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Ervin Zube and Landscape Architecture

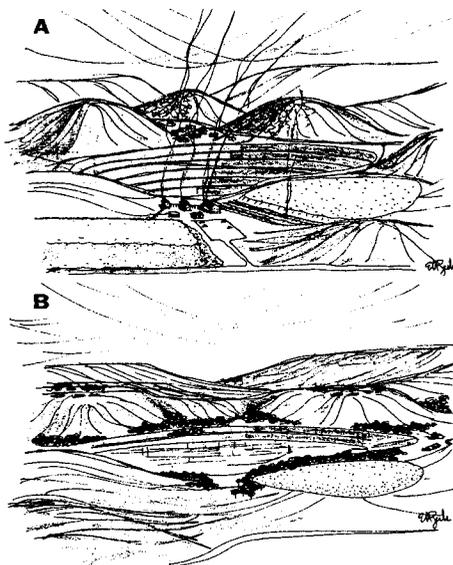
BY PAUL H. GOBSTER, ASLA

As he grew in his knowledge about the landscape through his involvement in it as a person, student, practitioner, teacher, program director, and researcher, Ervin Zube's ideas about what landscape architecture is and should be continually evolved. He was a prolific writer whose publications span a broad range of audiences, and his contributions to *Landscape Architecture* are insightful—not only because they capture the growth of a scholar over a period of four decades, but also because in them Zube speaks directly to fellow landscape architects about the need and possibilities of growing the profession through the generation of its own knowledge base. This joint evolution of scholar and profession can be traced through the pages of *LAM* and related publications.

Studying landscape architecture at the University of Wisconsin—Madison (1949–1954) and at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (1957–1959), and later in land-

met Erv Zube in 1970 at Clark University where he was a doctoral student in geography. I served as outside member of Erv's dissertation committee. I was immediately impressed by his breadth of knowledge and by what a quick study he was. He had picked up a mastery of the rationale of psychometric measurement and how it might apply to observer judgments of landscape scenes as well as physical variations in landscape settings. He employed these methods in his dissertation research and subsequent classic analyses of the relationships between judgments of scenic attractiveness and physical properties (e.g., presence of water, length of view) across settings in the Connecticut River Valley. In my opinion, the reports from this project remain unrivalled in scope and scientific soundness. Across his career Erv managed to combine empirical research and design, policy making and practice, planning of future environments, and a sense of history regarding past environments.

—KENNETH H. CRAIK
environmental psychologist,
University of California,
Berkeley



Zube's articles for *LAM* included a piece in January 1966 on Wisconsin's taconite mining areas, where Zube proposed that open-pit mines (A) be transformed into postmining landscapes such as (B). Zube thought that new landforms could be designed based on the materials from which they are made, as shown in "landform resources," below. All the sketches are Zube's own.

Land Form Resources



Overburden



Rock Reject



Coarse Tailings



Fine Tailings

scape architectural practice and teaching at Madison (1961–1964), Berkeley, California (1964–1965), and Amherst, Massachusetts (1965–1972), Zube learned about and contributed to the profession during a critical period. Through the work of Ian McHarg, Philip Lewis, Burton Litton, Julius

Ervin's contributions to the field of landscape architecture included his attempt to reconceptualize "design" as a means rather than as an end. Design for him was a process of thinking that established a defensible basis for acting to achieve a set of specific outcomes within a culturally derived aesthetic appropriate for the environmental setting.

His focus on the outcome of design and planning decisions with regard to human perception, sense of place, environmental compatibility, and cultural appropriateness was a welcome and refreshing perspective to those of us coping with the excesses of modernism and its self-referential, anecdotal and, for the most part, indefensible methods. He believed in asking blunt questions that challenged the efficacy of normative design practices. He believed that landscape architecture deserved more than the mere self-expression of the designer.

He was dedicated to raising the level of inquiry from a craft to that of an intellectual discipline. He referred to medicine and law as models to measure the progress of our state of the art. His ideas met great resistance within mainstream academic and practice circles, but he was an inspiration for a generation of students and colleagues. He was a natural mentor and encouraged many to pursue advanced degrees in related fields.

