

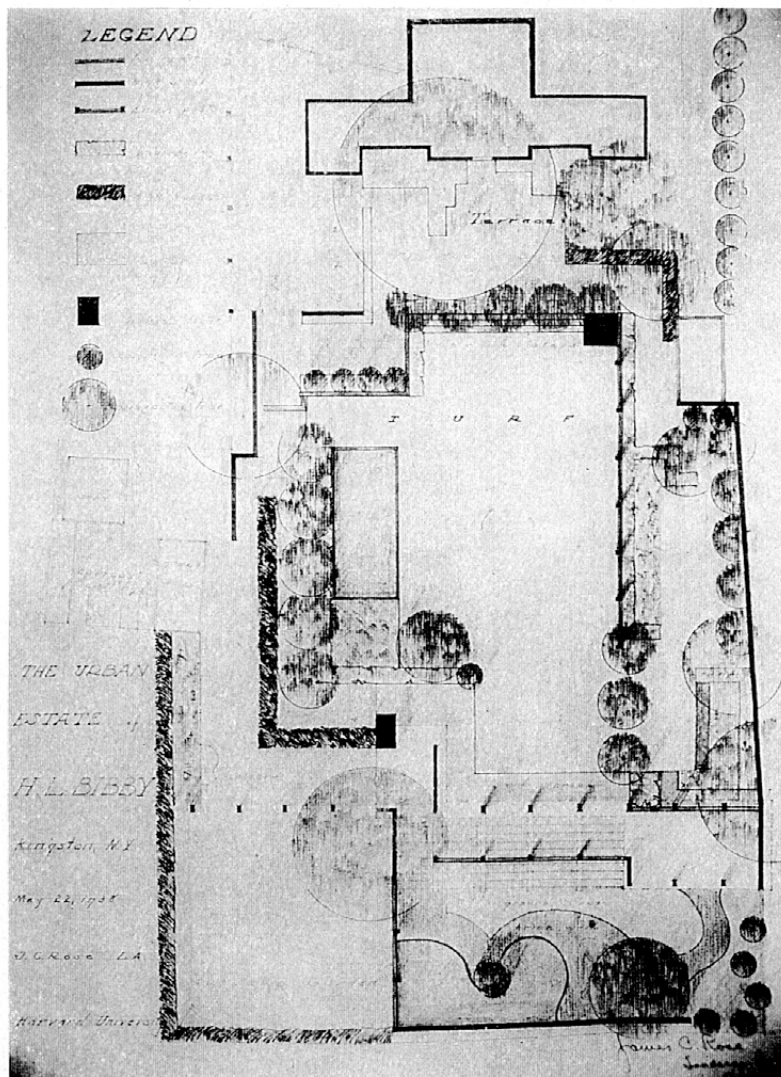
FREEDOM IN THE GARDEN

A CONTEMPORARY APPROACH IN LANDSCAPE DESIGN

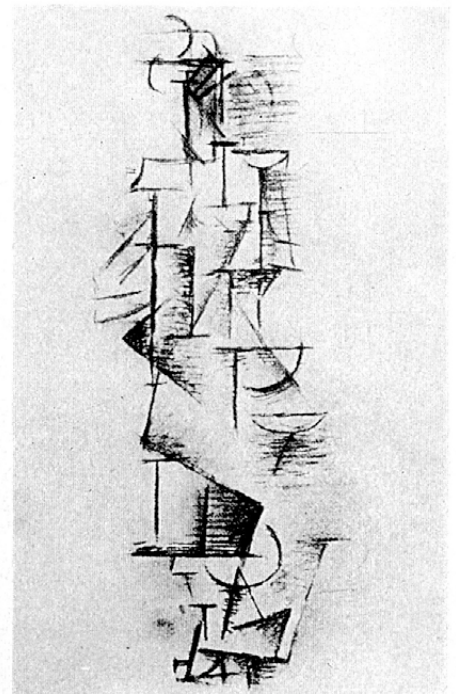
BY JAMES C. ROSE

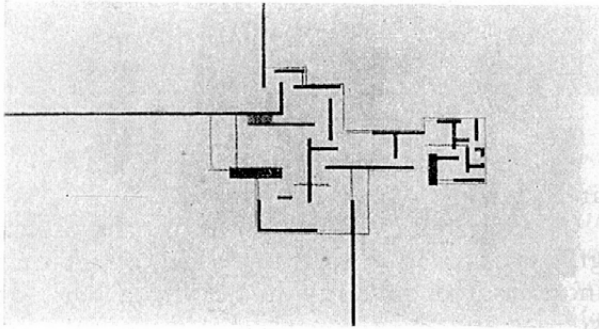
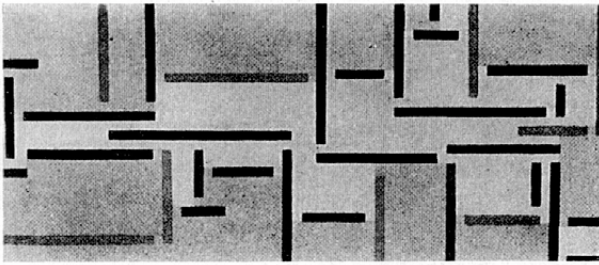
LANDSCAPE design falls somewhere between architecture and sculpture. Relieved of most structural and use requirements in the architectural sense, it is less purely æsthetic than sculpture because of circulation requirements. In reality, it is outdoor sculpture, not to be looked at as an object, but designed to surround us in a pleasant sense of space relations. It differs from both architecture and sculpture in several important respects:

1. Materials, for the most part, are living and growing.
2. Horizontal dimension is usually much greater in relation to the vertical, a fact that increases the difficulty in getting a sense of volume and third dimension.
3. Scale, determined by the sky and surrounding country, is necessarily larger.
4. A sense of form is more difficult to achieve because of the looseness and instability



Aesthetic division of space imparts distinction to the garden plan, at left, by the author, who seeks to preserve in materials abstract relations such as those expressed in Picasso's "Figure," below, reproduced from "Cubism and Abstract Art" by courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York City





