

The Cultural Landscape Foundation
Pioneers of American Landscape Design

STUART O. DAWSON

ORAL HISTORY

REFLECTIONS

Claire Bennett Joseph P. Riley
Mark Dawson Nelson Scott Smith
Gina Ford Sumner Winebaum
Maurice Freedman
Dick Galehouse
Stephen Goldsmith
Dirk Lohan
Doreen MacGillis
Byron Matthews
Marc Mazzaelli
Travis Mazerall
Alistair McIntosh
Takako Oji
Milt Peterson
J. Edward Pinckney

Reflections by Claire Bennett, FASLA

September 2011

Many many people will attest to the superiority of Stu Dawson's skill and talent as a landscape architect, but when his name is mentioned, my mind goes directly to the memory and vision of a gentleman, a truly "gentle man". He radiates gentility, soft spoken, tender sensitivity. His charisma is impacted by all things of nature, whether it is animals, growing plants and trees, or the needs of humankind. This rare combination in one human being is Stu Dawson for me.

Thoughts about my dad by Mark Dawson

September 2011



We always had conversation at the dinner table and inevitably it would turn to work, the office, the competition or the projects. And what struck me was how interesting it sounded. We would discuss Halprin's work in Portland or work Pete Walker was doing or what was happening in the office. When dad would describe his work, he was animated, excited and spoke with passion about his profession. He was traveling all over the country, to Chicago, New York, Florida and Washington DC. It just seemed exciting. I had the privilege to travel with dad and I remember going on my first (of many) trips to American Can in Connecticut. I was ten. We took a small prop plane out of Hanscom Field in Lexington, it was my first flight and the pilot allowed me to fly plane, sort of. I recall not being able to fall asleep the night before because I was so excited to be with my dad and go to work on a plane. To this day dad is just as much fun to be around. I thought what a fascinating way to make a living.

Dad has a way of making you want to do more; he has a way of making you want to participate. He is creative, hardworking, enjoys the day and makes fun out of the most mundane. Wanting to teach me how to work hard dad gave me the opportunity, the opportunity of a lifetime. We had just bought our new/old boat named 'Tern,' a beautiful wood Crocker Catch sail boat with two masts. I was twelve. She was beautiful with elegant lines, a dark red hull below the waterline, shiny white hull above the water line, with mahogany varnish rub-rails, a bowsprit, cabin and masts. She needed painting from top to bottom. Dad allowed me to be responsible for restoring her, filling, (with cotton batting) caulking, sanding, painting, sanding again and painting the bottom. He had me convinced it was the most important job on the boat. We would work weekends. After about the fifth weekend, I realized it was the worst job ever, uncomfortable, invisible to most and dusty. It was simply a miserable place to work under the boat carriage. The day we launched her I was nervous, dad asked me why I seemed tense. I said 'Dad if I didn't do a good job on the bottom Tern could sink'. He roared with laughter and she floated off just fine, never sinking on my watch. Four years later he let me work above the water line, bright work, work that everyone could see. And again I felt as if I had 'shot the moon.' In the end dad did less work on the boat and I did more.....another lesson learned.

While working on Tern I learned to work with my hands and I fell in love with building. I was strongly influenced from hanging around the boat yard watching wooden boats being crafted, from rough lumber to beautifully crafted boats. To this day I love to use my hands and build things. And to this day dad is still designing and building, still working with his hands, painting, drawing or building. It is just the way it is.

Reflection on Stuart O. Dawson, FASLA by Gina Ford

September 2011

I joined Sasaki's landscape practice in June of 1997, a recent architecture school graduate with no real experience or understanding of landscape. I was, however, fairly handy with a computer, and in the early days of computer-aided design, this was a useful skill for a novice. In fact, on my very first day, I was asked to create a CAD plan of Jamail Plaza at Rice University for Stu Dawson. It was my first assignment and I was eager to make an impression. I fondly remember the way he studied the printout – marveling at this new way of drawing and then slowly pointing out all the small imperfections in the computer's auto-generated paving pattern.

