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ELEMENTS
OF A
SUCCESSFUL
LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE
PORTFOLIO

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ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PORTFOLIO

A GUIDEBOOK

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ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PORTFOLIO

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ABSTRACT

Because there are virtually no books or written works dedicated to the creation of a landscape architecture career portfolio, I have taken it under my own discretion to create one for my fellow students and myself. The career portfolios I refer to in this project are those intended to either gain employment or an internship. I specifically focus on entry-level portfolios in my study, assuming the more experienced members of this field will most likely have developed their own set of procedures and techniques.

This project is twofold, consisting of a research portion and a guidelines portion. The first part of this project involves the analysis of literature and the use of interviews as tools for creating the final guide. My literary research looks toward work written for other professions since none exist specifically for landscape architecture. I look into fields such as: illustration, design, and architecture. The interviews I conduct are directed towards two main groups, those who have successfully submitted a portfolio and those who are involved with the hiring process. This research helps answer questions, gives examples, and supports various aspects throughout the guide.

The guidelines in this report serve as the final product, demonstrating how to put together a reputable entry-level portfolio from start-to-finish. It presents a collection of information gathered from interviews and related readings. I organize my findings into 6 categories: (1) preparing, (2) selecting, (3) editing, (4) formatting, (5) arranging, and (6) additional notes. The information that is provided has been agreed upon by those involved with my study. I attempt to cover all likely issues faced and address them in the order I believe they will appear.

There are some limitations to this guide, as different firms will likely have different needs. The overall purpose is to provide general information and attempt to satisfy universal needs within the industry. Readers are encouraged to make use of the information presented, but must ultimately let their own judgments dictate their decisions.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to **John Dao**, who has watched over me like a brother ever since we were young. Over the years we've climbed many obstacles together, and you always volunteered to go first so I would have help up. I just want to take this opportunity to say thank you for always leading the way, and hope you know that I will always be there right behind you, ready to catch you should you ever fall.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to all those who have contributed their time to this project and allowed me to take from them the knowledge and understand necessary to prepare for the real world. This book would not be possible without you.

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"Whichever purpose it needs to serve, your portfolio is your passport and your visiting card, through which you introduce yourself to the new worlds you wish to enter and by which your value is established and compared to others"

– Igor Marjanovic, *The Portfolio: An Architectural Student's Handbook*, 1.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Although understood to be important, many aspiring landscape architects see the career portfolio as an enigma. When confronting students with an academic portfolio, you'll notice almost immediately their ability to critique it; deeming it worthy of success or failure. But at that very same moment, ask them what a successful career portfolio consists of and how one should go about putting it together, and you will find the same puzzled look time and time again. This is an experience I too am familiar with, as I have often found myself at a loss while pondering the answer to these very same questions.

Why are these questions so difficult to answer, considering that when an academic portfolio is presented in front of us, we are able to identify with great ease why something works or doesn't? The struggle to identify the elements of a successful career portfolio can be traced to the fact that students lack the necessary foundation to make sound judgments. During our academic careers we developed criteria which we base all our work on. These standards stemmed from the critiques we received from our professors and peers. With career portfolios, on the other hand, we have yet to develop such standards. As a consequence, many of us are reduced to looking elsewhere to find answers.

Guides have been useful tools in helping those in other professions discover what is successful. Unfortunately, there are almost no guides online or in print for landscape architecture, forcing many to learn through trial-and-error like others before them. My intention for this book is to assist students in bypassing this flawed system. By conducting an in-depth study on career portfolios and creating a guide based off these findings, I hope to assist the aspiring landscape architect in establishing the foundation necessary to develop a successful portfolio. My main objective is to find the answer to this relatively simple yet perplexing question: How do you create a successful entry-level landscape architecture portfolio? To answer this, we first need to analyze what a portfolio is and why it is significant.

"A portfolio is your attempt to summarize the best about you"

– Supon Design Group, *The Right Portfolio for the Right Job,* **VI.**

THE PORTFOLIO

To be considered hirable by a firm in today's market, you first need to separate yourself from the rest of the crowd. Luckily, in the landscape architecture profession, you are given a wonderful opportunity to showcase your "uniqueness" through your portfolio; a collection of work which visually demonstrates your skills, experiences, and knowledge.

"The portfolio is often more important than an interview, which is an assessment of compatibility, and more descriptive than a resume"

– Supon Design Group, *The Right Portfolio for the Right Job,* X.

While a well-written resume is a necessary step to getting your foot in the door, a well-executed portfolio will be the key to getting your work noticed and helping you land that new job. A portfolio allows for creativity, individuality, and freedom of expression beyond that of a resume. It is reasons like these that it has become so crucial for us to understand how to create a successful career portfolio.

Many types of portfolios exist today, but we will examine two that address our intended purpose of getting a job. The first type of portfolio is the "teaser" portfolio. This is often introduced at the same time as the resume and cover letter and is intended to entice the employer into setting up an interview with you. Because this type of portfolio is sent out to dozens, if not hundreds of firms, it is typically very short; only covering a few pages of your very best work. Designers usually vary their projects in the teaser portfolio to demonstrate that they have a broad knowledge of different skills. The text is kept to a minimum. The key is to not reveal too much information, but instead elicit a strong interest in the employer. The finer details may be discussed during the interview.

The second notable portfolio type is the "interview" portfolio. This is your complete collection of finest works that you wish to share with the employer and is what you will want to bring with you to the interview. The main purpose of this portfolio is to show in detail your experiences, design skills, and thought processes to the firm in person. If you successfully demonstrate your graphic abilities in the teaser, the employer will be able to recall who you are once seeing your strongest pieces reappear in your interview portfolio. This portfolio will also allow you to support the claims you have made in your resume and demonstrate your ability to articulate in words your design philosophies.

The interview portfolio is the main topic of my study and is what the final guide will address. The information made available will also prove to be beneficial to the teaser portfolio as well, as this portfolio is simply a condensed version of the interview portfolio and abides by many of the same rules.