Recognizable continuity of the contemporary style, from pattern to architecture to landscape, is exemplified in two more illustrations from "Cubism and Abstract Art," reproduced through courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art. They are "Russian Dance" by Doesburg, top, and a house plan by Architect Miës van der Rohe

of growing material used in garden design. In building or sculpture, shape, height, and scale are determined once and for all by non-changing elements. The variables in landscape—sky, topography, and materials—make it a subtle art, and worthy of specialized study.

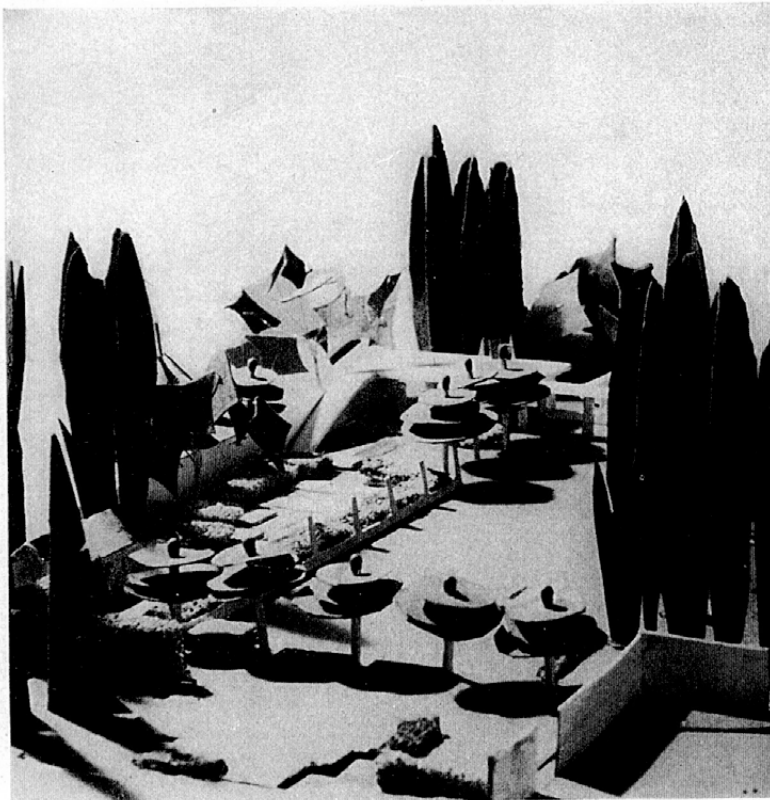
II

We are told that industrial design and "so-called" modern architecture came about through the discovery of new materials and methods of construction, but that landscape design cannot change because materials and methods have not changed. We have found our final resting place. Our grave is on axis in a Beaux Arts cemetery. A monument terminates the vista, and if you approach with reverence, you can see the bromitaph authority has placed there: "A tree is a tree, and always will be a tree; therefore we can have no modern landscape design."

