriously.

“ Several men on my team that I did performance evaluations for did not like their performance evaluations. Depending on their personalities, they responded in different ways. One went so far as to file an official grievance against me. Then another one, he was in my office, and I told him based on this, this, this, this is how I would evaluate you in your performance. He was so angry that I really felt that if we were in another kind of situation or another kind of world, he would have actually physically hit me. That was the level of anger I confronted.

“ My boss would take me in the boardroom at the end of the day and say, ‘You’re doing a terrible job. I can’t even believe it. You’re all over the map. You’re a dictator-type leader.’ I’m sitting there going, is this for real? I was just so shocked. No one had ever talked to me like that before. I’d always been pleasing my bosses. They always liked me. And then he would phone me on my cell phone in the morning before the workday and say, ‘Listen, I was a little hard on you. Let me take you for breakfast and make it all up to you.’ Okay, so we’re going for breakfast, and he’s saying, ‘Would you like your own office?’ I was like, ‘I’m not sure what’s happening.’ Yeah, just the head games.

“ I remember a girl saying, wear a ring on your married finger if you go to the construction site. Otherwise, you're just going to get harassed. Just hearing that made me so nervous. I think I was scared of men a lot of my life. I don't know why. I have a wonderful dad. He's not someone who panders to gender roles or anything. I feel like I had to heal my own issues with feeling scared of men. For some reason, scared of that masculine energy. Now, I feel like I like men. Men are my friends and I like the masculine parts of myself! I like using a chainsaw. I did my own roof with my dad. I like doing the hard labour work that women don't normally do. I don't want to act like a victim or anything. I feel like I let myself be taken by those societal norms, and then I had to address it because I think hidden in the whole patriarchal system is the dislike for it.

“ I wonder what things would look like if there wasn't such an entrenched patriarchy, what things would look like in a landscape architecture office. If such a thing would exist. Because I did work for a woman once, thinking, 'Oh, this is going to be great! It'll be so much better.' But in some ways, it was way worse because she was also dealing with her own entrenched patriarchal thinking. I felt as a woman in her office, she relied on the men all the time to make the decisions and advice. In some ways, it was like she felt like I was her competition.

“ It'd be fun to work with more women, to be honest. Even the architects I work with are mostly men. There's one woman I work with in architecture and there's more women in civil engineering as well. Anyways, it brings a new dynamic. What's the word? A little bit of a breath of fresh air. It's a little bit more collaborative and a little more open-minded. You don't feel like you're judged as heavily. I don't know if that makes sense. I think you could just sense more perspectives and more appreciation and more people contributing when you have a group that incorporates a lot more variety on their team.

“ All my bosses were male, but that never bothered me. Obviously, I want more female leadership, but it was never something that I felt because I was a female, I cannot rise. That never really crossed my mind. I had great male bosses who took me under their wing and supported me, helped me rise, and helped me learn through my career. Maybe I was very lucky in that sense. Obviously, I also had not-so-great bosses, which I won't talk about. Now, I know how to identify toxic environments, but I feel like that comes with any gender. There are great female bosses, and there are also terrible female bosses who are not supportive of females rising and moving upwards in the organization. So, I don't see it as a gender or sex problem.



The Role of Motherhood

“ I remember when I was going to go back to study landscape architecture, a woman who I'd worked with who used to be a landscape architect, she's like, 'It's not a profession for women who want to have a family and want to have kids. It's male-dominated. They don't care. They'll stay to 7 o'clock, and it's almost like who will stay the latest. If you leave to go home and you have kids, it's like you're not advancing as far.' She was older than me. But now that I have two young kids, I could never imagine working for a firm with two kids. Just the unpredictability, your inability to predict your schedule and having to go home and then continue working after you're home, that just wouldn't work.

“ One person said, 'You are going to have a few years where you're just not going to be the star employee. You have to put your family first.' My head couldn't see how I would do that. I didn't want to do a crappy job there to have a family, so I just felt like my only option was to go for family and be successful there. Whether it's that I've left the career and I'm doing that for the rest of my life or that I go back, I don't know yet. But it was too black and white that way for me. I couldn't do both.