"Remember, an investment in your portfolio is an investment in your future"

— Ed Marquand, *How to Prepare Your Portfolio,* 8.

CHAPTER 2 – RESEARCH

Before I could successfully guide others on creating a reputable career portfolio, I first needed to have a solid understanding of the subject myself. This is where my research came in. Being a landscape architect student myself, I had a lot of questions about the career portfolio. I used my own curiosities as a basis for what others might be speculating about and, with that, decided which sources would most likely provide the best answers. I decided to conduct interviews with landscape architects to provide me with primary sources of information, while looking into written guides to offer me my secondary sources. Below, I describe how I engaged in each type of research. I explain how the data was collected and recorded, the limitations of the research, the conditions I overcame, and how my findings were analyzed and evaluated in the end.

LITERATURE

To better understanding how to conduct my interviews, I first looked towards literary work on portfolios. I decided early on to explore guides written for other professions to fulfill this purpose as I was well aware of the complete absence of landscape architecture in this particular study. I looked towards fields such as illustration, design, and architecture since their principles were similar to those of landscape architecture. The information found here served as the foundation for my research and gave me the background information necessary to compose my interview questions.

Because these guides were written for other professions, I placed my greatest attention on finding relevant information to maintain integrity in my study. I looked mainly for general advice that would universally satisfy the needs of all professions within the category of design. This ensured that my findings were applicable to both the intended field as well as landscape architecture.

During my inquisition I was able to find useful amounts of information but had encountered many obstacles along the way. The problem occurred when I discovered how few portfolio guidelines actually existed, and among those, how few were sufficient in guiding their readers towards success. Many guides I reviewed were not fully focused on the portfolio-making process despite the word "portfolio" appearing in the title. Instead, this topic took a backseat to other elements related to the hiring process, such as resumes, cover letters, thank you letters, and the like. Portfolios were often reserved to a single chapter or section within the entire book. Although these elements are notably important to a job hunter's future success, they are already well documented. Resources for these are abundantly available on the internet, in books, and in magazines.

Among those concentrated on portfolios, many presented out-of-date information. An example is the mentioning of video cassettes in the book, *Ultimate Portfolio*, written by Martha Metzdorf, as: "the leading edge form of portfolio [development].[1]" Several discuss the process of assembling a portfolio prior to the standardization of computers. These books provide tips for mounting, gluing, cutting, and laminating one's own work. While once useful, over the past few decades these techniques have steadily been replaced by computers with layout programs such as Adobe InDesign. For reasons like these, I have resisted in mentioning web-based and CD/DVD-based portfolios my final guide.

In addition, other guides were merely a showcase of professional work. They often gave very few explanations on their methodology and appeared more like advertisements than guidelines. Although enjoyable to look at, they failed to fulfill their purpose as a tool for educating others. The book, *The Right Portfolio for the Right Job,* by the Supon Design Group, for example, only gives a brief introduction on the process of creating a portfolio and focuses more on showing examples. The accompanying text in these examples briefly describes the company's history and provides quotes like, "we give prospective clients an understanding of the underlying strategies and appropriateness of our

solutions, and how our vision is directed to solving their individual needs.[2]" Statements like these only boast the company's abilities and offer no real advice.

But after much rummaging, I collected enough appropriate information to arrange a basic portfolio outline. I organized my findings into five main categories: (1) preparing, (2) selecting, (3) editing, (4) formatting, and (5) arranging. Although the actual categories varied from book to book, I established these five to universally classify all the elements discussed and emphasized in the readings based on their commonalities. This allowed me to clearly organize my data in preparation for the interview process.

INTERVIEWS

Since the advice from the readings was not specific written for my intended field, I felt it necessary to present my findings to landscape architects during the interview process to validate their significance. These interviews also gave me an opportunity to seek out requirements specifically for the field, as I was previously unable to do so in my readings on other professions. I interviewed both those involved with the hiring process and those who have successfully submitted their portfolios to a firm and were hired. I formed two sets of interview questions for each group and based these questions off the five categories I derived from my literary research.

The overall process was pretty casual and consisted of me asking a set of questions to the participant while quickly jotting down their responses. At times, some interviews appeared to be more like conversations than actual interviews. Each session was approximately 30-45 minutes long and composed of about 16 questions. This study was limited to participants in the Sacramento and Bay Area regions of California and to those who were able to donate their time to my study. Many were very cooperative and willing to help.

Below, are the questions I used to interview those involved with hiring. These questions are similar to the ones asked of my other group.

Content/Selection

1.)   What types of work do you expect to see in a portfolio? What NEEDS to be included?

2.)   Of those, which is the MOST important?

3.)   Should the portfolio show a broad spectrum of work or be more focused towards what the firm does?

4.)   Which is more important to you, work showing design skills or technical skills?

5.)   What kind of work would you NOT like to see?

Format/Arrangement

6.)   Preferably, how many pages should the portfolio consist of?

7.)   How much text should be included in the portfolio?

8.)   Do you read word-for-word what is written in the descriptions or do you simply glance over them?

9.)   What is an ideal size for the portfolio? 8½ X 11? Smaller? Larger?

10.) How important are the page layouts? How much time should be spent creating these?

11.) Should one show their best items first, last, or spread them throughout the portfolio?

Preparation/Miscellaneous

12.) Describe the best portfolio you've seen and explain some of the elements which make it successful.

13.) What is the most common mistake recent graduates make in their portfolios?

14.) What are some major dos and don'ts?

15.) How much time do you spend looking at each page of the portfolio? At the portfolio as a whole?

16.) How did you go about creating your first portfolio?   What went through your mind? What were the issues you addressed?

I was also able to gather some valuable information during my attendance of the "LDA Professional Portfolio Night," an event held by the UC Davis Landscape Architecture Department and the American Society of Landscape Architects, Sierra Chapter. The professionals involved gave a brief talk on what they looked for, what they required, and some helpful tips and techniques to be successful. Afterwards, they made themselves available to answer any questions we may have had and to critique our working portfolios. I used this time to interview Principle Landscape Architects and look at examples of their work.

