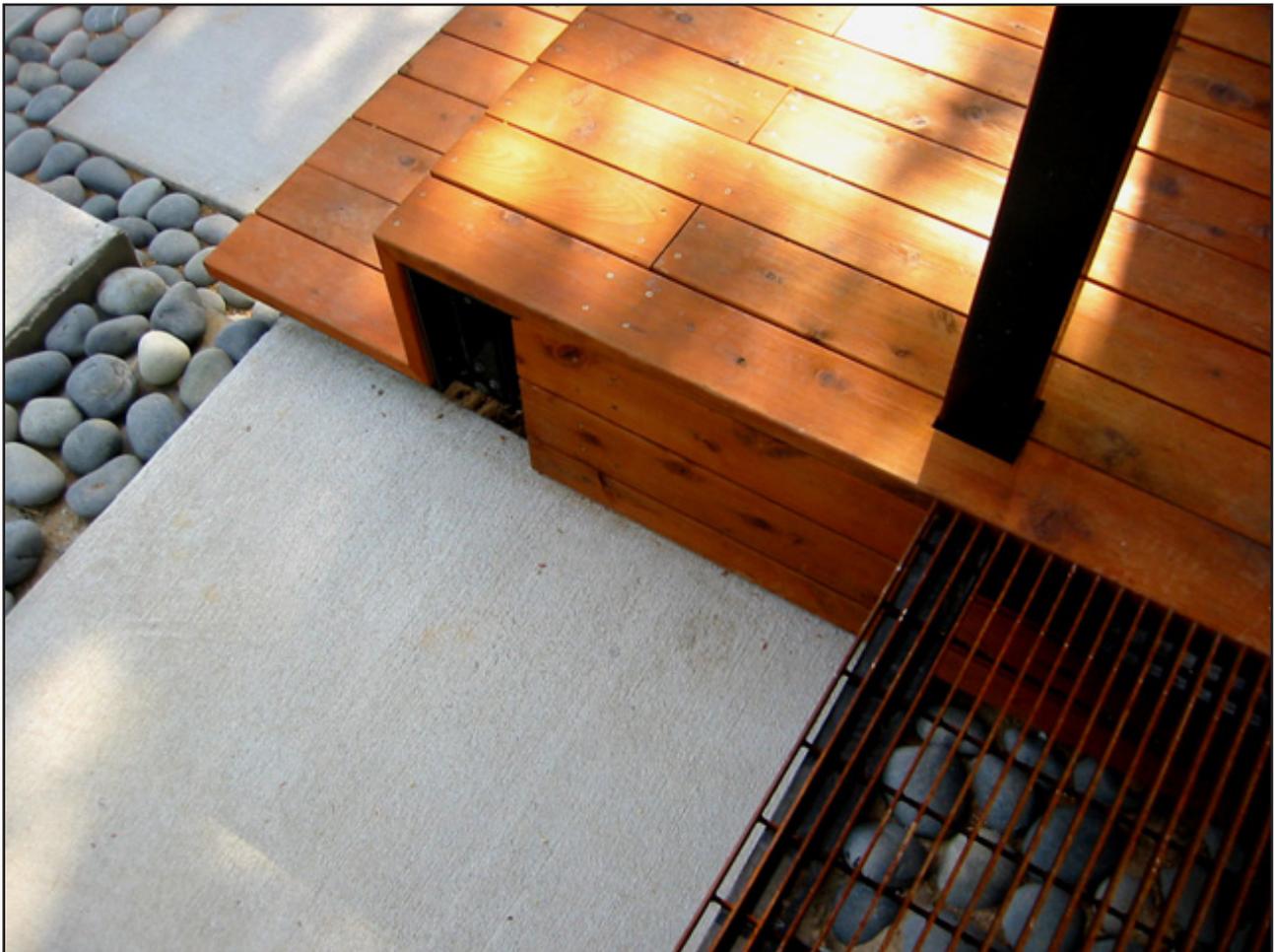


## Tectonic Landscapes: The Outdoor Classroom Project

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The Tectonic Landscapes initiative focuses on small, unremarkable, and often forgotten places adjacent to the lives of under-served people. Located in the boundary between architecture and landscape

the projects seek to create experiential delight out of small-scale design opportunities. Through the adaptive re-use and recycling of leftover urban spaces the resulting projects augment and enhance

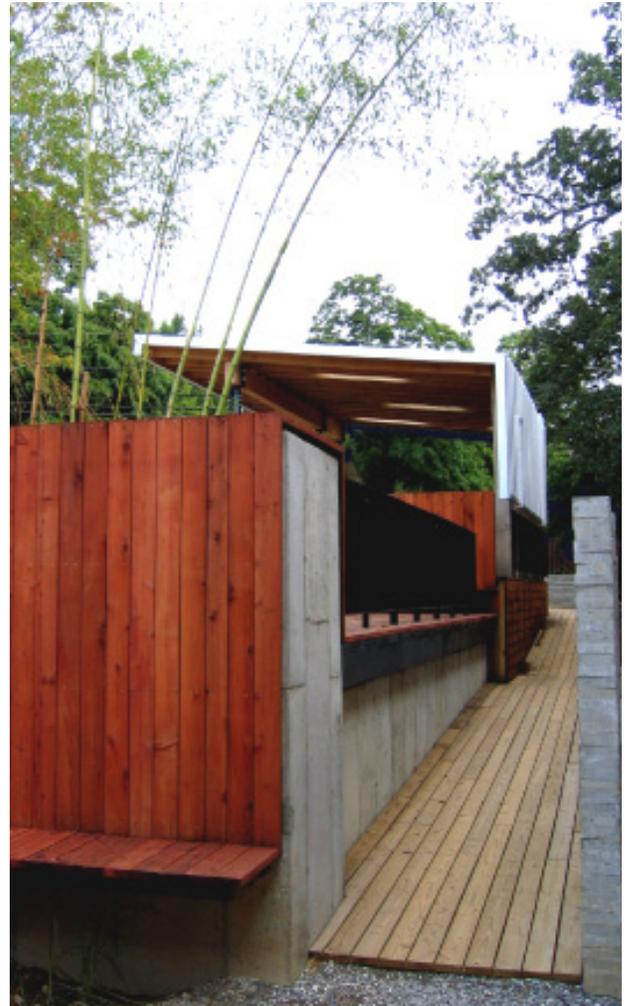
existing building infrastructures with new, primarily outdoor, spaces that provide pragmatic functions, promote play, and exhibit a social and environmental conscience. The underlying pedagogy explores the potential for subverting distinctions between the disciplines of Landscape Architecture and Architecture in order to privilege a more comprehensive introduction to the spatial and material fundamentals that transcend disciplinary boundaries.

