

The new landscape of collaboration

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The Coen Residence. House and garage are sited to quietly greet visitors, and create a semi-private East-facing courtyard that opens up to the surrounding views

When I began my practice in 1992 with my former partner, Jon Stumpf, we set out by establishing a small set of core goals for our firm. The heart of these was to promote design excellence and to collaborate with the world's greatest thinkers in the architectural and design community. Sixteen years later, these important ideals remain at the center of our practice.

Recently, I was one of thirty speakers participating in the Future of Design conference organized by Monica Ponce de Leon, Dean of the Taubman College of Architecture at the University of Michigan, principal of Office dA, and one of my favorite architects. As I listened to the other 29 designers address what they believed the future of design to be, I noticed an emphasis on the strength and importance of a cross-discipline approach to their work. Intra-office

collaboration was also addressed and it was clear that most of us believed deeply in the power of the collective. The old model of the 'chief architect' calling the shots for the team, and within his or her office, is on decline and has always been somewhat of a myth. It is clear that most of the new leaders in the design profession are promoting a working environment that is much more interactive and engaging than in the past.

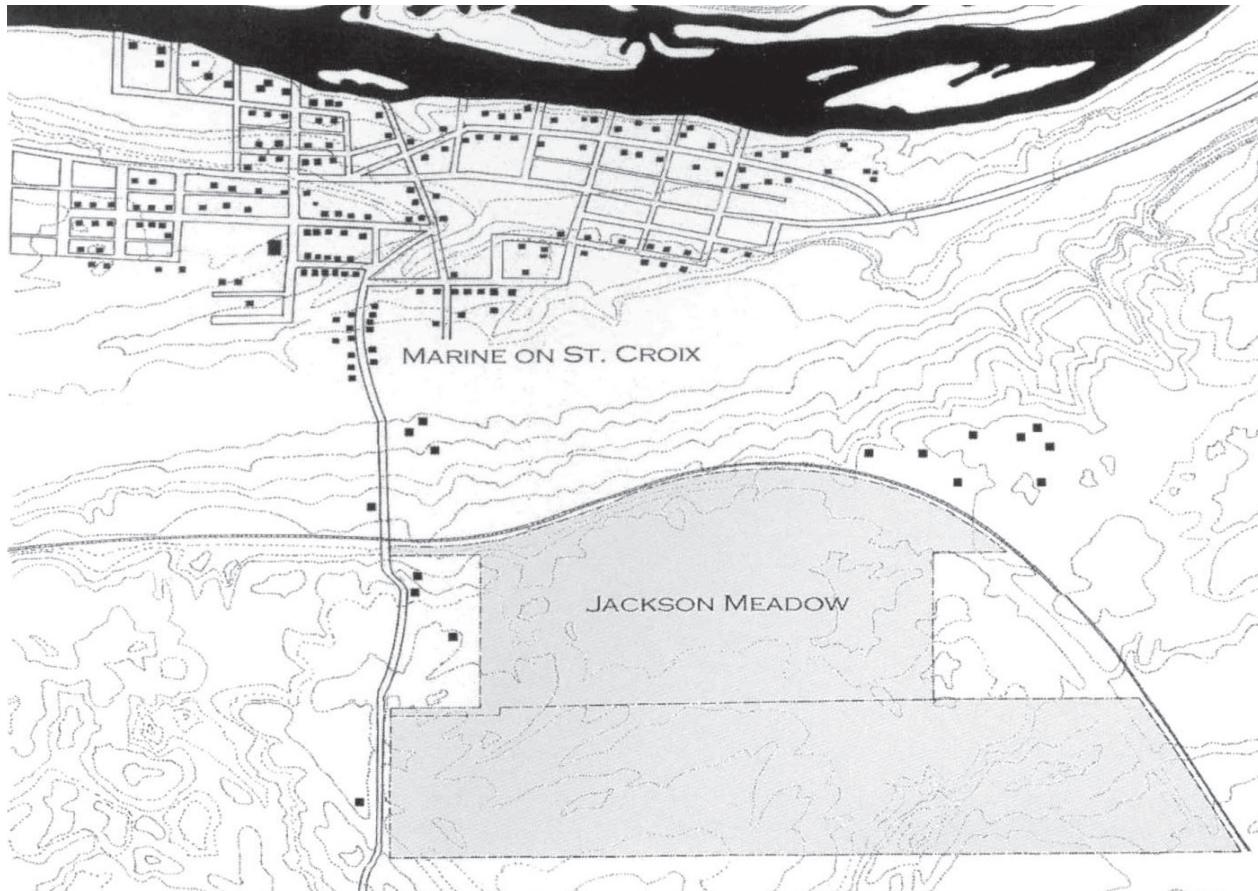
Collaboration is at the heart of what we do within our office and with the architects, artists, engineers, and designers with whom we work. Our projects often straddle a fuzzy line between architecture and landscape architecture. We have the scale, vocabulary, and understanding to effectively communicate and implement design concepts at the site scale, yet our understanding of architecture, our detailing, and our

attention to proportion and materiality allows us to communicate with architects incredibly well. We enjoy all facets of design, and work to translate ideas in a way that highlights structure while also presenting the site as a quiet but equal player in the dialogue of the design.

