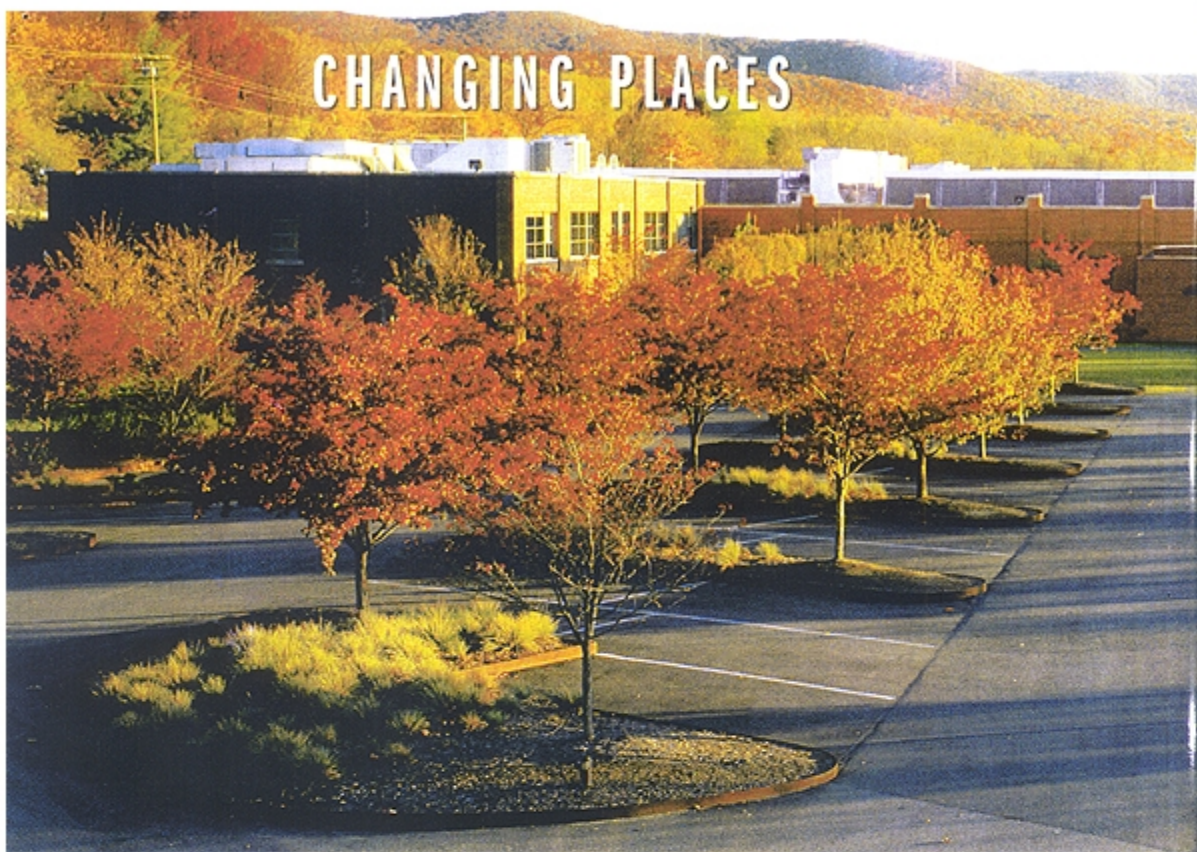


landscape architecture

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THROUGHOUT the profession's history, landscape architects have drawn inspiration from painters, sculptors, and writers. But what happens when artists take over the design of landscapes? Is this a threat to landscape architecture, or an opportunity for new partnerships and roles for the profession? Dia:Beacon, a new 300,000-square-foot museum in Beacon, New York, provides one answer to that question.

Dia:Beacon is one of the galleries owned by Dia Art Foundation, also known as Dia, a collaborative effort started in the 1970s to support artists who challenge boundaries. Headquartered in New York's Chelsea neighborhood, Dia helped artists such as Walter de Maria and Michael Heizer begin working at a much larger scale in the open landscape, often in places like Nevada, where Heizer continues to build his monumental *City* installation in the desert. Such artists "realized that they needed not only to

PARTNERS IN ART

Who helped avant-garde California artist Robert Irwin design a traditional landscape in the Hudson River Valley?