I have worked closely with Stu for the nearly 15 years since on a number of projects – Jamail Plaza and other projects at Rice University (Houston), the Center of Science and Industry (Columbus, Ohio), the Detroit Waterfront (Detroit, Michigan), the Kennedy Center Landscape (Washington, DC), and National Harbor (Maryland). Though tempting to write here about that project work or about the projects that came before my time at Sasaki that continue to motivate and inspire the practice, I would rather reflect on the lessons I learned from Stu. His mentoring provided me with wisdom, process and principles that have shaped who I am and inspire me to this day.

Stu has an unwavering commitment to quality. I can't count the number of times this scenario played out when working with him on National Harbor:

... a call on my office phone first thing in the morning...

"Good morning, Gina. Come over when you have a moment" ...

... Stu sitting at his desk sorting through a stack of index cards ...

"I woke up in the middle of the night thinking about the bollard detail"

... a mont-blanc pen-made plan and section to scale ...

a tricky detail resolved.

Walking around Charleston Waterfront Park, this focus and rigor is present everywhere. Everything in its place – all the subtlety of scale and proportion accounted for – all the details and plant materials in harmony. Stepping into that space, one cannot help but feel the mastery of his practice.

A true leader, Stu has the ability to motivate quality and greatness in others. It is nearly impossible to sit at the desk next to Stu, watching the rigor and quality of his process unfold, and not feel inspired, engaged and enabled to attempt the same. His is an infectious kind of spirit that inspires a strong, shared sense of community, purpose and true collaboration.

I remember working on a design study for the southern end of our Detroit Waterfront project – a large piece of land within a long, narrow site. I proudly brought three options into Stu's office, confident I had the solution. He asked me to pin them up on a wall facing his desk and then challenged me to fill the wall with others. As the wall filled, he'd pull people in to his office, "Look at this ... look at all these options ... this is great". I would have filled the office with options, if he asked.

Beyond the importance of aesthetics, Stu understands and teaches that the work is about helping our clients raise and reach their aspirations and about making wonderful places for people. He is the opposite of the stereotypical, single-aesthetic, ego-driven designer with a capital 'D' many of us learn about in school. Instead, he is a genuine collaborator, leading a journey together with his client and team toward the highest possible outcome.

We worked together on a streetscape project – a space intended to be a great, urban, pedestrian environment. The engineers designed the curb radii to accommodate large vehicular movements. For Stu, this was the thing to dig in on – the righteous battle. We conducted our own traffic analysis, showed precedent examples of the intersections of great city streets, and developed alternatives to satisfy the need for vehicular access without sacrificing the use of the space. He would not rest until it worked for the pedestrian.

Lastly, Stu is committed to a model of practice rooted firmly in teaching. I remember Carl Steinitz talking about Hideo Sasaki at the office's memorial service. As a critic, he said, Hideo was more "light than heat." This poetic sentiment captured the way Stu works as well – a method of teaching and practice focused on the creative illumination and steering of ideas. I know that I am one of hundreds, maybe thousands, of practitioners that have learned from Stu – at the office, on project teams, or in academia. It is stunning to think about the collective impact he has had on the profession of landscape architecture.

I am so grateful for Stu and for the opportunities I have had to learn from and work with him. It is hard to imagine I could write something here that can capture what an incredible individual

and professional he is – or how much his mentorship has meant to me. His influence is with me every day as I continue to shape my own practice.

STUART O. DAWSON (SOD)

By: Maurice (Mo) Freedman

Stu has been a friend and associate of mine for over 40 years. As a life-long engineer with my personal experience based on science, objective analysis and hands-on construction experience; professionally engaging with an outstanding Landscape Designer, with a big "D", is usually very challenging and often non-productive and confrontational due to conflicting strong egos on both sides. While the world of engineers tends to be definitive and absolute, the world of the Designer is based on art and intuitive feelings.

Stu, unusually in my experience, melded his design skills, seamlessly with my analytical efforts to create an almost unique, multidisciplinary practice, providing the best of both worlds for the users, the project in hand and the client. I have always been most impressed with Stu's large-scale vision for great swaths of parks and public spaces such as the Master Plan for Boston Harbor South, Charleston's Waterfront Park and other much used and appreciated public spaces.

Not the End

Memories of Stuart Dawson by Dick Galehouse

September 2011



My first memory of “Stu”, my colleague and collaborator for over 50 years is arriving for my first day of work at the old grocery store which served as our first office, and seeing this tall blonde guy in suspenders looking for all the world like a Hollywood star. Stu later told the tale of turning down Robert Redford’s offer of a part in one of his movies after a chance meeting on a plane trip.

