

# Women in Landscape Architecture:

## Amplifying Our Voices

By Gail Greet Hannah



On June 27 and 28, 2023, Landscape Forms, North America's leading designer and manufacturer of high-design site furniture, structure, LED lighting, and accessories, brought together 15 women leaders and three students in landscape architecture to discuss critical issues and future opportunities for women in the profession. The Roundtable was held at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, hosted by Landscape Forms CEO, Margie Simmons, and moderated by Allyson Mendenhall, FASLA, PLA, Director of Professional Practice, Sasaki.

Roundtable participants included seven female principals of their own design practices, two executive leaders of divisions within large multidisciplinary firms, three academics, the CEO of a nonprofit organization, the Deputy Director of a municipal agency, and two undergraduate and one graduate student(s).

They work and study in different parts of the country, and are diverse in age, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds and professional focus; but they share a deep commitment to the profession, an optimism about the opportunities, coupled with an acute understanding of the obstacles women face in pursuing landscape architecture careers, and a deep desire to help women and the profession progress forward. The discussion focused on structural and cultural issues facing women in landscape architecture with the goal of identifying ways in which they can be enabled and empowered to bring their creative strengths, skills and passions to the work; gain recognition for their contributions; have a full voice in defining the goals and ethos of the profession; and promote equitable and rewarding opportunities for women landscape architects of the future.



## WHAT'S AT STAKE

Landscape architecture today is at the nexus of problem solving for the major issues of our time. Climate change, endangered natural and cultural environments, urban design, social justice, health and wellness are among the critical challenges within its purview. The landscape architecture profession is growing in visibility and stature. Landscape architects are being brought in as key contributors and leaders on multidisciplinary efforts to address global issues in ways not seen before. The scope of the profession is expanding. Landscape architects have the capability, through the design of systems and spaces, to impact equity for people and the earth. In addition to designing corporate and educational campuses, playgrounds and arenas, parks and streetscapes, and retail spaces, they are developing master plans for green infrastructure in cities; devising interventions for sea level rise, coastal resilience and riverfront remediation; and leading efforts to preserve racial and cultural heritage in landscape and restore native habitats. They are conducting research into new materials and processes, building tools for measuring performance in areas from environment to equity, and creating compelling ways of communicating through a variety of media to disseminate information and connect with stakeholders. Importantly, they are exercising exceptional skills as collaborators to meet challenges that are growing in scope and complexity.

And then, there is the disconnect. Women in landscape architecture are playing significant roles in all these areas. However, while female students outnumber male students in both Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (BLA) and Master of Landscape Architecture (MLA) programs in the United States and constitute 61% of American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) student memberships, women represent just 36% of professional full ASLA memberships. The nonprofit VELA Project (Visioning Equity in Landscape Architecture) research (2018) reveals that while 55% of BLA and MLA graduates and 47% of LARE candidates are women, only 27% of licensed landscape architects are women. And

at the top of the career ladder, they occupy just 12% of advanced leadership positions. The issues are too important, the opportunities too vast, and the challenges too urgent to lose and under-use this skilled and talented population. Women are not achieving their full potential to engage in, lead, and map the future of the profession. This roundtable was designed to share insights and learning in order to move the conversation and the profession forward. Key questions addressed included:

- *Have your opportunities as a woman expanded with changes and growth in the landscape architecture profession?*
- *Do women bring particular perspectives and ways of operating to landscape architecture?*
- *How would you characterize the work culture for women in the profession?*
- *How can we act individually and collectively to ensure women at all stages of their careers have full access to opportunities in the profession?*



Landscape Forms CEO Margie Simmons welcomed the group:

“Landscape Forms has a long-term organizational commitment to the landscape architecture profession, but this is also a deeply personal issue for me. Many women have had an impact on my career, and I want to pay it forward. We see through the career ladder there is a large observable loss of women in practice and leadership. That is why we are here today — to talk about that and what we can do individually and collectively to solve the issue. I believe in the power of many. When we gather and work together, we can have a real impact for all women in the profession.”

### CHANGING LANDSCAPE / CHANGING OPPORTUNITIES

Professional landscape services, including landscape architecture and design, have not increased significantly as a sector of the economy in recent years, according to IBIS Industry Research. However, roundtable participants believe that landscape architects are taking a larger share of the pie and experiencing more opportunities for work on a wider range of projects and initiatives. “I’m not sure there are more opportunities for women in particular,” stated Aan Coleman, President and Founder, Coleman & Associates. “It’s just that the profession has grown. And the more longevity you have in the market, the more opportunities present themselves.” The growth in the profession has helped raise awareness of the roles and contributions of women, while an



increase in women-owned firms has increased the visibility of women in leadership positions. Diane Jones Allen, Principal, DesignJones LLC., and Director/Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Texas at Arlington, believes that has an effect on women and the way they see their work. “Women tend to take the position that all boats rise together, so they see other successful women as examples that they can do it,” she asserted. “It is encouraging.”

