

PLANTS DICTATE GARDEN FORMS

EACH HAS PLACE AS MATERIAL IN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

BY JAMES C. ROSE

IT is quite common and almost a boast among some Landscape Architects that they have "never planted a seed" or "don't know one plant from another"—an "art for art's sake" attitude which puts landscape design farther and farther from contemporary life and is therefore the worst possible salesmanship. Can you fancy an architect selling a client on the basis that he knew and cared nothing about brick, wood, and concrete? Or that he was too concerned with beauty to bother about them?

Considered as materials, all plants have definite potentialities and each plant has an inherent quality which will inevitably express itself. An intelligent landscape design can evolve only from a profound knowledge of, and sensitivity to, materials. When we force materials in architecture or sculpture we are sure of at least one thing: that the form, however offensive, will be relatively constant. But with plants the struggle is endless and results in victory neither for the plant nor the man who clipped it. If the plant should win the design would be lost; and if the man should win he would succeed only in preserving something false from the beginning.

The twentieth century landscape, although hardly touched, even in theory, would of necessity result in the honest use of materials as in the best modern architecture and sculpture. Plants are not applied to a preconceived ground pattern. They dictate form as surely as do use and circulation.

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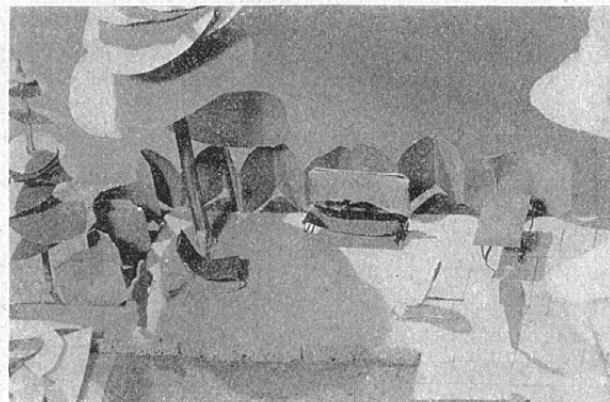
It is only fair to mention that some Beaux Arts landscape designers have used plants for their inherent quality, but under this system they could never be more than decorative elements made to conform to an eclectic, ornamental, imposed, geometric pattern with an eye to pictorial composition alone. No striving for the picturesque has resulted in more than a superficial camouflage or façade

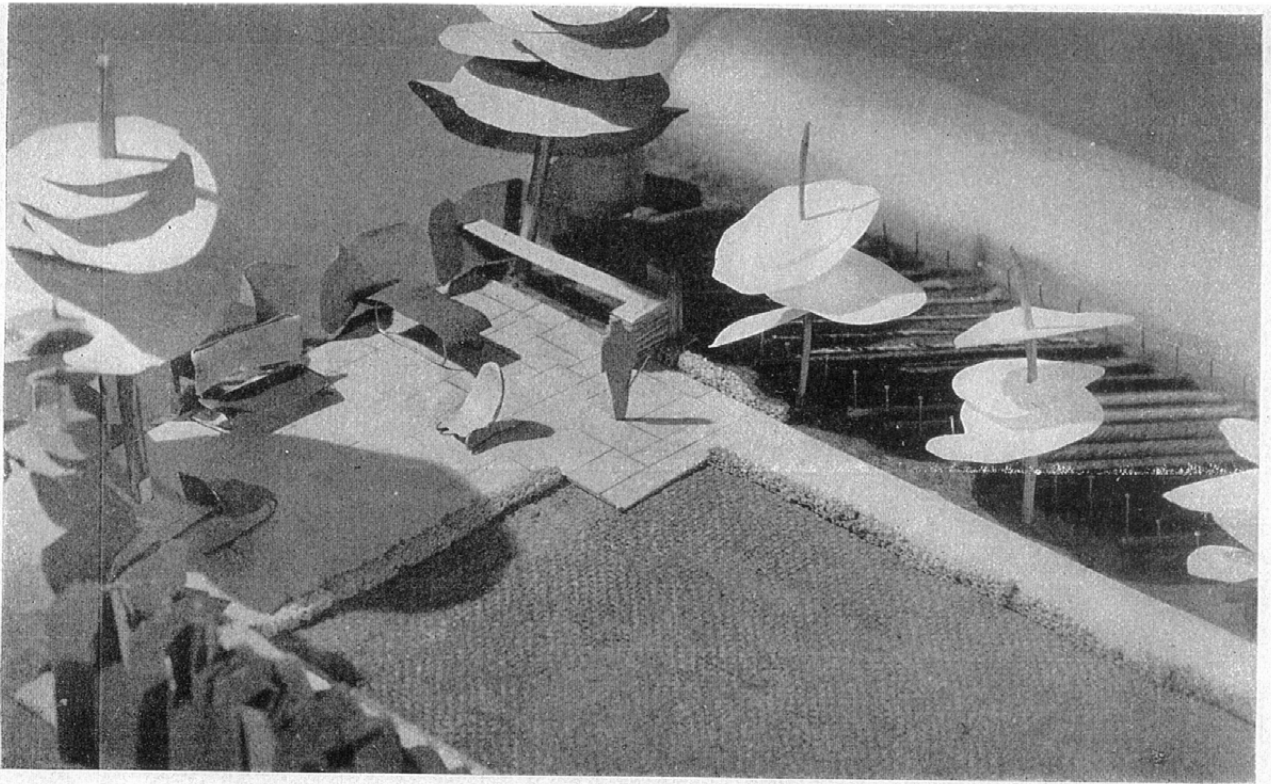
which obscures rather than expresses the real meaning. Character develops from the actualities which have been solved rather than obscured. Otherwise, we have only the personality of a "great individual" who softens everything with a disguise of ornament to protect hothouse souls from contact with reality.

