



THE ESPLANADE



At the Chicago
Botanic Garden,

the Esplanade is a modern-day village green—a place to gather, to rest, to take in the view.

Its world-class design is simple and elegant, thoroughly modern in its use of space—yet written in the basic geometric shapes of formal, classical design.

Though it is a garden of great dignity, the Esplanade is a public space, a “people” space, a garden that is meant to be used.



LOOK UP AND OUT

It made sense to approach Dan Kiley to design the Esplanade. As one of the 20th century’s greatest modern landscape architects, Kiley had helped to redefine ideas about space. Rather than trying to recreate nature, as their Romantic predecessors had done, Modernists like Kiley looked at space as three-dimensional volume, capable of being arranged into geometric pieces flowing into and out of one another.

Modernists were pragmatists as well. They understood that humans actively use their landscapes—for agriculture, for living, for play. Realizing that man’s connection to the land can be lost in urban life, Modernists searched for ways to reestablish that contact in even the most urban of sites.

The tenets of modern landscape architecture continue to resonate: Keep it simple. Make it useful. Let the spaces flow. Strive to make connections.

Dan Kiley was a master of these ideas.



TO LEARN MORE

Saunders, William S., ed. *Daniel Urban Kiley: The Early Gardens*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

Kiley, Daniel. *Dan Kiley: The Complete Works of America’s Master Landscape Architect*. In collaboration with Jane Amidon. Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1999.

Trieb, Mark, ed. *Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993.

Lenhardt Library

For these and other titles, visit the Lenhardt Library of the Chicago Botanic Garden Library, open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday.
www.chicagobotanic.org/library

Joseph Regenstein, Jr. School of the Chicago Botanic Garden

The Joseph Regenstein, Jr. School of the Chicago Botanic Garden offers classes and seminars in gardening, landscape design and more. For a course guide, please call (847) 835-8261 or visit
www.chicagobotanic.org/school.

es-pla·nade (es'ple näd') *n.* a level, open space; especially, a public walk, often along a shore.



THE DESIGNERS

Daniel Urban Kiley (1912–2004)



Photo: Aaron Kiley

Considered one of the founding fathers of modern landscape architecture, Dan Kiley reshaped America’s ideas about the outdoors during a career that lasted more than 60 years.

If you’ve traveled in America, you’ve seen Kiley’s work: the grounds beneath the soaring St. Louis Memorial Arch, the thrilling fountains at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado, and New York City’s Lincoln Center. Kiley designed gardens large and small, private and public. He collaborated with the best modern architects—Eero Saarinen, Louis Kahn, Edward Larrabee Barnes—on projects that broke down the barriers between indoor and outdoor architecture.

In 1997, Dan Kiley was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Bill Clinton.

Peter Morrow Meyer

Having worked with Kiley for nearly 14 years, Peter Meyer continued as the designer of the Esplanade when Kiley passed away in 2004. Meyer has designed and executed commissions



around the world, collaborating with some of today’s most recognized architects and artists.


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GEOMETRY IN THE GARDEN

Kiley was renowned for merging classic elements of garden design with a clean, modern perspective. The simple geometric forms that humans have long used to shape nature became the vocabulary of his landscape design. They are used throughout the Esplanade.



The Commons: Allée and Tapis Vert

A natural gathering place, the Commons combines *allée* (avenue) with *tapis vert* (carpet of green). This simple, rectangular shape is three-dimensional—with elms as walls and roof, and grass at your feet.

A Wall of Water: Sound, Sight, Movement

The design of the Esplanade acknowledges the Chicago Botanic Garden's deep ties to the water (the entire Garden is a series of islands within a lake system):

- The *allée* leads directly to the water and its view of Smith Fountain.
- Three long fountains provide the Esplanade's best sound effect with a wall of water plumes. The fountains draw you toward them with their sound and shimmering water.
- The lake walk and water terrace give visitors direct access to the water as well as to the Crescent and Native Plant Gardens.

A Bosque (Grove) of Cones

Topiaried yews stand in a grove, like sentinels, around the Pavilion. Their man-made shapes contrast with the informal, loose spruce behind

them, marking the transition where the formal Esplanade gives way to the more natural gardens beyond. Yews are quick growers that tolerate aggressive pruning (here, two to three times a year).

The Right Plant Equals The Right Effect

Peter Morrow Meyer chose particular plants to create particular effects in particular sites. (This is good advice for home gardeners, too.)

Dutch Elm Disease (DED) has destroyed most of the elms in America; Commendation™ elms are, to date, one of the best disease-resistant tree varieties. The Chicagoland Grows™ program, of which the Chicago Botanic Garden is a partner, is introducing this hybrid.