By Frank Edgerton Martin

control the work, but they also needed to control and channel the whole environment," according to Dia's director, Michael Govan. "Dia came along and provided the means for artists to think this way."

Housing artworks on the scale of Richard Serra's and Donald Judd's sculptures takes a great deal of space. In 1998, Dia's leaders were looking for new spaces to house pieces that could never be displayed in their Manhattan galleries. They found a building that

is worth a visit on its own. Almost 90 minutes north of Grand Central Station by train, Dia:Beacon is in a remarkable 1929 Nabisco printing plant that is almost fully daylight by sawtooth skylights, which were intended to show true color for press checks. Today, this huge space exhibits the work of 22 artists in roughly 260,000 square feet of galleries.

Dia commissioned avant-garde artist Robert Irwin as overall designer (Irwin is the designer of the garden at the Getty Center in Los Angeles). Irwin provided a schematic framework at all scales of the project, including the garden. Govan says, "[Irwin] helped Dia consider the design of the Beacon project in experiential and environmental terms as a totality—from the visitor's entrance . . . through an orchard that serves as a parking lot, into a plaza that signals one's arrival at the museum. Irwin is an artist who thinks in three dimensions, so we gave him leeway."

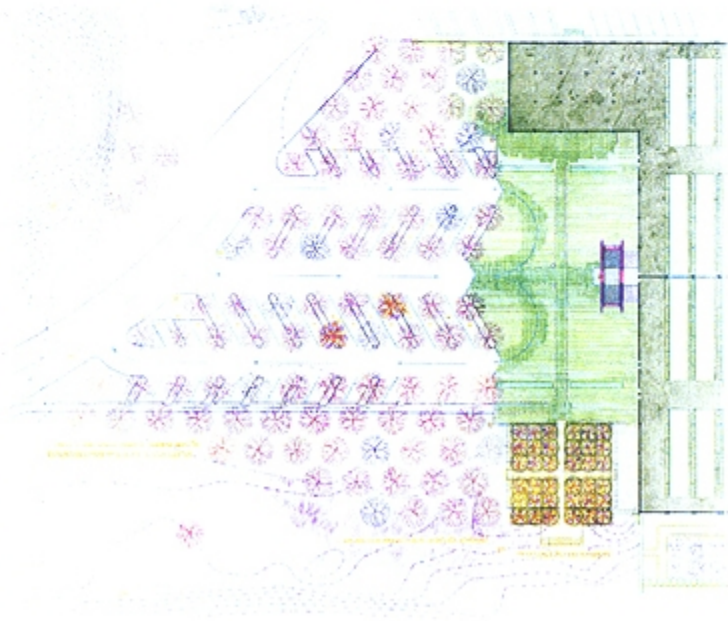
Landscape Architecture readers might



A view toward the south along the Hudson River's bluffs shows the angled islands of the parking area, focusing directly on Dia:Beacon's front door, above. Robert Irwin's plan sketch, right, for the parking lot and building entry conveys his concern for spatial transition and enclosure.

think that much of this scope should be entrusted to a landscape architect, and in a way it was. Irwin had help with his foray into Hudson River gardens from Ridge-wood, New Jersey, landscape architect Brian Tauscher, ASLA. (New York City-based OpenOffice architects helped him adapt the building for gallery use.) Tauscher and OpenOffice played the hidden but essential role that engineers often play: They offered the technical expertise to make the overall design work.

"Irwin doesn't consider himself a landscape architect," Govan says, "and he knows that every discipline has its language." He is a very hands-on artist and museum planner who is aware that multidisciplinary



RENDERING © ROBERT IRWIN, COURTESY DIA ART FOUNDATION



support is needed to create working buildings and landscapes. Irwin even said that he wouldn't take on the Dia:Beacon project unless he could move to Beacon, New York, which he did. He lived there for three years. He spent many hours sitting inside and outside the empty building, just watching the change of light. "One of Irwin's best qualities is response, a dialogue with an existing condition," Govan says.