Through a cross-disciplinary, full-scale approach to design education, participating students were confronted with the indeterminate scope of architectural endeavor. Specifically, projects are structured to undermine common disciplinary preconceptions while occupying the space between the professional disciplines of architecture and landscape architecture. The resulting discourse serves to expand their field of operation while positing an alternative to the fragmentary nature of core architectural design education in which site and building, as well as drawing and making, are too often seen as separate, codified realms of isolated expertise. Implicit to this educational approach is the primary proposition that the interplay between site and building is fundamental to any comprehensive beginning.

The work of Carlo Scarpa, along with the spatial landscapes found in the villas of the Italian Renaissance, (d'Este, Lante, Gamberaia, etc.), provide historical precedents for the Tectonic Landscape initiative. Serving to articulate the conceptual scope and underlying pedagogical agenda these precedents embody a continuity between and across discrete disciplinary boundaries commonly limited by the threshold between interior and exterior or distinctions between an organic, 'natural' palette and the realm of building construction materials. Procession, sequence, view, tactile sensation, formal strategies, and ordering systems constitute shared interdisciplinary content. Privileging the spatial over a specific material palette or the presence/lack of enclosure establishes a common ground of design occupied by both landscape architects and architects.

In an effort to focus on transferable topics common to design, (in a broad, inclusive sense), projects in the Tectonic Landscape initiative are structured to repress the most familiar, discipline-specific characteristics. Removing much of the botanical material associated with landscape architecture and the weather enclosure typical of buildings undermines

expectations and initiates a process of reevaluation. Denied the fetishistic desire for object buildings and freed from the demands of more complicated enclosure systems, architecture students reexamine small-scale design opportunities in elements that are typically ignored or tertiary in a typical building studio project.



## DESIGN PROPOSAL

The Outdoor Classroom was a collaborative, design + build project that addressed issues of active and participatory education in the context of the normative American playground. The completed project provides for a mix of outdoor activities in a centrally located, relatively urban, mixed-income neighborhood where 60% of the students qualify for the free lunch program. At the scale of an individual schoolyard the project explores the potential for augmenting aging

school infrastructure with new, outdoor teaching and recreation spaces that expand learning options and promote physical activity. At the urban scale the project reexamines the relationship between public schools and city park facilities in an effort to reconnect communities to their local schools and expand public access to outdoor space. By pushing the envelope of adaptive reuse, the Outdoor Classroom project sought to create a high quality, small-scale landscape of architecture in the civic realm.

Occupying a leftover corner of the existing campus created where the diagonal topography abruptly met the orthogonal building, the project creates a new transition between the school interior and the hilly playground. A new gateway opens onto Maple Street, creating an entrance to the playground and inviting after-hours and weekend use by the neighborhood. Wrapped by a ramp, four significant spaces organize and animate the project. Moving from North to South, the entry sequence from Maple Street passes alongside the story-telling court and covered pavilion before descending into the kickball court, which doubles as seating for the adjacent stage. Finally, the redwood "ribbon" terminates in a planter box and bench at the edge of the new basketball court. While each space has its formal, intended program, the overall project operates day-to-day as a large piece of outdoor furniture. Low walls and oversized steps provide informal seating for jumping, lounging, and/or quiet play.

### COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The Outdoor Classroom was a collaboration between The Washington Elementary Parent-Teacher Organization, The School Administration and Teachers, The District School Board, Tradesmen from the Department of Facilities management in the School District, Members of the Local Construction and Design Professions, and an interdisciplinary team of faculty and students from the School of Architecture. Prior to the School of Architecture's involvement, The Washington P.T.O., a non-profit volunteer organization, worked for eight years to raise public awareness about the potential benefits of blending classroom curriculum and outdoor space. While the P.T.O. raised awareness and project funding the school's principal led an energetic teaching faculty eager to pursue and implement progressive alternatives in an attempt to improve on their ranking of 347<sup>th</sup> of 451 public elementary schools in the state.



### PROFESSIONAL MENTORSHIP

Forty-four people representing thirty-two companies donated time and expertise to assist participating students as they worked from the initial, conceptual stage through construction documents and finally to the full-scale construction. Along the way students developed mentor relationships with craftsmen in the building industry and developed new skills by working with professionals in the electrical, plumbing, and metal-working trades as well as equipment operators and consultants from the allied professions of Engineering, Contracting, and Landscape Architecture. This engagement is fundamental to the instructor's pedagogical intent. Working directly with skilled craftsmen and consultants breaks down antagonistic relationships that often arise between designers, engineers and the building trades. As the project developed students learned to ask questions and value the craftsman's skills.

