

TRANSCRIPT

SCRC Series: Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project – MC 00191

Field Notes: Samuel Thomas Reynolds (compiled November 16, 2011)

Interviewee: SAMUEL THOMAS (“SAM”) REYNOLDS

Interviewer: Yona R. Owens

Interview Date: Monday, June 13, 2011

Location: Asheville, North Carolina

Length: Approximately 78 minutes

This interview for the Lewis Clarke Oral Histories Project was conducted in the Reynolds brothers’ gallery. A native North Carolinian, Sam Reynolds graduated from North Carolina State University School (now College) of Design in 1971 with a degree in landscape architecture. Over the years he has worked for Jerry Turner, Joseph Hill, Ed Carson, and Lewis Clarke. In the late 70s, he partnered with Settle Dockery, Tom Hunter, and Linda Jewell. By 1989, the firm was known as it is today, Reynolds & Jewell. Questions for this interview allowed Reynolds to discuss his professors, his career, and describe a selection of projects for which he is well-known.

YO: My name is Yona Owens and I am interviewing Sam Reynolds at his gallery in Asheville, North Carolina, on June thirteenth, 2011. I’d like to start off with our first standard question, tell me a little bit about where you’re from and how you got interested in landscape architecture.

SR: Well, I’m from eastern North Carolina, not one specific place. My father was a Baptist minister and we moved every three years. The place I graduated from high school was Spivey’s Corner, North Carolina, so I’ve always lived in the country in very rural settings. I was fascinated with art and also science growing up and learned of the School of Design, and because my school was so small I had to go for an interview to be accepted at the School of Design. So, my father took me to the big city of Raleigh, to us back then, and I actually interviewed with Dean Kamphoefner. My grades were good but again, being from a very small school they wanted to make sure I could do the work. So, when I was accepted and entered the School of Design I had never heard of landscape architecture. I mean, I entered in architecture. So, the first semester I discovered this profession and it seemed to me to really combine my interests, which were art and science, much better than architecture did. So, I was just fascinated, and that was it from then on. And besides that, I didn’t have to take structures. [Laughs]

YO: You didn’t have to take structures. [Laughs]

SR: Right. So that started me on the path to landscape architecture.

YO: What attracted you to State at the time? Was that the only school that was offering the program?

SR: Yes. I mean it was a state supported. It was all I could afford. I couldn’t afford, nor did I really know what was available outside of the state. So, I didn’t even look beyond the schools in

the state. Actually, I was also a Morehead Scholar nominee at that time and accepted into Carolina, but they didn't have anything I wanted, so that's why I went to State.

YO: Well, I'm happy that you made that decision.

SR: [Laughs]

YO: What year did you start and when did you graduate?

SR: I started in '66 and I was under the five-year professional program and graduated in '71.

YO: Did you take cross discipline classes, like drawing and painting?

SR: Just a few within the school. Back then the first two years all the students were lumped together—I'm not sure how it is now—and so, we got a lot of that at the very beginning. I think [there] were courses teaching you how to express yourself, not traditional painting and drawing and stuff, but courses that taught you how to think in terms of creating either objects or places. I felt like I got a lot of kind of cross discipline ideas just from those first two years of school.

YO: Do you remember some of the professors?

SR: Oh, yeah. One that really stands out is Duncan Stuart. I'll never forget, he was the first professor I had in design and the first project we ever had—that's back when he was developing tetrahedra, you know, the different mathematical shapes, and so, we had to express ourselves to our class and do it in the form of a specific kind of tetrahedral. You know, the three ways—who we think we are, who we think other people think we are, and who we'd like to be, and we had to express that in a visual form, in some kind of geometric form. It's the first time I'd ever been in a class without a textbook, without any definite course of study. It was all up to you to create and it was just like magic land to me. I loved it, absolutely loved it.

So, yeah, Duncan was a big influence. I can't remember the gentleman's name—[Glen] Milne who taught technical drawing. And that was not your typical technical drawings, taking a cylinder and intersecting it with a box, and creating the resulting intersection of shapes. So, it was quite involved. I remember—oh, I can't remember the sculptor's name, Whitehurst or something like that.

05:17

YO: [Ray] Musselwhite?

SR: Musselwhite, that's it, yes. And, let's see, who else?

YO: George Bireline?

SR: Bireline I never had. Joe Cox I had. I remember him. He was a great teacher.

YO: Did you run into Roy Gussow?

SR: Gussow was gone when I came.

YO: Was he?

SR: He would come back occasionally and give talks, but he was not there. His beautiful sculpture was in the courtyard, but—

YO: Right. How are classes like drawing and painting of importance to landscape architects?

SR: We're a visual professional. I think, and I'd probably get an argument on this, but I think being able to visually present your ideas is very helpful. We can do nice work, pictures, but I think being able to show someone in some way they can recognize what they're getting, because—and I'm talking about from kind of a perspective point of view, not a plan point of view—because we get educated and draw mostly in plan view and it becomes second nature to us and yet most people rarely have interaction with plans. And so, I can see blank looks on people's faces when I'm presenting. They don't know what they're looking at, so models or drawings that depict a scene I think are very important to them. Of course we have now such great computer capabilities that anybody can do it. So, I think it's very important.

YO: Founding dean, Henry Kamphoefner, retired in 1973, two years after you graduated. What do you remember about Kamphoefner?

