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Daniel Kiley and Landscape Architecture

To complete the project team, SOM contracted landscape architect Daniel Kiley in late 1955 after the completion of the general site plans. He came strongly recommended by Eero Saarinen, who worked with Kiley on the Jefferson National Expansion Monument [1947 (NHL, 1987)] and the J. Irwin Miller house in Columbus, Indiana [1954 (NHL, 2000)]. In addition, he collaborated with Pietro Belluschi on several projects in the mid-50s.

For over sixty years and in more than a thousand projects, Dan Kiley transformed the landscape of private houses, public institutions and vast urban spaces into magnificent places of natural beauty. In September 1997, Kiley was awarded the National Medal of Arts, the highest honor that can be bestowed upon an artist in the United States. Kiley's work includes the Lincoln Center, NYC, NY; The J. Irwin Miller Garden, Columbus, IN; Rockefeller University in New York City, the Oakland Museum in Oakland, CA and the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts.

Born in Boston in 1912, Kiley attended Harvard's Graduate School of Design in the mid-1930s. In 1939, with fellow landscape architects Garrett Eckbo and James Rose, he published a seminal manifesto on modern landscape architecture, declaring that,

A natural scene is the result of a very complicated and delicately balanced reaction of very numerous natural ecological forces. Man, himself a natural force, has power to control these environmental factors to a degree, and his reorganizations of them are directed by a conscious purpose toward a

⁶⁹ James S. Russell, "Learning from Industry: Architectural Technology at the U.S. Air Force Academy," in Bruegmann, *Modernism at Mid-Century*, 149-155; "Air Force Academy," in Reynolds Aluminum Company, *Aluminum in Modern Architecture 2* (1960): 47-51.

conscious objective. To endeavor to make the result of such a process 'unconscious' or 'natural' is to deny man's natural place in the biological scheme.⁷⁰

This view would find a sympathetic listener in Walter Netsch, Jr., who shared his view of “man as nature.” In turn, Kiley wrote, “The steel and architecture [at the USAFA] were so strong in relationship to the site. I could really build on it.”⁷¹

In 1956, Kiley developed plans for four major spaces within the Cadet Area. First, following SOM's general plan, he created a wooded slope from the Terrazzo down to Lehman Valley to the south. He described the transition, writing:

Fully cognizant of the power created by a harmonizing of built form and land form, the architects placed the classrooms, dining and administrative offices into an L-shaped configuration that opens up to the existing landscape, an aspect of the design that I found to be crucial. This move allowed a small hillock beside the terrace to play an integral role in the spatial definition of the complex. In this way, nature's erosive forces, slowly subtracting and transposing the earth's surface over millennia would intersect with a comparatively instantaneous human transformative act of construction.⁷²

The construction of Sijan Hall in the late 1960s greatly altered this landscape feature, with only the small hillock remaining on the Terrazzo.

Second, he developed designs for “Cadet Gardens” within the courtyard spaces of Vandenberg Hall. Kiley wrote:

Within this stringent order, I felt it was necessary—and only fair to the cadets—to inject lightness and room for maneuvering outside the bounds of military discipline. With this in mind, we designed the Cadet Gardens, housed within courtyards of the Cadet Quarters, as loose arrangements of plants and small pools. A variety of materials were used for lushness of foliage, bloom and texture, not only to contrast with the dry Eastern Slope ecosystem but also to be quite different from the unadorned clarity and eminent scale of the rest of the compound.⁷³

These designs remained unimplemented due to financial constraints. In a letter to Kiley date 21 March 1958, Walter Netsch Jr. wrote, “It will be impossible to win both quadrangle and the air gardens. In addition, Kiley

⁷⁰ Rose, James C., Daniel Kiley and Garrett Eckbo, “Landscape Design in the Primeval Environment.” *Architectural Record* (February 1940): 74-79. Reprinted in Treib, Marc, ed. *Modern Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); Rose, James C., Garrett Eckbo and Daniel Kiley, “Landscape Design in the Rural Environment,” *Architectural Record* (August 1939). Reprinted in Treib, Marc, ed. *Modern Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); Rose, James C., Daniel Kiley and Garrett Eckbo, “Landscape Design in the Urban Environment,” *Architectural Record* (May 1939): 70-76. Reprinted in Treib, Marc, ed., *Modern Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

⁷¹ Quoted in Jory Johnson, “Man as Nature,” in Robert Bruegmann, *Modernism at Mid-Century*, 110.

⁷² Kiley and Amidon, *Dan Kiley: The Complete Works*, 28-31.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

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developed plantings for the Court of Honor that used a gradual merging of the formal grid into the natural landscape. These fell by the wayside as well.⁷⁴

Finally, he drew plans for a seven hundred foot landscape, called the Air Garden, on the east quarter of the Terrazzo level. Kiley noted:

Plantings in the central Air Garden are highly structured, with overt geometric rhythms and modular proportions that represent intuitive links to nearby buildings. Yet the Air Gardens subvert the overarching uniformity and introduce intricacy and playfulness into the heart of the campus.

The central axis of the pools is raised out of two dimensions by hedge segments of clipped American holly. . . Behind the hedge, four parallel lines of honey-locusts, fourteen feet on center, further increase the volumetric dimensionality of the garden, yet they do so delicately as an overlay second in visual importance to the graphic field below. It is not clear if the pools are recessed or if the walkways that partition the water plane are extruded; somehow in this spot, one loses one's certain knowledge of where solid earth is.⁷⁵

These pools were buried in 1976 due to maintenance issues. The general configuration, however, remains intact, and in recent years, major sections have been restored.

Although much of Kiley's plan for the Cadet Area remained unfulfilled or altered, the Air Garden, even with sections currently buried, stands as an example of the work of "arguably the most important American landscape architect of the second half of the twentieth century."⁷⁶



⁷⁴ Jory Johnson, "Man as Nature," in Robert Brueggemann, *Modernism at Mid-Century*, 113; Netsch to Kiley letter quoted in Joseph Disponzio, "Introduction," in *Daniel Urban Kiley: The Early Gardens*, William S. Saunders, ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 15.

⁷⁵ Kiley and Amidon, *Dan Kiley*, 31.

⁷⁶ Disponzio, "Introduction," 8; Also see Elisabeth Kassler, *Modern Gardens and the Landscape* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964); Gordon Bleam, "Modern and Classical Themes in the Work of Dan Kiley," in *Modern Landscape Architecture, A Critical Review*, Marc Treib, ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); *The Work of Dan Kiley: A Dialogue on Design Theory*. [Proceedings of the First Annual Symposium on Landscape Architecture, the University of Virginia, School of Architecture, Division of Landscape Architecture, Campbell Hall, February 6, 1982], Warren T. Byrd and Reuben M. Rainey, eds. (Charlottesville: The Division of Landscape Architecture, 1983); and Melanie Simo, *Invisible Gardens: The Search for Modernism in the American Landscape* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994);

⁷⁷ Lois Craig, et al., *The Federal Presence*, 477.

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