Journal of Architectural Education

Volume 57 Issue 3
February 2004

Landscape and Architecture
Desiring Landscapes

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Directing Vision in the Landscapes and Gardens of Carlo Scarpa

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organized in three essential types: gardens. His work in this area is and, of course, landscapes and that were mythic, literary, painterly, of landscapes and gardens desire, Scarpa designed a range to the client’s agenda and budget. rather, he made them from his gardens in response to a client’s [Figure 5]; and the Balboni Apartment, Novella, Florence (1958-61; Oc 127) (1955-57; Oc 111); [Figure 4] Project Gipsoteca canoviana, Possagno toward Multi-purpose building. Photo by author Figure 11: Fusina Camping, Central allée, view [Image 54x545 to 186x679] Sergio Los calls the Fusina As an expression of this [Image 192x463 to 324x680] points of Scarpa’s original scheme are Consequently, many of the finer requires only a modicum of pruning. complete screening of the parked that of the trees and shrubs along and vehicles are interlopers requiring through carefully planned vegetation and vehicles are required landscaping. During the intervening decades, the rate-of-growth of camping vehicles has far outpaced that of the trees and shrubs along the allées, resulting in a loss-from-complete screening of the parked vehicles from the visitor along main paths. Moreover, the plants have not been well maintained in a design that requires only a minimum of pruning. Consequently, many of the finer points of Scarpa’s original scheme are desperate or unattainable. Moreover, the entire site may be completely lost as the property is slated for acquisition by the Azienda del Commercio Trasporti Venetiano (ACTV) for the construction of a new Ferry Terminal that will demolish virtually all of Scarpa’s landscapes. [Figure 7] Its imminent erasure notwithstanding, the campground is located west-southwest of Venice on the coast of the mainland, four kilometers south of Palladio’s Villa Malcontenta (1555-1955) at the end of the Via Mononzani, near the mouth of the Brenta Canal. [Figure 8] The physical, spatial, and convoluted structure of Fusina Camping is part of a network of directed views consisting of the three buildings or fabricas, alleys of shrubs and trees, observation platform however, Scarpa vista of industrial Venice. From the ostensibly climaxing in a framed “borrowed views” is distinct however, from the borrowing of views in the European Picturesque where there is often a clear demarcation between the ownership of the foreground and the distant view. Scarpa’s attitude towards “borrowed views” seems to fall somewhere between the atmospherics described in the Yuan yeh, and the Picturesque described in Humphrey Repton’s Red Books. [Figure 10] The massing and location of the service building alongside a brolo (orchard) of fruit trees. [Figure 2] The service building is one of Scarpa’s most Mies-like buildings, second only to the equally sparse addition to the Gipsoteca canoviana in Possagno, which he designed concurrently with Fusina. [Figure 3] The service building is a complex amalgam of two meter-high brick bearing walls housing alternating shower units and half-meter high brick walls. The low walls are outfitted with sinks, mirrors, work areas, and low concrete benches for seating. [Figure 1] Except for the showers, all of the service are out-of-doors, partially covered by metal roofing. [Figures 14a & 14b] Both the shower building and the main building are equipped with rooftop observation decks, accessed by prominent located steel stairs. [Figure 2] The making and location of the service building extends the overall rhythm of the allées. The chevron-shaped path at Fusina is one of the earliest demonstrations of Scarpa’s interest in Asian gardens, a study that probably began before 1955. [Figures 15a & 15b] Among the first books Scarpa purchased on Asian art and culture are Nontake Turit’s ABC of Japanese Art, and Osvald Sirén’s Gardens of China. Also in his library are Henry’s Chinese Houses and Gardens, and T’ieh Yu’s The Japanese Garden. Scarpa’s study of Asian gardens was more image-based than factual, in part because he tended to respond to the world graphically and also because most of the books he owned on the subject were in English (Im and Siren for example). Beyond the iconic reference to the chevron path, Scarpa’s design for Fusina included another theme that is an essential part of Classical Chinese garden art, “borrowed views.” “Borrowed views” are introduced to garden literature in the 17th century treatise on Classical Chinese garden art, Yuan yeh by Ji Cheng. Scarpa knew the Yuan and Ito Teiji’s The Japanese Garden. In his attitude towards “borrowed views” is clear from his brief explanation of a particular aspect of the Brion sanctuary. He made these observations during an informal slide talk in Madrid, in the summer of 1978. His last known recording of a public presentation, in the recording his voice is often
lost beneath that of the translator or obscured amidst the ambient noise from the lecture room and adjacent street. Typical of Scarpa’s talks, he speaks in fragmentary sentences, often in an ironic or self-effacing manner, making the task of piecing together his thoughts into coherently propositions still more difficult, and perhaps, inappropriate. This may be why so much of the recording was not published in the Opera completa and why so much of the recording was not perhaps, inappropriate. This may be published in the Opera completa and why so much of the recording was not appropriate. This may be...
announcing the landscape dimension of a particular work. While Scarpa was designing the Turin exhibit, he was simultaneously working on two of his most important commissions of his architectural career: the Fondazione Querini-Stampalia (Figure 20) and the Museo di Castelvecchio, both of which had significant garden programs. Moreover, the tanned copper reflecting pool from the Italia '61 exhibit was re-installed in the garden of the Fondazione Querini-Stampalia (Figure 21), and a modified version of it is used in the garden at the Museo di Castelvecchio. Scarpa used the parapez interrotta – that ironically hold distinctive, screen-like walls – the landscape-like qualities of Scarpa's work, and the critical role the walls played in defining the space, not simply volumetrically, but in terms of its landscape-like character.