SR: I remember the introduction, kind of his opening welcome to all the new students, and the statement he said that sticks with me is, he said, look to your left and look to your right, because those students will not be here in two years. Basically what he was telling you was that the School of Design is not your average, everyday place for education and you've got to have some commitment. And I think in the early years it was very much like that. A lot of the projects we were given required quite a bit of effort and it was famous for students staying up all night doing projects, and so, if you didn't have that commitment you were not going to make it through. And I think also you had to have some bit of skill or talent to go along with that. But what I remember is him setting the stage for the commitment to be really good to get through the School.

YO: Landscape architect Gil Thurlow, was a faculty member even before Kamphoefner arrived.

SR: Right.

YO: What was Gil Thurlow like as a professor?

SR: First of all, he was a great professor. He took a real interest in his students. He really, well, he taught design, and plant material—I took from him, and he taught us—his plant material classes were just classic. Most of them were field trips. We'd just walk around campus and he would start talking about plants, and I still have stories about certain plants and I can remember them to this day, just because of the way he presented them. But the thing that we learned about plants different from what you would get in a horticulture school is the aesthetic use of it, how you use it to create effect and to create a space, not how fast does it grow or how much sun or shade. I mean all the technical things you need to know, but how you use the plant is what he

taught us. He also had a real good basis of design, just teaching us how to create spaces, and he had a real wit, which helped, just for instance, his personal interest. I got married when I was in my fourth year and he found out about it and he came up to me and he said, now this is not going to take away from your landscape architecture, is it? [Laughs]

10:42

YO: [Laughs]

SR: And he quizzed me some more about it, but it just showed his interest in his students, and he did say that, yeah, you need to take every third weekend off. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs] Every third weekend.

SR: Right.

YO: A grueling course.

SR: Yes, yes.

YO: Besides Thurlow there were about six other landscape architecture professors there during your time. Do you remember the names of any of those professors and some of the courses they taught?

SR: Let's see. Dick [Richard R.] Wilkinson was there. He came in as head of the department when I was a junior, I think, and didn't have much interaction with Dick because he was more involved with the graduate student program trying to get that going. He brought a guy that worked with him, Don Ensign, who I had for a couple courses. Don Ensign was probably one of the most incredible designers I've ever seen, and I learned more just from sitting there and watching him do things—design and draw—than most anybody. He was just an incredible thinker. Who's the gentleman from Utah?

YO: Let's see. I have a list. I'm not sure who's from Utah. Randy Hester was there.

SR: Randy came the last year I was there so I never had Randy.

YO: Wayne Maynard?

SR: Wayne Maynard. Wayne was involved in the early computer stuff and again I didn't have much interaction with him.

YO: Joseph Porter?

SR: No. Joe came, again, my last year, so.

YO: Or Daniel Young?

SR: Dan, Dan Young, that's who I was trying to think of—another professor who took a lot of interest in his students. He would have us over to his house and just a very caring, very sensitive guy, very nice, very good professor.

YO: In some of the other interviews I've done, people have mentioned how the faculty did interact with the students on like a social time. I'm just kind of like thinking that was something really important to everybody about this after school hour interaction.

SR: Well, you know, it's small classes. I can't remember. Maybe there were a dozen or so of us in my class, so it wasn't like a big impersonal class, and we had these professors for multiple classes, and if you didn't have them for classes they were always around the School of Design. So, we were always running into each other. So, it was a different kind of atmosphere. Not all of them were as generous with their time to the students, but a number were, and it made a great influence because I felt at times that there was so much I wanted to know, but I didn't even know enough to know the question to ask. So, just being around them, seeing what they did, seeing how they lived, how they grew up and that kind of stuff.

YO: Right.

SR: I mean, it was helpful, just very helpful.

YO: What were crits of your work like? How did they do the crits?

SR: They were nerve wracking.

YO: [Laughs]

SR: As you can imagine. You have a project and you spend a specified period of time, it can be as short as two weeks to six weeks or months preparing for this, and you would have crit time with the professor, typically along the way, but on that day you had to put your project up on the wall along with everybody else in the class, and you had to present it. So there was not only the work you produced but the presentation, presenting your ideas in public, and to a shy kid like myself from Spivey's Corner just speaking in front of people was difficult. I mean, that was a challenge. So, you add that to your project and they were sweating days. [Laughs]

15:25

YO: [Laughs] I can imagine.

SR: But it was a great way to learn. It's like you had to produce or else. And it made you, you know, you really thought about things and I think that was what was in it, and at least it instilled in me kind of a work ethic of doing the best that I thought I could. I mean, that's the only way I could sleep at night—doing well, at least I've given it all the effort I know to give it.

YO: Right.

SR: But yeah, they were nerve wracking.

YO: A hallmark for the School, I guess.

SR: Yeah.

YO: Can you recall any of the visiting crits, people who came in from the outside?

SR: Hmm. [Pause] No. I'm having a blank on that.

YO: Okay. Well, let's sum up your experience at the School. What philosophy or approach to design do you feel you got from the School of Design and that you continue to kind of build on?

SR: One of the best courses I ever had was from Henry Sanoff, who was an architecture professor, and he taught design as a methodology and basically we—I think this was my second year—we had to design a building. Frankly, the end product didn't matter. What we had to do was to keep a notebook and catalog the process and how we made each decision, and it really forced me—I kept that notebook for years—it forced me to go through this very logical process of making design decisions and at some point when you've had enough experience and you've done it hundreds of times you don't need that crutch.

But that rigor of decision making stayed with me. I like to tell people I think, particularly in landscape architecture—well, architecture, too—there are certain very pragmatic facts you have to take care of, size of the space, what the activity's for, make sure the functions work, make sure the adjacencies work, but at some point there's that creative leap. You've got all your bubble diagrams and adjacencies figured out, but what does it look like? I mean, there's a number of things that are not entirely logical or can be done in a logical sequence, and that's the creative leap, which is fascinating to me. But certainly having that rigor, getting to that point's very important, and that's one of the main things I learned there.

