



Peer Reviewed

Title:

Eudoxia: A New Civic Landscape [Transforming the American Garden: 12 New Landscape Designs-Exhibitor]

Journal Issue:

[Places, 3\(3\)](#)

Author:

[Van Valkenburgh, Michael R.](#)

Publication Date:

1986

Publication Info:

Places

Permalink:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3ht7z8w2>

Acknowledgements:

This article was originally produced in Places Journal. To subscribe visit www.places-journal.org. For reprint information contact places@berkeley.edu.

Keywords:

landscape, architecture, design, garden, eudoxia, civic, italo calvino, invisible cities, michael r. van valkenburgh

Copyright Information:

All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author or original publisher for any necessary permissions. eScholarship is not the copyright owner for deposited works. Learn more at http://www.escholarship.org/help_copyright.html#reuse



eScholarship
University of California

eScholarship provides open access, scholarly publishing services to the University of California and delivers a dynamic research platform to scholars worldwide.

Eudoxia is guided by my conviction that landscape design is both personally expressive and socially motivated. I believe that any design idea requires an interpretation of its formal precedents and natural processes, whether or not these are explicit in the final design. Inspiration for imagery arises from these and other, unsuspected sources—dreams, fleeting thoughts, memories.

Architecture and landscape architecture share the task of making functional and memorable places. Yet landscapes are open to the sky. Without a differentiation between inside and out, a landscape must be judged in spatial and sculptural terms. Indeed, this paradox is ubiquitous to the field and is a central concern explored in this project.

The name Eudoxia is taken from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, which, in its vision of the city, prompted this proposal. I was particularly taken with the following passage:

"An oracle was questioned about the mysterious bond between two objects so dissimilar as the carpet and the city. One of the two objects—

the oracle replied—has the form the gods gave the starry sky and the orbits in which the worlds revolve; the other is an approximate reflection, like every human creation."

The garden proposed here is a rich, woven, dense landscape like Calvino's imaginary carpet that captures a city's essence. Calibrated in its forms, exacting in its intent, Eudoxia is not a scenic landscape but a scenography for contemporary life.

This garden is intended for an urban, corporate headquarters and is located between a pair of new, three-story buildings. The garden cuts through an entire city block with street frontage at the north and south ends. It provides ceremonial entrances and places for meeting and contemplation, and is open to the public.

Eudoxia's composition is in the spirit of early 20th century modernists: abstracted geometric forms and spaces are linked by a broken axis and are balanced by proportion rather than symmetry. Influences include Cubism and the paintings of Moholy-Nagy. The hedge composition departs from the machine aesthetic of the modernists in the

organicism of its materials and reliance on the seasonally changing color matrix of a palette of deciduous plants. Hedges derive from the typology of planted forms by Lutyens and Jekyll and from Vita Sackville-West's Sissinghurst. Embodying a new landscape type, Eudoxia uses elements of private gardens while relating to the city in scale and complexity.

The garden joins an urban exterior to an intimate interior. Beginning at the south end, an arc of trees bows over the sidewalk edge to establish a landscape stylobate inviting entry. A twelve-foot stucco screen wall, set back from the sidewalk, is reiterated in a parallel evergreen hedge. Windows in the wall and hedge frame the landscape composition within and two doorways frame the major entry points.

The building entrances are located at the street ends under continuous, double-story loggias that extend the length of the buildings at the east and west sides, establishing covered passageways from the buildings and the garden. A labyrinth of corridors formed by hedges offers a series of pathways between the two buildings. Users of the gar-

den may revise their daily walks to include different plant fragrances, colors and densities. Each hedge is composed of one plant species. Some are evergreen, others deciduous; some have unpruned tops, others have a finished surface. A sixteen-foot-high, circular purple beech hedge is lodged asymmetrically within the composition and is incised by lowering the ground level five steps. From the ground, it is seen as a vanishing ellipse. Viewed from above, the hedge composition functions as a large parterre. Along each loggia, hedge niches provide sites for sculpture and offer places for conversation or rest. Near the center of the garden, isolated in a narrow room, is a long, raised herbaceous border of blue-flowered Siberian Iris. The image is inspired by Rothko's paintings, but here the tonality responds to seasonal light rather than the edge of the canvas. In November the withered brown foliage tacitly anticipates the stark beauty of winter.

Beyond the flower border, pressed deep into the earth, is a court of stone and water. Eleven water trays, filmed with water and separated by paths, are cut into the

center. Each tray empties into a main pool at the base of a gently curved, twenty-five-foot-high wall of rock, bound at each side by cut stone pillars. Water pipes—like those found in cleft rock springs—pierce the wall at the top, pouring water in summer and accumulating ice in winter. The ice and water wall is shadowed and quiet, separated from the city's noise. It is a room for the sounds of water and the fragrance of moisture. The north-facing water-wall reflects the color of the sky and prevents the warming rays of the winter sun from disturbing the thick, blue ice. The north wall is a twenty-foot hemlock hedge.

Access to the water court from the south is provided by a pair of partially walled stairs. Beneath them, recessed sitting chambers offer secluded vantage points. From the north, a stairway directly descends the geometrically terraced slope through a grove of columnar evergreens that heightens one's sense of vertical change.

Throughout the garden, moveable wooden lawn furniture can be pulled into areas of sun, or into pools of shady solitude.





