Contour

LINES from the Landscape Architecture Department at Rutgers University
Back to school with another issue of Contour Lines. Summer is a busy and exciting time for landscape architecture. Projects are built, perennials flourish, trees get taller—our landscapes change. LA students are just as busy during the summer as we are during the rush of the school year. In this second issue of Contours Lines we'll look at a few of the spring and summer projects some students pursued.

I had the perfect summer internship—spent tromping through streams and kayaking through salt marshes in Jean Marie Hartman’s summer lab. I really experienced the landscape of New Jersey differently than I ever had, gained valuable plant and invertebrate knowledge, and had a chance to warm myself after a long winter spent in the computer lab.

In this issue we explore students contributions to communities in Newark, Somerset, and the Virgin Islands through Praxis studios, as well as contributions to our own campus on the Arbor trail. We learn about the internship program in Central Park from firsthand experience. We also see the fun side of the program with tours with Darrel Morrison and a Sketch Out Loud event during Rutgers Day.

Enjoy our second issue!
Design inspiration emerges in unexpected ways. As a graduate student in the St. Croix Praxis Studio, I embarked for Christiansted, St. Croix, USVI, with my studio peers and professors in January. With few expectations upon departure, I opened my mind to new possibilities and prepared myself with the tools to capture island experiences and the National Park Service’s Historic Fort Site in Christiansted, St Croix, USVI.

Leaving New York I penned the first page of my St. Croix Design Journal. A blank canvas of 120 pages, this journal would quickly fill-up over the next seven days of travel as I documented the places I visited, people I met, stories I heard, and reactions I experienced. Where would my design inspiration come from during my seven days in St. Croix? And how would my documentation of site visits and sketching exercises lead to a coherent development of strong schematic concepts? These questions stimulated my design eye into action and upon arriving in Christiansted, the sketching began.

Over the course of the next three days working with the National Park Service in Christiansted, the connection between hand, eye, and notebook led to dozens of site sketches—from 30 second line work to 3-5 minute sketches with color. As my hand and eye worked to capture and consume as many sights and places as they could, my notebook also began to capture another element of place—the sounds and stories of the people I met. Whole pages were devoted to documenting the stories of neighborhoods and the people that lived in these streets. These stories helped to further inform my sketches, guiding my eye to look for nuanced details that connected with the island’s history, present, and future.

As the week of study began to come to a close, I thumbed through my inchoate pages of notes, looking for potential concepts to further develop during my final days in St. Croix. I realized that while my pages contained a diverse range of sketches and feedback from the island’s locals, it was missing integral insight from young Crucian adults.

Preparing for our presentation to the National Park Service and the residents of Christiansted, we realized that we could flip our presentation approach to be less about telling the audience about what we learned during the week and more about using the presentation night as a final opportunity to listen and document audience feedback. I wanted to listen closely to young members of the audience to better understand their wishes for the Historic Fort site.

During the presentation night, I was lucky enough to meet a young man named Josiah. Born in Christiansted, Josiah left St. Croix at an early age for the US, accompanying his father as he moved to various urban churches to serve as a priest. After living in Detroit and New York, Josiah attended Harvard University yet left during his sophomore year “because it was too cold!” He landed work as an artist in Miami and studied music production.

Two years later, he felt a calling to serve as a priest. After living in Detroit and New York, Josiah attended Harvard University yet left during his sophomore year “because it was too cold!” He landed work as an artist in Miami and studied music production.

Two years later, he felt a calling to serve as a priest. After living in Detroit and New York, Josiah attended Harvard University yet left during his sophomore year “because it was too cold!” He landed work as an artist in Miami and studied music production.

Two years later, he felt a calling to serve as a priest. After living in Detroit and New York, Josiah attended Harvard University yet left during his sophomore year “because it was too cold!” He landed work as an artist in Miami and studied music production.
Excitement filled the room when students were asked to redesign and build a community garden in Newark. The students worked with the non-profit organization, It Takes A Village, Inc—a job training program for recently released non-violent offenders—led by CEO, Nicole Singletary. Our studio objectives were to learn to engage the community in the design process, to use green infrastructure to address both the social and physical needs of the space, and to transform city-scale analysis into design-build projects.

Inspired by Nicole Singletary’s passion for the garden, the class first designed the space in small groups. These ideas varied in form, but mostly maintained the pathways, division of spaces and memorial spaces. The community feedback for these initial designs was positive and full of excitement.