Participants are aware of an increase in women across other disciplines, as well. “When I walk into the room, it is not all white men the way it used to be,” declared Adrienne McCray, Principal, Lee and Associates, Inc. She recounted a recent project in which she was the design lead, and the owner, project manager, and construction team leader were all women. “In the pre-construction meeting we all paused for a moment and said, ‘When has this ever happened?’” Barbara Deutsch, CEO, Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF), agreed that the expanding focus of the profession on critical emerging issues has had important impacts for women. “I have talked to a lot of women about how they get work, and I think there is innovation in the types of projects that are getting done and the way they are getting done that has increased opportunities for women,” she said.

“There are other reasons for this development,” stated Ying-yu Hung, Managing Principal, SWA, who looked to the history of the profession. “Landscape architecture as a discipline was historically focused on form and regarded as a subsidiary to architecture. Predominantly male-dominated, the architects took on landscape as an extension of their design vision, resulting in static, formal spaces that did not reflect the dynamic nature of our discipline. As environmental and cultural challenges took center stage in our discourse about the public realm, the question turned to who is best suited to address them. Now that the profession has evolved, the need to address climate change and social equity concerns has opened the doors for landscape architects to target these issues head on at a systematic global level.”

Adrienne McCray suggested that when the work was about “landscape as an object”, men dominated, but community, culture and environment are issues for which women are suited “in an intuitive way” that has helped the profession open up.



### DO WOMEN BRING PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVES AND WAYS OF OPERATING TO THE PROFESSION?

The consensus was yes, they do, and it is not a matter of genetics but of the way women are socialized. Diane Jones Allen described landscape architecture as multi-sided — environmental, economic and cultural — and declared that women are also multi-sided, citing the simultaneous challenges of raising children, caring for aging parents, managing households, and volunteering in the community while pursuing careers and running businesses. “Women understand complexity,” she asserted.

“We have to be complex creatures in order to survive, and this strange and difficult discipline of landscape architecture is like that. I look at landscape architecture and say, ‘This was created for me. Landscape architecture is a woman!’”

The discussion that followed examined how the perspectives and ways of operating that women bring to the profession are reflected in the kinds of projects women take on, the methods and communicating styles they employ, and the expectations and measures of success they bring to outcomes.

The high number of ASLA and LAF project award winners attest to the interest of practicing and aspiring women landscape architects in community building, cultural heritage, green infrastructure, environmental remediation, and social equity. Examples from website descriptions of the focus and mission of participant firms paint the picture:



“Historic landscapes, cultural sites, green infrastructure”

Elizabeth Kennedy Landscape Architect, PLLC

“Immersive, resilient landscapes that adapt to social, economic and environmental transformation”

TEN x TEN Landscape Architecture and Urbanism

“Meaningful connections between people and the land... through creative story-telling”

Superbloom

“Ecology, culture, urban environments and the celebration of community history”

DesignJones LLC

Several participants stated that they cultivated a work culture within their firms that defined working within the practice as not just a 9-to-5 proposition but a commitment to a set of values that inform the work. Adrienne McCray said she works to build an experience of community by requiring in-person collaboration and charrettes, so when the team approaches a client about community-focused work, they know first-hand what community means and, “we know we are the best people for the project.” Elizabeth Kennedy, Principal, Elizabeth Kennedy Landscape Architect, said she does not make compensation offers to prospective hires until they decide they want to do the kind of work her office does, “So they understand what they may be forfeiting.”

A recurrent theme of the discussion focused on the approach to communication and interaction that women bring to the



work. Openness was frequently cited as a characteristic and sign of strength. Openness to differences of opinion, to talking about uncomfortable subjects, to sharing experiences, and to acknowledging the inevitability and instructive potential of failure were seen as essential to landscape architecture practice in a changing social and cultural environment. Maura Rockcastle, Principal & Co-Founder, TEN x TEN Landscape Architecture, said she is not sure whether her own approach to an openness-centered practice is based on her gender or gender identity, but hearing other women around the table she noted with admiration, “an emotional intelligence and an awareness of listening.”

Adrienne McCray stated that in her observation, women pay greater attention than men to uplifting others. Giving team members in her practice the flexibility to make decisions, rather than simply telling them what to do, is a leadership strategy that she says “tries to build in a different way. Allowing all team members to participate makes you a strong leader, although sometimes, it may be seen as weak.” Women were also viewed as more open to transparency in business. Diane Lipovsky, Principal and Co-Founder of Superbloom, declared that in her experience the path to succeeding in a firm and the profession is often not clearly defined and that she, and Superbloom Co-Founder Stacy

Passmore, try in their practice to make clear the steps for success and to share information on the economic and operating vulnerabilities of the business with team members, “So they can see how you get there.”

Elizabeth Kennedy observed, “As women, we are used to moving things around to make them work and that is sometimes seen as chaotic and illegitimate.” She cited the important role of women in the birth of microlending as an example of what can happen when “there is a trust in flexibility and an approach to innovation that is not necessarily invested in the perfect, which can cause impatience in people who identify with the traditional ‘executive’ perspective.” Diana Fernandez Bibeau, Deputy Chief of Urban Design, City of Boston, agreed, arguing that shifting the focus on design away from the notion of perfection and the utopian ideal of “the land” is something women are more open to because of the way they navigate their lives and confront tension. “There are differences in our society and differences in outcomes — and there is not a perfect outcome every time. This perspective has real value, because if there is anything we know about our world, it is that we are all the products of differences.”