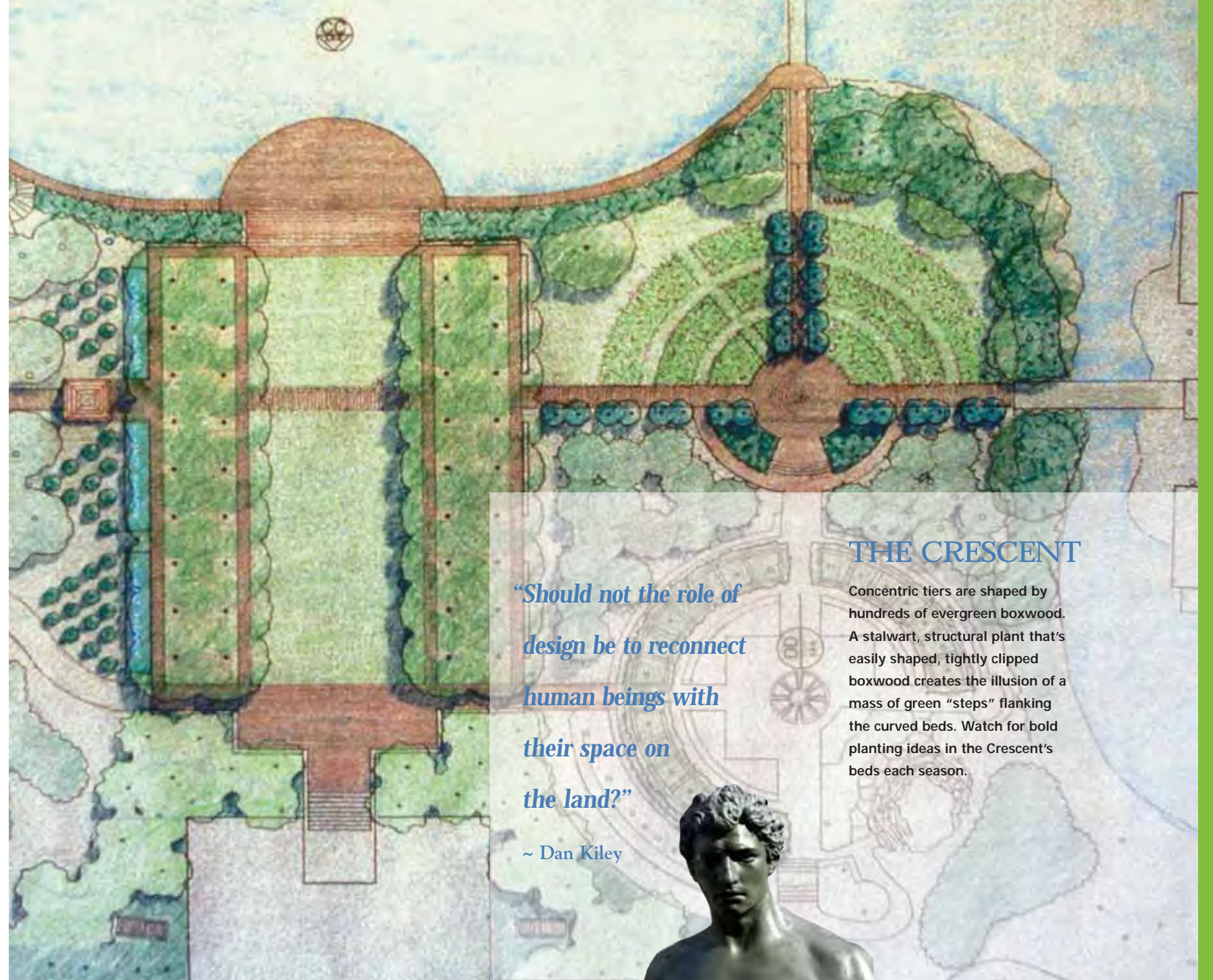
The *allée* is lined with disease-resistant elms. In time they will form an arch that visitors will pass through before they experience the “burst” outward to the water and sky beyond.

Despite their size, trees can create subtle effects. As you cross

the bridge to the Esplanade, a natural wall of columnar beeches guides you toward the *allée*. Willow trees wave at the water's edge—even when young, their effect is romantic. American hornbeam, tightly clipped into a hedge, forms the back side of the seating areas.

A grove of birches veils the Regenstein Center, enhancing the effect of “a building in a garden.” White-barked ‘Whitespire Sr.’ was chosen for its borer resistance, multi-stemmed shape and open crown. A mix of ferns and a sprinkling of hydrangeas add texture and color.

Waterlilies, long lauded as one of the most beautiful flowers known to man, add elegance to the water's edge.



“Should not the role of design be to reconnect human beings with their space on the land?”

~ Dan Kiley

THE CRESCENT

Concentric tiers are shaped by hundreds of evergreen boxwood. A stalwart, structural plant that's easily shaped, tightly clipped boxwood creates the illusion of a mass of green “steps” flanking the curved beds. Watch for bold planting ideas in the Crescent's beds each season.