It is a vain person who believes that he is free of his own times and can create a detached "thing of beauty." The personal equation exists only as a minor part of the social equation; as society becomes inter-dependent its expression is social and the "great individual" passes from the scene. It is then that the elements of our own environment become integrated and virtuosity loses meaning. It is then that an expressive style evolves and design ceases to be an eclectic adaptation of ornament to provide a picturesque setting for idle people.

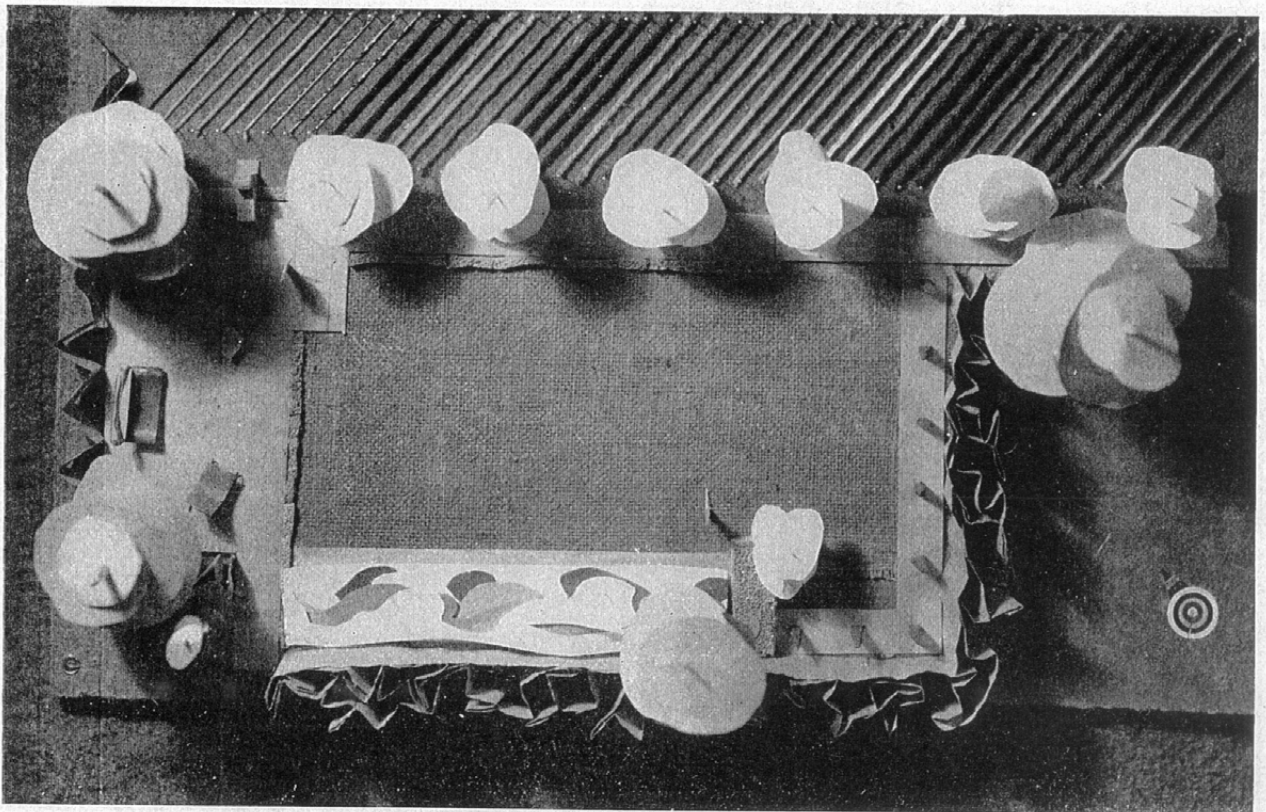
We cannot live in pictures, and therefore a landscape designed as a series of pictures robs us of an opportunity to use that area for animated living. The war cry is often heard