### WORK CULTURE...WHAT HAS CHANGED AND WHAT HAS NOT

Participants generally agreed that a more equitable work culture is evolving within the profession. “That’s very hopeful,” said Maura Rockcastle, “but when you step outside the realm of practice and academia, you experience some tension or resistance.” Aan Coleman noted, “It is an interesting trajectory we’re on. There is still an old-boys’ network, but more men are showing support.” To which Adrienne McCrary added, “It’s changing, but where the old-boys’ network operates, it keeps men from engaging and leaves women unconnected and feeling isolated.” Ying-yu Hung said she sees some movement in the culture with a new generation of men who seem less focused on demonstrating the conventional characteristics associated with maleness. “The new generation has come to identify themselves as individuals, each with their own unique strengths and points of view rather than subscribing to the binary notion of what constitutes being “male” or “female.” There is more gray area, and that’s a positive. Although women still struggle for recognition and the value of what they bring,” she stated. Karen Janosky, Director of the Master in Landscape

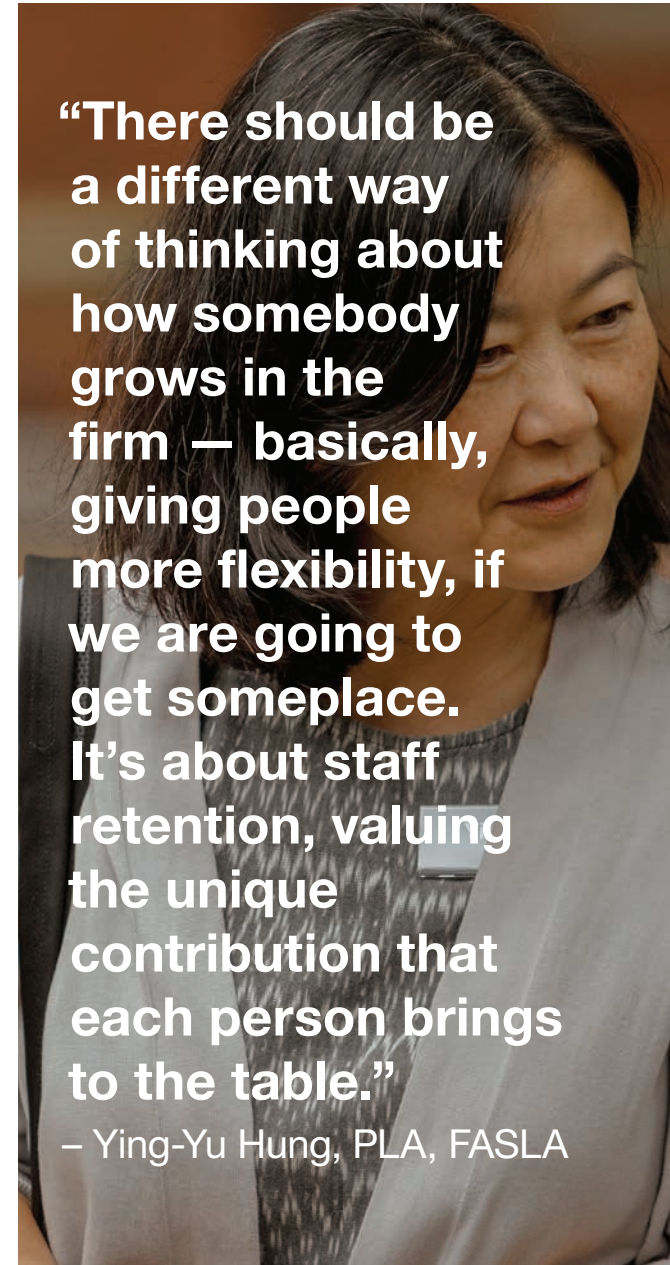


Architecture Program, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, lamented, “It’s good to see women progressing in the profession, but it’s more like slogging. Too slow for me.”

Barbara Deutsch noted that, at times, it has been so difficult for women to operate within the existing work culture that they had to leave and start their own firms. “Sadly, I wish we didn’t have to do that, but that’s where I see a lot of the innovation in the type and value of the work coming from,” she declared. Gina Ford, Principal and Co-Founder, Agency Landscape + Planning, told her story of entering the profession as part of a group of peers. “Despite my own high performance academically and professionally, I watched my male colleagues with less demonstrated success grow into leadership more quickly.” Later, after rising to the top ranks of a large firm and then leaving that role to start her own practice, she recounted, “Many of the women who had joined my prior firm had also left. This was no accident. It is problematic.” Maura Rockcastle, said she left a large, high-profile firm “for reasons of self-care and restoring self-confidence,” and founded her own practice. Both Ford’s and Rockcastle’s practices, in company with others represented on the panel, have garnered awards for their work.