Our architect/landscape architect collaborations began with architect David Salmela. In sixteen years we have completed over 50 projects together, the largest and most prominent collaboration being Jackson Meadow. The site is a 145-acre area of high ground in open fields and wooded hills overlooking the St. Croix River Valley in Marine on St. Croix, Minnesota, featuring nearly 220 acres of land permanently protected by conservation easement. The community was organized topographically, with a series of neighborhoods connected by a loop

road and pedestrian corridors around a central public green. Salmela and Coen + Partners arranged all homes to be accessible from the open space corridors. Front porches direct residents and visitors to a trail system that links over 350 acres, connecting Jackson Meadow to William O'Brien State Park, adjacent neighborhoods, and downtown Marine on St. Croix. The result is a nationally recognized and award-winning sustainable community that is a model for community design within rural landscapes.

The initial key to our relationship was to put aside our egos, and the typical boundaries defining architects and landscape architects, to see what would evolve. David promoted our involvement from the moment he was invited to visit the site and we were always supportive of his process. Our initial on-site analysis was very



Greater site context.



The design team chose to include only white houses to allow the visitor to focus on the context and greater landscape. The effect is drastically different but equally powerful in the winter.

interactive, involving careful study of the land and its context. Together, these two forces inspired a conceptual framework for siting the structures, and the composition of the structures inspired the architectural concept.

After the initial concept is established, we believe part of our collaborative role is to support and reinforce the architecture by creating a simple and elegant site plan complementing the architectural materials and forms. The geometry of our work radiates from and extends the architecture into the site. As the architecture and site develop in concert with one another, a seamless dialogue is created and the lines between structure and land are blurred.

More specifically, we recognize our role as providing the critical translation of the architecture and the mission of the client to the outward environment. We embrace this role and pursue resolutions in support of work that represents a complete, branded environment, not a project where collaboration has not been a priority and the work of individual

disciplines has been cobbled together. We also realize that thoughtful disagreement is a natural part of successful collaborative teams and that the key is for all involved to work towards the same visionary solution. It is expected that our recommendations will be heard, challenged, and tested multiple times for our highly visible projects.

Our methodology is not about imposing a particular directive, but rather working together to refine the unique ideas of our design team and project partners. We believe our firm and the work we produce are set apart from other landscape architects by the unique framework we establish for each project. Our goal is to always reverberate and reinforce the architectural form. Our solutions do not present ideas, constructs, or materials that are not in concert with the architectural and client mission. Our landscape success is crafted in part through our understanding and respect for the vision of both client and architect.

Our office is now recognized as a landscape architecture firm. We are often found in the role of prime consultant for community and master planning projects because of our extensive experience leading projects of great community importance and scale. We continue to build relationships with contemporary architects that we admire throughout the world. It is inspiring to work with such a diverse group of successful architects and to understand their philosophies and approaches to collaboration. It is not surprising that we have found the



Blake Feil residence : The placement of the three structures (main house, garage, and shade garden house) creates a composition that protects an exterior East facing courtyard. A thin Bluestone walk divides the site and leads you into the courtyard.

leading architects to promote and embrace an extremely interactive process. Select ongoing collaborations include Bull Creek Residence with Michael Maltzan Architecture, an art-based landscape framework for four residential structures on a sixty-acre lake front site in Austin, Texas; Watermill Residence with Andrew Berman Architect, a re-imagined English garden landscape for a waterfront retreat in Southampton, New York; and the Daniels Faculty

of Architecture, Landscape, and Design at the University of Toronto with Office dA, a winning competition entry for the redesign of the building with expansive green roof and planted façade treatments.

In order to create real change in our country, we need to collaborate on the process of educating and influencing our city and political leaders. Architects need to promote great landscape architects in leading and co-leading important master planning



The structures were sited to save all existing oaks while still achieving spatial goals and communal relationships.



Goldner Residence: All three structures sit on an exterior stone plinth that extends the interior into the site and pulls the site into the architecture. A simple Bluestone retaining wall creates an intimate lawn that mimics the dimensions of the house. Minimal site disturbance was required.

projects. Landscape architects need to promote and assemble dynamic teams of architects, artists and designers. Civil engineers need to stop designing subdivision and urban master plans, and establish collaborative relationships with talented landscape architects. Bridge engineers need to forge new relationships with our architectural leaders. There are many more examples.

This is an exciting time to be practicing design. We are redefining the role of the landscape architect, architect, artist, industrial designer, engineer and contractor and witnessing the lines between disciplines becoming both blurred and strengthened for the benefit of the built environment. Designers are teaming together and promoting each other's work in ways we have not seen in the past. Design is in the mainstream and headlines more than ever, and true collaboration is the future of design.



The well house is our welcome monument and also houses the well monitoring station. The only black structure sits in a field of little bluestem at the formal entry.