The photography above is from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Chelsea Flower Show 2013. The Telegraph Garden described as “Super-Density” by Christopher Bradley-Hole. Could it be a “Maximal Minimalism” approach?

Julie Moore
Ryerson University
June 7th, 2014
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designer’s Life Story</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Accreditation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Philosophy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Man of Big Projects</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Front Garden of Bury Court Barn</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavender Fields, Vauxhall Park London, UK</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower show 2013</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Of Projects’ Styles</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects Description</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Context</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Comparison Analysis</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape Style &amp; Formality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardens’ Intended Use</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Landscape Design</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art of Placement and Signature Material</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting Design Principals</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DESIGNER’S LIFE STORY

Christopher Bradley-Hole was born in Brighton in the UK from inspiring green-fingered parents. During his childhood his fascination for architecture and curiosity for plants and gardening were noticeable. His family environment stimulated him to first study Architecture at Brighton University in England.

His mentors were university professor Peter Bareham and John Brookes. Mr. Brookes was and still is recognized as one of the most influential garden designers of the century, prominent for his work, teaching and writing. His book Room Outside was the “igniter” that motivated Christopher to explore the conceptual association between architecture and garden making. Interestingly Christopher’s book The Minimalist Garden was for me the “detonation” for my passion about Modern Landscape Design.

With perpetual enthusiasm, he started visiting many gardens from the Yellow Book, a ‘bible’ for garden visitors including listings of secret gardens of England and Wales. Through his multiple garden hunting expeditions his zest for gardening and plants was nourished, inspired and he simply became obsessed with the whole subject.

Over the years, Bradley-Hole developed as an architect, worked in architectural firms in London and became partner. Later on the harsh routine of on-going corporate projects got to him and he “fell out of love” with the profession. So he went back to study a post-graduate diploma course Conservation of Historic Landscapes, Parks and Gardens, at the Architectural Association. This back to school voyage was an eye opener for him in regards to historic gardens and their social importance.

In 1994 when he won a design competition advertised in the debut issue of Gardens Illustrated, he discovered his true creative path. Later he got his first major contracts from clients in Notting Hill, an urban area densely populated in the UK. Since then, he has been dedicated to modern landscape design from city courtyards to immense country estates and won the “Gold Medal & Best Garden award” at the 2013 RHS Chelsea Flower Show for the Telegraph Garden. He has formerly won five gold medals and two best show garden awards. As he once said, "I was like a convert, and there's nothing worse than a convert!" I guess he came in touch with his “life purpose” and accepted to follow his heart. This is why he has been so successful.

“Christopher Bradley-Hole is one of the world’s foremost landscape designers. His projects have had a far-reaching influence on the way contemporary design has developed.”
EDUCATION AND ACCREDITATION

Bradley-Hole was first trained as an architect, but his life passion for plants, landscapes and aesthetics commanded him towards landscape design. He received a graduate degree from the Architectural Association, one the oldest independent schools of architecture in the UK and recognized as one of the most prestigious and competitive architecture institutions in the world.

As a Landscape Architect and Garden Designer, his international experience ranges from private & public design projects including the BBC and the Arsenal Football Club to the Stirling Prize Winning Sainsbury Laboratory in the Cambridge Botanic Garden. He has been developing innovative and sensitive designs for the award-winning Spink Property near Henley on Thames.

Avid participant in the famous Chelsea Flower Show in England, he won the “Gold Medal” in 2013, his sixth gold medal and a stunning achievement! In brief the concept of his winning garden was a current contemplative design composition inspired from English landscapes coupled with Japanese methods to garden design from a modern art perspective. I will discuss this brilliant project further in my paper.

In addition, Christopher is also a bestselling author of two beautiful books, The Minimalist Garden and Making the Modern Garden. He has been a speaker around the world and he teaches landscape design and construction at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, which I hope to attend one day.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Chiswick, a district of West London, is where Christopher Bradley-Hole first established his landscape design practice in 1995, inventing town & country gardens with the help of three employees. When major opportunities such as the Arsenal Stadium redevelopment and BBC Media city came along, he moved his firm to Southwark in Central London. This larger studio, close to the Tate Modern, had eight occupied workstations with a capacity running up to twenty projects at the time, with variable budgets coming from both private & public sectors.

Christopher was responsible for the concept development of each project and stayed involved throughout the design process and implementation. He believes that young designers benefit strongly from working in an office the same way architects do as part of their training. He said: "I think any practicing designer should be able to have someone in, to work with them either on a paid basis, or not paid, so that there is a chance for experience". So he perceives that working as part of a team is a critical part of the learning process and as a young designer I couldn’t agree more with him.