The class then synthesized the designs into five main projects: a seat wall & benches, rain gardens & a deck, planter benches, terraced steps, and a composting area.

The build process was difficult to start when the class found that the site had been an informal junkyard. During the excavation process, students unearthed license plates, old bricks, and windshield wipers. The class focused on reusing as many materials as possible, so in addition to the found materials, they recycled pallets, old tires, and broken concrete.

Children helped dig and enjoyed letting their imaginations run wild in the garden. Community members wanted to be a part of the process, but in reality, the class was a part of theirs. That all members of the community were welcome to help build and give the garden its final touches. There was a DJ, a fire truck to fill up the rain gardens, and community members helping to dig and make planters. The opportunity to positively influence other communities made this studio successful.

—Alexis Schenker & Karina Livshitz
Revitalization of the Arbor Trail

Originally started as an effort to clean a local creek, The Arbor Trail project has become a 3 year incentive to restore the nature trail and tree collection on the historic Carpendar Estate, now the Rutgers University Inn and Conference Center.

Initially, I worked on raising campus awareness about the site through meeting with students, faculty, and staff. Then, through the support of the Landscape Architecture Department and SEBS Dean’s office, I did an independent study doing trail clearing and a tree inventory of the site. I have since held two staff and faculty meetings to discuss the site’s progress, organized an invasive tree species removal, planned an Arbor Day tree planting of 200 trees, and

The Arbor Trail can act as a passive recreational site for the students of Rutgers University and the citizens of New Brunswick.

hosted three trail cleanups with various student groups on campus.

In the fall of 2014, I started a G. H. Cook Honors Thesis focusing on a management plan for the site’s restoration and prolonged maintenance. As one of the only forested areas on Cook Douglas campus and the city of New Brunswick, this site has great potential to be a valuable teaching resource for students studying the natural environment.

Elliot Nagele

Terrace Perspective

Praxis Project Leading to CUES Internship in Somerville

Last spring, students from Frank Gallagher’s Praxis Studio on Ecological Design developed a new master plan for the Somerville Landfill. Students considered site access, local history, environmental remediation, and other issues. Final designs were presented to the Somerville Town Council.

This presentation led to Rutgers continuing to work with Somerville as part of a project with the Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability (CUES). Over the summer, the CUES interns re-examined the site and reviewed the student designs. One of the main foci of the CUES team was developing the Green Seam—the stream along the middle of the site—in greater detail, and working within existing landfill regulations. This led to the creation of a terracing system along the Green Seam. The terraces increase flood storage and allow woody vegetation to be planted on top of the landfill liner instead of the herbaceous planting typically mandated by liner systems. This greatly enhances the ecological value of the site and creates a unique identity for the Green Seam.

The final CUES proposal represented a compromise between Somerville’s original Vision Plan and an ecologically ideal plan that, while still conceptual, addressed the main issues of the site. Through walkways and entrances, the community has the opportunity to connect to the natural resources and historical context of the former landfill site. The site’s ecological function was enhanced through the restoration of the existing wetlands and the novel terracing of the Green Seam.

Theresa Hyslop
Central Park Internship Provides Valuable Experience

My experience at the Central Park Conservancy introduced me to the different processes that go into the designing and building of projects, especially when dealing with an organization that is 75% non-profit and 15% private.

I had an opportunity to observe problems, work with people who were solution oriented, and see how projects were started and finalized. I worked with different contractors, nursery owners, gardeners, zone managers, and landscape architects.

What fascinated me most about working at the Central Park Conservancy was the kindness and patience shown by all the employees, who were willing to help in any way they could.

The Central Park Conservancy internship enabled me to see the many different jobs needed to start, complete and maintain a site in a park that is known around the world.

I learned many things in a short period of time, such as reading construction documents, planting plans, and the importance of documenting projects and their progression.

This internship showed me that a degree in Landscape Architecture is flexible and can allow me to pursue different routes which can be very advantageous in the current economy.

--- Amber Betances
Photographs by Jonathan Mizrahi
The Rutgers Water Resources Program (WRP), directed by Dr. Chris Obropta, is a program through the Rutgers Cooperative Extension that focuses on water quality issues throughout the state of New Jersey. Working, primarily with different municipalities and non-profit organizations, the WRP helps design and implement green infrastructure projects that aim to improve the quality of the state’s waterways.