YO: Pretty important.

SR: Very, very important.

YO: So, after you graduated you worked with Jerry Turner & Associates.

SR: Mm hmm.

YO: As your first professional experience out of school, what did you learn about the profession?

SR: This is probably true of any business that you go into, but the fact that you don't have all the time in the world. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs]

SR: That there are time budgets and construction budgets, and a lot of times in school—I mean we had deadlines, you know, for getting our project done, but we didn't have any budget to design to and we didn't have to account for our time.

YO: Right.

SR: Those were major. It's like, oh, no. You mean I have these restrictions placed on me? So, yeah, it's like welcome to the real world.

YO: [Laughs] Well, then you worked a couple years or so for a firm in Charlotte and another one in Norfolk, Virginia, and I guess what I'm trying to get here is it seems like a big decision to move from firm to firm. What kind of thinking was going on or what was in your process of developing your skills that kind of made you move around a little bit?

SR: I was with Jerry I think about three years. Is that right?

20:02

YO: Uh huh, three years.

SR: And that was the mid '70s when I left, and that's when we had a bit of a recession, if you recall.

YO: Yeah, that's right.

SR: And so, part of my reason to leave was the fact that I could see the firm was shrinking. Jerry was very open and he was a very good person to work for, and telling everybody what was going on. He didn't try to hide it. He wanted to keep everybody as long as he could and he said, what can we all do to keep us all employed, whether we cut back on our individual hours or whatever. So that was kind of what was going on at the time.

A friend of mine had opened this business in Charlotte and asked me to come work with him. It was kind of a landscape architecture, making signs, doing whatever we could. He had a landscape architecture degree and a graphic arts background. So, I had a little money saved up, things were slow in Raleigh, and I just said, well, I'm at a point where I—even though I was married and had a small child, I was not too tied to things—didn't have a house to worry about—and I said, maybe this experience will be good. So, I left just to get the experience and also more of a feeling of being on my own.

We kind of eked out a living while I was there. I can't remember if it was a year or two, it never really took off, but I did learn something really valuable. We were sitting there one day and we had nothing to do and just said, you know, there's still people that live in big houses in these really nice subdivisions that would spend a few hundred dollars on a plan to improve their house. All they need to know is that we're trained to do that. So, this is something I probably would never do otherwise, but we made up this little flyer and it started off by saying, take advantage of us.

YO: [Laughs]

SR: You know, we were honest. We said, times are hard. We're young, struggling landscape architects. We're willing to come out and do houses that if the times were good we probably couldn't afford to do. And we got, I don't know, fifty, sixty houses to do.

YO: Oh, my goodness.

SR: I mean the fees were rock bottom, but at least we got something to do, and it was one of the best experiences because I had to deal directly with homeowners and all kinds of people. Heretofore, I was in the back room so I didn't have to interact with the clients. So, it was a great experience just sinking or swimming, you know. I had to get out there and deal with people.

YO: Now that's you and Joseph Hill?

SR: Joseph Hill, yeah. And so, I worked there until my savings ran out. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs]

SR: And then I got a job offer from Ed Carson in Norfolk and I just needed a job. So, moved to Norfolk. It was a nice office. He did some varied work. He was an artist himself so the work was just first rate. Again, we lived there until things started getting a little slow. You know the economy was really not very healthy during that time frame. I started looking around for work and that's when I came, after that, to Lewis, back to Raleigh.

YO: Right. That was '76 to '78 that you were with LCA, Lewis Clarke Associates.

SR: Right.

YO: As a senior landscape architect. Where was the office located at the time?

SR: It was in the Koger Center.

YO: Oh, it was the big staff time of the office, right?

SR: Right. And there were four of us, Lewis, Wayne McBride, Quinn [Tart] the bookkeeper, and me.

YO: Really?

SR: When I came, yeah, that was it.

YO: [Laughs]

SR: In that huge space.

24:55

YO: Right, wow. At this point in your career I'm thinking you were probably getting an opinion on what makes a boss. So, I was wondering what was Lewis like as a boss?

SR: I'll say that I think Lewis is probably one of the smartest people I've ever met and he had a real knack for looking at a very complex project and picking up the key thing—this is what

we've got to solve. I remember where we did this little study on—I've probably got the name wrong—some major river in Pittsburgh, and I can't remember who the client was, but it was something about dealing with barge travel on the river, the scenic quality of it. Lewis said, it's not the barges on the river that's the problem. It's the barges stopping on the river. I mean, it's just like, oh, I never thought about it like that. He said, yeah, activity is fine, but if they park and stay then it's a blight. That was the problem, and so we did this little study and all these sketches. But I just marveled at his ability to get to kind of the kernel that was very important in the project.

YO: I wish I could figure out how he does that. [Laughs]

SR: Yeah.

YO: Let's see. Do you recall any other projects that you worked on at LCA?

SR: One recurring project was Mt. Olive College. I think when I was there most of the resort work had kind of ended. I know there was—I think we did a project at State when I was there, that avenue going to the School of Design. I think that was with Lewis. It was taking up the street and turning it into a pedestrian, in front of Syme and—

YO: Let's see—

SR: Does that ring a bell?

YO: It doesn't. What rings a bell with me with the School of Design area, or the College of Design now, is there was a student plaza and kind of a serpentine tiled wall.

SR: That's right, yeah.

YO: So, I'm not sure if I recall them working on the road.

SR: Well, Lewis did the original courtyard. That was before my time. Then they built the School of Design addition, which closed off that street.

