

Lee, Chris

From: Bauman, Robert
Sent: Friday, April 05, 2019 10:10 AM
To: Lee, Chris
Subject: FW: Q & A about how the Marcus Center landscape was designed

PAC

From: Virginia Small [<mailto:virginiasmall7@gmail.com>]
Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2019 11:13 PM
To: Mayor Tom Barrett; Marcoux, Rocky; Bauman, Robert
Subject: Q & A about how the Marcus Center landscape was designed

Hello,

I thought you might be interested in this interview with an associate of Dan Kiley who was on the PAC design team.

<https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/thinking-behind-marcus-centers-famous-chestnut-grove/>

BTW, Joe Karr himself designed the atrium and courtyards of 411 East Wisconsin Center, another Harry Weese building...

Best regards,

Virginia

|
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Milwaukee MAGAZINE

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THE THINKING BEHIND THE MARCUS CENTER'S FAMOUS CHESTNUT GROVE

[VIRGINIA SMALL \(HTTPS://WWW.MILWAUKEEMAG.COM/AUTHOR/VIRGINIA-SMALL/\)](https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/author/virginia-small/) ✕ MARCH 26, 2019

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LAST UPDATED ON MARCH 29, 2019

In an interview, landscape architect Joe Karr recalls working on the design with Dan Kiley and Harry Weese 50 years ago.

Retired landscape architect Joe Karr, now in his 80s, vividly recalls working on the design team of the Milwaukee County War Memorial Performing Arts Center with legendary landscape architect Dan Kiley (<https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/landscape-architect-dan-kiley-enduring-milwaukee-legacies/>) and architect Harry Weese. In a recent phone interview from his Chicago home, Karr described it as a “completely collaborative project between two of the most creative individuals” he ever met.

Karr worked in Kiley's office in Charlotte, Vermont, after earning landscape architecture degrees from University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and University of Pennsylvania. In April 1969, Karr returned to his home state and opened Joe Karr and Associates as a division of Weese's firm.

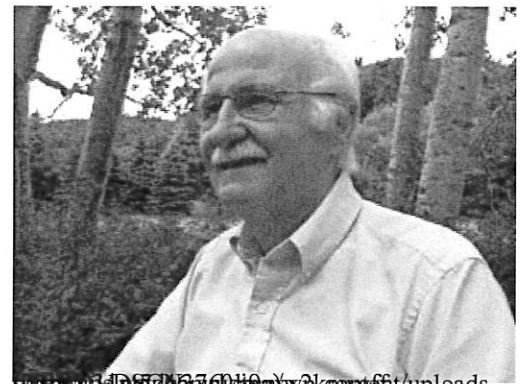
Now called the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, the riverfront Downtown civic center originally nicknamed the PAC is now the subject of [debate regarding its historic value \(https://www.jsonline.com/story/money/real-estate/commercial/2019/03/08/4-things-you-should-know-marcus-centers-tree-grove-removal-plan/3069603002/\)](https://www.jsonline.com/story/money/real-estate/commercial/2019/03/08/4-things-you-should-know-marcus-centers-tree-grove-removal-plan/3069603002/) and proposed renovations, including demolition of the plaza and grove. Milwaukee's Historic Preservation Commission will take up the issue Monday of whether the property should be given historic status, which would require that any proposed changes to the building's exterior and grounds be publicly reviewed for appropriateness.

How was the landscape for Milwaukee's Performing Arts Center conceived?

Joe Karr: Architect Harry Weese was designing the building and brought Dan Kiley into planning the landscape. Dan made the initial site visit. He had a strong connection with Weese, including several collaborations in Chicago.

The main idea was to keep the site mostly open, so you could view the river. It was important to not feel crowded against the building, and to let it be seen from afar. Since everything else is mostly built up around there, this was an opportunity to have an open space.

Also, both Dan and Harry often kept designing outside the borders of a project and sometimes considered several blocks beyond. In Milwaukee, they developed a plan encompassing land across the river from the PAC (which became Pere Marquette Park), across Water Street to the east (now Red Arrow Park), and south to the Pabst Theater. They helped envision that whole area surrounding the PAC.



<https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/uploads/2019/03/08/4-things-you-should-know-marcus-centers-tree-grove-removal-plan/3069603002/>
Joe Karr today. Photo courtesy of Joe Karr

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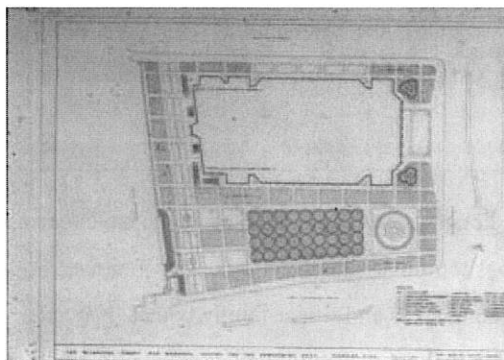
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What was your role?