He believed that our profession had yet to realize its potential for influencing public policy, for creating a more fit environment for human life, and for developing the intellectual protocols required of a true academic discipline. Today, his work remains unfinished, but it is being pursued by others, inspired by his example.

—NICHOLAS DINES, FASLA,
Landscape Architecture,
University of Massachusetts

Gobster, Paul H. 2002. Ervin Zube and landscape architecture. *Landscape Architecture*. 92(8): 62, 64-65, 92-93.

DRAWINGS ERVIN ZUBE

Fabos, and others, landscape architecture was growing from a focus on the artful arrangement of form in small-scale design and master planning to encompass a wide range of concerns about large-scale regions. Zube placed himself in the heart of this change. In "A New Technology for Taconite Badlands," his first article for *LAM* (June 1966), Zube explored the prospects of open pit mining operations planned for Wisconsin's Lake Superior

south shore region, and through sketches and analysis called for "the creation of a new dynamic landscape" that relates to the form and scale of the region. In "Scenery as a Natural Resource" (*LAM*, January 1973), he described his efforts in the North Atlantic Regional Water Resources Study to map the visual and cultural resources of a 167,000-square-mile region using landform and land use data. Both articles show how Zube's concern as a landscape architect with form and aesthetics is translated to large-scale regions and issues. They also reveal Zube's emerging concern for the policy aspects of landscape architecture, calling for the adoption of systematic planning and design procedures to ensure scenic resource protection alongside more traditionally considered landscape values.

While his work was helping to advance the profession, Zube saw a key element missing that limited his scholarship: the study of people. His research to date had cast Zube in the traditional role of landscape-architect-as-expert who identifies and evaluates aesthetic value in the landscape. But his life experience—aided in part by his association at Berkeley with J.

Ery's most important contribution to landscape architecture was legitimizing and demystifying the role of research in landscape architecture.

More than anyone of his generation, he single-handedly raised the bar of scholarship and critical inquiry in landscape architecture.

—MARK FRANCIS
Landscape Architecture, UC-Davis

B. Jackson—had taught him that landscapes are defined as much perceptually and culturally as they are physically. To address this, he made the unconventional career move as professor and head of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts to return to school and pursue a PhD in geography at Clark University (1970–1972). There he studied environmental psychology, examining how people perceive the aesthetic quality of landscapes, what aspects of landscapes are linked with beauty and related values, and how perceptions differ across individuals

Ery was on my MLA committee at the University of Arizona and was a huge influence for my career choices.

When I began I was focused on just being a good designer. After taking research classes and many long conversations with Ery, I began to understand the greater importance of research to the profession.

—ANDY KAUFMAN,
graduate student, Washington State University



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and groups. These issues were taken up in "Rating Everyday Landscapes of the Northeastern U.S." (July 1973), a summary of his dissertation research that one of his committee members, environmental psychologist Kenneth Craik, still finds "unrivaled in scope and scientific soundness."

Following his PhD work, Zube directed a series of interdisciplinary projects at the Institute for Man and Environment at UMass (1972–1977) and the School of Renewable Natural Resources at the University of Arizona (1977–1983) that quickly established him as a leader in the growing area of landscape perception assessment. Through collaborative relationships with diverse students and colleagues, Zube explored the rich cross-fertilization of ideas that resulted, producing a number of acclaimed books and other publications on landscape assessment, design evaluation, and environment-behavior studies. But while seeing the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration, as a landscape architect Zube also lamented how the field was increasingly being built on knowledge from other professions. In "The Roots of Future Innovation: Re-

Erv was someone who could communicate easily with a wide range of people. He did not come into research on human perceptions by accident. He had both an intellectual and theoretical understanding of perception and an intuitive feel for people and their practical understanding of landscapes. I remember being out in the field talking with farmers and ranchers, local government officials, or just people in a small community. Erv related to and was interested in everyone. They liked him because he talked about things that mattered to them.

Erv really was a visionary. It's a greatly overused term. I've worked with plenty of university egos who thought they were visionaries. Erv is the only person I've worked with who I think qualifies as one. I worked with him doing research on human perceptions of riparian landscapes in southern Arizona. At the time he started doing this research, nobody else was doing it. By the time the research was coming to fruition, groups like the Bureau of Land Management were talking about how badly they needed this type of work done. They came to Erv asking if he could do some work in the area, and he had already done it! I specifically remember the meeting. We were sliding copies of various reports on the San Pedro River over to the BLM guys. They really were stunned. Erv was visionary in the sense that he worked to develop things that were needed long before people knew they were needed.