YO: Oh, that's right.

SR: Then there was a portion of the street remaining in front of—is that Syme?

YO: Yeah, I think so.

SR: And then the two dorms up above, and I think that whole area we did. My memory's fuzzy, but I think we did that whole area, taking up the street and making a pedestrian way, and organizing the space above.

YO: Now were you working on Fayetteville Street Mall at the time?

SR: Oh, Fayetteville Street. Well, Fayetteville Street was winding down and when I came there they had completed the first three blocks and they had just added a fourth block to the project. So, I did work with that, yes. I forgot that.

YO: Yeah, that street mall has now been torn up, and there might be two malls left in the entire nation from that period of reverting streets to pedestrian walkways. What was the thinking at the time about recovering the roads for pedestrians? Where was the philosophy going at that time?

SR: You're talking about why did they get rid of the cars, what was the thinking behind that?

YO: Mm hmm.

SR: Well, I think—it's interesting how planning goes through phases. The automobile dominated landscapes occurred, as I understand it, as a result of Eisenhower and defense of our country, getting high speed interstates so we could move military on them fast. And then that led to traffic engineers being taught to move traffic quickly and I think, and this is just my own speculation, I think making spaces totally pedestrian was probably a reaction to some of that through the country, without really thinking, without really, you know, having historical data to back up what this would do.

30:28

I mean, it's fascinating to me. I went to China and it's like the little village—they're all so classic and it's the same thing in Europe. Any country you go to, the way the little villages are set up, I mean it's classic. It's like you have a town center and then it's surrounded by residential and usually the size of the place is based on how far you have to walk and then you go to another town.

Well, you can't exclude the transportation corridors, whether it's cart, horse drawn or whatever. They have to be part of that, you can't exclude them, and that's what we did with the malls. So, you ended up with stores that depended on foot traffic to operate. And then there's all kinds of issues of feeling safe and those kinds of things. You started creating public spaces that were cozy and warm, but they also allowed people to hide and became dangerous at night and also the places weren't populated around the clock. There were all these things that I think it was a new arena we didn't think about, which made these spaces over time less appealing or they didn't work.

YO: Right.

SR: They were a novelty at first, I think. I mean, they were well designed everywhere, I mean all of them won all kinds of awards. You talked about the one, Nicolette in Minnesota and all these places, but the spaces, according to the way human nature works and cities work, they were just backwards. They just didn't work. So, I don't know, I kind of rambled on the answer to your question, but I think they were nicely designed spaces, but they just didn't work and over time that happened.

YO: Right.

SR: Then people went out of business and so on.

YO: Let's see. In '78 you left LCA and formed a firm in Raleigh called Dockery, Hunter, Reynolds, and Jewell. Tell me a little bit about each of the principals.

SR: Settle Dockery and Tom Hunter were distant cousins, both from Rockingham. Settle was a year ahead of me in school so he'd been out of school. I actually worked with Settle at Jerry Turner for awhile. Tom had gone through Carolina and was working in advertising in New York City and came back and got a master's in landscape architecture. He wanted to do golf courses.

So, when he graduated, and I don't know the full story, but he and Settle joined forces and formed the firm called Dockery and Hunter. Well, when I left Lewis they offered me a place to park, [Laughs] they just said they had an extra desk, and I had one job, a residence I was doing. So, I went there and the first month I was there—they'd been in business for two years and they were struggling. The first month I was there, they got more work than they'd had in the whole previous two years.

YO: Oh my heavens.

SR: It was just phenomenal. So, they said, Sam, would you like to come work for us?

YO: [Laughs]

SR: And I said, no, but I'll be a partner, and they said, okay. [Laughs] And that is kind of the way it worked because we were all the same age. I wasn't going to work for them.

YO: Right.

SR: And then they said, because they knew Linda Jewell, who I didn't—I knew of her, but I didn't know her at the time. She would come over and critique their work. That's how they knew her. So they said, well, if we're going to make Sam a partner, let's make Linda a partner, so the firm very quickly became from Dockery, Hunter to Dockery, Hunter, Reynolds, and Jewell, and that's the way it started. That first year we got our major break through Linda's contacts. There was an architecture firm in Washington, D.C. that did all the work for this huge developer called Charles E. Smith Companies, and—

YO: Charles & [E. is correct] Smith Companies?

34:58

SR: Mm hmm. They were doing this office tower on top of a parking deck in Alexandria, right outside of D.C., and they were having trouble renting office space. They had an elevated parking deck. So, the architects upgraded the lobbies as best they could so all they had left that they could enhance was the parking deck and kind of the courtyards, which were really light wells for the different office buildings. So, they tried their hand at designing and the Smith Company didn't like it. So, the Smith Company decided to have kind of a competition and they invited—it's the Olin partnership. Back then it was Hanna/Olin, very well known firm.

YO: Olin?

SR: Mm hmm, from Philadelphia, I believe, and they also invited A.E. Bye—no, I'm sorry—Peter Rollins. He was from somewhere in New York, both very well known firms. One of the staff architects that was working this project said, I know this firm in Raleigh. They're new, but I know Linda Jewell and she was really good in school and we might ought to consider them.

Well, the project manager from the Smith Company called us up like the Monday before Thanksgiving and said, we have this project, but I don't know you guys and I'm not sure you should be in this competition, but I tell you what. Bring me some ideas Monday and if they're good enough I'll let you in the competition. Well, this was the Monday after Thanksgiving. Well, we just saw it as the golden opportunity.

YO: Right.

SR: I had no Thanksgiving that year. I mean, we worked around the clock. We built a model that was like six feet long.