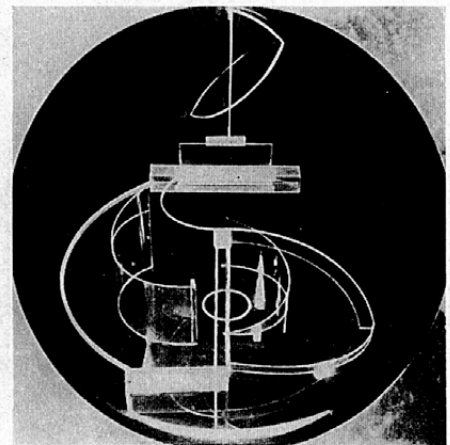
Painting has had no noticeable change in materials, yet how a Beaux Artist must scratch his head when he compares Picasso with Leonardo.

Sculpture seems to have undergone at least a minor revolution if you compare Brancusi and Cellini, although similar materials have been at the disposal of both.

Music achieves the most startling renovation of modern times, yet the same nine notes used by Bach are used by Stravinsky. Let us not consider what might have happened to



Arrangement without rigidity is characteristic of both the garden designed by Rose, photographed at left from the terrace of a model, and Gabo's "Construction Spherique" reproduced from "Modern Plastic Art," by courtesy of Dr. H. Girsberger, Zürich





The rhythm of trees and free-standing piers recalls Stone Henge, reproduced above from "The Circle," by courtesy by Dr. Walter Gropius, and "Les Peupliers" from "On Drawing and Painting Trees" by Adrian Hill, by courtesy of the Pitman Publishing Corporation

landscape design if it had been limited to nine elements as constant as a note in music.

Perhaps the dance is the best single example of change in expression without change in material. The *Ballet Russe* quite obviously differs from the Greek chorus or the toe dancing of the '90's, and the human body is the only important element ever used by dancers. That must be as steadfast as a tree.

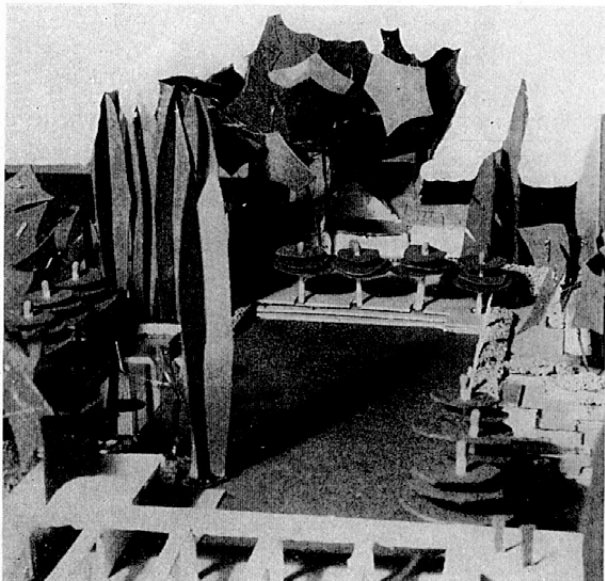
III

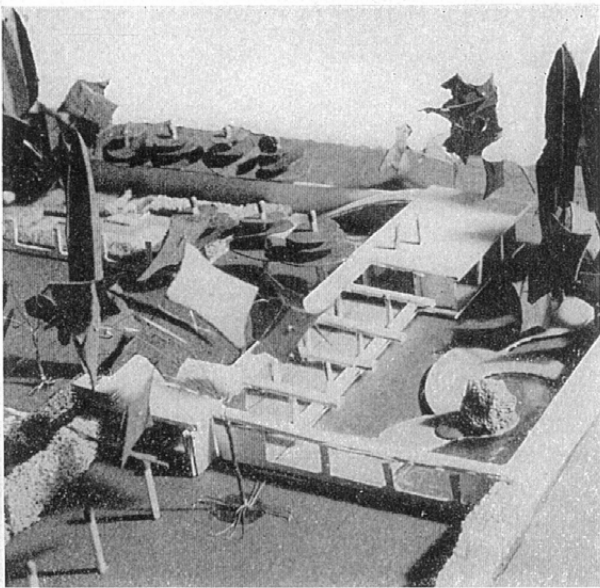
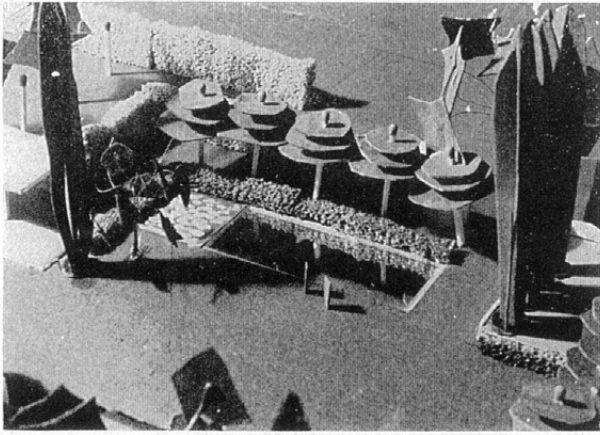
These changes in approach—and we can trace them everywhere from industrial design to poetry—have evolved whether or not the development of materials or methods applied directly to them. They are not changes in degree; they are not the attempt of the new generation to be different. We are told that the principles of the Renaissance are the A, B, C of design, and that we must learn the alphabet before we may talk in good company. Another beautiful bromide — but, unfortunately, to learn the Renaissance alphabet in design has about the same value as to learn the Greek alphabet if we wish to speak English. No question but that it is a scholarly thing to do, and has an historical interest; but just as we cannot assume that a professor of Greek could write a better play than Noel Coward, we cannot assume that a foundation of classic design will better equip us to do modern.