The information I collected at the end of this study reinforced those topics I derived from my research on other guides; preparing, selecting, editing, formatting, and arranging. I will present my findings through the guidelines portion of the project to support my claims and to help me clarify different points I make.

ANALYZING AND VERIFYING THE RESULTS

When I felt I had sufficiently gathered enough information from both my interviews and my research on other guides, I determined the importance of the data by analyzing its ability to answer certain questions. Literature was examined for its ability to answer questions such as what should a career portfolio include, emphasize, and omit. Interviews were evaluated on their ability to explain clearly what firms look for in a professional portfolio and what is commonly being done today by other professionals. I verified these results afterwards by cross-referencing the two for consistencies. Any data that was conflicting or ambiguous was omitted from my final design guideline.

"You want the viewer to be swept away. You want whoever reviewed

your portfolio to think about your images on the way home in the

evening and again when they wake up in the morning. In short, you

want them to be motivated to call and give you a job"

– Martha Metzdorf, *Ultimate Portfolio, 2*8.

CHAPTER 3 – GUIDELINES

Before I begin, I would first like to describe what this guide is and isn't. This guide is not a systematic method on how to create a specific portfolio style. I believe that it is much more beneficial to you, the readers, if I allow you to explore your own design solutions based off the knowledge I present. This guide, then, is a collection of information gathered from interviews and related readings. The information I provide will help you understand how to approach certain questions you may have and offer suggestions on how to satisfy them. These suggestions are those that have been generally agreed upon in my study and are supported by quotes and examples. I attempt to cover all the issues I feel you will face during the creation process and have broken them down into a format which addresses each in the order they will most likely appear. The order of the guide is as follows: (1) preparing, (2) selecting, (3) editing, (4) formatting, (5) arranging, and (6) additional notes.

Please note that there will be limitations to these guidelines. Different firms will most likely have different needs. The overall purpose is to give general information, attempting to satisfy universal needs within the industry. Use discretion and let your own judgments dictate your final decisions. Ultimately, my aim is to help students understand how to find their own solutions to the problem: How do you create a successful entry-level landscape architecture portfolio?

PREPARING

1.)   Decide on the field of work you're interested in pursuing within landscape architecture.

There is one crucial thing to establish before you should begin creating your career portfolio and that is to decide what type of work you're interested in pursuing. Whether it's commercial, residential, historic, or public, by taking this step you will have a better understanding of who you're selling your work to and what they're interested in seeing. This information will allow you to tailor your portfolio

specifically to the area of interest; addressing the needs of these types of firms and increasing the chances of showing them work they're interested in seeing. In addition, you will also enhance the likelihood of you finding work in the field you truly enjoy.

By taking this extra step, the work you show in your portfolio will likely be higher in quality and will have more attention to detail because these are the ones you were most interested in doing. This can benefit you greatly during your interviews. If you enjoyed working on the projects you show, you will be better able to express your enthusiasm for them. After all, no matter how good your work is, it is all about how you sell it in the end. In short, "your goal is to look at your existing work, decide exactly what markets you want to appeal to, and build the best portfolio possible to get yourself work in those markets.[3]"

2.) Once your intended field is established, find firms which operate under this category and research what they look for in a candidate.

You can broaden your understanding of what firms look for in your chosen study by spending some time researching your career opportunities. Look at websites, advertisements, and/or brochures of the tops firms you're interested in, and take note of the work they do and how they do it.[4] If you have yet to establish a list of top firms, look around and see which ones catch your attention. I suggest looking into only a few firms because attempting to look at them all can be extremely time consuming and needlessly unnecessary.

Conducting research will give you more confidence when you begin selecting materials to include in your portfolio as it will give you an idea of what their expectations are. The added benefit to researching a firm is that they often list a contact person whom you may call and ask questions to. So, if you still don't quite know what to include in your portfolio, call them and find out for yourself.[5]

Perhaps the most effective research method is the informational interview, a meeting that you schedule with practicing professionals, without the intention of seeking employment, for the purpose of learning more about their jobs. Although you must maintain a certain degree of professionalism, this type of interview is typically less formal than a job interview. You are put in control of the meeting and you are the one asking the questions. Many firms are more than happy to accommodate you in this type of meeting, so do not hesitate to ask. As Erik Smith of Callander Associates puts it, "you wouldn't want to work for a firm that doesn't do this.[6]" The informational interview is beneficial because it allows you to collect information not found elsewhere firsthand. It can be a vital tool when companies are not hiring to help you network, get feedback on your portfolio, gain valuable interview experience, and learn how the business operates. You are also able to make an impression on the company, just in case they find themselves hiring later on.

3.)   Be prepared to make more than one portfolio.

In an ideal world, you'd be able to make a personalized portfolio exclusively for each firm that you apply to, but this is nonsensical in the real world. To do such a thing would be extremely costly and a great waste of time, as some of the people I have interviewed admitted to applying to between 50 and 100 different firms. These are the reasons why many have suggested on creating a few specialized portfolios and one general portfolio.

"Even if it were once possible, there is no longer a single type or format of portfolio that will fit all contexts"

– Igor Marjanovic, *The Portfolio: An Architectural Student's Handbook*, 2.

The specialized portfolios are the ones mentioned earlier, those which show works that are compatible with a specific firm or field, demonstrating that you can do tasks the employer will want you to do. But it is also important to address those other firms outside your intended field as well. It can be difficult to land a job straight out of college, especially one in the area of your choice. The specialized portfolio will not be suitable in addresses these other career opportunities. Therefore, you are going to need to create a general portfolio in addition. Researching a firm, according to Victoria Ngo of Tanaka Design Group, can help you determine which type of portfolio you should send out:

> "Look on the firm's website to determine the graphic level you need to compete with…you can…tell the kind of standards required by each firm. If you're applying to a big name [firm]…a fancy [portfolio] would matter most. If you're applying to a small 3-person firm that works on small projects, send them a general one."[7]

In the section to come, I will explain in greater detail the aspects of a specialized portfolio and a general one, as well as how to select work for each type.