YO: [Laughs]

SR: We drove it up and we were there Monday morning for a nine o'clock meeting.

YO: No kidding.

SR: They liked it so much they allowed us to be in the competition.

YO: Wasn't that kind of them? [Laughs]

SR: [Laughs] Then, Mr. Smith liked our plan so we won, basically, the competition and what happened, for the next ten years the majority of our work was with the Smith Company in D.C. I mean, I'd say seventy-five percent of our work was with Charles E. Smith Company and we did all these parking deck rooftop gardens. We won a national award.

Those were heady years. We'd fly up in the morning and have a nine o'clock meeting, I'd be there, be through by noon, walk around the Smithsonian Mall, and be home for dinner. We thought we were hot stuff. [Laughs] But it was fun. It was really high design, they spent lots of money, and it was a chance to really do some interesting urban design. We did a lot of those, which was a lot of fun.

YO: Well, I would imagine that you were innovating a few things at that time because we were just starting to put urban gardens and rooftop gardens in on buildings at that time, weren't we?

SR: Yeah. Well, we did a lot of study and research and tried to be on the cutting edge of doing things. One of the major projects we did, if you know Crystal City this is where our work took place, and basically all the projects along Crystal Drive we did, over a ten-year period.

YO: Really?

SR: And one of those is the Water Park. We were having a hard time coming up with a concept for it so one of the founders of a firm called, The Ant Farm—I don't know if you remember them?

YO: The Ant Farm? Yes.

SR: I forget the gentleman's name, but we got him to come in and consult with us and it was the most fun, outrageous exercise ever. This guy came back and he'd made a comic book [Laughs] about being in outer space and seeing this crystal, which was Crystal City and so on. We didn't really use his story line, I mean there were a few things we kind of took as a starting point and went off of, but we would put that kind of time and effort into getting people involved to help us and then it turned out to be a very nice project. Those were fun years.

40:18

YO: It sounds like it. Linda Jewell is both an architect and landscape architect, right?

SR: True.

YO: Would you call her one of the pioneers for women in the profession?

SR: Well, I'm probably not a good historian enough to put her in that category, but I would say she is certainly one of the stars representing her gender in the profession. Linda, when she left Raleigh when we were working on a lot of the Smith work and she went to Harvard, and the way our firm was set up Linda and I did most of the design work. And so, I enjoyed working with her. We'd kind of go back and forth. It's like you take the plan for awhile. [Laughs] And then, we'd switch off and she'd take it for awhile.

I think she's probably one of the best conceptual thinkers I've ever met, and I was very detail oriented, so we worked great together from that standpoint. I would go up and spend the weekend with them and we'd work on the kitchen table, so it was wonderful. But Linda not only is a good conceptual thinker, she is very practical, well rooted in construction. She used to write a construction article for LA magazine for years.

YO: Oh really?

SR: Mm hmm. So, she is well versed in all aspects of the profession and just a real advocate for landscape architecture. I have a lot of interest but Linda, she lives, eats, sleeps landscape architecture. So, she's quite a person and, yeah, she's a real, I think, star in the profession.

YO: A good way to put it, I think. Jory Johnson is the author of *Modern Landscape Architecture: Redefining the Garden*, published in 1991. The book is a sort of a must-know about projects for landscape architects, and I believe Jory worked for Hunter, Reynolds, and Jewell at one time. Did you and he talk about design principles or what landscape art projects are considered historically iconic?

SR: I'm sure we did. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs] That was a heavy question, wasn't it?

SR: I think we probably had those discussions when he was trying to design a bench. [Laughs]

YO: Really? [Laughs]

SR: Jory was always—he was a very deep thinker and brought a lot of that, and actually we told him when he left, you need to be doing something other than working in an office. I mean, you've got too much to offer. So, I'm happy for him that he's become a voice because that's what he's very suited for, and he was a very good thinker and designer as well, but I think his talents really lie in what he's done.

YO: Well, it's a beautiful book, very nicely done. So to finish out the genealogy of your firm, in 1989 you became Reynolds and Jewell and you've explained a little bit about how you worked together when she was at Harvard, but what happened when she moved to Berkeley?

SR: It became more difficult.

YO: [Laughs]

SR: That three hour time zone difference makes it more difficult, but what we would do, and it was kind of this way at Harvard. She couldn't be involved in every project, but the ones that were worthy, the really big ones, I'd make sure we could schedule it so that she was involved. So, for instance, she came and worked on the Koka Booth Amphitheatre that we did and I got it scheduled so that we had a charrette at a point in time that she could spend a week working there, helping develop the concept. So, our work together continued.

44:46

The other thing that happened—but the other thing that happened, when she moved to the West Coast was about the time that our working with the Smith Company came to an end so a lot of that work stopped. That was another recession era move. That was also when Tom left the firm, and Tom was the administrative head. And so, it became me, who was both administrator and designer, and it was a trying period at first because I had been in the back room for so long and now I had to generate work. So the firm kind of took on more of my personality, more low key, I was more local. I had lots of contacts and I really never had to market because architects are your biggest client. And I knew so many, and so, we were comfortable moving on to a five to an eight or nine person firm without me marketing so I never did, so most of the projects were more local. When there was one that was worthy we would definitely get Linda involved.

YO: So, Linda went to Berkeley, and Tom Hunter, where did he go?

SR: Tom left. He wanted to become more of a designer and at Hunter, Reynolds, Jewell, he was really the administrator and he knew he couldn't flip roles in the firm so he went on his own and just is all by himself, doing very small residential. He thought he was going to do golf courses. He's never been able to get enough to make that happen. But he was very gracious and we're still very good friends, but he just wanted a different role and it couldn't happen in the firm that we had.