As an intern with the program since the summer of 2014, I have had the opportunity to work on many different projects. These projects range from writing tree canopy assessments and watershed management plans to conducting rain barrel workshops and constructing green infrastructure projects.

Throughout the summer, a large portion of my work was concentrated in the city of Camden which has experienced a great deal of crime and disinvestment over the past couple decades and has many water quality and water access issues. For example, Camden uses a combined sewer overflow system (CSO) like many previously industrialized cities along the east coast. In the event of a heavy rainstorm, this system causes stormwater and sewage to be disposed of in the Delaware River, causing a serious health threat to the river and nearby communities. Additionally, many of the lower income residents of Camden do not have direct access to the waterfront and lack the resources necessary to access water for use in private and community gardens.

The WRP works to address all of these water quality and environmental justice issues in Camden. Having the ability to work with these communities showed me that people of all backgrounds are affected by and concerned with environmental quality. Similarly, it showed me that no matter the city or town, people care about their environment.

--Eliot Nagele

Public Speaking and NJASLA 2015

This past January, I had the pleasure of attending the NJASLA conference in Atlantic City. Though I have been to the conference for three years now, every year seems to provide me with new experiences and lessons that I feel will carry on throughout my career. Every day of the conference was jam packed with educational sessions on a wide range of topics in Landscape Architecture.

In one of these sessions, I was given the opportunity to introduce one of the speakers. Douglas Hoerr was the Monday morning keynote speaker. I was tasked with introducing his lecture topic on horticulture based design, as well as his expansive educational and work experience, in front of hundreds of attendees, including professors, fellow students, and many strangers. Though introducing somebody may not be the most difficult speech to give, it definitely still requires some preparation and practice that help develop future speaking skills.

As well as developing my own skills, introducing a speaker also helped me gain a lot of attention from professionals. After the session, I had several people come up to me to tell me that I did a great job; one gentleman even exchanged business cards with me because he was impressed with my presentation skills!

To any students considering attendance in the future, I would highly recommend it. The conference is a great opportunity for professional networking, educational advancement, and taking on new challenges and opportunities that you did not know were possible.

--Mark Lacey
In the last few years, there has been considerable discussion about the merits of the exclusive use of native plants vs. non-native species and, with awareness growing within the consumer market, the practice has been gaining momentum across the industry as a whole.

Yet it wasn’t until last fall, when New York City enacted Local Law 11 of 2013, that “going native” transitioned from being a preference to a mandate. As a result, city agencies and their third-party vendors and contractors now have new guidelines to which they must adhere when designing for the public realm.

The enactment of Local Law 11 represents only the latest policy in the local government’s long-term commitment to urban ecology issues in New York City over the last 25 years. It is designed to serve as a tool to increase biodiversity within New York City public spaces by maximizing the NYC Parks Department’s use of plants that are native to the metropolitan region, wherever appropriate. By specifically focusing on biodiversity, rather than individual plant species, Local Law 11 seeks to ensure a richness of species—both plant and animal—to provide for diverse ecosystem within the five boroughs.

The NYC Department of Parks and Recreation has created a comprehensive planting manual that encourages the use of native plants, while minimizing the presence of non-native/exotic species and monocultures. Developed in partnership with city and state agencies, the planting list outlines the native species considered suitable for planting and highlights the qualities of and planting conditions for each species listed. A helpful feature of the guide is the comparative list of native species that could be planted in place of commonly used non-native species.

While Local Law 11 most directly affects the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, it also applies to landscape architects and designers who are retained for projects that are being executed on or abutting public land—with implications extending to the localized industry on a larger scale.

With the implementation of Local Law 11 of 2013, an important resource has become available to our industry: This well-researched and frequently updated native planting guide developed by the NYC Parks Department is available and made easily accessible to our industry—by law. Available through the NYC Parks Department, it is also available for download through the website of the Greenbelt Native Plant Center, a non-profit native plant greenhouse, nursery and seed bank located on Staten Island.

Funded by the NYC Parks Department, the 13-acre Center’s mission is to achieve long-term sustainability through science-based programming and research and, ultimately, improve the native plant populations and conservation value of the City’s parkland. Most importantly, they’re available to offer guidance in project planning—free of charge—which includes facility tours, site visits, design assistance, and downloadable planting guides and species information sheets.