SELECTING

4.)   Create a checklist. Test each piece you are considering to this list.

Your main objective during the selection phase is to make sure your portfolio is saying everything you want it to. This is why it is so crucial to establish a checklist for your work early on. You want to make sure each piece you include has a reason and a purpose.[8] Refer back to the information you found during the preparation phase to help you establish your list, and continue updating it as you progress through this guide.

By taking this step you will have the benefit of visually seeing and accurately recalling the message you are trying to get across to your employer. It will also allow you to discover the projects which are best suited in marketing your skills. Test each piece you are considering against your checklist; if they fail to meet your expectations then they should be excluded from your final portfolio. Here are a few sample questions that may appear in your checklist:

- Does this piece reinforce the point I'm trying to make?

- Does it reproduce well in black and white?

- Does it resize well?

- Does it show a certain skills or talent I'm trying to get across? Is it the best piece to exhibit this skill or talent?

- Does it show my knowledge and thought process?

- Is it visually pleasing?

- Is it easy to read and understand?

- In the end, did I show all the skills I possess and portray them in a positive light?

There is always the difficulty of overcoming sentimental attachments to some of your favorite works and trying to honestly determine its worth as a component to your portfolio. An objective eye is a good start, and a little help others can be extremely valuable.[9] If you've received bad comments on one of your favorite pieces, chances are you shouldn't include it.[10] If you feel a certain piece exemplifies something favorable to your audience but believe it fails to meet certain standards, you can rework the piece until you are satisfied with it. I will talk more about this in the next section on editing and revising.

It is perfectly acceptable to have a large collection of work as long as they pass your examination. This will allow you to pick and choose which pieces to include depending on the situation, giving you greater flexibility in addressing the different needs of different firms. Ultimately, your

portfolio should identify your skills, play them up, and show them off.[11] Your portfolio should

communicate your interests and way of thinking. Does the piece show any of these features? Does it

help you show a broad understanding of different skills? If yes, then you may want to include it in your

career portfolio.

Figure 1: Portfolio of Cecilia Tse: This project shows an understanding of programs such as AutoCAD, Photoshop, and SketchUp.

It is clear, easy to read, and visually pleasing.

5.)   Show a broad range of work.

You need to show an understanding of various skills and projects in your portfolio. Even a specialized portfolio, one which is intended to show work similar to those done by a specific firm or field, needs to show a broad range of skills outside the intended focus. The key is to emphasize what the firm does but not overdo it. Firms want to see that you have potential to expand into other areas, sometimes areas where the firm is weak in.[12]

It is good to present a variety of different skills and projects because you never know what will catch an employer's attention. Works addressing different ideas, audiences, styles, and approaches to a certain problem are always welcome; they add to your versatility. If you focus too much in one area, especially in your specialized portfolio, this can draw the employer away. You may give the impression that you are limited in your skills and incapable of handling other jobs and tasks.

The following is a list of important things you should show in your portfolio. Add them to your checklist to ensure you properly address each when you begin creating your portfolio.
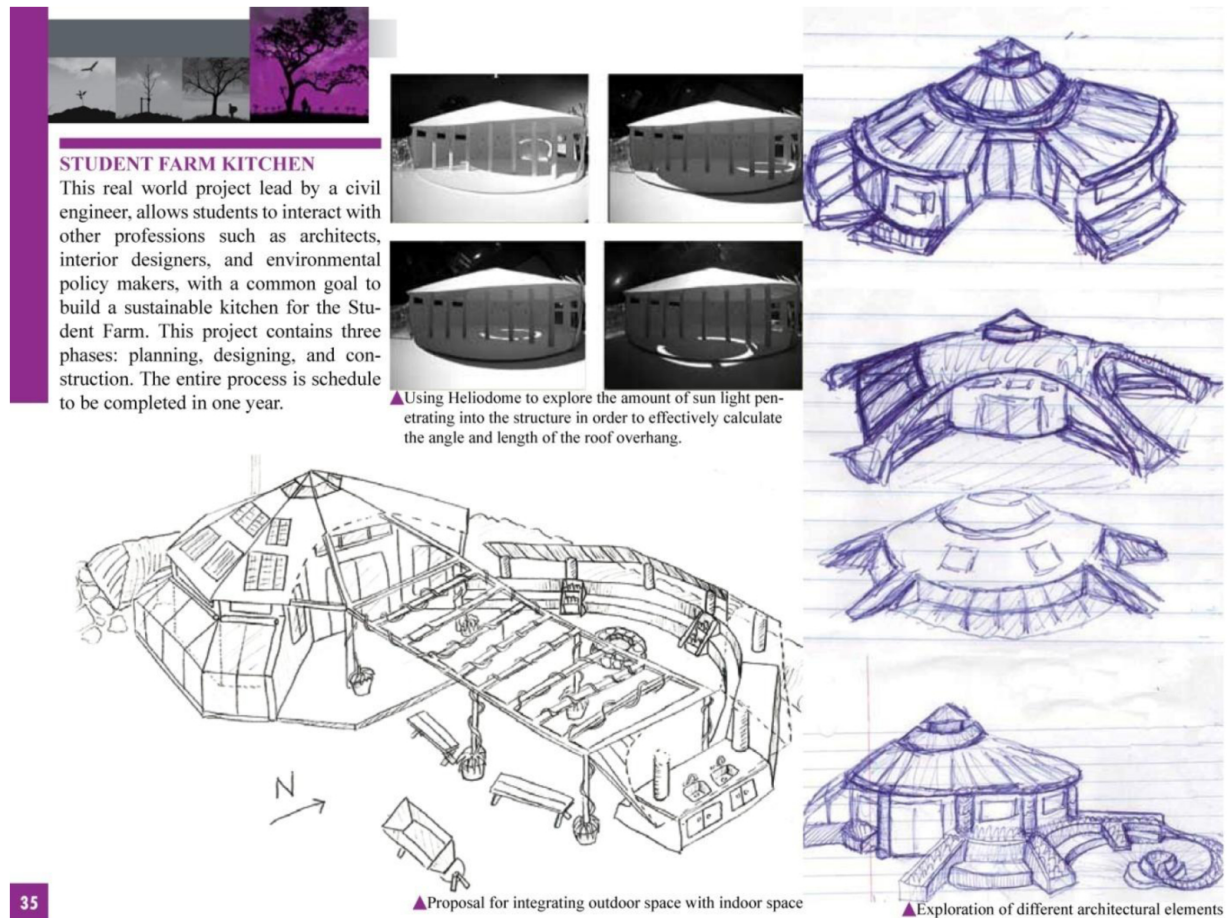
Hand-Rendering Skills