Three outstanding features of Stu’s practice distinguish his career as a landscape architect and his character as a colleague and friend.

First, Stu taught us the “power of the pen” when he would pick up his pen in team or client workshops, taking the lead by rapidly sketching out a design concept. Born and raised in Illinois, he fit the late architect Walter Gropius’s observation that, “My best students come from the Midwest.” The former Director of the Norfolk Redevelopment Authority once observed, “I have never seen anyone who can plant trees so rapidly on a master plan.”

Second, Stu’s open, affable and engaging style has led to long enduring personal relationships with clients and colleagues alike. He maintained an over 50 year relationship with the late Charles Fraser, the visionary developer of Sea Pines Plantation and Harbor Town at Hilton Head Island SC. One of Stu’s prized photographs is the picture that he took of Charles in suit complete with bow tie and straw hat “walking” a 16’ long alligator in the early construction phase of Sea Pines Plantation. His design partnership with Mayor Riley of Charleston, SC endures to this day. Stu is fond of telling the story of how excited Mayor Riley was, upon his return from a trip to Europe, when he announced that he had found the perfect gravel for the promenade at Stu’s Waterfront Park: gravel of the right color and crunchy sound when walked upon. Stu recently visited the office for the sole purpose of taking Van Arend, the office’s first receptionist and later his administrative assistant, out to lunch for her birthday.

Third, Stu's practice of landscape architecture in the broader vision of urban design has brought an enduring legacy to his project work which includes the John Deere facility in Moline, IL where he partnered with Eero Saarinen, Indianapolis White River Park in Indianapolis, IN; and his partnership with Mayor Riley in Charleston, SC in the design of the Charleston Waterfront Park, winner of ASLA's 2007 Landmark Award. In Charleston, Stu's design of the Waterfront Park is a direct response to the City's historic context, and the gridded form of the adjacent historic district.

We at Sasaki are very proud of Stu's contribution to the profession, the example he has set for his colleagues, and the beauty he has brought to our built environment.

Reflections on Stuart Dawson by Stephen Goldsmith

October 2011

As the Mayor of Indianapolis in the 1990's it was my good fortune to meet Stuart and Sasaki courtesy of the Army Corps of Engineers. At first I was put off that a federal agency would impose on me its selection of landscape architects for one of the most important projects in the city's history. I anticipated the worst of federal bureaucrats and out of town professionals unwilling to pay attention to local interests. When I conceptualized the project I hoped that a small and ignored river could transform itself and its adjoining communities into something quite special — literally from forcing people away from the water to bringing value to those who wished to adjoin it.

I first found that Stuart was something quite special when the initial presentation to us included presenting to us the turn of the century plans for the city from then famous landscape architect George Kessler. Not only did Stuart dig deeply into our community's heritage and present, but this amazing find and his plan to amplify it brought together the very best in a vision of the future and a respect for the past. The result, when we finished executing this vision was indeed breathtaking — over a billion dollars in new investment, significant new areas for a large urban university, new residential, three new museums, the country's most attractive AAA baseball stadium, new hotels, the headquarters of the NCAA and recreational and green space for a new downtown community.

It's not too much to claim that Stuart's talents dramatically improved the quality of life of our city.

Memories of My Association with Stu Dawson by Dirk Lohan

September 2011

It must have been in the late 70s when I was hired by McDonald's Corporation to design the new corporate headquarters in Oakbrook, outside Chicago Illinois.

The project was to be a campus set in a former private estate with old oak stands and a small river.

After extensive research, we decided to engage Sasaki Associates for the Civil Work and Stu Dawson as the Chief Landscape Designer.

I remember an early meeting, perhaps it was lunch and even some drinks, where we discussed the joint approach to the design of the park setting for the 3 corporate buildings that were to be built.

I knew by then that the Chairman of McDonalds, Fred Turner, really loved the existing woods and wanted us to preserve as much of it as possible. After a free flowing brainstorm session, Stu and I agreed that we would devise a plan that was to be very sensitive to the existing landscape and the topography and that the buildings would be located in such a way that they were surrounded by and afforded views into the woods rather than parking lots.