Early in his career he was approached by Mitchell Beazley to write a book. So in 1997 his publishing debut was achieved with The Minimalist Garden, a book with a zeitgeist attitude. It became for the readers a sort of invitation to step outside the house and into the garden with a philosophical twist. I think his book presented a contemporary view on the “reductive fringe of modernist style” and with a focused on the architectural connection between house and garden. This is why the art of applying modernist ideas to the practice of making gardens is quite fascinating to me.
HIS PHILOSOPHY

Reporters and writers often describe the artistic work of Bradley-Hole with recurring adjectives such as "minimal, harmonious spaces, geometric, and pure proportions". The consistency and integrity of his design style has become a sort of mantra throughout the international press. The thinking of Bradley-Hole is often labeled as being anthropocentric. (Wikipedia defines “anthropocentrism as the belief that human beings are the central or most significant species on the planet, or the assessment of reality through an exclusively human perspective.”)

During an interview he said: "I've always had the philosophy that there should be room for people in design. I think design must have a socialist philosophy; it must be concerned with people, like people interacting and enjoying themselves, whether it's two people or two thousand. It must be about improving people's lives, trying to do something which is going to make the world a bit better." He acknowledges this way of thinking involves more time and effort, but insists he would prefer breaking new grounds than just repeating tired formulas that makes "the world a depressing place because you're just reducing everything to a sort of banal level." I personally find this statement refreshing and totally agree with it.

He said: "The modernist movement in architecture, where form followed function to a certain extent, was about new ideas, about new uses of materials, about freeing space, light, abstraction, asymmetry, dynamism, and movement; all ideas in which I'm interested." Obviously the man is an idealist with solid passion for modernism which he expresses through design principles.

He believes that the ideas refined in the works of renowned architects such as Le Corbusier, Pierre Chareau and Mies van der Rohe, are as relevant today as they were initially: "While that must have been a very exciting age, I think today is a very exciting time to be working in modernist way in the second generation." What a great way to look at modern landscape design.

In addition, he is an advocate for collaborative work with kindred spirits in other disciplines. With his open-minded attitude, he produced a medieval “hortus conclusus” (enclosed garden) design for a CD by music group Orlando Consort. He mentioned: "I think some of the rewards are in the people you meet and the opportunities you come in contact with, which are extraordinary. It’s just so nice to be meeting people who are at the top of their tree."
A MAN OF BIG PROJECTS

“The grass garden at Bury Court in Hampshire was designed by Christopher Bradley-Hole. Photograph: Andrew Lawson”

The leading minimalist Bradley-Hole perceives freedom in the role of landscape designer and truly enjoys this aspect compared to other professions where there are so many legal constraints. He feels very privileged to be able to indulge in his fascination for design through the act of garden making. Combining his architecture skills and horticulture knowledge he creates a dialogue that expresses itself as an original art form. "Whether the greater influence is architecture or is landscape, or whether there’s a third element which is art, that meeting ground is what makes designed landscapes very interesting”.

In the grass garden at Bury Court, the pool links the universe by reflecting the sky, the architectural elements as well as the foliage of grasses running along the gravel path. The linear design nests an original seating area tied in with the geometric pattern of the site layout. The spaces between the wooden posts become like paintings and delivering framed views of the surrounding landscape.
THE FRONT GARDEN OF BURY COURT BARN

This is a brilliant world of informal forms within a formal grid. Christopher expresses harmony through contrast and opposites. A band of tall grasses, mixed with flowering perennials, creates a dream-like meadow-feel built inside a grid pattern of rusted steel-edged beds and gravel paths. Interestingly it is all green and turning to gold in the fall.

"At its tranquil heart is a reflective pool and simple but innovative seating area."

“A planting of silvery Stachys Big Ears, the dark Sedum Matrona, phlox Rosa Pastell, with Echinops ritro Veitch’s Blue to the rear left and Agastache foeniculum to the right.”

This melodious pallet of colours and textures emanates a soft perfume just by looking at the picture… I can just imagine being there…

Let’s keep in mind that the Bury Court in Hampshire has been growing for ten years!

The different types of grass selected by Bradley-Hole dance together with perennials such as the Eryngium and Agastache shown on the photograph on the right. The gravel within the bed punctuates the rhythms. Notice how the grasses glitter into the light and how the planting flows despite the firm limits of the planting beds.
This public lavender garden was design in 2005 for London Borough of Lambeth. This historic park is a medium-sized Victorian park with a rich history. Vauxhall Park is one of Lambeth’s nine Green Flag Award-winning parks. The award acknowledges the community and council achievements to provide the neighborhood with a quality green space.