“These narratives point to a need for structural change within work culture and organizations,” declared Ying-yu Hung. She warned that it wouldn’t be easy, especially in large male-dominated firms where men say, “It’s always worked for me. Why should we change?” which would mean rethinking how value is assigned and how performance reviews are done. Because women have very different obligations and responsibilities that can bump up against the realities of project deadlines, she said,



**“There should be a different way of thinking about how somebody grows in the firm — basically, giving people more flexibility, if we are going to get someplace. It’s about staff retention, valuing the unique contribution that each person brings to the table.”**

– Ying-Yu Hung, PLA, FASLA

She understands why some women say things like, “I tried,” “I struggled,” or “this company isn’t working,” but she is hopeful that change can happen.

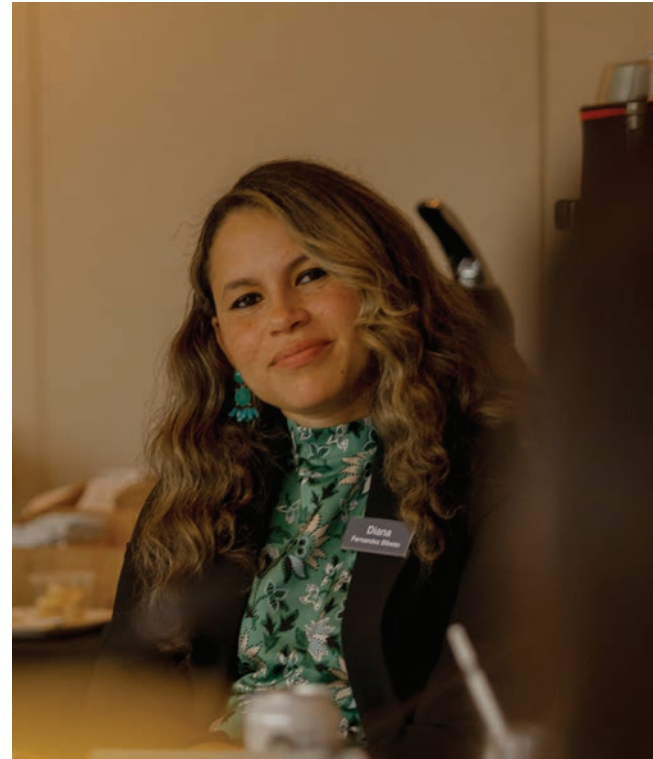
**“I think we have to stand up and speak out and ask, ‘How do I make a difference?’”**

Diana Fernandez Bibeau talked about her own experience: “I’m engaged in demolishing an agency that hasn’t served its people and making something new from the ground up. Why aren’t we thinking about changing the structures within our profession? Because at this time, we choose to support our women, our people of color, and intersectionality in our practices. It’s hard to make structural changes, but that doesn’t mean we can’t do it and can’t be aspirational in the hope for what we can do in the future.”

Diane Jones Allen said her experience as an African-American woman has gotten easier, but she is still having to prove herself. “I have to prove that, as a woman of color, I should be directing a landscape architecture program and, in my firm, that we can do the work.” Elizabeth Kennedy shared, “I look at these issues through the prism of gender but also of race and privilege. When I came out of Cornell, there were no spaces for people who looked like me. People of color went to work within practices of color, because there was no other place in the market for them. When the conversation turns to ‘the ceiling,’ I think, ‘Wow,’ because there are women in this room who did not even have a seat at that table.” She says that there are still occasions where she has to exercise self-care and self-protection inside and outside the profession.

More women are now rising to leadership positions in the profession, but there is debate about whether this has affected a change in work culture. Barbara Deutsch declared that in the 90s, women didn’t help each other out — because the profession was so male-dominated, they didn’t know how to deal with other women in positions of power. But now, she said, “Women are more comfortable with supporting other women. They know how to work with women in leadership

roles, and women leaders operate differently in ways that aren’t threatening.” Diana Fernandez Bibeau said she still sees women exhibiting traits from the male model of “getting to the top by whatever means possible,” and because of the way firms are structured, this behavior is incentivized.



“An aggressive woman is seen as out there getting what she wants, while women who don’t present in that same aggressive manner are seen as weak, too focused on inclusion and not on the prime areas of the business. This can be really toxic in the work environment where you are trying to lift women up.” She advocated for more discussion on how to foster collaboration, “so we are all better at the end of the day.” And Adrienne McCray called for leaders of practices to focus on succession by setting up resources for leadership preparation, including mentoring inside and outside their own firms. Developing women as leaders would be helpful with the issues around women leaving the profession, she said. “We’ve lost women, because their husbands made more money, even as landscape architects. Higher-level positions for women are really key to retention.”