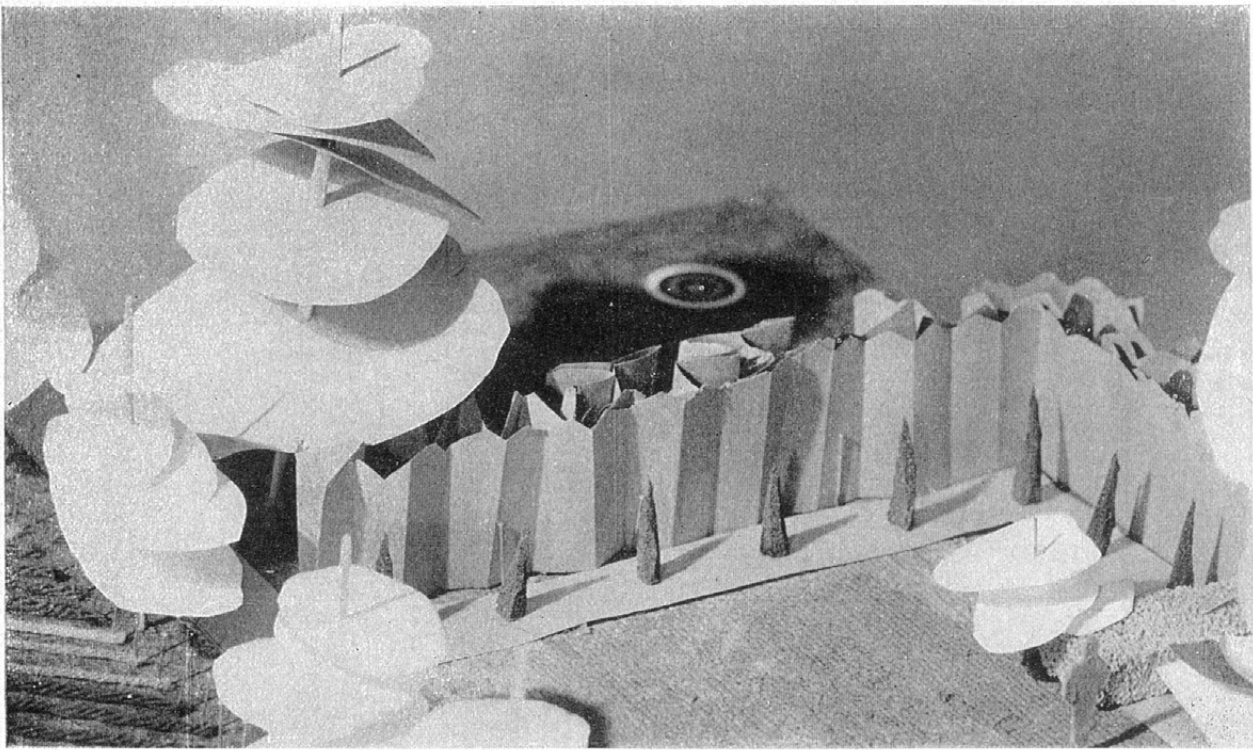
In architectural composition with plant materials, Rose uses a low hedge to enclose without obstructing the view and selects plants which will remain the desired height and width without clipping, to insure minimum maintenance. Each plant plays its part in the scheme





Distinctive of the author's garden design, shown here in a working model, is the simple division without sacrifice of visibility, the disposition of space for use, and interest gained from planes and line directions in opposition. If executed with indigenous materials, Rose estimates this type of garden would not cost more than 15 per cent of the cost of a house in the \$3,000 to \$5,000 class. He has considered the organic relation of plants to design





Notable in this garden model is the exchange of an axis for movement and direction, as discussed in the accompanying article. Plant materials are composed in volume

that we must combine use and beauty; but by this is meant that we should develop a ground pattern of segregated, geometric areas strung along an axis in Beaux Arts relationship and separated by "embellishments" which compose a picture for the "terminal point" of each area. Something to look at!

This may be called exterior decoration, but from the standpoint of twentieth century design, it has no justification. The intrinsic beauty and meaning of a landscape design come from the organic relationship between materials and the division of space in volume to express and satisfy the use for which it is intended. From this viewpoint, the landscape "picture" fades with the "façade" and clears the deck for animated design. Now we can throw away the rubber stamp of Beaux Arts tradition and, although a continuity of style will rightly develop, the solution of each problem will acquire individuality and distinction because it is based on the organic integration of almost inexhaustible material, existing conditions, and the factors of use which could

This plan of the garden was drawn for record only after decisions had been made on the site and the model constructed from the pattern evolved from use relations

never repeat themselves exactly in all cases.

Ornamentation with plants in landscape design to create "pictures" or picturesque effect means what ornamentation has always meant: the fate call of an outworn system of aesthetics. It has always been the closing chapter of art which had nothing more to say. In one last hasty attempt to propagate, it sings the same old song with a more rasping voice and sordid emphasis. What a pity so few Landscape Architects realize the opportunity they are overlooking in not examining the possibilities of the contemporary approach. It might justify a profession which has, until now, rightly been tagged a useless luxury for the idle and not-too-intelligent rich.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the December issue of PENCIL POINTS, Rose will continue his discussions with: "The Dwelling: Integration of House and Landscape."

