



Daniel Urban Kiley's "Water Curtain" Garden at the Milwaukee Art Museum's Quadracci Pavilion. Photo by Tom Stambor.

9 THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT DAN KILEY'S ENDURING MILWAUKEE LEGACIES

VIRGINIA SMALL NOVEMBER 8, 2017

LAST UPDATED ON MARCH 16, 2018

MILWAUKEE MAGAZINE

He's partly to thank for many familiar Milwaukee spaces

Daniel Urban Kiley (1912-2004) was one of the most prolific and influential landscape architects of the 20th century. Downtown Milwaukee boasts two Kiley-designed landscapes.

The Cudahy Gardens surround Milwaukee Art Museum's Santiago Calatrava-designed Quadracci Pavilion. They include a geometric-patterned "water-curtain" garden punctuated by plazas with monumental fountains; bosques of linden and Sargent crabapple trees; and a

lakefront promenade. The front garden was designed to complement the soaring architecture and also be enjoyed from the Reiman Bridge linking the museum to O'Donnell Park.

It's less known that Kiley also designed the grove of horse chestnut trees directly south of the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts. That understated and welcoming oasis was completed more than 30 years before the MAM project.



Robert Greenstreet, dean of the UW-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning (with microphone) and Peter Ker Walker, a landscape architect and former partner of Dan Kiley, address a symposium on Kiley's work Nov. 2, 2017 at UWM. Photo by Eli Nowlen Liebenow, courtesy of the School of Architecture & Urban Planning.

Kiley's public spaces continue to resonate, even as societal trends and the landscape architecture profession evolves. Here's why:

1) Kiley-designed spaces invite open-ended enjoyment. Samuel Dennis, Jr., who teaches in UW-Madison's Department of Landscape Architecture, said that people can use Kiley-designed public spaces in their own ways — to “pour their own meaning” into them. He contrasted that with a trend in some public spaces to “overwhelm them with narratives.”

Rennie Tang, assistant professor at California Polytech-Pomona, Department of Landscape Architecture, reiterated that public spaces can actually become limiting and exclusionary if they are “over-programmed for specific uses.” She said Kiley’s landscapes harken back to a time when “people strolled through parks just for the sake of strolling.”

2) Kiley merged formalism within Modernism. Walker, who worked with Kiley for 24 years, outlined key elements of their landscapes: classical proportions, grids and axial patterns, groves or bosques of trees, walkways and terraces, and water. Walker said they tried to create solutions “evoking simplicity and order.” He said, “Much of what Kiley contributed was a feeling of appropriateness.”

3) Classical forms and symmetry are timeless. Ernie Wong, a principal of the Chicago-based [*site design group, ltd.*](#), compared Kiley’s aesthetic to classical music. Kiley was “a highly disciplined formalist whose designs are publicly accessible.”

Jennifer Current, who teaches landscape architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology and practices locally, called Kiley the “lone classicist among the Modernist landscape architects.” Leading a tour of the Marcus Center grove, Current said it bears some resemblance to the Art Institute of Chicago’s much lauded South Garden.

4) Kiley collaborated well with architects. Henry Weese, the Marcus Center’s architect, brought Kiley to Milwaukee in the late 1960s after they teamed up on other projects. Santiago Calatrava collaborated closely with Kiley on the MAM site, where Kiley intentionally created subtle public spaces around the dramatic soaring pavilion. Pat Kressin, now a principal with Milwaukee-based GRAEF USA, was the local project coordinator for MAM’s landscapes. He said David Kahler, of Kahler Slater Architects, enlisted Kiley to compete for the commission. Kiley also worked on many projects with other prominent architects, including with Eero Saarinen on the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, and Dulles Airport, as well as Louis Kahn, Richard Meier, I.M. Pei, and Kevin Roche. Harry Wolf spoke of Kiley’s prodigious talent and the “presence of his spirit” as a “special elixir” in collaborations.

5) Kiley saved Milwaukee from having a parking lot in front of the Quadracci Pavilion. Kressin revealed on a tour that Calatrava had originally suggested having a black-topped parking lot as the pavilion’s foreground — a choice with previous white Calatrava buildings to achieve dramatic contrast. Kiley quickly nixed that concept. Rosheen Styczinski, principal of Milwaukee-based New Eden Landscape Architecture, noted that Kiley’s design for MAM “clearly serves the architecture.”

6) MAM’s landscape designs catalyzed greater connectivity along Milwaukee’s lakefront. Kressin noted that the Kiley-designed lakefront multi-use pathway, which links Veterans Park to Summerfest’s grounds and now Lakeshore State Park, ultimately inspired the development of Discovery World and even current efforts to more fully integrate all parts of this “cultural campus” with Downtown. MAM’s new east addition, which includes a café and seasonal outdoor seating, has also helped draw visitors to this part of the campus and further fulfill Kiley’s visions for the site.

7) Kiley eliminated visual distractions. Kressin explained how Kiley ensured that not a single utility box jarred views within MAM's gardens, a feat achieved through meticulous planning and ingenuity. Kiley also designed custom concrete benches with efficient hidden lighting.

8) Kiley remained open-minded and shunned formulas. His influences ranged from master landscape designers Andre Le Notre and Frederick Law Olmsted to Zen Buddhism, viewing art and "reading wonderful people." At a 1982 symposium, Kiley said, "You can't get enough of seeing what's been done in the past, looking at the present. Looking at good and bad all the time ... You're interested in how a thing works and how it would work better ... It's curiosity. Like Thomas Jefferson had."

9) Kiley worshiped nature. He observed natural phenomena daily where he lived and worked on a sprawling, mostly undeveloped site in Vermont. Kiley wrote in a book about his complete works: "The greatest contribution a designer can make is to link the human and the natural world in such a way as to recall our fundamental place in the scheme of things ... There is an evolving, ever-changing, many-faceted order that binds everything into harmonious parts of the greater whole." Kiley added that it "takes the form of sacred geometries and infinitesimal ecologies."