Regardless of project scale, Local Law 11 of 2013 makes it easier for us as designers to contribute to the improvement of our local ecosystems—whether through easy access to a comprehensive native plant guide, or highly trained and science-based plant professionals a phone call or email away. Both of those City assets should be considered a useful resource for designers who wish to integrate a native planting plan into their residential, commercial and institutional projects in the metropolitan NYC region.

-- Kimberly A. Tryba
Faculty Profile:
Dr. Wolfram Hoefer

This year has been busy one for Wolfram Hoefer. In January, Wolfram became head of the Rutgers Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture. In May, he left for Europe to continue his research on the different cultural interpretations of landscapes by the general public in North America and Europe and how they have an effect on public participation processes as well as professional approaches towards planning and design solutions for adaptive reuse of brownfields. We asked Wolfram a few questions about his plans for the graduate program as well as his goals and plans for his research.

Upon becoming head of the Rutgers Graduate Program in Landscape Architecture, Wolfram conducted extensive interviews with enrolled graduate students in an effort to understand students’ thoughts about the program and to identify opportunities for strengthening and enhancing the program. Student ideas ranged from facility improvements, such as better computer resources and studio space, to enhanced curriculum, particularly in the final year of the program. Wolfram looks forward to ongoing discussions with students through the Graduate Committee to inform and support continuous improvements to the program.

When asked about his focus for the program, Wolfram described it as creative design rooted in cultural theory, informed by ecological and environmental sciences, and tested through outreach (CUES, extension, and other venues). This approach provides the opportunity to educate award-winning designers who take advantage of the strong scientific expertise available within the Department of Landscape Architecture and SEBS, as well as the rich social, cultural and historic resources at Rutgers. He believes that the combination of high quality design talent and exposure to science and socio-economic disciplines will allow the program to compete with highly respected schools and give graduates the background and experiences needed to excel in their landscape architecture careers.

This inter-disciplinary approach is evident in Wolfram’s ongoing work as Co-Director of the Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability (CUES), which is a unique partnership between the departments of Environmental Sciences and Landscape Architecture at Rutgers. The mission of CUES is to implement solutions and develop best practice examples that help municipalities in New Jersey to improve resiliency, habitat quality, and living conditions, while providing educational opportunities for Rutgers students interested in enhancing urban resiliency through environmental planning and design.

This past summer, Wolfram traveled to Europe in order to promote collaboration with Rutgers and to further his research. His first stop was at the Akdeniz University in Antalya, Turkey. This was the first academic exchange activity between Rutgers and Akdeniz under the Mevlano Exchange Programme in the field of landscape architecture. At Akdeniz he gave lectures, conducted seminars, and discussed possible future staff and student exchanges and research collaborations between the two departments. In June, he presented at the international conference Polycentric City Regions in Transformation – The Agglomeration Ruhr in International Perspective. Through a series of interviews and case study investigations, he continued his research focusing on landscape architecture designs as the creative expression of location-specific cultural values, which impact design and land use decisions in the context of post-industrial urbanization.

Wolfram is also working on a book inspired by personal experience. When he came to Rutgers in 2006, he believed that New Jersey would offer a great opportunity for research and design work on post-industrial landscapes and sought to evaluate the potential role of landscape architecture in the revitalization of formerly industrialized urban and suburban regions of New Jersey for resilience and sustainability. He considers this to be important for positioning the Rutgers MLA program in relation to competing master programs, positioning the Landscape Architecture Department within Rutgers University, and establishing the relevance of landscape architecture in New Jersey as compared to New York City and to the U.S. as a whole. However, because landscape architecture is still playing only a minor role in New Jersey’s post-industrial revitalization efforts, his book will be an analytic comparison of New Jersey to a region undergoing a similar transformation process, but one shaped strongly by landscape architecture and regional environmental planning: The Ruhr Region in Germany.

--Donna Dahringer

Faculty Profile
Brooklyn Botanic Garden Tour with Darrel Morrison, FASLA

Rutgers students had two opportunities to learn from landscape architect Darrel Morrison, renowned for his native plant landscapes at Storm King Art Center and New York Botanic Garden. Both events were sponsored by the Graduate Student Association. The first, a lecture, concluded with a dinner to meet and talk with Mr. Morrison. The second was a tour of a recent project—Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Native Flora Garden Expansion. In his easy manner, Mr. Morrison discussed his inspirations, design methods, and a short history of his BBG project.