I think it was Stu who came up with the idea to require the contractors and all of the workers on the site, especially those that were building the buildings to go through a 2-hour indoctrination about the importance of the natural environment. We established the rules that protected the trees, their branches and foliage and root system from any damage by construction equipment. Each worker who had gone through this educational process received a green tree sticker for their construction helmets. Additionally, severe penalties were imposed on all contractors if any of the trees were damaged that were outside narrow boundaries from buildings and roads.

This program was a great success and if I remember correctly, not a single tree was lost.

Although I have worked with Stu on several other projects, I consider our initial collaboration to be the basis and glue of our friendship.

My Reflections on Stu Dawson by Doreen MacGillis

September 2011

For the past four years Stu Dawson has served as a volunteer Board member of the York Land Trust, a non-profit, land conservation organization in York, Maine where I am the Executive Director. Recently, I had the pleasure of working closely with Stu on an exciting public access project on our Highland Farm Preserve. This 151-acre property acquired by the Trust in 1999 to prevent its conversion into 37 house lots, is now a wonderful place for the public to enjoy a vast network of hiking trails, panoramic views and diverse terrain.

A team of land trust staff and board members including Stu developed a management plan for the property that called for the creation of a handicapped-accessible parking area and trail along with other visitor amenities. While we hired a local engineering firm to draft the detailed plans, it was Stu who developed the initial design concept and rough layout.

Stu wanted the parking area to be a pleasurable part of the visitor experience, not simply have a functional purpose. He envisioned a grand entrance, with an elegantly-curved, gravel driveway leading to a beautiful "parking garden" that blended perfectly into the surrounding landscape. He mused, "It should be a place where one's elderly mother-in-law would find it an enjoyable experience to simply drive through, even if she never gets out of the car!" Stu's plan reflected all of these qualities while incorporating 21 parking spaces (two handicapped accessible) as well as three areas for buses; a quarter-mile long, universal access trail, an educational kiosk and several picnic sites.

Finding the right location for the parking area proved challenging because of the property's limited road frontage, clay soils, wetlands and required setbacks. After ruling out several initial sites, we finally settled on the current location where visitors can take in the lovely views of the upper reaches of the York River across the street and the open meadows filled with wild flowers at Highland Farm.

A perched water table made water drainage difficult. Stu worked closely with the engineers to ensure that they incorporated the proper drainage mechanisms to keep water off of the site and moving in the right direction. There were many other aspects of the parking area plan that Stu consulted on throughout the yearlong process. His valuable input, oversight and uncompromising standards regarding safety, aesthetics and future maintenance, resulted in a final design for the parking area that we all were thrilled with.

Once that was completed we then turned our attention to the landscape plan. With input from a local nursery owner and volunteer botanists, Stu developed a wonderful landscape plan that was both aesthetically attractive and practical. The poor soils on the site limited our choices for landscape plants and trees. Stu recommended mostly species that were native and hardy

enough to thrive in the poor site conditions. As a finishing touch, Stu insisted that we splurge on several stone ballards, a majestic, hardscape design accent that would help define the space and protect the trees. While the project budget was tight, I could not deny Stu this last detail that would complete his brilliant vision. So, of course, we agreed.

In many ways, those ballards are a metaphor for who Stu is--- someone of sterling character who holds steadfast to his position; someone who is grounded and practical but also incredibly elegant and graceful.

Reflections of Stu Dawson by Byron Matthews

It is a pleasure and honor to know you. I want to thank you for all you did for Newburyport during the revitalization of the redevelopment area of our downtown. Today, 40 years later, you volunteered your services to help and assist a group of citizens (called The Downtown Group), who are concerned about the lack of maintenance and general upkeep of the downtown.

It goes without saying that your professional expertise in guiding the improvements in Newburyport created a downtown area that is the envy of all the communities in the USA.!

You were a dominant factor working together with all the municipal officials for making Newburyport a community we are all proud of.

Thank you again, Stu.