“ I am a mom of a seven-year-old son. He is the project that I have to work with for my everyday routine, even on Saturdays and Sundays. Those are the busier days when he doesn't go to school. That's what I'm doing right now. But I got spare time for a couple of hours after he goes to school and before I have to pick him up.

“ Being a mom, it's a full-time job, and it's in addition to your [work]. It's not possible to do both of them together completely. You have to ignore some parts. To be able to create a balance, you have to do less in some parts. I'm talking about being the working woman, not a landscape architect. I used to work long hours a lot, and then most of the weekends. Even after a working day, I used to go to a lot of networking events. These are things that I won't be able to do anymore. Just recently, I started going to networking events. Even once a month or once every two weeks is too much for me. When I go to an event, it means that the babysitter or my husband has to take the responsibilities that I have at home to be able to accept the other thing.

“ There was this one time I thought I was going to go to our Christmas party, but I'm not going to go anymore because my husband was travelling, and I had to take my daughter home. My director said, 'No way! Bring your daughter. Do not skip out because you have to take your daughter home from daycare. Bring her. We'll love her.' And I did. Everyone was so gracious. She was the only kid there. She was running around, sneaking in snacks everywhere at this pretty formal event. But everyone was so supportive. Nobody was looking terribly down on either me or my daughter. Some even played with her. Then, in our more recent discussions, she said if my daughter is ever sick and I need to come into work, bring her into the office. Just do it. She did it when her kids were young, and she had male bosses who didn't like her doing that. So, for her, it was her chance to change that. I'm moved by that.

“ My vision had always been success for me is I'm making a lot of money and I've got people working under me, and I'm leading a good team. Then, when I got pregnant, I'm like, 'Oh wait, success can also be having a family.' It didn't even occur to me until I got pregnant.



Acceptance, Confidence, and Self-Stewardship

“ I think that I should have aimed a little higher for myself, knowing what I'm capable now. I think that I had convinced myself that I was a good student but wasn't going to be a great landscape architect because that was how the women were treated in our program. So, I just applied for mediocre jobs. That set me on this path of working at civil engineering firms where you never really do high-design work.

“ Farming helped a lot in my confidence of being out and doing things, like actually taking the agency to get out and do it yourself. It helped with my level of Yes, I can set out to do something. You just build it and see how it goes. It's still a work in progress, but it helped me with the practicality side of engaging with land and planting and seeing results, and planting and seeing results. So, it is more of a practical, hands-on thing.

“ [If I were to change anything], it would have been around being better at being assertive and advocating for myself. Negotiating better salaries, negotiating better contracts, learning all that. That's what I would have done. That's what I would change.

“ I would purposely go to HR and say, 'Can you put me on other projects? Can you put me on projects with these people because I work really well with them?' I do this if I'm able to. I would make a case to work on projects with people that align with my values and who will treat me more or less as an equal and train me the way that I want to be trained. I've taken those initiatives.

“ After I became disabled, one of my newer passions became dealing with accessibility and universal design. So now people from different parts of our company will call me and be like, hey, what could I do to make this more accessible? I'm sort of becoming known as that. I really enjoy that. I want to believe that I was sensitive to accessibility as a non-disabled person, but once I had to spend a few months of my life in a wheelchair and then with a cane, it just makes you see the world so much differently. I feel like it made me such a better designer.

“ You just sort of go, 'You know what? It's neither here nor there. It doesn't matter.' Then you take away a lot of the [suffering regarding sexism]. You're assuming all this heartache and pain. That's just how they're moving through life. I'm not the one who's going to be here to correct them all. That's too much of a burden.

“ I think for my personality, my strengths, and my weaknesses, going through professional practice as a structure for my life was very, very helpful. I feel it grounded me. I'm able to have my flights of fancy but also think through the steps and think about what kind of actual impact this will have in the real world. I'm proud that I can deliver on something concrete because when I was working in government, I saw the other side of that. There's just so much talk, but people don't have the skill set to deliver on something concrete, so it just becomes lost up in the air.

“ I really devote myself into Yoga these years. I think health is more important than everything else. I don't think health is just you get a diet, and you exercise, and you're healthy. That's not called health. It's not easily achieved. Mostly, you have to feel it inside out.