In this exhibit [Scarpa] has created an environment... that is immediate, highly suggestive and captivating. In the space of a relatively modest pavilion, Scarpa transposes the essential characteristics of nature, civilization and the art of the Veneto – coordinating them into a complex sequences of movements and effects to create an environment of extraordinary lyric power.32

Santini continues, "The external wall is varied, composed of portions that are dark and impermeable, some that are transparent and translucent while still other parts are made of high polyphrastic glass or of grillwork. Through such diversified weavings and gradations... of colors and transparencies, Scarpa has held constant, moderated and preserved the illumination of the environment, even at mid-day, making visible the [film] projection of [oil images], persuasively inviting the true visitor to stand quietly and rest for a moment... Towards the interior the environment is enclosed, yet without being claustrophobic, by interrupted walls... that are suspended. In places the walls appear as a single element, in still others they are separated into two... interweaving with the space using volumes, language, variations in thickness, and a variety of changing contours...."
29a & 29b] It is not the hedges that are lowering however, but the ground that is hanging up beneath your feet. As you reach the end of the hedge, the museum entrance is visible to the left, framed on the left by the antique marble basin and pedestaled Scarpa relocated to position [Figure 30a & 30b]. At the center of the basin is a marble banquetee – the figure of a horned calf. The entrance is framed by the right hand another fountain that Scarpa relocated as part of the entrance ensemble. Passing between the two fountains, one moves towards the main entrance, to the left of which is the jutting volume of the sacello. Upon entering Scarpa directs the visitor to the left again, taking one on a path parallel to the double hedges.

At the end of this meandering journey of paths, turns, and directed views, on the piano nobile of the Napoleonic Wing, Scarpa reinforces the relation of garden and interior to the main entrance, one path leading to a single Scarpa garden. It is bracketed by the thick stone walls of the Napoleonic Wing and newly dressed heavy transverse room dividers. [Figure 31] In a space in which views of the garden are specifically offered by a transcendent visitor, the visitor is reminded of the garden, both by the sly Scarpa constructs, and by the path the visitor takes.

In order to reach the museums you will the Museo di Castelvecchio (or any of Scarpa's works in landscapes which landscapes work and plays a part), permit your imagination to present you with a garden and a museum that directs your vision and your body, in ways that instruct as well as enrich.

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