Reflections on Stu Dawson by Marc Mazzarelli

September 27, 2011



I first met Stu in January 1990 when he was teaching a design studio with Peter Walker at Harvard. Stu kept office hours and I stopped by several times to chat during the semester. I remember liking him right away. It turned out we both shared an interest in railroads and the certain nostalgic type of Americana that John Stilgoe was teaching then. But what really drew me to Stu was that he clearly was a no-nonsense practitioner with both feet planted firmly in the real world. When he asked me what I wanted to do after Harvard, I remember my response being something like "I want to build". Stu could relate to that.

Soon after graduation, Stu kept his word and hired me at Sasaki Associates. He was a very patient mentor and helped my professional development enormously. At that time, having just graduated from Harvard and working at a top firm like Sasaki, I thought that I had it all figured out and of course I knew nothing. I remember more than once Stu scolding me for pulling all-nighters to make project deadlines. His lesson was that professionals learn time management skills and how to delegate. I've never worked deep into the night since.

After traveling with Stu on some memorable project assignments in Kansas City and Chicago we got to know each other better and learned of our mutual appreciation of music. At that time I was playing on the weekends in several successful rock bands, one of which actually performed on the Conan O'Brien Show. When an opportunity to tour the United States was

offered, he encouraged me to take time away from the firm. I was surprised, but Stu knew that life wasn't always all about practicing design.

Even though I left Sasaki in 1997 to start my own practice, Stu and I continue to see each other on regular basis. Whether it's over a burger in Harvard Square or up at his place in Maine, he's become a great friend and perpetual mentor filled with stories of working with Hideo, Pete Walker, Saarinen and even partying with Noguchi. Now, that's cool.

Reflections on Stu Dawson by Travis Mazerall

October 05, 2011



The profession of landscape architecture was introduced to me at a very young age by my grandfather, Stu Dawson. I cannot remember a time when I wanted to be anything other than a landscape architect. Since I was a young boy he has instilled in me the importance of hard work and commitment. In Stu's 50+ years of practice he has had tremendous success professionally and academically, leaving a lasting impact on his colleagues and clients. This is largely due to his strong work ethic and collaborative nature.

He has always stressed the importance of family. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment has been his ability to foster a loving and supportive unity among his family and friends. He has established countless family traditions, including the annual pirate treasure hunt, family sandcastles, watermelon seed spitting contests and organized food fights to name a few.

It's hard for me to picture him without a scheming look in his eye and an ear to ear grin across his face. Whether he was helping me stealthily sneak around the house to plant fake spiders to frighten my grandmother or figuring out the next elaborate game that usually involved tossing a small inanimate object through the air, his zest for life and passion for adventure has remained steadfast.

I cannot comfortably refer to him as Stu, which is how he is professionally known. I am much more accustomed to calling him Pal, which is how his seven other grandchildren and I lovingly refer to him. Pal is many things to our family. He is a caring and devoted father, grandfather and more recently a great-grandfather. He is a role model and a patriarch. His years of hard work have brought him many successes for which he deserves both praise and commendation. I'm proud to be a part of the firm he helped build, Sasaki Associates.

Reflections on Stu Dawson by Alistair McIntosh

September 2011



Stu Dawson has been one of the two or three landscape architects who have shaped my professional life. My working relationship with Stu started in the Stubbins Room of Gund Hall -- in the early 1990's, the default setting for faculty social gatherings at the Harvard Design School. There, I found Stu leaning on a cane, recovering from a minor bicycle accident and good naturedly grouching about being told by family and friends to wear a helmet in the future. By the end of our conversation we were discussing a project in the Mid-West he had been awarded and "it would be good to work together on it". We started working together that fall on what became the Indianapolis Waterfront.

The key words are: worked together. Stu has always been a design collaborator and his steady guiding design critique was a hallmark of our working relationship. His is a design perspective that sees our profession through the lens of making. Design ideas are very important, but for Stu the music is in the making and in the finding of the exact resolution of grading, planting and material form located in a particular place. My most enjoyable times were spent with Stu working on the detail articulation and resolution of the fabric of projects, all of this work done together over a desk with pen and paper often with dueling Mont Blanc fountain pens.