- "A frequent comment…is that recent…graduates do so much work on computers that they no longer have the traditional hand skills, so this might be one way to distinguish your work.[13]"

- Hand-rendering demonstrates a key skill that can be used in the absence of a computer.[14]

Figure 2: Portfolio of Gwen Xu: These pages highlight her broad knowledge of hand-rendering skills; inking, coloring, architectural structure, and perspective.

Works Showing Process (i.e. before-and-after, problem-and-solution)

- "Progressive stages can show…how you work and your ability to adjust or modify [a project].[15]"

- Many employers admitted that these types of work are essential in showing how you think and problem-solve and is what they look for the most.

- These types of work help paint a clearer picture of the project. By showing process, one can see the obstacles you faced, the attempts you've made to overcome them, and ultimately, the solution you found in the end. This tells the reader the whole story.[16]

STUDENT FARM KITCHEN

This real world project lead by a civil engineer, allows students to interact with other professions such as architects, interior designers, and environmental policy makers, with a common goal to build a sustainable kitchen for the Student Farm. This project contains three phases: planning, designing, and construction. The entire process is schedule to be completed in one year.

▲Using Heliodome to explore the amount of sun light penetrating into the structure in order to effectively calculate the angle and length of the roof overhang.

▲Proposal for integrating outdoor space with indoor space

▲Exploration of different architectural elements

Figure 3: Portfolio of Steven Le Zhang: This page gives the audience more information about the thought process and final solution than multiple pages could if they only showed the final product. We can see here how Steven analyzed lighting and architectural structures to find the best solution.

Technical Skills

- AutoCAD is a standard tool that ever landscape architect should know how to use. This was agreed upon by all 5 speakers present at the "Professional Portfolio Night."

- Adobe software such as Photoshop and Illustrator are other notable programs mentioned frequently by landscape architects.

- Construction documents are favorable as well, especially those showing irrigation, grading, drainage, and detailing skills.

Design Abilities

- "Technical work is favorable but it is absolutely necessary to be design oriented.[17]"

- You have to give evidence of your creativity and show that you understand design concepts and principles. After all, landscape architecture is a design field.

6.) Avoid including everything.

The most common mistake that many aspiring landscape architects make, according to Byron McCulley, Principle of Amphion Environmental Inc., is attempting to show everything as opposed to only their best work.[18] Keep in mind that an employer will inevitably remember the weakest pieces in your portfolio, not the strongest.[19] Therefore, you should never include inferior work in your portfolio just to have something to show. It is always better to present fewer pieces that are high in quality than many low quality pieces that you'll have to apologize for later on: "You should give the impression that you can solve any problem your employer hands you, that you are talented, resourceful, and professional."[20] If your portfolio makes such an impression, then there is no need to include anything else. Remember, when in doubt, leave it out.[21]

EDITING

7.) Create new work and redo old ones.

Many recent graduates find themselves stuck in a classic vicious cycle: they don't have many pieces to show in their portfolio because they've never had a job, and they can't get a job without having impressive pieces to show.[22] You may have noticed while going through the selection process yourself that you either were unable to illustrate certain skills, or illustrated skills with work which appeared weak visually or conceptually. If this was the case, now is the best time to improve your skills

and your work. "You'll never have more time than now to do this," Scott Robertson of Omni Means

explained during the Professional Portfolio Night.

Create new projects to demonstrate the talents you have yet to demonstrate in your work so

far. Choose a site, give yourself a mock program, and create a working design within those parameters.

You could also do design-build work if you know someone interested in renovating their front or

backyard. By doing these new projects, you will not only be able to represent your graphic and verbal

skills, but you can also demonstrate your ability to address new site constraints, budgeting, design

styles, and project types not yet attempted in your other work. An effective method is to base your work

off the criteria you collected during your preparation phase. Ask yourself, "Do I have work that exhibits

all the skills these companies look for in an applicant?" If not, then you must give yourself the necessary

assignments to fill in these gaps.[23]

Redo several of your old course work, outside projects, and assignments, to take advantage of

the lessons you've learned the first time around.[24] When redoing weaker projects, you can strengthen

the skills you hoped to showcase initially. Stronger project pieces can also benefit from a revision.

Implement new skills and techniques to create a stronger, more memorable impression.

8.)   Make sure everything is high in quality.

To uphold professionalism in your work, you must have high quality or 'photo quality' images.

To get this from work done on the computer, you need to save your projects with a resolution of 250dpi

(dots per inch) or greater. This is the optimal setting most professionals use to balance image quality

with file size (as the dpi increases, so does the image quality and the file size). The bare minimum is

150dpi; you shouldn't include anything lower than this as it will appear pixilated or low in quality. All

work done outside the computer should be scanned rather than photographed whenever possible.

Scans are typically better in terms of quality as they do not have issues with lighting, angles, and legibility that cameras typically do when photographing work. If your work is three-dimensional or too large to scan, then a photograph might be necessary. These images should be taken to a photo-editing program such as Photoshop to correct some of the issues mentioned above. Play around with levels (brightness, contrast, hues, saturations, and so on) until you get your ideal image. It is recommended that you use JPEGs as the format for your images as these are small in size, easy to save, and retain a good amount of information for printing. The portfolio itself should be a PDF file, which retains raster and vector data, meaning your images and your text will remain clear.

All written work should be proof-read for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Many professional landscape architects confess that written proficiency is the most important thing.[25] Some have been so bold as to say they would immediately throw away resumes and teaser portfolios if they contained any typos. Remember that companies are taking the time to look over your work, so it is critical that you show the same level of commitment by reviewing your work carefully.