Contemporary design represents a change in kind, a change in conception, the expression of a new mentality we have derived from the effects of the industrial and economic revolutions. These revolutions have the significance for our civilization that the discoveries of

Gallileo, Copernicus, and Magellan had for the Renaissance. They have put a transparent but impenetrable screen between us and the past, and we find ourselves in a new mental atmosphere. We can appreciate Gothic cathedrals and Renaissance palaces, but we can no longer produce them because we have been cut off from their source of inspiration. History has no value for us unless we learn this first. The only direct stimulus we can get from the past is an understanding of how the social and psychological influences led a particular

The author's garden model below shows how a composition of tree forms is combined with water and architecture, achieving informality without loss of form





Reflections in the pool, top, and perspectives from the summer house, at once a structure for vines and for shelter, were all carefully studied from every viewpoint

civilization to arrive at its peculiar expressions. We should do the same for our own civilization and seek to express it.

IV

Style evolves naturally from the subjective influences of the social order in which we live; fashion is the superficial manipulation of any style to produce variations that have momentary appeal. To determine the essential elements of the contemporary style, we can do no better than turn to the abstractionists. They are the great experimenters in art as Einstein and Millikan are in science. Their work is invaluable. Dissociated from context, we can see the new mentality in the raw.

The constructivists probably have the most to offer landscape design because their work deals with space relations in volume. The sense of transparency, and of visibility broken by a succession of planes, as found in their con-

structions, if translated into terms of outdoor material, would be an approach sufficient in itself to free us from the limitation imposed by the axial system. If you wish to consider any line of sight an axis, then you have an infinite number of axes in a garden or anywhere else, and so it should be. By selecting one or two axes and developing a picture from a given station point, we are losing an infinity of opportunities. The axial approach merely harks back to the elegant façade and two-dimensional design of the sixteenth century. Such elegance fitted the society of Louis XIV, but has no relation to our own. We no longer design buildings like Mansard. Why should we design gardens or even world fairs like Le Nôtre? No one would think of furnishing a room on the principle of the axis. You do not expect to stand at one end and find an æsthetic composition at the other. You want a sense of proper division and interest from any point. So with gardens: it is fundamentally wrong to begin with axes or shapes in plan; ground forms evolve from a division of space.

V

The Beaux Arts system—and it seems incredible that practically every landscape school in the country is bound by it—has an amazing scorn for plants. They seem to be totally dissociated from design, and a knowledge of them a matter of indifference. Plants, rock, earth, and water are the major materials of landscape; to ignore any one of them limits the possibilities. Now they are stuck in a “design” at the last minute to provide enclosure or frame a “picture,” but they are seldom used for their own sake. From Brancusi we can learn the importance of qualities inherent in a material; material gives the quality to a design. Warmth, charm, and intimacy come from materials. The popular belief that the contemporary style is necessarily cold and impersonal betrays an ignorance of the style and scant feeling for the use of materials. We can use anything from adobe brick to concrete and steel, and can therefore expect all the attributes of former styles in addition to the freedom that comes with self-expression.

Plants are to the landscape designer what words are to the conversationalist. Anyone can use words. Anyone can use plants; but the fastidious will make them sparkle with aptness. At Versailles, one finds hedges and trees clipped to fit the design. The whole scheme represents that point of view which we have discarded. It belongs to the period that crowded rooms into an H-shaped plan. The

contemporary landscape would require the honest use of materials and the expression of their inherent qualities.