How does a landscape architect make a California artist's schematic site designs into a Hudson Valley landscape? "You throw

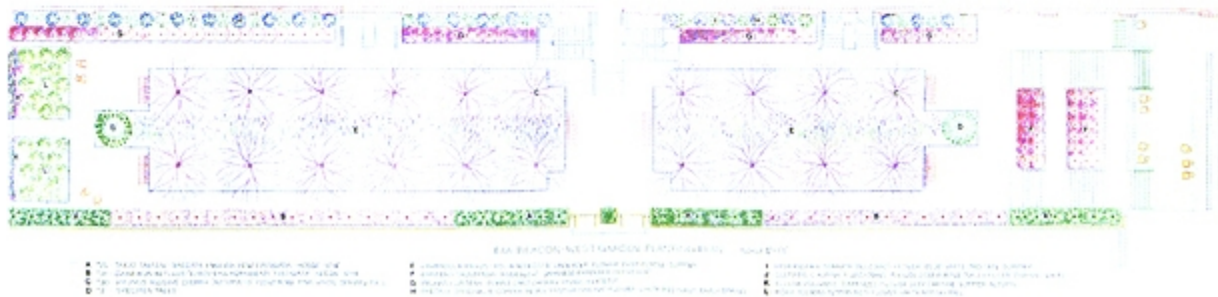
The site of the former rail spur and loading dock is now a walled garden with an allée of cherry trees, above. Lavender and weeping hemlock trees are at each end. Irwin's plan drawing, below, illustrates the train-car linearity of the garden and its tight passages. At the garden's center, benches invite quiet reflection.

out all of your formal training and just keep an open mind," Tauscher says. Owner of the design/build firm Artisan Gardens, Tauscher forged a working relationship with Irwin during the yearlong site design

and installation process that came near the end of building construction. Tauscher is not ashamed to describe himself as a "very nuts and bolts practitioner" who is far more familiar managing schedules and crews than the vagaries of art theory. Yet, this commission has been like no other for him, and he has become familiar with the curatorial culture of one of the most sophisticated modern art museums in the world.

"I wasn't here to install a landscape but to fabricate an exhibit," Tauscher says of the past three years. As an exhibit fabricator, he

© ROBERT IRWIN, BOTTOM: © RICHARD BARNES, TOP: BOTH COURTESY DIA ART FOUNDATION



LIST OF PLANTS

ENTRANCE DRIVE SPECIMEN TREE

COPPER BEECH
(*Fagus sylvatica* 'Atropunicea')

ENTRANCE AND PARKING LOT FLOWERING TREES

WINTER KING HAWTHORNE
(*Crataegus viridis* 'Winter King')

WINTER GOLD CRABAPPLE
(*Malus* 'Winter Gold')

HEDGEROWS AND GROVE OF TREES AT THE SCULPTURAL DECK

PYRAMIDAL EUROPEAN HORNBEAM
(*Carpinus betula* 'Fastigiata')

VERDANT AREAS BORDERING THE PARKING LOT

HIDCOTE LAVENDER
(*Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote')

ICEBERG ROSE
(*Rosa floribunda* 'Iceberg')

BLUE OAT GRASS
(*Festuca glauca*)

PLANTINGS IN THE WEST GARDEN HEDGEROW ALONG THE FENCE AT THE WESTERN EDGE OF THE GARDEN

ENGLISH YEWE
(*Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata')

PYRAMIDAL EUROPEAN HORNBEAM
(*Carpinus betula* 'Fastigiata')

PLANTING BEDS ALONG THE BUILDING AT THE EASTERN EDGE OF THE GARDEN

PURPLE SAND CHERRY
(*Prunus x cistena*)

WHITE PEONY
(*Paeonia* 'Festiva Maxima')

BLUE LACECAP HYDRANGEA
(*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Bluebird')

FLOWERING TREE BEDS IN THE CENTER

AUTUMNALIS CHERRY
(*Prunus subhirtella* 'Autumnalis')

HIDCOTE LAVENDER
(*Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote')

SPECIMEN TREES AT THE END OF THE CHERRY BEDS

SARGENT'S WEEPING HEMLOCK
(*Tsuga canadensis* 'Sargentii')

FLOWERING CLIMBING PLANT ALONG THE RETAINING WALL AT THE NORTH END

CLEMATIS
(*Clematis* 'Nelly Moser')