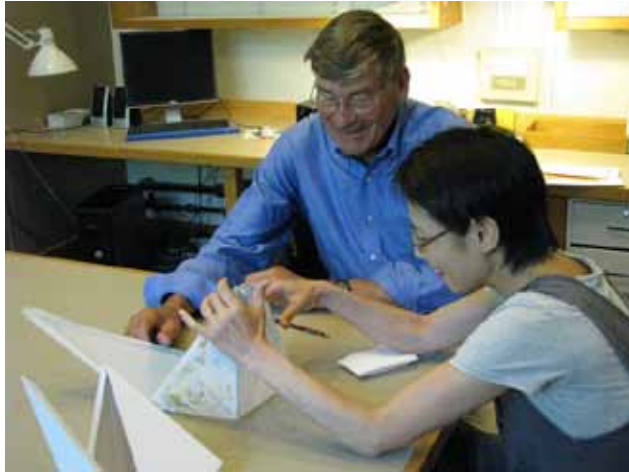
The other great reward of working closely with Stu has been to listen and learn from his insights into the other designers he had worked with, knew personally, or had been taught by. This was an insider's master class in the history of the profession in the post war period. He gave insights into Saarinen and his search for alternative solutions to form, a tale of "life" drawing at Rich Haag's office, or his lucid description of how Stanley White taught landscape architecture at the University of Illinois.

Finally, Stu taught an invaluable skill for traveling designers, how to instruct bar tenders in many and varied places to make the perfect dry martini.

Cheers Stu.

My Fond Moments with Stu Dawson by Takako Oji

September 2011



Amidst the intense studio environment at Harvard GSD in 1990, I vividly remember the day Stu walked in with an ever so approachable smile. He had a charisma and a sense of presence as he quietly walked around the “trays” of GSD.

As my final studio project, we worked on the State Street Redevelopment Project in downtown Boston. Stu would make us walk everywhere, in and out of all the buildings, recording curbs, benches, trash cans, dumpsters, manholes, overhead wires, their materials and relative locations, storefront activities, light fixture types, plantings, signages, winds, sun exposure, and all the what-nots and hithers and yons.

Back at the studio, Stu would go over our notes and diagrams that were so messy and illegible and say, “Boy that is a beautiful drawing!” To make up for the messy drawing, we stayed up all night and drew up a beautiful plan. Stu looked at it and said, “The radius of this intersection was larger, wasn’t it?” and walked away. Stu preferred honest and accurate drawings over attractive fake ones. He never missed a broken contour in the bushes!

To Stu, everything started with a deep observation and understanding of topographic relationships. Through his studio experience, I was finally convinced that landscape architecture was for me.

After graduation, I worked with Stu for seven years on the Indianapolis project at Sasaki Associates. When the team thought we had exhausted the design alternatives, Stu would inject yet another brilliant perspective and we would all say, “Why didn’t I think of that?” Stu and I used to get excited over developing miniscule details. I would then get “called to the carpet” by the project manager and get yelled at for blowing the budget on scupper design.

Stu always encouraged me to seek for better and more beautiful ways to solve all problems even utilitarian ones. I must also add, his drawings and handwriting were just exquisite.

Reflections of Stuart Dawson by Milt Peterson

September 2011



Stu and Milt choosing granite.

In the planning and development of real estate, as in life, most people we deal with pass as a part of the crowd. There are, however, a few people that have extraordinary talent, insight and resolve that just make them stand out as special. In my 50 years in real estate development I have dealt with thousands of people.

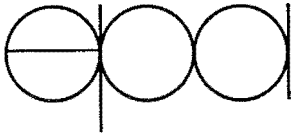
Stu Dawson is one of the special people that I have had the pleasure of being able to go to when I needed someone to look at a large property from many thoughtful perspectives. Properties, such as people, have personalities. With people, personalities are developed by parents, teachers, coaches and mentors. Their job is to bring out the best personality traits and talents. In real estate, the great professional planner/landscape architect innately understands how to get the best out of a property and make it all it can and should be.

Stu Dawson looks at great properties with a keen sense of responsibility and stewardship, realizing that he is going to be deciding what this property will be for the future. He understands that this does not mean all properties can be great and he uses his keen planning acumen to understand a site and plan it so that it meets its potential but he doesn't try to go beyond.