YO: And Settle went to work for the York Company, right?

SR: He did.

YO: He's had a long relationship with the York construction and development people.

SR: Right and actually became a client. [Laughs]

YO: Really?

SR: Occasionally, yeah.

YO: [Laughs] That's wonderful. Pictures of several of your recent projects can be found online at reynoldsjewell.com, and you just mentioned the Koka Booth Amphitheatre at Cary, North Carolina, and I'm just wondering, in developing a program for the site, was it your idea to design the bring-your-own seating?

SR: The what?

YO: The bring-your-own seating? In other words it's kind of an informal—it's sort of like, here's the grassy areas and now people make seating arrangements the way you want them, and I love it. I think it's great. Did you have that in the program or how did that come about?

SR: Well, when the project was initiated it had been there for a long time and they had this temporary tent, different orientation of site. But if you'd ever gone to the old performances, there was a very small area where you could see the performance and so people came for the experience, sitting under the pines at night and listening to music, even if they couldn't see what was going on. So, we tried to, even though it was a tremendous upgrade, we wanted to continue that ambiance of sitting under the pines. So, the lawn or under-the-pines seating was very important.

Actually, we kind of reluctantly brought in grass because we took out very few trees to build it and then we added trees back that were full grown pines. But when we put in that crescent, which defines the rear of the site, we had to get some view lines and so we had to take some trees out. So, it became grass, and I actually did a drawing to get the perfect grade. The perfect grade had to be level enough that you could sit with a reasonable size blanket grouping and the grouping behind you could also somewhat see over you, and at the same time your wine glass wouldn't tip over. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs] And what grade did it come out?

SR: I can't remember exactly but it was around four percent.

YO: Oh wow, very critical. That's the kind of attention to detail that you're noted for, as I've found out.

SR: Right, yeah.

YO: Let's see. Now, you also mentioned Crystal City Water Park in Arlington, Virginia, and this is just simply a spectacular thing to experience. What's the dimensions of this water park and what was the inspiration for the fountain and wall of water designs? How did you come up with all those different concepts?

49:54

SR: I'm having to draw on memory here of the dimensions. It's funny. All of those spaces are based on being able to get three buildings [Laughs]. So, let's see, they would be probably a couple hundred feet wide. The width is very narrow because it's where the street's parallel to the railroad track and it's kind of coming to a point. So, the width varies from my guess is like seventy-five to fifty feet on the narrow end. And also, the street in front of it is a one-way street, five lanes of traffic. So, there was a defined direction that at least the vehicles used to view the site so that gave us some clues about exposure and orientation.

It's also where the underground shopping mall exits so there's a point that you come from the shopping mall that you can see it. So, both those points kind of set up this diagonal that we used to create the water wall, and we wanted to—of course Mr. Smith said he wanted a water wall, that was his direction—but at the rear of the site is this railroad track, which visually we didn't want to see and also has some noise to it as well as the fact that—I forget the highway right behind it—but a lot of noise.

So, our idea was to elevate the rear of the site that visually hides the railroad track and also gives us a pretty good area to drop water, which creates pretty good sound which would help mask the traffic, the airport, which is close by, the railroad tracks, and visually gives us something to look at. It's kind of the centerpiece.

So, that was kind of the genesis of the idea. And then we had this philosophy of doing urban spaces, and that is we wanted to create places for people to sit that was not necessarily a bench—like a wall or the edge of a planter or oversized steps—because we felt like if we had all these benches and nobody was there then it gave the appearance of being either unfriendly, not used. But if it didn't look like it was specifically a place to sit and it was unused it was just part of the landscape, so that was kind of a philosophy we used.

We created a moat with a little island for events and the steps that go down to the water, they're nine inches, which is not typical, so it's a little easier to sit on the steps and that's on purpose. Then we did this series of grass mounds that help to soften the hardscape, but they're raised perfect bench height so you can sit around them, you can lay on them. So, we created all these spaces for people to sit, lie, use the space, but they don't look like that's necessarily their purpose. It's kind of a secondary purpose, but people figure it out.

YO: It's like going and having a nice discovery session, something.

SR: Right. And the other thing is that we always liked to have lots of variety and to think about the fact that you might have a couple of people that want an intimate spot, a group of people, just various things, or somebody who didn't mind being around other people. Some people like sun, some people like shade. So we gave a lot of attention to creating—I mean, it's not just a pretty visual space—we really thought a lot about the use of it and how people would use it.

YO: Well, it works, [Laughs] it definitely works. Let's see. You recently completed some work at the Sarah P. Duke Gardens in Durham, but you and Linda Jewell have had a long relationship with Duke Gardens, about twenty-five years I understand.

SR: Right.

YO: Did you bring an Asian influence into the Duke Gardens or did they push an Asian idea at you?

SR: That was actually a concept by the Gardens, the Asiatic Arboretum portion, which is now the Culberson Asiatic Garden, or Culberson—I don't know if they keep the word Asian in it or not, but—

YO: It's W.L. Culberson Asiatic Arboretum.

54:53

SR: Okay. The purpose of that is to display the Asian counterparts of indigenous plants that we have here. So, that was their idea, and I think horticulturally that's fascinating what they're doing. So, we just complemented it with making the place look more Asian in terms of the spaces we designed—the little buildings and bridges and structures—just to really complement their concept. That was what we did.

YO: And you had been to China so I guess you did some reconnaissance while you were in China, right?