FLOWERING HEDGE IN FRONT OF THE CLIMBING PLANT

HEATHER
(*Calluna vulgaris* 'Darkness')

ICEBERG ROSE
(*Rosa floribunda* 'Iceberg')

STAIR PLANTERS

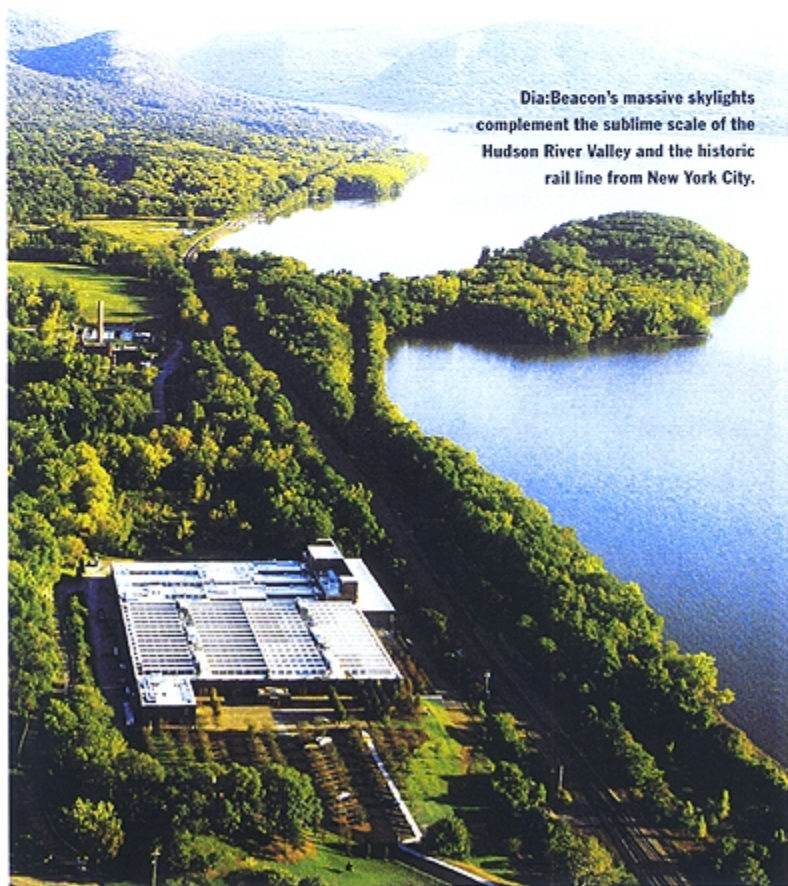
JAPANESE BARBERRY
(*Berberis thunbergii*)

sees himself in a new kind of role for a landscape architect, built on trust with the artist. Tauscher describes his role not as a designer or contractor, but rather as a technical-arts advisor who understands the systems (soils, plants, climate, and maintenance regimes) underlying Irwin's landscape palette. He continues to tell Irwin and Dia which ideas will work and which won't. One obvious example is plants. The palette that Irwin explored at the Getty Center in Los Angeles is far different from the trees, shrubs, ground covers, and flowers that will endure a mid-Hudson Valley winter. Tauscher continues to direct Irwin to local nurseries and sites that showcase local trees.

PART OF IRWIN'S ART, both at Dia and at the Getty Center, is to treat enclosed gardens as galleries. Perhaps because Irwin had input on the overall project, his gardens seem to make much more successful transitions into the architecture at Beacon than at the Get-

ty, where he had a stormy relationship with architect Richard Meier. Tauscher's horticultural knowledge supported the creation and ongoing maintenance of a 1,200-square-foot walled garden at the south edge of the old Nabisco plant. The garden's axial focus is an allée of cherry trees with lavender planted as undergrowth and weeping hemlock trees set at each end. The western edge of the garden is bounded by a hedgerow of yew and European hornbeam, while hydrangea bushes and other flowering plants climb the eastern wall.

Clematis vines add color to the northern retaining wall. Dramatic stair planters at the south end of the garden containing Japanese barberry culminate in a wonderful loading-dock kind of space where Dia operates a small outdoor coffee and hot dog stand. Just inside is sculptor Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses*, immense steel enclosures that draw visitors into their spiraling centers with a changing array of light and shadow.