FORMATTING

9.) Create a simple yet powerful page layout.

The page layout itself is a design project which can say a lot about your abilities as a landscape architect. It can tell an employer how efficient your organization skills are, how you address small spaces, and how you create movement in your work. You can control exactly where the view looks and how they will progress through each element on the page. You want to create interest with your layout but avoid being too distracting or overwhelming; simplicity is key here. You don't want to take attention away from your project. Focus on the negative space, as complexity can cause you to lose class.

Keep in mind that some firms may choose to photocopy your work, so consider choices which are both convenient and effective. Avoid using light colored texts and dark colored backgrounds as these can reproduce poorly. Dark backgrounds, in addition, can frustrate employers when they need to print your work. It can be very expensive and wastes a lot of ink to print page after page of work with dark backgrounds.

Your pages should, in the end, bring together your texts and images, using visual elements that are consistent between the two to tie them together such as their appearance or content (Figure 4). According to Igor Marjanovic, author of *Portfolio: An Architecture Student's Handbook*:

> "When you make the first mock-up version of your portfolio, there is a high possibility that you will end up with isolated rectangles of images and text. The first rule is to break the traditional separation of image and text and to blur the boundaries between the two, so that you can use words to highlight visual ideas, and use visual ideas in the most effective sequence to construct a narrative in its own right.[26]"
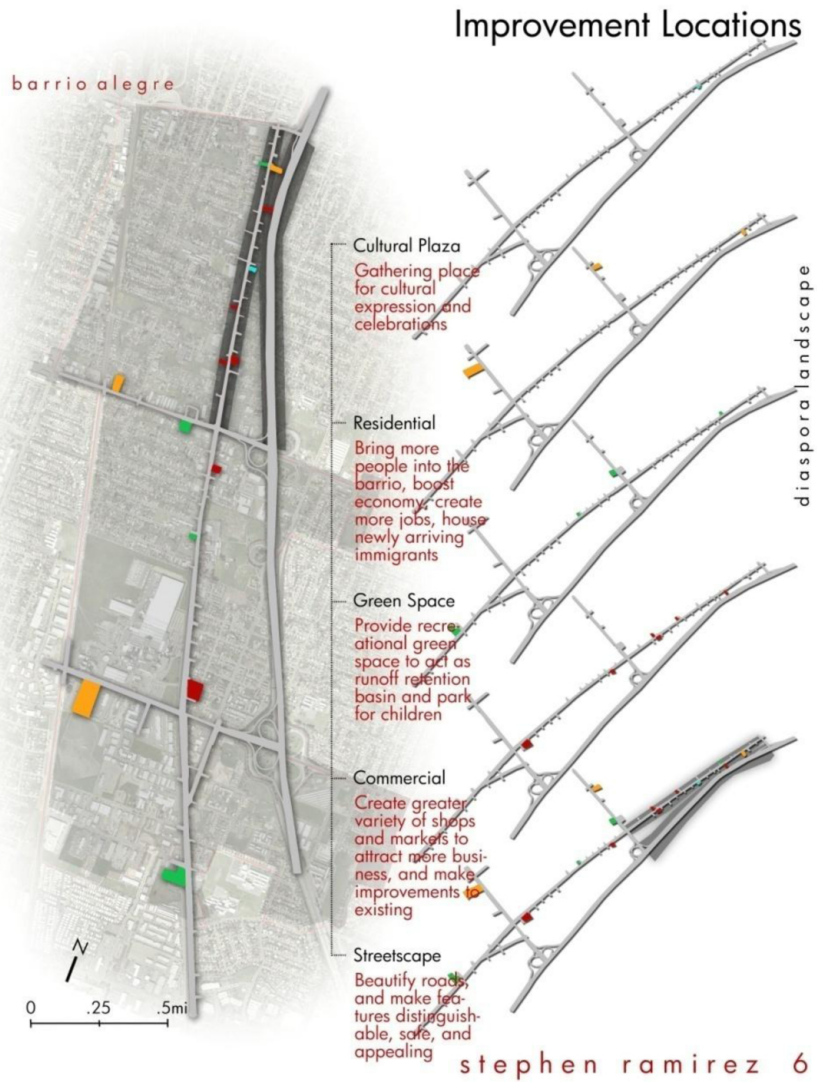
Figure 4: Portfolio of Stephen Ramirez: This page brings together text and images successfully by structuring each horizontally to create a consistent harmonious image.

Your pages should be consistent throughout, using certain elements repetitiously, even if with some variation, to create a theme (Figure 5). Lastly, pay attention to the type of work you're presenting. If most are horizontally oriented, design your layout to fit accordingly.

Figure 5: Portfolio of Steven Le Zhang: Steven created a theme in his portfolio by reusing trees to help organize his work into different sections. Above are (front top left, clockwise): a title page, a section page, a project page, and table of contents.

10.) Add appropriate text.

Text is a necessary component which helps clarify your design intentions and elements that might not be obvious to the reader visually. The few things landscape architects look for in your text are answers to these questions: What is this project? Where is it? What did you do? What obstacles did you face and how did you overcome them? How did you get to your finished product? There are a lot of things that can be said in the text, which makes things very tricky because these landscape architects also suggest keeping the text to a minimum.

The text you include is almost always glanced over, instead of actually being read through word for word. Interviewers look for key words that stand out. To properly balance both what firms look for and what they prefer, you should create an information section which states the title, the site, the program, and other key pieces of information (figure 6). The body of text, then, should only include the most crucial explanations such as pointing out unique circumstances. Three sentence paragraphs are plenty to explain the essence of a project. Firms will ask for more information during the interview if they are curious.