## BEYOND THE BINARY

Women have identities that are bigger than the binary. Racial, cultural, economic, and fluid gender identities all play roles in how they experience the world and how others respond to them. Diana Fernandez Bibeau placed intersectionality at the center of work culture, professional practice, and the future of landscape architecture. She explained that the intersection of culture and gender has been at the forefront of her own professional experience and informs her conviction that, “We need to integrate lived experience into the profession. Landscape architecture, as traditionally taught, has been based on the idea of ‘cleaning’ lived experience out of practice in the service of a formal European view of landscape,” she said. “We don’t always value alternate perspectives, and I don’t think we have come around to seeing a broader picture of how we design for people, which is a reason the things we are building are not always aligned with the people who want to practice in the profession.” She challenged the profession for

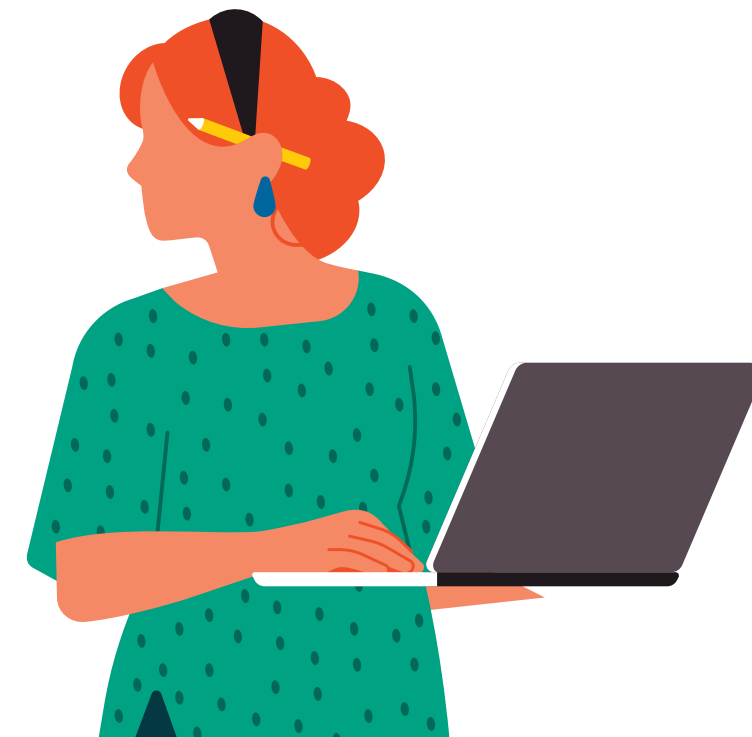
**“drawing the plan in green and red because that’s the way we do it, instead of using a multitude of colors to represent where we are all coming from. I think we have an opportunity to shift the conversation and to raise some power dynamics to influence what we do out there.”**

Naomi Canino, a third-year graduate student in landscape architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design (RSID), talked candidly about what it is like for young black women navigating the professional world of landscape architecture. “We need to be exhaustingly observant,” she declared. “There were times when I had to teach people how to interact with me or decide if I could be my true authentic African-American vernacular, English-speaking woman — or if I have to pull out a different version of myself and take on values that are not truly me.” “If you don’t use the academic language of landscape architecture,” she explained, “you are often seen

as not being as knowledgeable compared to others. But if you are working in a community where professional language may be a barrier, using it can distance you from the people you are trying to help. We have to keep our eyes on all the things we are juggling all the time.”

Elizabeth Kennedy underlined the inevitable impact of lived experience on the work, declaring that

**“the cultural shifts and non-stop traumas of the past 20 years — the recession, COVID, Me-Too, Black Lives Matter, the LGBTQ+ movement — have caused very rapid changes in the culture that affect us all differently and add dimensions to the conversation... The other part of lived experience is the under-valuing of the profession. A lot of what we bring to the table is not valued, especially work for ‘outsiders.’ The information we bring to work on social justice in underserved minority communities has not been considered valuable.”**



## VALUING WOMEN / VALUING THE PROFESSION

Under-valuing the profession also undermines its economic viability, a major concern for landscape architects who are not as highly paid as many other credentialed professionals. Barbara Deutsch laid out the issues: “The major economic issue for the profession is failing to assert its value and recognize the things we can charge for.” She reported that, in response, the LAF Board is engaged in conversations about the fee-for-service model vs. charging for value, which will require identifying different ways of showing value the profession brings. “There is the second economic issue of equity in earnings,” she continued. “There is no data for private firms, but in the nonprofit sector, where 74% of the workforce are women, there is data showing men are making 20 – 30% more than women for the same position within the same sector, the same organization, and in the same geographic area. It is very important to have data if we are to get pay equity and transparency.” LAF is investing in a compensation strategy for smaller firms to help them see their value, learn where they can go, and what they have to do to get there. Deutsch continued, “But women still bear the responsibility in our society for childcare, family care and community care. Until that changes, it is overwhelmingly hard and unfair. We must be more confident in showing our value and asking others to step up. We have to lead – to keep trying.”

Sarah M. Whiting, Dean and Josep Lluís Sert Professor of Architecture, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, chalks up some of the under-valuing of the profession to its lack of visibility. She noted that the New York Times features less news on architecture or landscape architecture than on other subjects of cultural importance. “One of the reasons why people do not know what we do is that they are not told. It’s about forming connections in the media and telling our stories, which are amazing,” she said. “Make noise!”

The shared stories of participants’ own lived experience offered sobering insights for recruitment and retention of women to the profession going forward. Aan Coleman said that she started her own business because she had three children and that was the only way she could see practicing in the profession. “I was paying as much for childcare as I made, while also paying the people who worked for me more than I paid myself. In other countries, they don’t do it that way. There is more support for women — in healthcare and childcare.” Allyson Mendenhall, at the end of her (unpaid) maternity leave in the early 2000s, searched to find care for her son in order to return to work. She came to the realization that once she paid for childcare, she would have \$100 remaining from each paycheck. “It barely made sense to go back, but I did.” She described the difficulty of sticking it out in the profession, declaring, “The economic piece of it is why we see so much peeling off of women.”