In the early 1980's Stu personally planned for our 1200 acre mixed-use Fair Lakes in Fairfax, Virginia - 9 million square feet of mixed use. We most recently worked together in doing what has become a new city called National Harbor. Because this property had such outstanding characteristics – 350 acres, located ½ mile from Washington, D.C., one and one quarter miles on the historic Potomac Riverfront and views of our nation's Capital – it needed a true visionary to give it the right theme, spirit and just good basic guts. The plan Stu created to fulfill his vision has built-in flexibility as we recognized that the project, when finished, will be approximately 15 million square feet. Realizing the project would be built over decades Stu and I came up with a white paper entitled about National Harbor, "What do I want to be when I grow up?"

Stu is the ultimate classic landscape architect. He taught me to respect art in the form of landscape itself and also great artists. While being classical he still has the sensitivity to be a great placemaker. Few professionals have that talent and if you review his handiwork for the last 50 years you will see the best in landscape architecture forming some of our great places.

In 1792 three gentlemen stood on Jenkins Hill. We as a country are now proud of our Nation's Capital and proud of the vision of Messrs Washington, Jefferson and L'Enfant. We now look back and thank them for their extraordinary insight. At National Harbor we are only 25% developed. Time will tell and judge Stu's vision for National Harbor. I'm confident he's going to get his due acclaim as did the planners of our Capital City, Washington.



Sept. 7, 2011

Stuart O. Dawson's Oral History Reflections by J. Edward Pinckney

It is a high honor for me to contribute this small part to Stuart O. Dawson's *Oral History Reflections*. I can think of no other living landscape architect more deserving of such recognition.

I believe my first encounter with Stu was in 1961 or 1962 while attending a university teacher's conference at Harvard University. We were invited by Hideo Sasaki to visit his office. Mr. Sasaki chose one of his newest and brightest staff members to show us around. That was "young" Stu, with his characteristic broad smile, handsomely dressed, friendly, contagious enthusiasm for his profession and his office. I never forgot that brief encounter and first impression ---- which never changed.

Over the years that followed, I worked almost continuously on some aspect of Sea Pines Plantation, Hilton Head Island, S.C., which is one of Sasaki's and Stu's "flagship" community planning projects and also my home for some 30 years. This project has repeatedly won top honors from all of our leading professional organizations. The imagination, creativity, and forward-thinking that Stu and his colleagues put into the Sea Pines master plan in those early days (50's & early 60's) resulted in what is still one of the most recognized examples of sustainable community planning and development, even today.

Of course, Stu has created many world-class, award-winning projects around the globe throughout his career. Another of those projects happens to be the Waterfront Park in Charleston, S.C., on which Joseph P. Riley, mayor of Charleston, asked me to work with Stu over the ten year creation of this important park. Largely due to Stu's creativity, attention to the community's needs and desires, his perceptions and sensitivity toward historic Charleston, and his endurance and patience, this park has won-over the hearts of the community of Charleston and of the entire state of South Carolina. It has received every national award available to it, while affording me an outstanding and rare privilege to have worked with Stu.

When Stu was selected to chair the ASLA national design awards program, I was fortunate to be able to work with him as one of the judges. These and other experiences and observations of Stu have been a continuous inspiration to me and many others, and serve to confirm his extraordinary design talent, his enormous leadership by example, and his pervasive honesty in design, as well as business and personal relationships. Stu has been one of the best "bridge builders" of our profession in so many ways.

When Sasaki (the firm) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2003, I chose to send Stu this poem because I thought it was representative of his career and contribution to the profession. It is even more appropriate today:

Reflections on Stu Dawson by Joseph P. Riley, Jr.

Mayor, City of Charleston, SC

October 2011



Stu Dawson is a great artist. His art is landscape architecture. His most profoundly beautiful work is the Waterfront Park in Charleston along our spectacular harbor. Before Stu's creation was a scruffy, ill-defined, deteriorated former shipping terminal. I recall vividly Stu's sketching on drawing paper, free-hand, an image that is now this beautiful public place. Stu is a quiet, reserved, soft-spoken person. He spoke through his fingertips and it was so joyful to see what he was creating.

I enjoyed every opportunity to work with Stu. He helped shape other important public spaces in our city and I think of him so warmly when I am in those places. It is my City's great fortune that this very special man and extraordinarily gifted landscape architect painted one of his masterpieces on the canvas of our beautiful city.