“ If I could go back, I'd like to change my low confidence that I had for years. I only feel like in the last year or two that I've actually started to develop a healthy level of confidence. I had very low confidence for most of my career, and it really held me back. It even made me arrogant in not wanting to own up to things I didn't know. It held me back from actually being able to learn. I wish I could change my confidence and speaking my values more. Standing up for my values more. I think if I had more confidence, I would have more conviction in what I believed.

“ I started small [with sharing my knowledge]. I started with just getting my colleagues on board, talking to them about what it is that I do, and then over the course of one year, my friends would say, ‘Guess what? I was in this place, and I was looking at the sidewalk, and I realized, hey, this is not built for pedestrians. This is not health promoting.’ It made me so happy because these are clinicians. These are health researchers that have nothing to do within the design world.

“ Just being a professional in a professional office, you’re learning how to do checks and balances all the time, and to make sure that you’re not dropping the ball here; dotting an I there, you’re wrapping everything up; you’ve checked all the angles, and you’re ready to submit something. Before that, I was just like a kid. Then you go into a professional office and it’s no, you’re not submitting this with a typo in it. You’re going to go over that again and again and again. I just think anything I do now, I’ve got a professionalism to it. I’m happy about that.



Love of Work: Landscape Architecture and Beyond

“ I love the community engagement, the open house working with clients, the dynamic. They get a little spicy. I realized that I actually don't mind it. It was exhilarating, actually.

“ I love working with very creative people. When you present things at the urban design review panels and have a committee of very experienced designers who are reviewing your projects, I really appreciate it. I don't talk too much at these. You have your group of professionals that are very good at explaining and walking people through the design intent and making [the panel] feel it and see it. There are some that are just so amazing at that.

“ When I did my undergrad in biology, I studied fractal patterns of mammals. We would track the movement patterns and then see how they fractalized. The end result was understanding landscape patterns and how they affect how animals move. I've always loved that. I always felt like when I switched to landscape architecture, the animal was human, and you were understanding how the human engages with their environment. I think that's the best thing I like about landscape architecture is how we can best harmonize with the surroundings. I think it's actually a profession where you can help to increase people's opportunities to develop a connection with nature. Even in a very passive sense, like you're not forcing anybody to do it. You're making it available within these hardscape settings.

“ I like what I do. I don't know if it's necessary about landscape architecture, like the big picture of landscape architecture, but I mean, even that too, I do feel like it's a really relevant discipline in the times that we're living in. Creating more equitable spaces, climate change, and anything that you do as a landscape architect has an impact. I'm more interested on the social side and perhaps less on the ecological side, but I do appreciate what landscape architects can do.

“ I think that landscape architecture is a profession that is easily made sustainable. You can do environmentally sustainable work to a larger degree than a lot of other related professions. Even if the client has no interest in that, they don't realize you're doing all kinds of stuff that is environmentally sensitive. You're not costing them more money, so they don't care. I always found ways to try to build sustainability into the work that I've done, whether the client is aware of it or not.

“ I approached the land with an analytical mind and a designer's eye. Nobody had the most beautiful lettuce fields that we had because we planted all the plants like red, green, red, green, and different textures. I would go experimenting with planting what I was calling decorative plots, where I would do landscape designs with the vegetables. I loved the colour of the blue soleil leek leaves with the dark purple basil and interplanting them.

“ I know designs I like to do, like working on projects for seniors that have very strong sustainability and affordable housing. It's fascinating working for today's housing crisis. I think those are challenging but rewarding types of developments to be part of. To keep working towards innovation and creating really high quality and beautiful designs as well as being part of projects that are received well that can provide amenities and services to the communities, provide great pathways and connectivity to open spaces and programming that the community really needs. I hope my future can keep guiding me towards those types of work that are important for today and the future.



Beautiful Connections: Being Inspired and Supporting Others

“ I follow people who are good, who kind of foster a good environment. That was one of the main reasons why I chose my supervisor. I had thought, ‘Wow, she’s brilliant. I would love to be brilliant just like her.’ I had thought that while she’s very kind and gracious, I also want to be that kind of leader. She recently retired and I wrote her a heartfelt note saying exactly what I just told you. I thought, I picked her because I thought working together would be wonderful because she seems like a wonderful person to work for. She exceeded my expectations. She was more wonderful than I thought. I wish we had ten more years to go.