As a beginning landscape architect in the 60s, Morrison used “the same 10 plants” for all his designs. Then, after reading American Plants for American Gardens, by Edith Roberts and Elsa Rehmann, the classic native plant guide for gardening and landscaping, he began to understand that plants were an integral part of creating the feeling of community and place. Additionally the species attracted by biotic diversity—butterflies, bee flies, and birds—added to the garden experience.

After years of studying how plants grow in spaces not planted by humans, Morrison gained a deep understanding of native plant communities which infuses his current work. He has a thorough knowledge of how to grow the right plant in the right place—a mastery of the amount of sun, shade, soil, and moisture each plant can tolerate. Though he plants vegetation in drifts inspired by wind distribution patterns, he understands and accepts that the plants will change over time as they find their most suitable location. Using native plants provides an ever shifting landscape that encourage frequent visits to see how the plant growth has changed.

Morrison sources the seeds for his native plants from the local area where he is planting his landscapes. Grasses account for 80% of his plants as their deep, water finding roots provide shelter for more drought vulnerable plants. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden Expansion began as a design charrette with Morrison, Rick Darke and W. Gary Smith five years before the new garden opened. The area adjacent to the original Native Garden was to be developed into gardens representing 2 unique ecosystems in the New York area: the Hempstead Plain of Long Island (of which only 38 of the original 40,000 acres remain) and the Pine Barrens of Long Island, Staten Island and New Jersey. In the spring of 2011, Morrison was asked to design the site to be planted in spring of 2013.

When Morrison designs a site, he begins by working on large paper with pastels, making sweeping strokes to represent pathways and drifts of herbage. For the BBG project, he refined his lines into a series of interconnected pathways and boardwalks that traverse a sand ridge and a pond. He delivered concept drawings, the paving pattern for the council rings, and a rough grading plan for the sand ridge. SiteWorks completed the final grading and boardwalk construction plans.

By spring of 2012, he made the final plant selections, in collaboration with Uli Lorimer, Curator of the Native Flora Garden. Seeds had been collected by Lorimer, Morrison and others, and these were then propagated by Greenbelt Native Plant Center, the native plants nursery for New York City Parks. These plants included the dominant species in the ecosystems, for example, Pinus rigida in the Pine Barrens, but also includes some flora to entertain and provide visual interest, such as prickly pear. In spring of 2013, Greenbelt nursery grew 15,000 plugs of about 150 herbaceous species for use in the Brooklyn garden. Morrison personally oversaw the placement of all of them.

Exotics do manage to sneak into the site, which Morrison recommends clipping rather than pulling, as many weeds are happy to grow more plants from the broken root bits that remain after a plant is pulled. Some native plants may start to dominate others, but they can be trimmed back to not outcompete their neighbors. “I am for letting the plants fight it out” he says with a grin.

Mr. Morrison’s advice for budding landscape architects? “Get to know your plants.” He recommended internships with botanic gardens like Mt. Cuba or Chanticleer or work at native plant nurseries like Pineland Nurseries or Greenbelt Nursery. Field courses, learning how to do quadrants and transects, mapping plant growth and making sketches of plants provide enormous knowledge of each plant’s characteristics, as well as expertise in plant communities and what grows well together. Thinking about how to translate native plant communities to the city can also be useful—rooftops become granite outcrops, while the north side of buildings act as shady ravines.

When asked if he would ever use a non-native plants, he laughs and says, “People don’t hire me to do that, but I do love tomatoes and basil.” —Jennifer Ryan

A challenge in the site included a 100 year old English Oak at the edge of the space. Rather than remove the grand exotic, Morrison underplanted with grasses that will tolerate shade from the tree.
On Saturday April 25, 2015 Rutgers held its annual Rutgers Day celebration. As part of World Landscape Architecture Month and to Celebrate the Landscape Architecture Department at Rutgers, Richard Alomar hosted an on campus walk for visitors to Rutgers Day and senior Josh Rodriguez lead a Sketch Walk for students on the College Avenue Campus. The goal of SKO/L is to help celebrate Landscape Architecture and World Landscape Architecture Month with a wide audience of sketchers, designers and artists and to promote on location sketching as a way to document the landscape.

--Meghan Collins
Photographs by Josh Rodriguez
Blake Journal
Volume 2
Fall 2015

Journal staff:
Meghan Collins
Donna Dahringer
Jennifer Ryan

Faculty Advisor:
Anita Bakshi