—DAVE SIMCOX,
Department
of Recreation and
Parks Management,
California State
University, Chico

search and Theory" (November 1980), Zube spoke critically to landscape architects on how the profession's lack of emphasis on research was hindering its growth compared to allied fields: "In my opinion, the profession has been seriously remiss in...view[ing] the generation of

that knowledge base as primarily someone else's responsibility...other disciplines are not likely to address the how and why questions that are most useful to the profession and the kinds of questions that expand the boundaries of the profession rather than defend (Continued on Page 92)

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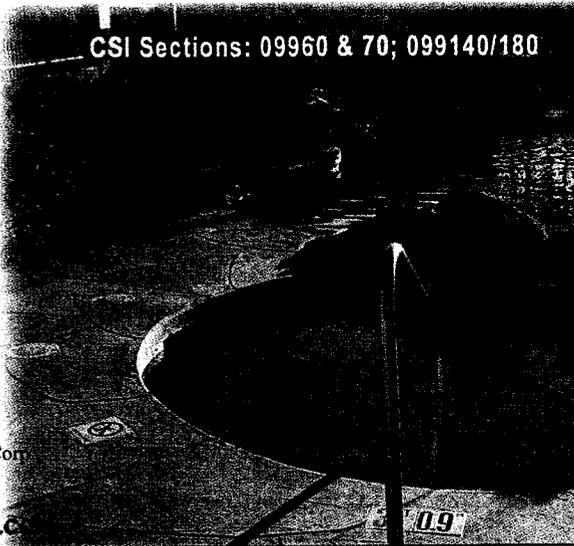
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Practice

(Continued from Page 65) already archaic and restricting boundaries.”

Despite his flair for program management and leadership, it was this passion for seeking endogenous knowledge that led Zube to return to his personal research during the last part of his career as a professor of landscape architecture in the School of Renewable Natural Resources at Arizona (1983–1998). His influential synthesis of 20 years of landscape perception research, done with James Sell and Jonathan Taylor and summarized in “Landscape Perception: Research, Application and Theory” (January 1982), won an ASLA honor award for research, and for many in the field (myself included), it set the agenda for what next steps needed to be taken. As part of the evolution in the field, Zube saw a need to move from descriptive and quantitative appraisals of scenic quality to deeper analyses about landscape values. In some ways this was a return to the beginnings of his work with J. B. Jackson in the 1960s, but one that was informed by the methodological rigor and experience of everything that he had done since. In “A Cultivated Dislike for the Egyptian Desert” (November/December 1983), he examined the apparent cultural apathy for the desert landscape among Egyptian natural scientists he was consulting with as a factor hindering the protection of significant natural and cultural sites in that country. In “Arizona Survey Reveals Anti-Development Attitude,” written with Charles Law and Edwin Carpenter (November/December 1984), the researchers found that along with substantial land use and population change in the state there had been a decided shift in residents’ values away from development and commodity production and toward non-commodity values such as wildlife and recreation. And in his last feature article for *LAM*, “The Advance of Ecology” (March/April 1986), Zube summarized the contributions of landscape architects who during the previous century worked to incorporate ecological thinking into landscape architectural practice.

Looking at these later studies along with subsequent articles he wrote for ASLA’s *Landscape/Land Use Planning* newsletter, one sees demonstrated the