“ Now, working on this volunteer project for my daughter’s school, I actually had my former boss help and volunteer with me. He’s retired and he wanted to hang out anyway. So, I thought, well, let’s hang out and work on a project. Then, I can still learn from him. I still have a lot to learn.

“ [Working from the client’s side] I really do my best to provide for the landscape architect on file, to bring them on as early as possible, so they can have impact to the overall space, and coordinate with the architecture and other design elements. I guess that’s where I’m at. I introduce and guide and provide feedback. But I also want the landscape architect to be free to provide their most creative ways to address challenges and to provide solutions for specific sites.

“ I’m probably going to veer away from this more traditional private practice scenario. Maybe there’ll always be a little bit of it on the side, but I’d like to go more in the direction of empowering the individual to do their own stuff rather than being of service. I see myself kind of getting away from the role of designer to client and becoming kind of more maybe in the area of thinker to inspiring other people. I want to zero in on that perspective.

“ I love all the cool things I learned. I didn't know anything about vegetation, ecosystems, nothing. I have a 50-acre property in the North and I know so many things about it...It used to be a gravel pit. There was never any soil put back in. It's only what blew in...There's the poplar. It was once considered the biggest species because of the way one tree creates a whole forest. And here's why they tremble. The stem attaching the leaf is a triangle shape, so when the wind hits it, it sloughs off the heat. It has its own little microclimate...Like a whole world has opened up for microclimate ecosystems. All people you meet are fascinated about that. Even raising my kids, I could just go outside and teach them. Doesn't matter what season. We can talk about maps and directions and vegetation and species identification. It's like a whole facet of my life I never knew anything about that has been opened by learning from all these different landscape architects.

“ What I'm also excited about is I'm doing a lot of arts programming. We have this huge building that's just been redeveloped. We also have performance space. I've been excited to think about including designers, and not just artists, in the work as well. We're going to be commissioning an art piece and I'm thinking this is something designers can also do. I think landscape architects would be wonderful at also doing public art. I would love to do something like [les Jardin des Metis] to host a design festival where we're giving designers or landscape architects a prompt to think about and design something site-specific. Could we do that inside a building that's like 22,000 square feet? Could we ask folks to design a landscape inside? That's how I'm excited to bring my training into my current role.

Acknowledgements and A Heartfelt Note from the Researcher

Thank you for reading this research project report. I wonder if you, like me, were taught to believe that research had to be non-biased, service to the world had to be self-sacrificial, and confidence was the only form of authentic success.

I've learned in recent years that life is a paradox, and despite any goals to be objective, we are naturally biased; behind altruistic intentions is inevitably a personal subconscious desire; and before we can be authentically confident, we must be comfortable with our insecurities. So, as much as I wanted to protect this project's integrity, my own relationship to the subject matter brings with it a double-edged sword. For context, I formally retired my landscape architect title in 2022 after seven years of Inactive/Leave of Absence status (to do a PhD), six years of Full Membership, and two years of Associate standing. My experience in the profession consisted of friendly co-workers, reputable design projects, and relative stability. Yet, as an idealist, my "departure" from the profession carries with it internal conflicts. To avoid using the voices of participants as surrogates for my own emotional baggage, I concluded my data collection by interviewing myself as an undisclosed 11th research participant.

I will share a snippet from my interview that reveals why this project came to be. In summary, my PhD research about what landscapes mean to humanity at a spiritual level set a bar for me on how I wanted to live life and relate to landscape architecture as a profession. What I found internally was a lot of dissonance. I couldn't get around how the practical sides of the profession and my ideals regarding landscape architecture were not aligned. Moreover, this dissonance was emblematic of how other things in society didn't make sense: the political and social narratives, the declarations, policies, and perfunctory words, and how these intentions did not match with the way people actually experience life. For instance, what is landscape architecture? We cannot define it because landscape is beyond language. So, certainly, we cannot define it through a legal document. Then, what it comes down to at a practical level is we're not landscape architects unless we fulfill the requirements of membership in a group. This, I couldn't make sense of. The dissonance isn't merely about having to pay fees and complete CE credits, but if those are the only gestures that assign me (and us) that identity, then how trivial is that?