I think the choice of lavender expresses it all in these photos. A classic and informal garden where it is easy to relax and breathe.
After eight years Christopher did an amazing come-back with The Telegraph Garden of the 2013 RHS Chelsea Flower Show. His original inspiration came from three ideas: “the making of the English landscape, the Japanese approach to garden making and by modern abstract art.” Via a modern contemplative composition his award winning garden was “a representation of England as a wooded landscape from which openings were cleared to allow settlement, civilisation and cultivation.”
The garden site was 32 metres long and framed with oak colonnade around two sides of the plan and wood panel walls. He explained: "You'll be able to walk behind those columns and between the back wall, which is going to be also in oak, but will be charred oak, which gives protection to the wood and gives a lovely burnt finish to it." The structure was crafted from English green oak a sort of bold statement wanting to highlight the dangers facing English native trees.

Using a subtle palette of monochromatic greens he captured the spirit of an English country landscape on a misty day. Also moved by the book In Praise of Shadows, by Japanese writer Junichiro Tanizaki, he explored the expression of what he experienced at Ryoan-ji where “the Kyoto temple whose 500-year-old garden is a landscape in abstract and microcosm, a panorama to be viewed from a verandah.” It is promoting the notion that a garden may be recognized as “high art capable of setting the mind free” and where mystery connects the viewer’s soul with the poetry of the landscape.

An unusual feature of this project was that the garden was not for entering but for contemplating.

The plant materials became a three-dimensional painting framed by its own oaken gallery.

When I contemplate his garden, a meaningful meditation evaporates from it. The “naturalistic tapestry of perennials conveys the flora of the meadow, woodland, heath and water margin.” The textures, planes and surfaces are evocative a semi-abstract form representing the human forces that have shaped the English countryside.
COMPARISON OF PROJECTS’ STYLES

PROJECTS DESCRIPTION

I choose to compare the Lavender Fields - 2005, Vauxhall Park London, UK with The Telegraph Garden for the 2013 RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

The Lavender Fields mandate was an historic public park designed for the needs of the surrounding communities in 2005 where as The Telegraph Garden was a creative landscape project in the context of a competition in 2013.

CREATIVE CONTEXT

Two fabulous landscape design projects created within two different contexts and developed eight years apart.

The Lavender Fields is an urban mandate settled on an historic site. It was an important landscape component of the park city planning venture. All steps of landscape design process must have been considered. As an example the site inventory like the assessment of the current site situation including spatial character observation and the site analysis exploring the opportunities and constraints of the site. The concept had to be developed based on the client and community’s needs and a specific budget must have been allocated.

The Telegraph Garden context was more of an artistic competition. The concept did not have the constraints of a municipal project but was more about communicating a social message through the expression of landscape design.

PROJECT COMPARISON ANALYSIS

LANDSCAPE STYLE & FORMALITY

Lavender Fields: An informal garden created to preserve the historical character of the site within a modern urban park environment and designed for relaxation, recreation and for the wellbeing of the users.

The Telegraph Garden: The purpose of this modern contemplative composition was the representation of England as a wooded landscape from which openings were cleared to allow settlement, civilisation and cultivation. It was a formal look where the grid was helping the viewer maintains its focus on contemplation while a soft form of plant materials was stimulating a deeper meditation effect.
GARDENS’ INTENDED USE

*Lavender Fields*: This wonderful garden is in a public park and was designed for the general public who wants to relax and enjoy recreational activities in very informal and somewhat romantic setting. This is a practical space.

*The Telegraph Garden*: This garden is ART within the context of an etheric competition. The intended use is at the contemplative level. This is a temporary spiritual and reflective space.

OVERALL LANDSCAPE DESIGN

Christopher Bradley-Hole’s design approach utilizes modernist architectural schemes within a landscape context, abandoning pointless ornament and reducing structure to essential elements. Where many designers use the traditional trick of providing a focal point in a space, he prefers not to intrude, giving the opportunity and freedom to people to bring their own ideas within the garden space. He said: “I like spaces which are quite empty so people can come into them and use them as they would.” You will notice a twist to this story in *The Telegraph Garden* because this garden was meant for contemplation instead of penetration.

ART OF PLACEMENT AND SIGNATURE MATERIAL

One of the strength of Bradley-Hole is certainly his ability in the art of placement. I think that his work often seek an origin from a grid and geometric forms. Then he creatively massages the plant materials within it. His choice of architectural structures and sculptures are made of natural material such as wood, stone or metal.

He says in his book *The Minimalist Garden* that “There is no reason why planting within the minimalist garden needs to come from a restricted palette. In Fact, the bones of the minimalist garden, conceived as an empty gallery, can be the perfect setting for showing off plants.” One of his best approaches is to create a scene that looks to be less controlled and more relaxed. He selects perennials and grasses that grow well together to create a naturalistic informal look, a sort of stylized meadow. His research made him select “plants that are of equal competitiveness and that will co-habit in an attractive and easily manageable way.”

