

DAN KILEY: THE COMPLETE WORK OF AMERICA'S MASTER LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

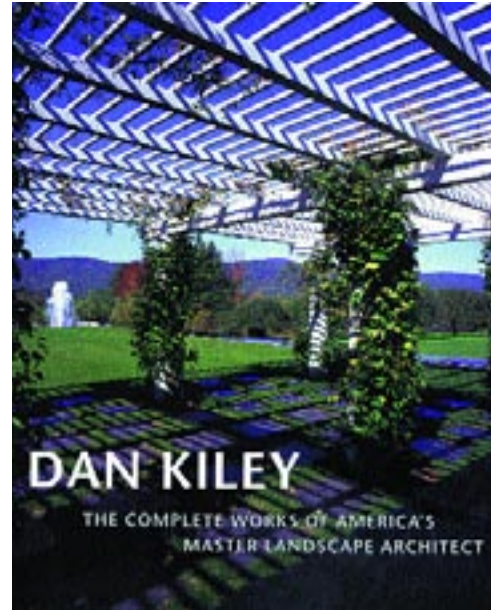
by Dan Kiley and Jane Amidon, published by Bulfinch Press/Little, Brown and Company, May, 1999.
Hardcover, 224 pages, 152 color and 130 b&w illustrations, 100 line drawings, \$65.

A Review by Victoria Carlson

It is time to take a long, close look at the work of Dan Kiley. This book offers an excellent and comprehensive view.

As the first major book about Kiley's long and prolific design career, this publication deserves attention. This handsome volume succeeds in the important task of documenting the many projects of a talented and influential leader in landscape architecture. Yet unlike some design books, this is more than an ego trip of a big name bouncing from one fancy job to the next. Far from being another glitzy picture book strung together with a few lofty abstractions, this monograph offers a substantial and inspiring view of a major design talent at work.

And remarkable design it is—distinctive in its powerful geometry, yet at once responsive to nature, built environment, and a humane sense of user needs. Kiley's work as a landscape architect has spanned over a half-century, shaping memorable green spaces, both public and private, across the United States as well as in Japan and Europe. Such high-profile and challenging landscape projects as the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs; the gallery-East Wing connection and the revitalization of the National Sculpture Garden at the National



■ *Left & Corner Chicago Art Institute, South Garden, Chicago, 1962.*
Below Miller House, Columbus, Indiana, 1955.



Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; New York's Lincoln Center; the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston; and Fountain Plaza in Dallas have established Kiley's reputation. Such work also affirms publicly the importance of landscape architecture as a design profession. In the Midwest, Kiley has created landscape designs that harmonize with their larger architectural context while becoming unique places in their own right: Chicago Art Institute, South Garden; the Henry Moore Sculpture Garden at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City; the Milwaukee Art Museum expansion; and some notable residential work.

The book brings these and other projects into clear and compelling focus. Each profile features an elegant presentation of first-rate photography and other visuals. The pictorial complements a detailed and insightful discussion of each design problem and the ideas at the heart of Kiley's response. The text is a delight to read—engaging, clear, and intelligent. The book's informative yet conversational tone recalls the best slide talks and professional presentations, during which a designer's articulate commentary reveals problem, process, and realization of project in ways that take an audience through the experience of design as theory and practice. A sense of adventure and discovery emerges in this kind of discussion; this same spirit is present throughout Kiley's narratives and essays.

But the need for practical and inherent problem-solving also comes through in the work and commentary, making this book a valuable resource for design professionals and a decision-making public alike. "A site is almost never a big, blank slate waiting for your creative genius; it is a set of conditions and problems for which one seeks the highest solution," Kiley reflects in a section entitled "Process." Throughout

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the book, Kiley vividly recounts the numerous challenging conditions and problems that he has encountered. These range from the site of the John F. Kennedy Library (a former landfill) to the ongoing challenge of making creative and distinctive landscape design work collaboratively with built forms by some of the century's most distinctive architects (including Eero Saarinen, I.M. Pei, and Henry Cobb). Increasing problems of urbanism make Kiley's views and innovative responses all the more relevant today.

Kiley's background and career development are presented both in vita form and through personal reflections that express the vigor and energy of the designer's own personality. Reference components

(vita, list of complete works and projects, bibliography) are detailed yet concise and easy to access. Quality graphic design and production also make the book a pleasure to use and a sound investment for any professional, public, or personal library.

Credit for the preparation of this monograph goes both to Kiley and to his studio associate and collaborator, Jane Amidon. Their joint effort here is both a fitting celebration of Kiley's work and a rich synthesis of ideas concerning what landscape architecture might be, presented in ways that will inspire and engage a wide audience.

For a landscape architect to advocate "going out on a limb" may seem like an obvious pun, if not a cliché. But the

essential perspective and daring at the root of that commonplace expression are Kiley's final point. In the book's closing section, he discusses new directions for his ongoing work: "In these projects and in those to come, I am seeking the nature of unified spirit; the tools remain order and scale, form and balance, unity and dynamic rhythm. This goal, I believe, is a compelling reason to reach out to that which is as yet unexplored, both in life and design (because, after all, they are the same)—it means going out on a limb, and that is the best place to be."

This fine book invites readers to climb with an adventurous leader toward that best place, a position from which to admire and