E STREET PLAZA

DAVIS, CA
WINTER 2008

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:
    REDESIGNING A BLOCK OF DOWNTOWN DAVIS
BETWEEN E STREET AND F STREET TO CREATE A
PUBLIC OPEN SPACE ENVIRONMENT TO HELP REVIVE
DOWNTOWN DAVIS
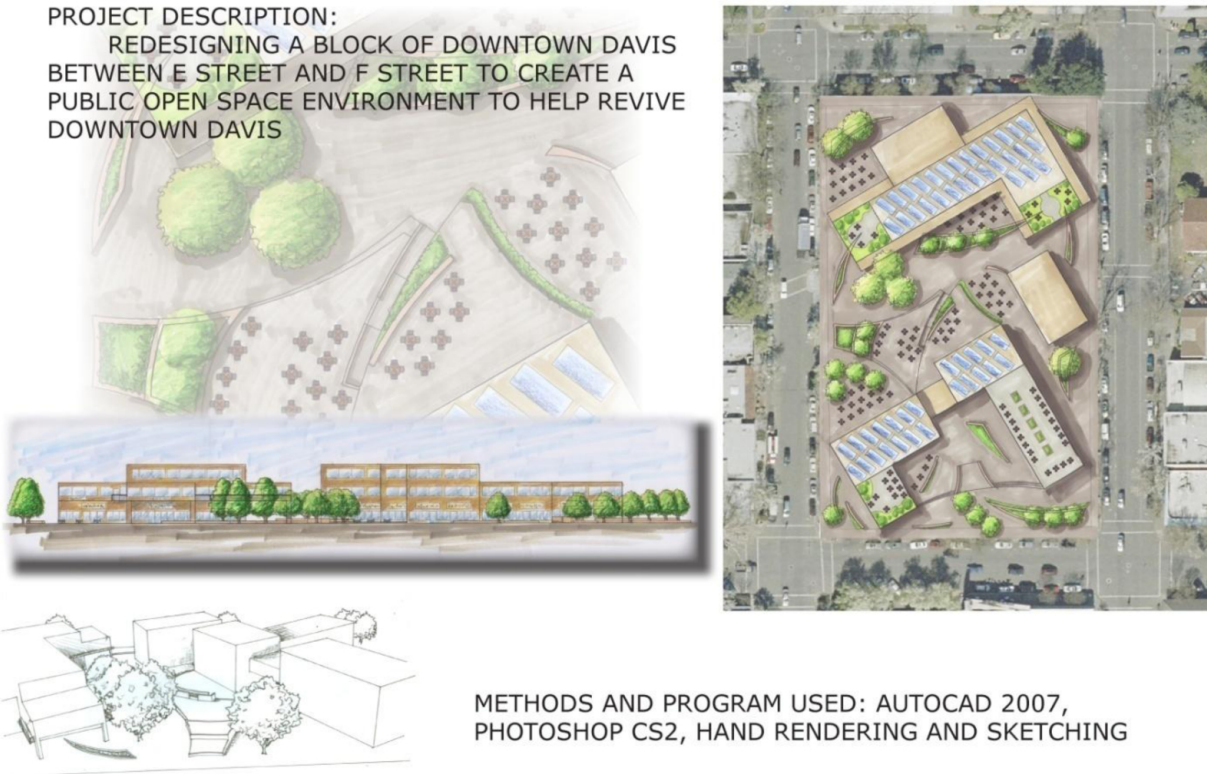
METHODS AND PROGRAM USED: AUTOCAD 2007,
PHOTOSHOP CS2, HAND RENDERING AND SKETCHING

Figure 6: Portfolio of Laurie Fong: Laurie created two sections of text which present information in a

brief, clear, and concise manner.

11.) Select a proper size for your portfolio.

There are no set standards when it comes to career portfolios, which can make the format

phase a little intimidating. I looked to find the preferences instead, looking towards Principle Landscape

Architects who are involved with the hiring process. How many pages? What sized paper? These are a

few of the questions I asked. As for size, you can't go wrong with 8.5"x11", the standard size for paper.

The size lends itself well to drawings, providing enough space without being overly cumbersome. It

should be no larger than 11"x17" as anything bigger can be difficult to carry and store. Smaller sized

portfolios are becoming a trend according to many, but they can be easily lost and lack the room to

show multiple images. You need to be very proficient in your organizational skills to successfully create

smaller portfolios. In terms of pages numbers, the average number recommended is between 8-15

pages. This is long enough to be concise and complete without being overly elaborate. This will also

ensure there is enough time during the interview to properly cover key projects you wish to discuss in

greater detail. Remember time is scarce in the business world and many firms have the "get-to-the-

point" mentality.[27]

ARRANGING

12.) Order your work to make an impression.

It is necessary to think carefully about the sequence and organization of your portfolio. The

arrangement is more than just ordering pieces of work; it is the art of preparing your presentation to

create an impression and will set the pace, the impact, and the overall mood of your portfolio.[28] There

are many schools of thought when it comes to this topic, some say to show your strongest pieces first,

others say last. Because I was unable to find conclusive support for one approach over another, I will

present each to you, along with their advantages and disadvantages.

Best First

Many say you should put your best foot forward; start out strong to make a favorable

impression from the very beginning and have your work pop out immediately. You want the

interviewer's initial feelings to be favorable because these feelings can carry on until the meeting ends.

Laurie Fong of Silverado Landscape and Design described the success of this approach by explaining how

her interviewer spent ample time looking at her work in the beginning, only to progressively flip through

each page faster and faster as he went on.[29] On the other hand, this can make your last impression a

weak one. And to some, this can be equally as important.

<u>Best First & Last</u>

Another popular suggestion about the sequence of work in your portfolio is to place your very

best items first and last. Not only will this approach create a strong first and last impression, but it also

addresses a typical reading pattern followed by many interviewers; that is, to glance at the first few

pages then thumb through to the back.[30] The major issue with this approach is the risk of having some of

your best pieces go unseen. As described earlier, other interviewers will spend less time looking at your

end projects or may even stop looking half way through the portfolio. In addition, interviews can

sometimes be cut short. Even if you included these works in your teaser, you run the risk of losing the

opportunity to explain or clarify certain aspects of the project.