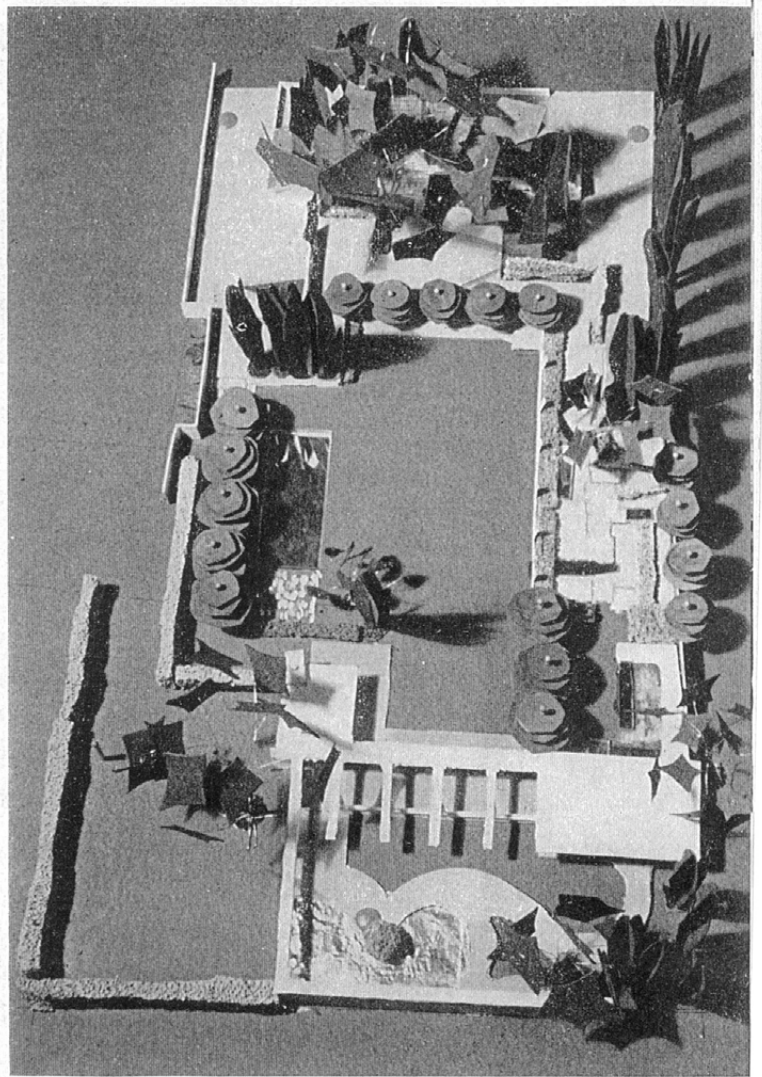
VI

The romantic period attempted to correct the fallacy of imposed academic principles, but failed in the graphic arts because its roots were in literature and sentiment rather than form and arrangement. This single failure has been the constant war cry of the classicists against any departure from their conviction of the absolute. The informal movement, essentially destructive, offered no satisfactory alternative to the order it replaced. Informal came to mean "formless" and proved as incompatible with the evolutionary state of man as the "back to nature" philosophy of Rousseau.

Anything that has not the quality of form is amorphous and meaningless. When man arranges nature or nature arrives at an arrangement perceptible to man, the thing acquires form and meaning. The arrangement may be pleasing or ugly, it may be loose or stiff, it may be symmetrical or unsymmetrical, but if the arrangement is perceptible, it possesses the quality of form, and to that extent is "formal." Informality does not exist for us except as an effect coming from the looseness and freedom in the use of form; the "leave nature alone" attitude is complete childish romanticism, and, more important, an impossibility.

Conclusion

No absolute exists in design any more than it does in nature. It is human, perhaps, to cling to a life line, but we only do so when we are afraid. Landscape schools from New York to California cling to the Beaux Arts system, and fight because their existence is threatened. Words are of no use. Fear dissolves the intelligence and blocks the vision. These conventional instructors not only look where we look and do not see what we see, but they say what we say and do not mean what we mean.



Ground forms, evolving from the division of the garden space, and the dominant lines appear in this view of the garden model. Interesting suggestions for gardens are seen in Braque's "Music," at left below, and Schwitters' "Rubbish Construction," reproduced from "Cubism and Abstract Art" by courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, Rockefeller Plaza, New York