Diane Lipovsky talked about the challenges of starting her own practice in the absence of social policies and support. “To start a firm, you have to have enough money to pay

yourself and anyone you hire. You have to be a risk-taking person to say, ‘We’re going to do it. It’s going to happen.’ It requires an ability to overcome fear — of not being able to care for yourself, your family or the people you hire as your work family.” Stacy Passmore added, “We face that fear every day. I appreciate these ideas about economics and value and would like to add the word ‘recognition’. If you are a woman, they ask, ‘Will she fail? Can she do it?’ If you are a male they say, ‘Look at him. He’s so bold.’ And when work is recognized as valuable, you can ask for more money.” Ying-yu Hung seconded that. “It can’t be just, ‘Oh, you are doing a great job.’ We have to look at compensation,” she said. “After all, a just salary speaks to self-respect, a just design fee speaks to our work as landscape architects.”

Maura Rockcastle related the story of a colleague who left the practice and the profession after having her second child. “We reviewed all our policies to try to avoid that, but the economics of the business made it impossible,” she said. “I felt like a failure, because I wasn’t able to retain her, especially because part of our mission is to elevate the chance for

women to become leaders in the practice.” Gina Ford added, “I don’t know how to solve the problem of not making enough money. New members of our team ask, ‘Can we do some pro-bono work?’ Everything we do is pro bono. We don’t have the resources, so we have developed an informal network of like-minded practices. We do surveys and look at financial policies, and we do some work-sharing when one of us is having hard times. The collective helps us feel better and less lonely.”

Elizabeth Kennedy summed up the conversation:

**“What I am hearing is that we need systemic change. We are taking this on internally, but larger cultural systems play a role... We have tech companies with pool tables, but we’re not addressing childcare and education in after-school programs, which are ways of supporting women and men being partners in the workforce. We have to push for systemic change.”**

Sarah M. Whiting warned that we will be held back as a country if we do not recognize that this is an important national issue. She encouraged participants to lobby for family care and for student loan relief, and to make the case that we are forfeiting our future by not supporting family policies and recognizing that education is a way of moving society forward.

Organizations and programs within the landscape architecture community are actively working on increasing awareness, equity, and diversity in the profession through research, advocacy, support groups, mentoring, scholarships and internships. These include WxLA, WILA, ASLA Gender Equity Task Force, LAF Ignite, and the VELA Project. For more information, visit these organizations’ websites.