SR: Yes. When I was in China I went to the national plant exposition there. I don't know what organization does this, but it was the most incredible kind of horticultural display I've ever seen. Every precinct in China had a certain amount of land that they could create a garden on, and I spent a day and I was almost running there was so much of it, from display to display.

YO: Really?

SR: It was the most mindboggling horticultural thing I've ever seen, and it's interesting because the following year I went to the Chelsea flower show, which you hear about all the time. And I've never been so disappointed in my life. It was nothing, absolutely—I went, this is it? You people should have gone to China. [Laughs]

YO: [Laughs]

SR: If you want to see something amazing, go to China. I mean, I just—it was incredible. I didn't even have to read. Just the landscapes were just breathtaking.

YO: Wow.

SR: Just incredible. There was this one space, or this one district, they made a mountain. They made it as steep and as tall as they could. They built a mountain.

YO: Oh, my gosh.

SR: And bamboo varieties like I have never ever seen before or since, bamboo forests that were planted. Oh, it was just breathtaking. So yeah, I got a good sense and that went by—actually, Duke was one of the sponsors for the trip to China, but yeah, it gave me a new appreciation for some of the aesthetics over there. It sure did.

YO: You still have that relationship going on with them, I understand.

SR: Yeah.

YO: You've got some more things that you're going to do for them.

SR: I have actually two or three projects going on right now.

YO: Well, we look forward to seeing those on the ground.

An example of some of your public monument work is the Oak Grove Freedman's Cemetery in downtown Salisbury, North Carolina, which is part of the larger cemetery known as the Old English Cemetery that dates back to the Revolutionary War. You and artist Maggie Smith collaborated on that, and you have on some other projects as well, but I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about some of the challenges that the Oak Grove Freedman's Cemetery presented and what are some suggestions for landscape architects working with sculptors and other types of artists?

SR: Well, first of all I want to say that's one of the projects I'm most proud of. The City of Salisbury put a road through what was the old black cemetery back in the early part of the 1900s and not until this late in the century—well, the other century—

YO: Other century, yeah. [Laughs]

SR: —that they did something about it. So, you couldn't have a more contrasting set of land values – the Old English very well tended, stone wall, on a tombstone cemetery next to a bare plot of dirt with a horrible retaining wall—that's the scar cut through it. So, the first thing we had to do—and there were no graves marked—so, the first thing we did was go through a thermal imaging process to try to locate remains.

YO: Oh my goodness.

59:46

SR: Because we certainly didn't want to disturb anything like that. So, we got some indication of where remains were. A lot of them were moved, I guess when they put the road through. So, then we came up with the concept of calling it sacred ground rather than trying to remark what was there.

Maggie, who is a wonderful person to work with, she really gets into the history. So, she interviewed numerous people in the community and collected letters, quotes, names, and what

we did was we left the wall—the ugly concrete retaining wall—but we put a new one in front of part of it of the same kind of stone—the local stone that that area is known for called Salisbury pink granite—in front of it, and we did it in a pattern.

Then we sandblasted quotes and names in it so this wall has this kind of fabric of just rich history etched into it. And we made a small opening in the wall—a little teeny plaza—so, if you wanted to walk to the space you could.

Then it was a tradition in the black community that they would leave things on people's graves. So, the wall turns a corner and goes up the hill and we made it like a stair stepping table, very wide, so that people could come back and leave things on the table tops.

Then the last gesture we did—well, there were a couple of other gestures. We changed the sidewalk, paved it to be an African pattern, and we put that pattern in the intersection and the pattern actually has an orientation which is to the east, which was important in African culture. The graves lined up east-west.

The last gesture was we wanted to breach the wall—separate it in two. And I can tell you that was an interesting exercise in Salisbury, North Carolina.

YO: Really?

SR: We had a major hearing in front of the historical society there and it was a public event and people spoke pro or con and there were a lot of feelings that run deep. But we were able to make a break in the wall.

So, what we did, we took the stones that would make the opening and placed them around the opening. We numbered them, and we had a diagram so if they ever want to go back there's a way to do that. It's just a very simple opening and we put a little plaque there about bringing people together, and it was that simple.

So, I think overall I'm most proud of that. The project's ended up taking on more social commentary and issues than it was initially proposed to do, but it was extremely well received of course by the black community and I think a lot of the white community as well. They said, we don't want to be known for having this separation, so I think it was a project that ended up having more social good in the long run even though it was arduous getting there.

YO: I'm going to deviate from my question list just a bit because I like to hear from landscape architects their experiences on changing a social situation, and this certainly sounds like it was. How long did the project take to come to fruition?

SR: Well, it's interesting because they had a competition and we were actually number two in the competition. The original winner was someone that they could not negotiate fee and the funding for this was minimal. I mean, that was one of the realities. We had very little money, two hundred thousand dollars, which in this day and age is nothing.

Both Maggie and I practically ended up working for free. But for instance, the community really pitched in the stone. We found from a local quarry—it was actually some old buildings that were down in the woods, but they were no longer used and they said if you take the stone away you can have it. So, we had to demolish the buildings, but the stone was beautiful and it was already cut. We could reuse it. It was in good shape.

1:05:16

Things like that happened that made it come together. I mean, I never see myself as a social crusader, but you get this chill down your spine when you do things and it takes on—it's interesting to me for us to create a place and a space that has meanings beyond just making it look nice. It has social value. It gave the black community something to really be proud of and they love it, and it's a beautiful place. And I think it's a fitting tribute to unknown people that are there.

YO: It's just wonderful. How about advice to landscape architects working with artists and sculptors? That happens not often, but it does happen. What are some things they should know about working with artists?