I drew the landscape plan in 1966. I also selected and tagged the 36 horse-chestnut trees (at Princeton Nursery in New Jersey) in 1967 or 1968 to reserve them and ensure they were an appropriate size by planting time. I also helped supervise the installation.

How would you characterize the relationship between Dan Kiley and Harry Weese?

Dan and Harry were closely related in how they thought about design. They collaborated very harmoniously. There was a flow



<https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/thinking-behind-marcus-centers-...>
 The original 1967 planting plan for the PAC property by the office of Dan Kiley. Image courtesy of Joe Karr

between them, so you could never really be sure who suggested specific aspects of a design.

For his part, Dan somehow found the essence of every project early on, and wanted to do it simply and cleanly. This probably evolved from his being a big fan of Andre Le Notre in France. In fact, the Tuileries in Paris [designed by Le Notre] have many similarities with Milwaukee's PAC, more so than any other Kiley project. Those trees are about 20 feet apart—similar to the PAC grove. In both cases you can choose to be in the sun or to cool off in the shade on a hot day, because there is quite a difference in temperature.

Why was the grove designed as a sunken plaza?

The decision to make a subtle change in level definitely creates a different atmosphere; you are in a space within a space. The same is true with the South Garden of the Art Institute of Chicago, completed in 1967, which I also worked on with Dan. Both spaces drop down about 18 inches. That change gives them a feeling of being a special space. That's what we're doing as landscape architects or architects—forming space. Of course, landscape architects use trees and such, and architects use other materials.

Was there planning about how the grove would evolve?

Yes, we thought of how as the trees matured, the canopy would become a mass, like a roof. You have another feeling when you walk into that sub-space, with that canopy over your head. That was the idea. Also, providing shade from the hot summer sun was definitely important. Someone can have a very definite experience by walking around or sitting in that space. It's different even from one corner of the grove to another, and from being on the plaza outside the grove, or closer to the river.

Was there a plan for pruning the trees?

Yes, normal pruning would be expected, to remove branches not fitting the overall sense of space created. Otherwise they are meant to grow together, as they do in the Tuileries. When I visited the Tuileries, although some trees had a smaller trunk diameter the rhythm was still intact. All of those trees have been replaced several times over a couple hundred years, but they keep the same design.



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 The horse-chestnut grove in 1986. Photo by Joe Karr

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What about the challenges of preserving designed landscapes over time?

Things can be saved if people want to. There has to be some interest in preserving something that has value. If it got too difficult to replace four trees, the whole PAC grove could be replaced with trees that are the largest you could find, so that you could preserve this space and its design.

Joe Karr also worked with Dan Kiley on the Oakland Museum of Art and the Ford Foundation Atrium, both of which have recently been preserved and updated. Karr's firm went on to design more than 700 landscapes for universities, colleges, corporations, hospitals, senior living communities, parks, cemeteries, industrial sites, residential complexes and single-family homes. Named a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1992, he closed his office in 2004 and continued working as a landscape architectural consultant until 2012.

Virginia Small has interviewed many acclaimed landscape architects and garden designers, including Piet Oudulf, who designed the Lurie Garden at Chicago's Millennium Park and plantings for New York City's High Line. She will speak about interviewing Frank Cabot in his legendary garden in La Malbaie, Quebec, before the showing of a film about him called The Gardener, at [a program hosted by Friends of Villa Terrace \(https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4076004\)](https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4076004) on April 24.

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Darlene Wesenberg Rzezotarski

An enlightening interview with an unsung superstar. I am fascinated by the comment Mr. Karr made about maintaining the trees through the years. That all makes sense to me now, and they should receive careful tending. I think this grove will become a highlight for visitors to Milwaukee, more fully appreciated than ever.

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Mark Debrauske

Thank you for pointing out the value to our cultural amenities.

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Pat Jursik

Thanks Virginia Small for giving voice to preservation. Since the invasion of hedge fund managers from the East, who tore down the 1988 Bradley Center and closed 4th Street, Milwaukee needs to remind these newcomers that this city is not just some quaint little town ready for their profit center makeovers. This city has wonderful gems built over the years by the people, investing tax dollars to house our cultural talents and treasures. Dan Kiley also planned the formal garden around the Calatrava. One should never discard these gems.