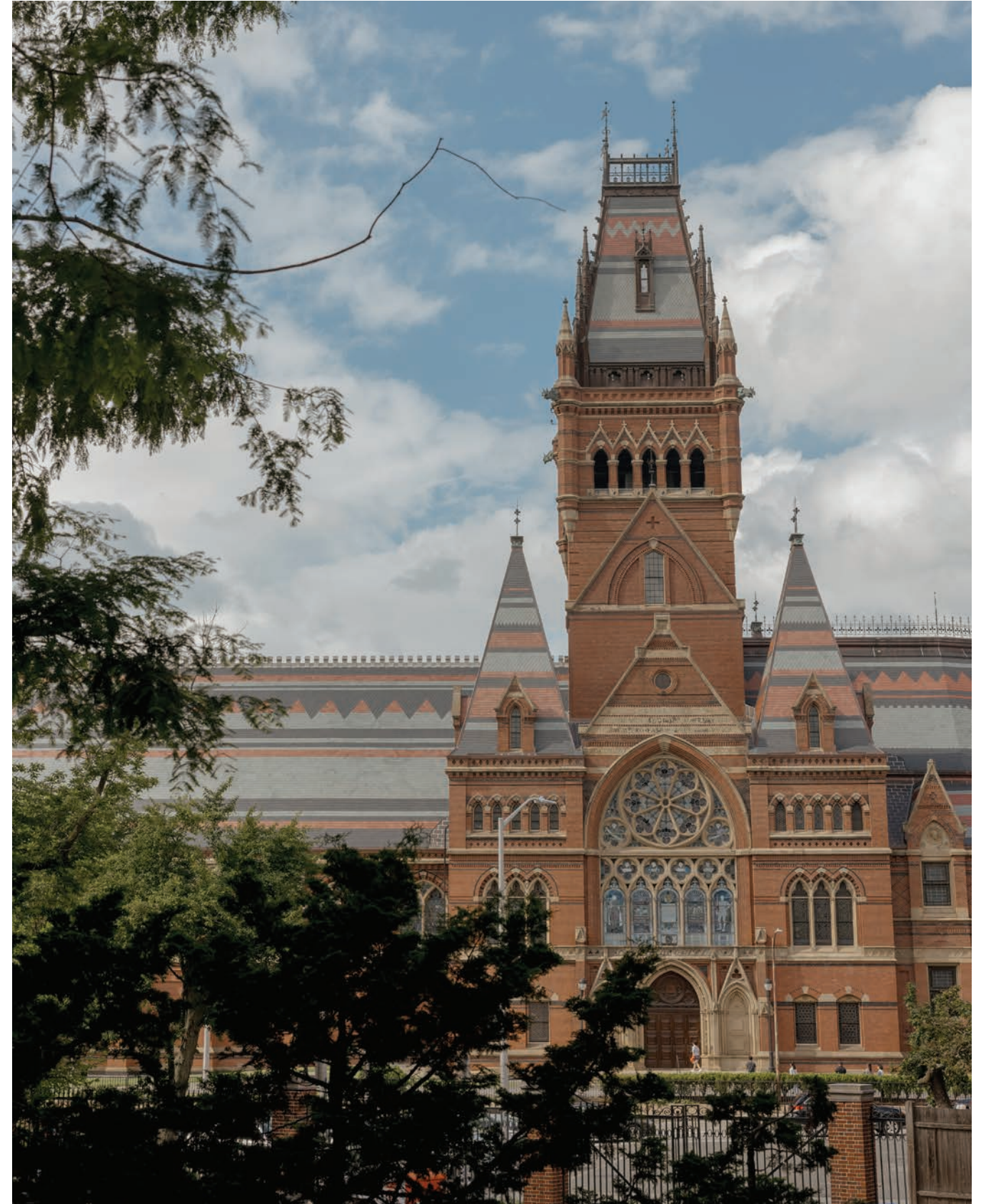


## LOOKING FORWARD

### *WHERE HAVE ALL THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS GONE?*

Barbara Deutsch presented data suggesting that a large number of landscape architects are missing in action. She explained that there are 3,000 or 4,000 landscape architecture students graduating globally each year, and assuming a 40-year career, there should be about 160,000 landscape architects practicing around the world. In fact, according to ASLA, data shows that there are consistently about 15,000 ASLA members and 15,000 licensees, and

according to the Department of Labor, there are 18,000 – 20,000 practicing landscape architects in the country. “We are missing landscape architects,” she concluded. Understanding why and what the “missing” are doing with their highly specialized training will require research. One way this might be done is through partnerships with landscape architecture degree-granting colleges and universities to collectively track and follow up with graduates. It is possible, as several roundtable participants suggested, that many of the “missing” may in fact be working in allied fields, such as construction management, transportation, government agencies, or environmental advocacy, where they are not counted in the statistics, because they do not hold titles as







landscape architects and may not require licensing. This is part of the larger issue around recognizing the full breadth of the profession in terms of the variety of roles landscape architects fill within practices and the scope of venues outside of landscape architecture in which they apply their knowledge and skills.

“We don’t recognize the many different ways that people practice,” Barbara Deutsch continued. The LAF Ignite program is taking this on by showing students that there are many ways to practice and that you can change many times in your career — from small, medium, large, and multi-disciplinary firms to city, state and federal agencies that collectively affect billions of dollars, millions of acres of land, and millions of people.

“Landscape architecture education needs to get that message out. It’s important for our institutions and organizations to put their resources together, so that all the ways we are uniquely trained are out there, and we can have a convergence for great change.”

Diana Fernandez Bibeau believes there is a stigma around public practice and government work and an assumption that “you must miss designing because you’re not doing it anymore.” “I worked in a private practice firm for most of my career,” she said. “And now, working in the public sector, I’ve designed more in the last year than I have in my entire career. And I am making decisions that landscape architects in private firms are implementing. It’s a different mindset for us.”

“Women have long found ways of working outside of landscape architecture practices,” declared Diane Jones Allen, who explained that she worked in a department of recreation and parks when she graduated from school, because she couldn’t get a job in a landscape architecture firm. “The department, at the time, was more open to hiring women and minorities, and I got a paycheck,” she said. “A lot of women have to go to those other options for economic



reasons to stay near the practice.” Later in life, she entered academia. “Being an academic has enabled me to have somewhat less stress and take care of other people,” she explained. “I tell students, ‘You don’t have to work in a private firm. There are other options.’”

Next year, according to Dean Sarah M. Whiting, the Harvard GSD will be dominated by landscape architecture students. (Applause in the room.) She reported that students are showing a lot of interest in practice, and in response, the school has expanded its offering of practice-centered courses. “The next generation is thinking about whether they want to go into practice, but they are worried about ending up in a low-paying corporate job with their looming student loans,” she said.

Karen Janosky teaches some of these practice-centered courses at the GSD and is excited about what she is seeing. “I want to talk about the future and the students, because they do things and ask questions that blow me away!” she exclaimed. She described a diverse student body interested

in landscape architecture around the globe.

“Graduates are starting offices and doing studies on the state of landscape architecture in Latin America. They are climate and environment ambassadors. It’s a broad set of things they are engaging with. I wonder if we will re-invent different versions of the profession and maybe this has to happen.”

Janosky’s practice-centered course ranges from Leadership and Identity, Marketing and RFPs, and Starting an Office to a studio that looks at Project Documentation, Drawing Sets and the Future of Artificial Intelligence. In the process, students write papers based on interviews with practitioners from an established network. “It’s part of connecting to a mentor or someone they might end up working with, someone who can teach students the value of landscape architecture and give them the context for practice, so they understand the possibilities and the challenges.”