SR: Well, I think as long as you work with an artist and it's a true collaboration where both of you respect each other's input that it can be a project that would be far better than either one of you could do by yourself. I think when you have a relationship where either the landscape architect or the artist sees it as a chance to showcase what they do—and basically it's working together—I think that kind of situation doesn't work well. So, take somebody who's willing to say, well, I wouldn't do it that way, but I can see your point and add to it. So, it takes finding somebody you can work with. I've done a couple projects with Maggie and I just think she's superb in that regard.

YO: Well, all the projects that have some of her work in it are just really very nice projects for sure.

Has the definition of landscape architect changed from what you originally thought it was, and to what you think it is now?

SR: No, I've always—I think a lot of us have questioned the name, landscape architecture. I've had people say, that's a fancy name for a gardener, or it doesn't really truly tell all that you do. And I don't know that I have a better term. But I think in terms of how I've seen it, how I viewed it when I first learned of it, no, it's the same. What I've always loved about this profession is that it is so wide ranging. I mean, you can be doing an object like a bench and then the next day you can be designing a town, and just think about the different things you have to know.

I've always said that if you're really good at this you have to know so much about so many things, and you're never compensated for it, [Laughs] but to be really good—I mean when you're doing a town you've got to think about all those things about how people live, work, play, what's comfortable, what makes them feel safe, inviting. I mean, all the social issues as well as just the good technical aspects of how you deal with storm water and grades and views and so on. Then there's doing residences and public gardens where it's almost art. It's like being an artist. I just find—I'm meandering a bit here—but I just find the profession fascinating. I just love it.

YO: What will the landscape architecture profession look like in the future?

1:09:51

SR: Well, honestly, I hope that we become more important. I think that as we get in—and we're starting to—I mean there's been that shift already to a change in planning concepts about how cities and communities interact. Twenty years ago whenever I would travel you could close your

eyes and open them and feel like you're just Anywhere, USA, and I don't want the new urbanism and the traditional neighborhood development to take on the same kind of look and I'm concerned that that might happen.

I think people like us—we're taught to start with the site. The site is what's unique. A place that's at the beach shouldn't look like a place in the mountains or in the desert and so on. So, I hope we become more a voice in the future. I mean, we're a small profession. The first time I went to Phoenix and you could see the line where the irrigation stopped—

YO: [Laughs]

SR: I wanted to see somebody that respected the desert for what it was and did a place like a desert, and of course when I went to Taliesin. This is being part of the site, part of the place. This is what it's about if you live here. So, I hope we become more of a voice for that.

YO: Do you think that the landscape architects need to develop a little bit more, for lack of a better word, "attitude" when they deal with the architects?

SR: I think yes, in some cases. [Laughs] It would be helpful if we had some good spokesmen, some good advocates, and we have—I mean, there's been a few. But again, we're a small number, but yes, I think we should be sometimes.

YO: Speak up a little bit more sometimes in a meeting or something.

SR: Right.

YO: How about landscape architects getting involved in civic matters as far as like running for city council or being on planning commissions? Should landscape architects get involved in that kind of thing?

SR: I think certainly. I mean, if somebody wants to do that there's always a place for our voice, absolutely. I started doing that a little bit, but I felt like my time and effort was better spent somewhere else. But there are certainly people who are very good at that and yes. Our voice needs to get out there.

YO: What's the one important thing to know about Sam Reynolds?

SR: Hmm, important thing to know. [Pause] Well, gosh, [Laughs] important thing to know. I have strong values. I value honesty, fairness, hard work, you know, American values—not just American, I guess—and if I ever work on a project, they're all important to me. So, I think it's important to know I don't see a backyard as just a backyard. It's where somebody lives and works and my role is to make it the best I know how to help them realize their dream. That was the other thing, is that I don't see it as me. I see it as me helping me. So, I really see—I'm digressing a bit.

YO: That's all right.

SR: I really see what I do as helping the general welfare, creating environments where people feel however they want to feel, because environments—we've all been in places that make us—they're just not comfortable and it really goes a long way to our feeling of wellbeing. So, the space you live and work in affects how you feel. So, I take that seriously when I design places and want it to be the best I can make it be. I'm just a facilitator. It's not something I'm looking for a signature on. I don't know if that's answered your question.

1:15:34

YO: That's admirable. What is your favorite project?

SR: [Pause] Well, I have a residence that I did, and I'm sure the guy wants to be anonymous.

YO: Okay.

SR: It's in Raleigh. I spent three years on it and the owner was heavily involved in it and I just think it's—the owner told me, he said, left to my own devices this place would be gaudy, and I know it. He said, I just like too much of everything. I don't know how to get it together. So, he said, that's what I want you for. But we would discuss everything before it happened. Well, the project's been finished ten years. He continually sends me photographs of it, saying, Sam, I just want you to see what it looks like this morning. This is so beautiful.

YO: Oh, how wonderful.

SR: So, that is so gratifying.

YO: Really. That is wonderful. Well, those are all the questions I have for today. Do you have anything you'd like to add?

SR: No, I think this is—you've asked me a lot of questions, but this is about Lewis. [Laughs]

YO: Right.

SR: And I wish him well. He was a big influence on me.

YO: In what way, do you think?

SR: Well, helping me—just observing how he did projects and again, like I mentioned, his facility for really finding the thing that was important about a project. That was a true gift and very instructive. So, I try to do that, I sometimes think I fail, but at least I had a great example in Lewis.

YO: That's very kind, that's very kind. Okay, Sam, that's it.

SR: All right.

YO: Thank you very much.

SR: Well, you're welcome.

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

Date: August 2, 2011