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Walter Wilson

I am a proponent of preserving the PAC as an historic land mark, one of the important legacies that identify with Milwaukee and its legacy. In the 80's I participated in the outdoor art shows, which enlivened the downtown atmosphere. It was a great space to showcase the great artistic talent in Milwaukee and the surrounding area. In addition, the performance stage at the tip of the grove, in front of the river, has been a fantastic space for outdoor entertainment. I recall enjoying the band, Bela Fleck and the Flecktones. in that park. It was an absolutely incredible show. Milwaukee should keep the PAC and its attachment spaces intact so that everyone with or without money can enjoy this special place for years to come.

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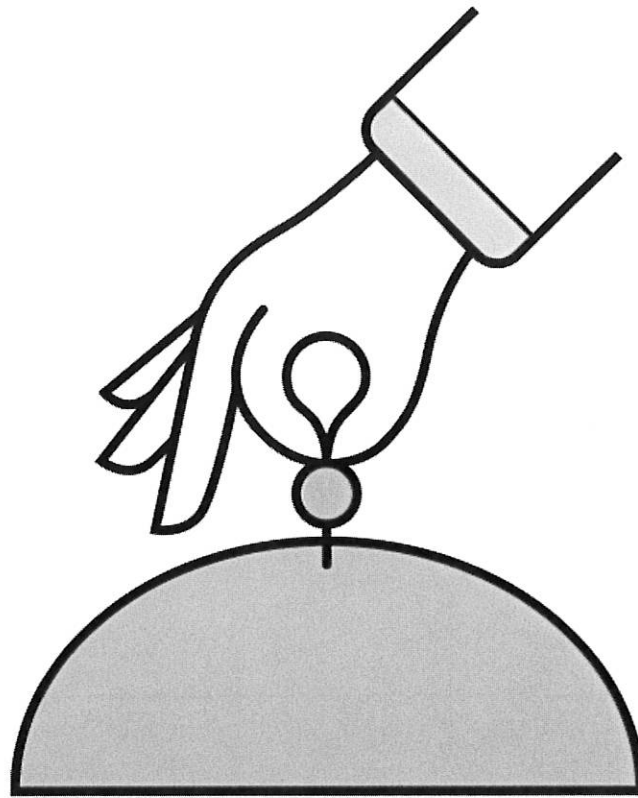
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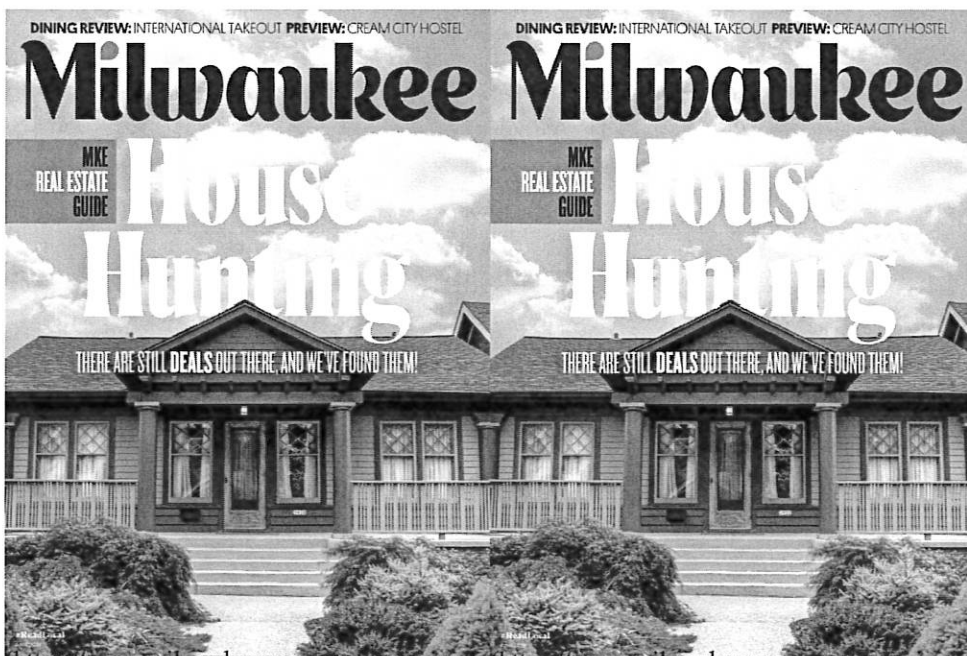


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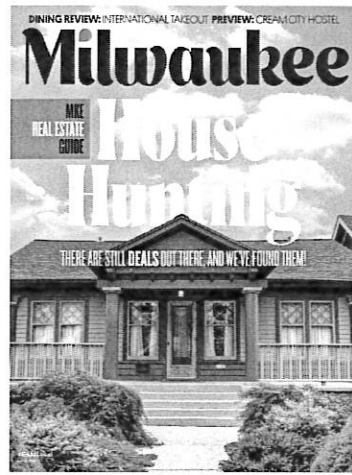
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