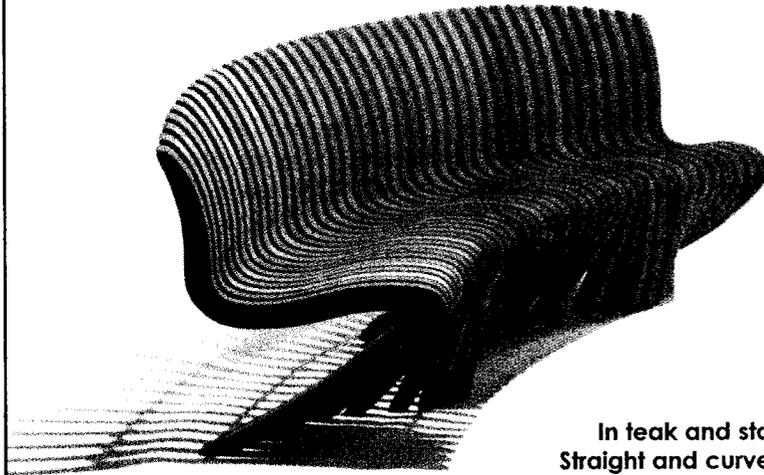
breadth of knowledge Zube felt was needed to understand and deal with problems in landscape architecture. There is still a primary concern for the artful arrangement of physical form, but it is addressed through an informed base of knowledge in natural systems at regional as well as local scales, a sensitivity to individual and cultural preferences and values, an acquired sense of the region and its inhabitants, an eye toward public policy implications, and the wisdom and perspective of history. As these things helped to form Ervin Zube as a scholar, he in turn sought to incorporate them into the landscape architecture profession. Through his writings and involvement on councils and task forces, Zube remained active through the years in attempting to infuse research into landscape architectural education and practice, and received numerous awards and recognition from ASLA and from the Landscape Architecture Foundation for his long-term contributions. In seeing the profession grow to incorporate the components of knowledge acquisition and dissemination, one senses that Zube took a measure of personal pride in those achievements. In "The Evolution of a Profession" (*Landscape and Urban Planning*, 1998), written nearly two decades after his "Roots of Future Innovation" critique and one of the last articles he would publish, Zube wrote about recent progress in landscape architecture: "The changes that have been discussed have been significant and are reflected in the increasing scale, complexity, and/or diversity of projects undertaken by landscape architects... There are currently examples of landscape architecture programs that have been involved in research for more than a quarter century, and there now exist significant research and scholarly journals that address the needs of the profession.... This provides further confirmation of landscape architecture as a profession and an applied art. Prospects for the future are very promising." **LA**

Paul H. Gobster, ASLA, is a research social scientist with the USDA Forest Service North Central Research Station in Chicago. The contributions of James F. Palmer, ASLA, and Joseph P. Crystal, FASLA, to this article are gratefully acknowledged.