Reflections on my partner Stu by Nelson Scott Smith

September 2011

My first encounter with Stu Dawson was sharing a taxi from the airport into Manhattan. I was wide-eyed, green, a young architect. Stu was somewhat of a mythic figure, among an influential group of designers advancing the professions. Stu was a handsome, rosy-cheeked kid in a seersucker suit. He was on the way to an important meeting with members of the Rockefeller family; he was conversational, affable, and humorous, undaunted by a broken heel on his shoe, a cramped back seat in the bumpy taxi, and last minute instructions from his colleagues. His enthusiasm was contagious.

Years later, Stu and I became partners. My impression of Stu never changed. Stu is supportive. We were partners for more than two decades; during that time, I could rely on Stu for encouragement, an idea, or to just a talk about the design world. Now and then, I would receive a handwritten note. Stu is an artist. With his big Mont Blanc pen he would draw on anything, including napkins. His drawings were simple and expressive. Stu is a collaborator. He actively sought and valued colleague's opinions and ideas to enrich the work. It was always about the work.

Working with his partners and clients, Stu used his drawing skills, knack for story telling, passion for design, and tenacity for "getting it right" to create legacy projects for the firm. I witnessed several of them.

Stu Dawson as Friend by Sumner Winebaum

September 2011



"Pleasure Ground" at the Mason Reservation, York Harbor, Maine

Stuart and I are neighbors here in York, Maine. We have no formal relationship as landscape architect and client. We simply are friends. We play golf together. We share in the beauty of an over-100-year-old Donald Ross-designed course. (Now there was a landscape architect.) We don't usually keep score. We hit, we share each other's pain, and then we have a draft ale.

So why am I trying to do an exegesis on Stu's already renowned skills and reputation? Well, I'm a sculptor, working mostly in bronze and Stu and I have done a number of charitable commissions together. He is the master of installations. I'm not Calder or Henry Moore for whom he has done installations, but Stu worked with me as if I were one of those marvelous sculptors and that is the point of this piece.

Stu is a consummate professional and a gentleman, a master of his craft and like most people who are truly good at what they do, he works easily and well with others and he takes criticism (with us an event most rare) without a whimper. We actually take pleasure in each other's critical suggestions. Honest.

At every work we've done together, Stu has found the way to marry the base (usually granite) with the site. At the site he simplified and simplified whatever idea we started with whether it be in a hospital entrance, an outside piece for a synagogue or a construction in a park. In the park (see photo) he conceived of a very gradual slope of grass that rose to an 8-foot -long piece of granite which had 16 bronze figures on it enjoying the park. The gradual grade meant the piece would reveal itself slowly. He also pointed out that the grass would not get trampled down and would stay pristine if the slope was not too steep. Stu is practical.

The synagogue piece we worked on was a menorah in the form of a 3 foot-tall pair of hands, with 3 ft. granite base, the hands reaching upward with the appropriate candle placed on the tip of each finger for each day the week's services went on.

Then the candleholders are removed for the other 51 weeks. It is outside so Stu designed what he called a "room" of lights, stones and trees around it. Good stuff.

One time for another competitive project here in Maine, Stu did an estimate, so complete even down to how much wire was needed to light the piece that the committee judged the proposal would be too expensive. We didn't get the job. For some reason the eventual winner did not submit an estimate. Of course, when the dust settled their work came out to be much more expensive than Stu's estimate. But as I've said he's pro whether the job is to figure out the Beijing Olympics overall scheme or to do an estimate for a piece for small park in Maine, Stu does it right.

Yes, Stu is a real pro and for me a real friend.

"The Bridge Builder"

An old man, going a lone highway,
came, at the evening, cold and gray, To
a chasm, vast, and deep, and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.

The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream had no fears for him;
But he turned, when safe on the other side,
And built this bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim, near,
"You are wasting strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day; You
never again will pass this way;
You've crossed the chasm, deep and wide-
Why build you this bridge at the evening tide?"


The builder lifted his old gray head:
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today,
A youth, whose feet must pass this way.

This chasm, that has been naught to me, To
that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be. He,
too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him.

Written by Will Allen Dromgoole

Thank you for this privilege.

Sincerely,



J. Edward Pinckney, FASLA

Edward Pinckney/Associates, Ltd. • Landscape Architects • Planners
Bluffton, SC 29910