Diane Jones Allen said, “When I studied history, it was only the big guys. The University of Texas at Arlington offers a class that teaches history, Olmsted, etc. and another that studies the work of contemporary landscape architects.” Her program requires an internship for graduation – six credits, for which students often get paid. Internships can be done in a landscape architecture, architecture, or engineering firm or agency. The only requirement is that there is a licensed landscape architect involved. “The best way for students to learn practice is to get them into practice,” she declared. After the internship, students share experiences with their peers to get a sense of the variety of ways landscape architects practice. “Most students think they know what they want to do before this experience,” she stated. “Then they come out saying, ‘Oh, I can do this or that.’”

Maura Rockcastle related an exchange with a young woman she met at a symposium who said, “Looking and listening today I learned that I have to go to an Ivy League school to do what you do.” “We need to acknowledge that lack of access to the profession is a critical area of concern,” Rockcastle said. There is evidence that efforts to address inclusion and diversity in landscape architecture education are growing (although as noted by Dean Whiting, the impending action by the US Supreme Court to eliminate the use of affirmative action will make that more difficult.) Pratt Institute offers a course called Beyond Traditional Practice, and Rockcastle has been a guest visitor at a professional practice course at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Design called Unruly Practices. “In order to change the profession we need to expand the pathways to it and provide as much access as possible to new and alternative methods of practice that are working to break down barriers,” she insisted.

Elizabeth Kennedy said she learned to be a landscape architect on a construction site. “Being around construction demystifies the profession and helps you feel more comfortable in the arenas where you operate,” she explained. She advised students to “work in nurseries, design-build,

whatever. Get out there, put on the hard hat and do it. It’s really important.” Naomi Canino agreed. “I worked as a landscaper in the field, getting my hands dirty and sweating. Doing it is part of learning the profession.”

Looking to new areas where the landscape architecture profession can make significant contributions, Diana Fernandez Bibeau described a diversity seminar she organized several years ago that included someone who had left the profession and was working at a tech start-up. “It made me think about how the profession is opening itself up to the information and technology industry,” she said. “I see that is where things are going. It’s not just making salaries but shaping the forms of things. We have not shed light on how much power the tech profession has on shaping forms and impacting world outcomes. This should be part of our conversation.” To this, Karen Janosky replied, “This is already happening. At the GSD this year, a student submitted a paper on a product she invented that responds to climate change. And now, she’s doing a start-up!”

“We have to listen to the next generation,” Gina Ford advised.

**“Lean into the real fear of climate change and recognize that the world view coming out of trauma, environmental change, and cultural shifts have great value and great power. This is how we will change.”**

The three students around the table shared opinions and insights on their own educational experience. Cheryl Zeng, an undergraduate senior in landscape architecture at Cornell University, said there are three things she wants to see in her education: “History, what people before me did; global perspective, what people in other countries are doing and how that fits together with what we are designing; and creative thinking.” She reported on a studio class she took that was open to students from all disciplines, from physics majors to furniture designers. “I learned so much from how other people were creating,” she said. “It made me think,

how do we create designs that do not come from traditional landscape architecture processes?”

Naomi Canino hasn’t had a practice course yet but has learned from graduating students that they are visiting firms to see how they go about their practices. “I think having just one semester of practice is missing something,” she said. “Being part of the LAF Ignite program is more about professional practice for me. I get to talk to different people and learn about the intricacies of the practice. Groups like this and ASLA conferences are important versus just going to firms and talking.”

Jakobi Johnson, a third-year undergraduate student at Michigan State University, agreed with Naomi that professional meetings and conferences were instructive, noting how much she has learned from listening to other women at this roundtable discussion. In her studies, she especially appreciated classes where students worked on drawings on site. “I wish we had more resources outside the classroom,” she declared.



## LAST WORDS

There is much work to be done by and for women to achieve equity and agency in landscape architecture, and the voices around the table in Cambridge made their calls to action known. Some succinct one- and two-word descriptions capture their view of the culture, opportunities, and future for women in the profession:

Evolving  
 Changing  
 Challenging  
 Principled  
 Competitive  
 Supportive/Not supported  
 Joyful  
 Expanding  
 Rewarding  
 Exhausting  
 Heaviness/Hopefulness  
 Exciting  
 Difficult  
 Lively  
 Constrained/Restrained  
 Phoenix Rising



Moderator Allyson Mendenhall offered her closing observations. “Landscape architects shape the world in which we live, and many of them are women. We represent an incredible amount of potential positive impact on our cities, community spaces, ecosystems and society. That is why this issue of women in landscape architecture is so important. I was thrilled by the diversity of perspectives and the level of engagement at the Roundtable, including that of the students. The discussion revealed the motivation and the innovation of women working to chart professional paths that are influential and fulfilling. We saw how women are creating opportunities for themselves and others. This event engendered a call to action, to assert our value and to seek out and raise awareness of the many roles and sectors of the economy, beyond narrow choices, where female landscape architects can inspire change by crafting individual careers that integrate well with their lives.”





## ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

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