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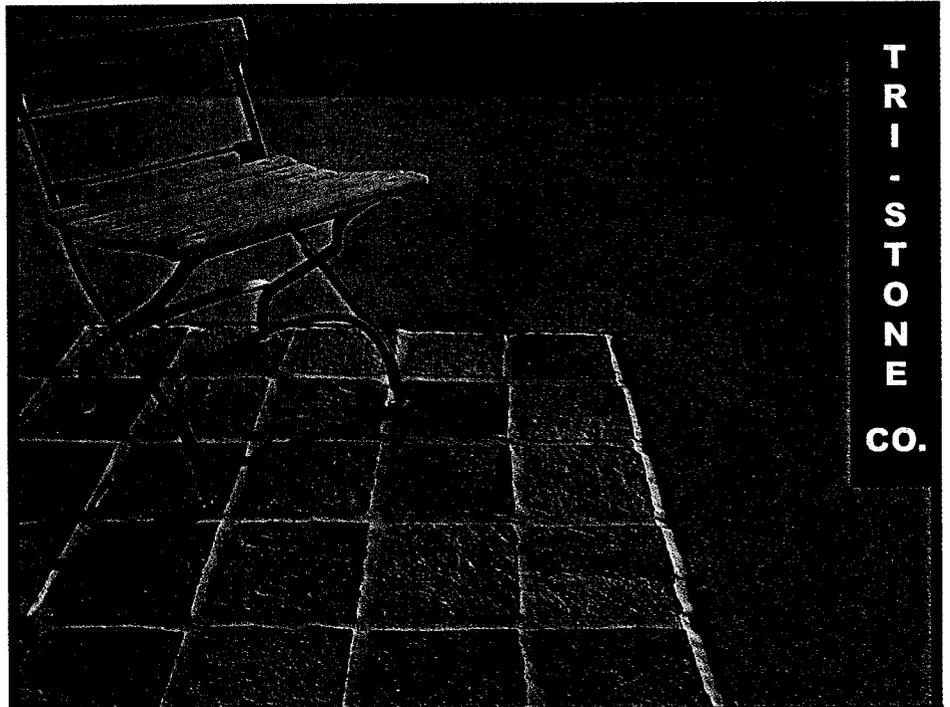
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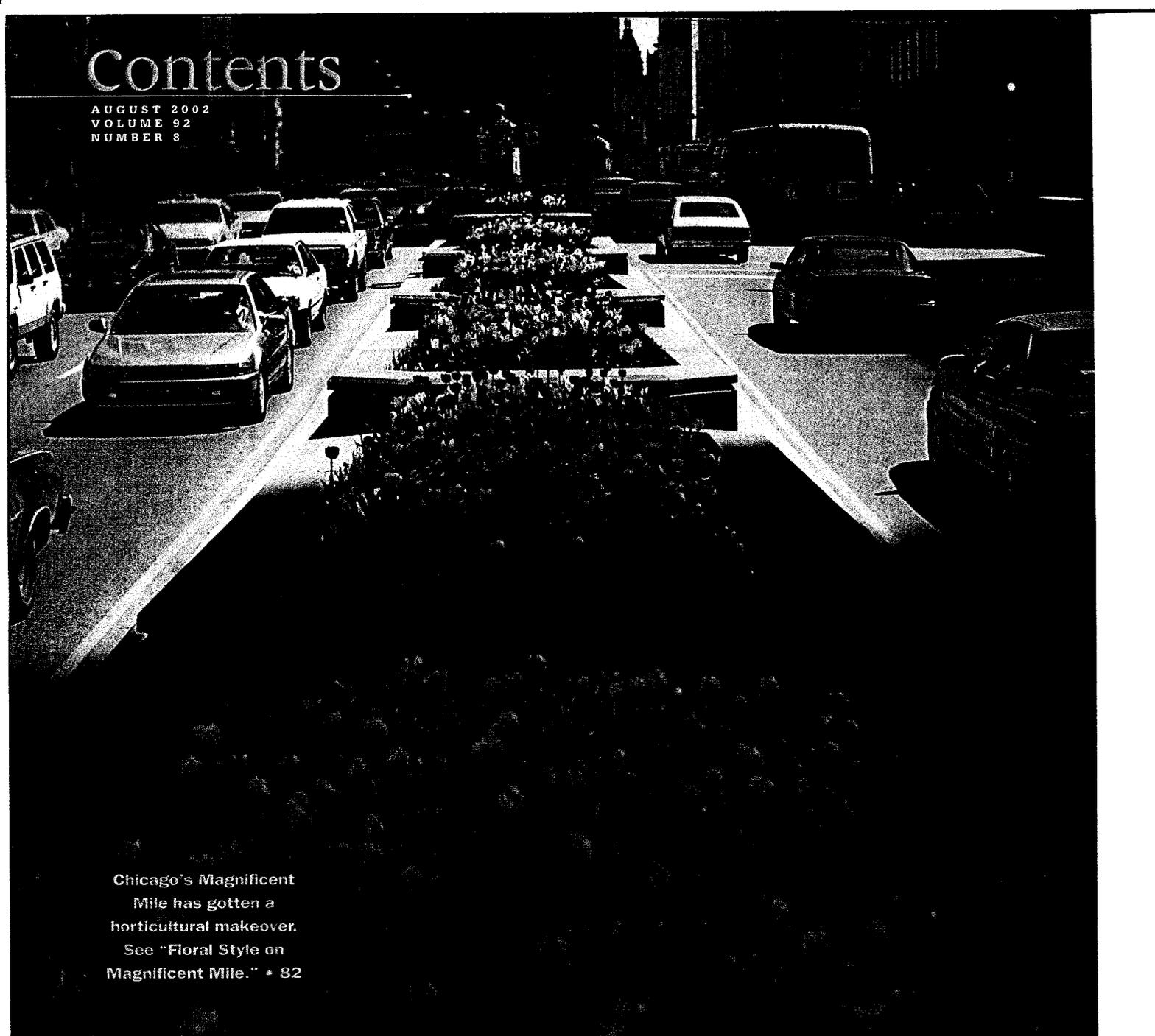
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A Depression-era farmstead of rural Georgia that played a role in the development of the 35th President of the United States is restored to acclaim. Photograph by Craig M. Tanner.