Dia Beacon's massive skylights complement the sublime scale of the Hudson River Valley and the historic rail line from New York City.

CHANGING PLACES

FROM HIS EARLIEST abstract paintings of the 1950s through the nearly invisible fabric scrims for which he became widely known in recent decades, Irwin has created art about disappearance; he challenges our assumptions about reality by veiling one small piece of a room or wall to encourage us to consider the room as a whole. At Beacon, Irwin's influence is quiet yet effective because he pursued a strategy of deletion and revelation. For example, the visitor's first interior impression from the front door is a vista that races straight through the huge building. This effect is created by the light that floods through an opening that Irwin cut through the southernmost exterior wall.

Irwin brings the landscape of a nearby wooded bluff site inside through small but strategic frames—an important lesson for landscape design at any scale. Along the plant's perimeter walls, Irwin placed clear-



A bosque of lindens frames the south edge of the entry court and balances the cubic mass of the bookstore and café wing to the north. Wood-plank walks are edged with rusting steel.

glass panes at the center of the milk-glass industrial window grids to frame small bits of the outside. All of the outside walls are punctuated with these windows and left as exposed brick on the inside. By contrast, internal walls dividing galleries are

painted white so that the visitor has a clear sense, when looking down long vistas of galleries, of where the building ends.

It is possible to have two entirely different experiences of Dia:Beacon simply by walking a two-hour indoor and outdoor loop in the morning, having lunch, and then retracing the same route later in the afternoon. If the sky changes from sun to clouds, the visitor will experience a dramatic difference in color and hue intensity on artworks and

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plantings. On a sunny day, the angle and intensity of sunlight and shadows will shift with the hours revealing new insights about materials and form. "The primary medium of Irwin's art is neither steel nor glass, neither trees nor pavement, but our perception, our curiosity, and our desire to make sense of the world around us," Govan explains.

OF COURSE, not everything has gone as expected. For example, a distinctive parking lot designed by Irwin and implemented by Tauscher is punctuated with linear islands of winter king hawthorne interspersed with winter gold crabapples. But the hidcote lavender understory of the parking islands failed, most likely because of too much shade and asphalt heat. So Tauscher recently worked with Irwin to find a replacement. Because landscapes are living works of art, landscape architects like Tauscher have a unique role to play over time as conservators and adaptors of these creations. Changing outdoor exhibits, unpredicted wear and tear, and new plant availabilities all present ongoing op-

portunities for landscape architects to help artists improve upon the original.

Another role is conveying the artist's design intent. Not all of Irwin's ideas have been grasped by Dia's staff. For example, before Tauscher's involvement began, Irwin designed a central plaza framed by the bookstore/café to the north and a bosque of lindens to the south that brings visitors to the front doors. Intended to do double duty as a front lawn and as a permeable driving surface for entering vehicles to turn into other parking aisles, the central court grass is showing car ruts. If you look at Irwin's original sketches, the turn tracks are actually shown as part of the work. But Dia's staff, who often set up yellow cones to keep drivers off the turnarounds, don't seem to know this. They hope to divert the cars—an ad hoc solution that makes much of the parking lot hard to reach—so that the grass can regenerate, which it never really will. Dia should consider letting cars turn on the plaza even if they wear down turn paths. Landscape architects, as the ongoing curators of living art, can explain

how such disruptions are part of an artistic landscape vision.

LAM

Frank Edgerton Martin is a regular contributor to Landscape Architecture and holds a degree in philosophy from Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, a few train stops north of Beacon.

PROJECT CREDITS Master plan: Robert Irwin, artist; Dia's staff; OpenOffice architects, New York City; Brian Tauscher, ASLA, principal of Artisan Gardens, Ridgewood, New Jersey.

Resources

- Dia:Beacon, www.dia.beacon.org.
- *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin*, by Lawrence Weschler; University of California Press, 1991.


How to Get There

Dia Art Foundation's museum in Beacon, New York, can be reached by commuter train from Grand Central Station in New York City. The museum is within walking distance of the Beacon station.


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