My perception is that his plant materials and water plane-surfaces become a sort of transmitter of “movements” activated by environmental elements such light, wind, moisture, pigmented colours and textures. His landscape design work could be compared to an oil painting in perpetual movement where the plants dance repetitively on the music of nature and delivering an emotional expression of the “moment” choreographed by the knowledge, talent and passion of Bradley-Hole.

I believe that he truly masters the world of “contrast” with interplay of light and shadow. Punctuation is often small rectangular pools where reflection emerges, and blocks of yew and beech whose contrasting greens caress the eyes and accentuate rhythms.

At the end the whole landscape becomes ONE with the site, sky, earth, plants, water and light creating an ambiance where the users feels comfortable and knows this is where they belong in the moment…
PLANTING DESIGN PRINCIPALS

The integration of Bradley-Hole’s early love of plants coupled with his architectural concerns is visible, harmonious and tangible in his planting design preferences especially if you remember that he is a man of big contrasts. He embraces the new perennial movement by exploring “the relationship between nature and the built environment within gardens and public landscapes.” This is where aesthetic and ecological trepidations are part of the panache of perennials and grasses complementing the diverse structural forms and constant changes of Mother Nature. He affirms that there is “something essentially right about that, because it does evoke nature, it’s inspired by nature.” Unity, rhythm and order is always present in nature.

His approach to planting design can be called “stylized naturalism” which embrace a contemporary cultural sensibility and can be seen and appreciated throughout his elegant designs of his country garden schemes. It was interesting to find out that in the The Telegraph Garden NOT all plants were native, but he said that they “look it and that’s the point.” He wanted to reflect the arrival in England of new species from overseas, “one of the oldest influences on our flora, and by no means always negative.” He believes that nations with strong horticultural identity such as Japan for example “have no qualms about using non-native plants provided they harmonise with the indigenous: purism of palette is not necessarily the way to achieve purity of vision.”

This type of statement could be a good spark for a flaming debate about the use of native or non-native plant materials… I believe in the importance of balance and this is something nature is really good at demonstrating over time.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe things happen for a reason. Two years ago I was researching landscape design images on Google because I wanted inspiration for the remodeling of our front lawn property. I remember finding an image of a beautiful modern landscape designed by Christopher Bradley-Hole. I did not know why, but his Zen work touched my quiet soul. I felt like I was falling in love with a stranger…

The following year, I had the chance to escape to Paris in the spring and intimately discovered The Nymphéas of Monet at the Musée de l’Orangerie. Standing a brush away from his painting, I cried alone in the crowd, moved by Monet’s interpretation of nature and beauty. Needless to say I felt in love again. At my return, I spent a few precious summer days with my cousin Claude A. Simard. He is a renowned R.C.A. painter who dedicated his life to his art of “painting gardens”. Walking together along his summer estate, we discussed the challenges of the art of landscape design through the trained eyes of very talented painter.

For me 2013 was a year of inspiration and in September I registered to the Certificate Program of Landscape Design of Ryerson University. During all this time my curiosity towards Bradley-Hole never faded. I read his book The Minimalist Garden during my “nonexistent spare time” and I felt so happy when I had the opportunity to research him in further details within the context of this class.
What I realized is that when a landscape artist creates from the heart, the final work will speak its essence of beauty and sensitivity. If you love the work of such an artist, it is quite probable that you are like him or her and have similar qualities…

Within the audience of a garden, will be someone like this truthful artist, who will deeply understand the landscape design expression and feel the same emotions. And when this happens, this someone in the audience will know that landscape design is not a collection of plants arranged nicely but instead landscape design is a philosophy, a way of thinking and living, landscape design is an emotion…

So through this interesting project, I realized that I share the same world views than Christopher Bradley-Hole. With dedication, sustainable passion, tenacity, hard work and a bouquet of opportunity I hope to be able to achieve what I admire in him. If everyone had a hero the world would be a better place. Maximal Minimalist approach or not, my hero is Christopher Bradley-Hole.

REFERENCES:
http://www.christopherbradley-hole.co.uk/home/home.htm
http://blogs.crocus.co.uk/chelseafowershow/crocus/christopher-bradley-hole-biography/
http://www.e-architect.co.uk/cambridge/sainsbury-laboratory
http://dmooredesign.blogspot.ca/2008/05/christopher-bradley-hole-designer.html
http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/collections/buildings/media_city.shtml
http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-gdaRziogTKc/Um9iioYzqil/AAAAAAAAbp4/ks-40va-eeg/s1600/97442.jpg
http://www.burycourtbarn.com/gardens/
http://blog.lisacoxdesigns.co.uk/inspiration/a-taste-of-rhs-chelsea-flower-show-2013-part-one/

And the fantastic book: *The Minimalist Garden*