

The products of landscape architecture and the nature of urban design

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All, without exception, total and all-of-a-piece urban designs include elements of landscape architecture. Many plug-in urban designs are landscape design projects and vice versa. The historical trails, squares and parks described here are all plugged into existing city frameworks to act as catalysts for development or, at least, to halt decay. What then differentiates the products of landscape architecture from those of urban design?

The landscape quality of open spaces is crucial to the experiencing of cities and perceptions of their quality. The streets, squares and parks of cities, such as London form part of their international image. It is difficult to consider Paris without its boulevards, or Singapore without the walkways along its riverfront or St. Louis without Gateway Plaza (see Figure 5.1). The character of all these places is, however, defined not only by the landscape but also by the buildings that face them and the activities they generate. It is this consideration of the three-dimensional world as experienced in time that is central to urban design work. Much landscape architecture in the city is, however, concerned only with the space between buildings. It is concerned primarily with the horizontal surface.

The Products of Landscape Architecture: Malls, Squares, Streets and Parks

The design of streets, squares, parks and other public spaces is often referred to as urban design by landscape architects. A number of the Bruner Awards for urban design, which have an intellectual basis in the broad thinking about the functions of built form represented in Figure 1.6, have gone to such designs. Many, if not most, of such spaces are actually designed by architects rather than landscape architects perhaps because of their ‘hard’ rather than their ‘green’ character. Sometimes they are the result of collaborative work between architects and landscape architects (e.g. Pershing Square in Los Angeles). Historically, the buildings that frame many of the best-loved plazas in Europe have been built up piece-by-piece over a long period of time. Sometimes each piece has been subjected to design controls but at other times the architects involved have designed with a sense of decorum – with a sense of concern for the context in which they are designing. Piazza San Marco in Venice is probably the best-known example (see Figure 5.2).