<u>Post & Rail System</u>

The last approach is the post-and-rail system, think of it as organizing your portfolio in the same

fashion as you would build a fence. Designate your very best pieces as fence posts, the strength of your

fence, and think of the remainder of the pieces as the rails that join one post to the next.[31] Metzdorf

describes in great detail how to successfully arrange your work in this fashion: First, pick out the three

best pieces you have in order, first, second, and third. These are your posts. Open your portfolio with

piece number one. This will set the tone of your portfolio. Close your book with piece number two, your

second strongest piece. This will make a strong last impression. Piece number three should be placed in

the middle.[32] Your remaining projects are your rail pieces, those which connect to your strongest pieces.

This will ensure that at least one of your strongest pieces will be seen. The major complaint about this

method is that it does not create as strong of an impression as a succession of high quality pieces would.

Whether you want to start off strong, finish strong, or show some various in between, think hard about how you plan to show your work. Make sure your arrangement is clear and effective. Remember to consider the juxtaposition of facing pages in your arrangements (figure 7). And most importantly, keep in mind that the evaluations of your portfolio are going to be very short. Therefore, you should make sure your placement properly addresses this; try to control the pace and strategically try to get your message across.
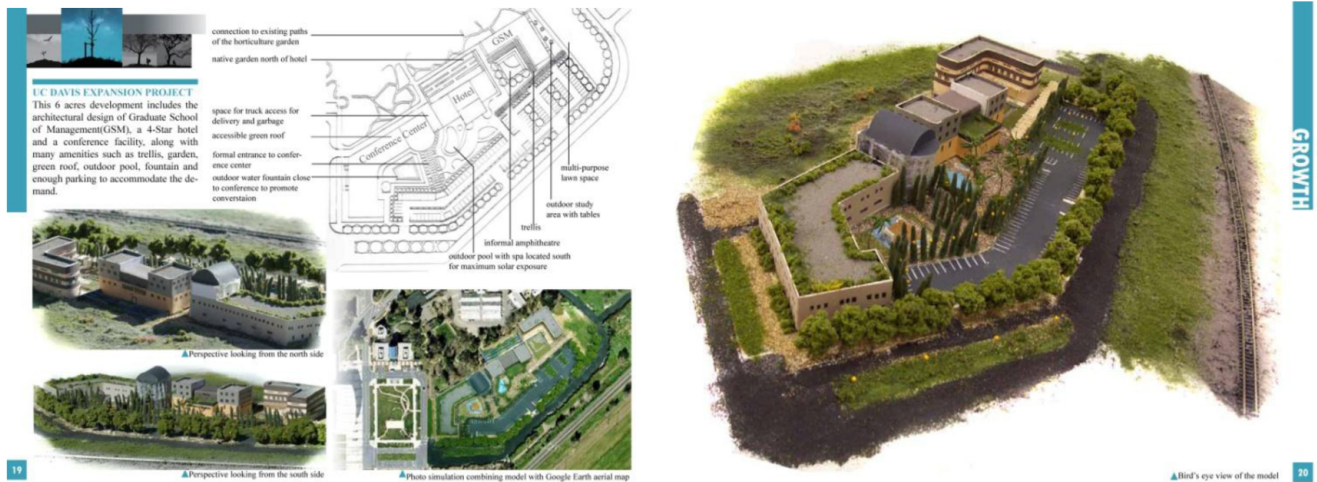

Figure 7: Portfolio of Steven Le Zhang: Showing the juxtaposition of two pages which complement each other.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

In this section I will cover tips, techniques, strategies, issues, and other useful tidbits I found during my research that did not belong in the other categories I covered earlier.

Document Your Process

Keep every piece of work you produce because you never know when it might come in handy; you may find inspiration or new ideas from your old sketches and designs. As mentioned earlier, these

can also help you show your thought process when combined with your final design. Date your work, photograph your site, and get copies of construction documents. All these steps will help you tell more about your project.

Create a Package

Create a motif throughout your portfolio, using consistent elements in each page. This will make your portfolio look more like a book than simply an arrangement of random works. Implement these elements into your resume letterhead, cover letter, and "thank you" letter. This will constantly remind them of who you are and the work you produced.

Keep the 'Teaser' Simple

It is entirely possible that you will be sending out a hundred job applications if not more after graduation. [33] This means making a complex teaser portfolio can be very expensive when you begin copying and sending them out. Your best bet is to limit the number of pages you have and avoid including extravagant features. While some companies now allow or require you to send in your teaser online, complex portfolios can still be troublesome as some have requirements on file size.

Getting your 'Teaser' Portfolio Out

If you're trying to send your teaser portfolio out to a company who has not posted a wanted ad, make sure you send it through the mail rather than online. Companies can easily ignore your work in an email, but are more likely to look at when sent through the mail.

The Interview

Before you begin your interview, it is important to review your portfolio so that your projects are fresh in your mind. Try to recall what you did and why you did it that way. Think of all the possible

questions that an interviewer can ask, and attempt to answer them before you leave. While there, ask

to see if they have a brochure that you can take home. These are essentially the firm's portfolio which

they hand out to prospective clients. Use these as examples to helping you think of new ways to update

your portfolio and present your work.

SUMMARY

1.) **Decide on the field of work you're interested in pursuing within landscape architecture.**

2.) **Once your intended field is established, find firms which operate under this category and research what they look for in a candidate.**

3.) **Be prepared to make more than one portfolio.**

4.) **Create a checklist. Test each piece you are considering to this list.**

5.) **Show a broad range of work.**

6.) **Avoid including everything.**

7.) **Create new work and redo old ones.**

8.) **Make sure everything is high in quality.**

9.) **Create a simple yet powerful page layout.**

10.) **Add appropriate text.**

11.) **Select a proper size for your portfolio.**

12.) **Order your work to make an impression.**

"You will eventually find success if you take to heart a few pieces of simple advice: be resourceful, be constantly on the lookout for opportunities, become more than just competent in your profession, and be persistent. Remember there is always room for the best in any profession"

– Ed Marquand, *How to Prepare Your Portfolio,* 7.

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[33] Marjanovic, *Portfolio,* 69.