My decision to leave landscape architecture (in a legal sense) was less so of wanting others to see or not see me as a landscape architect, but rather, my desire to learn to stop seeing myself as "a landscape architect" and stop being constrained by the boundaries that I've previously accepted as what landscape architecture, professionalism, worthiness, value, and purpose means. When I can find myself outside that box, I can then see my true purpose, the one that had been gifted to me when I entered Earth for the first time. This discovery, like the non-linear process of landscape design and construction (which I disliked but appreciated), is full of unpredictability. However, at this moment, I am grateful for those who supported me—the peers who wrote me recommendation letters for my grant submission, the staff and committee members at LACF who reviewed and

selected my proposal for an Annual Grant, and the interview participants who shared with us their dreams and sorrows—to make this project possible as part of my personal journey to embody my purpose and my voice.

With gratitude,

VTD

Appendix

Interview Questions

The following questions were used as guidelines for semi-structured interviews. Questions and orders were modified to correspond to the circumstances of the individual research participant.

1. First, I'd like to know a bit about who you are today. What is your current status with landscape architecture, and if you are no longer in the profession, what career role are you taking on?
2. Let's go back to how it all started. How did you first become interested in landscape architecture?
3. How did you envision your career as a landscape architect then? What was the ideal path?
4. What was your experience like as a landscape architecture student or a junior landscape architect?
5. What kind of landscape architecture work have you been involved in?
6. What made you decide to leave the profession? Or decide not to follow the traditional path in landscape architecture? Or, if you are considering a career change, what are the factors you are considering?
7. What did you like most about working in landscape architecture? What did you dislike most about working in landscape architecture?
8. How do you think being a woman affected your experience in landscape architecture? Considering that identities are complex, if you need to expand the question to other social identities beyond womanhood (such as ethnicity, family culture, etc.), feel free to do so.
10. If you had a chance to change something in the past regarding your career in landscape architecture, what would it be?
11. How does your experience in landscape architecture support or hinder what you are doing now?
12. How do you see a role for landscape architecture (or anything related to it) in your life going forward?
13. What career goals do you have for the future, do you mind sharing? They can be simple, pragmatic ones or big dreams that you wish would happen.
14. That's all the formal questions I have. Do you have anything else you'd like to share for the research study?

A Few Sources Regarding Gender Representation in the Design Professions

- According to CSLA, female representation in landscape architecture in 2015 was below average (38% in comparison to 48% on average for all other occupations). “*Value of Landscape Architecture in Society*,” **CSLA Website**, accessed Sept. 18, 2023, <https://www.csla-aapc.ca/advocacy/value-landscape-architecture-society>. In comparison, the 2020 joint DEI survey by CSLA, OALA, AALA, BCSLA, and MALA shows close to half of respondents identifying as female. *Kaari Kitawi and Helene Iaras, “Diversity in Canadian Landscape Architecture,” OALA Website*, accessed Sept. 18, 2023, <https://www.oala.ca/ground-55-diversity-in-canadian-landscape-architecture>.
- According to the CSLA 2019 compensation study, the percentage of female respondents decreases as the position increases in status (from 65% of interns to 57% of landscape architects, to 45% of business associates and 41% of senior landscape architects, to 31% of business partners and 29% of business principals). *The Portage Group, 2019 Canadian Landscape Architecture Compensation & Benefits Study*, CSLA, <https://www.csla-aapc.ca/career-resources/2019-canadian-landscape-architect-compensation-benefits-study>.
- According to the VELA project, the representation of women in the US landscape architecture career ladder drops by 40%, starting at 55% of landscape architecture graduates, to 47% of LARE candidates, to eventually, 27% of licensed landscape architects. *The VELA project, “Project 1: Journey to the Top,” Visualizing Equity in Landscape Architecture*, accessed Sept. 18, 2023, <http://www.velaproject.org/explorations.html>.
- Close to 50% of American graduates in architecture are female, but only 15-18% end up licensed. This discrepancy spurred a gender equity initiative called Equity by Design, which held The Missing 32% Symposium in 2012. *Equity by Design, “About %,” Equity by Design [EQxD]*, accessed Dec. 10, 2019, <http://eqxdesign.com/origins>.