

[FIG 02, OPPOSITE LEFT]  
*Feuer Ahorn / Vermilion Boulevard*

[FIG 03, OPPOSITE, RIGHT ABOVE]  
*Maple Boulevard View*

[FIG 04, OPPOSITE, RIGHT BELOW]  
*Landscape Plan 1:200*

[ARTICLE]

# I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE...

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[DESCRIPTION] *Changing Perspectives*

*Ich sehe etwas was du nich siehst....* or in english: I spy with my little eye. Most of you know this game. Either from the perspective of a child in the back seat of a car on one of these indefinitely boring rides. Or from a parent's perspective in the front seat looking for moments of silence.

This game is about playing together in a group, listening, taking turns and viewing the world through different lenses. At the end of the game everybody is looking at the same thing albeit from different perspectives. I don't know if my perspective is unique but what I have learned and what I try to teach is the ability to look through different lenses while looking at the world.

Professionals in practice and students of landscape architecture work on projects that tackle complex questions. These projects typically involve the development and evaluation of strategies and models in collaboration with town planners, architects, civil engineers, urban sociologists, artists, citizens and politicians, to name a few. This broad perspective of all the key protagonists closely matches the real-life environment in which interdisciplinary working groups come up with potential solutions to complex issues. A cross-disciplinary approach connects specific expert knowledge, scientific knowledge and applied knowledge right from the start. The boundaries dissolve and we spy.... But this kind of collaboration requires a few prerequisites namely trust, curiosity and openness.

## *On Avoiding Showiness*

When did you move to Canada? Are you from Germany? What brought you to Winnipeg? We always get these kinds of questions when people see the washing line running diagonally through our garden. Nobody would really expect two landscape architects to live on this plot of land, but we love drying our laundry in the sun. It smells so different - sun dried (Fig 01).



[FIG 01]

I don't work with recipes or truth and sometimes I might not fit people's expectations because my perspective is different. I cultivate doubt. Doubt provokes further searching and the process of searching enables the act of discovery, which, in turn, leads to the creative process of invention. And each case is unique.

What I learned and try to teach is the ability to see a location's potential, the ability to discover new aspects of something familiar. I am sure that many of you will have experienced the feeling, while engrossed in a topic or assignment, of coming across connections and associations in images, texts, exhibitions, or simply while you are taking a stroll. These impressions and associations are then condensed into something that suits our purposes. This is a phenomenon that we can systematically practice and improve.

Design should not aim to make a spectacle of itself or celebrate the clients' prestige, but simply strive to give the space its own energy by injecting a sensual feel. 'Show-off' gardens and landscapes are something I abhor. I always hope that my designs appear to have integrity as designed spaces because of their honest approach to appropriation. Perhaps it is their modesty and the humility of their execution that is their best lesson.

## *Treating Existing Features with Respect*

Virtually all projects involve the difficult task of translating a broad range of requirements, some of which are mutually contradictory, into a landscape architecture design. A key criterion in this process is deciding how a new range of uses, which we often have to elaborate ourselves, can be integrated into a landscape over the long term. All creative concepts are oriented towards the yardstick of what is already present. New developments are carefully and respectfully integrated in the existing structures. During this process, the idealised view of the landscape architect and

visitors to the site focuses on aspects of local and historical significance. It is time for a case study from work in practice.

## *I Spy... A Vermilion Boulevard*

In 2010 I was asked by Cibinel Architects whether I would like to comment on a project. The project is on the Fort Garry Campus just beside my daily route. What a sweet temptation. The site for the Active Living Centre is at the corner of University Crescent /Dafoe Road and I took a photograph there in my first fall term in Winnipeg because there was an explosion in red. (Fig 02).

Convinced by this drawing (Fig 03), our partners wanted to know where they could get those 'fire trees' from? "Save them, they are actually there!" was my answer. *Feuer Ahorn* is the German name for these trees, which means fire maple. Here we call them *Amur maple*. They turn brilliant orange to red in autumn. All these existing trees along the new building will provide the pleasant side effect of cooling it during the summer for free. And the runners on the track will feel like they are running through a forest, separated only by a layer of glass.

The design for the building was already very advanced when I was asked for my opinion. Everything was well developed but I noticed the 'fire' was not part of the plan. Puzzled looks, and maybe it is my English, but I said, "I am missing the fire".

To cut a long story short or in the words of *Le Corbusier*, 'I prefer drawing to talking. Drawing is faster, and it leaves less room for lies'. I asked for site plans and sections and one day later I went back with the fire. Bringing together the mysterious "fall shot" and the building in a simple section elevation was enough to create a yearning for what we designed below.

This "Aha" experience required a few modifications. Some walls had to be moved out of the root zone and the topography had to fit with the trees. If you believe in trees you should do everything to make their lives as comfortable as possible. Part of this concept for the Active Living Centre was to involve students from our faculty and facilities on campus in this design. Pieces of furniture could be designed and produced in

studios or by student competition in collaboration with C.A.S.T. or the wood shop. We called them "concrete cushions" and they are like colourful flowers in a meadow (Fig 04).

Overall the landscape design for the Active Living Centre (Fig 04) aims to create properly dimensioned spaces scaled for human adoption that take a free and open-minded stance towards the life of this campus landscape while setting the scene for the successful coexistence of a variety of protagonists. The entire campus is viewed as a platform in this context, a stage for the University's "post-boom generation" in search of moments of happiness. I like to work with spatial typologies rather than with single elements or features – how nice they might be or to use "nature" as an excuse in our design. They stand in stark contrast to their surroundings and create a clear delineation between private and public areas. These structures are capable of forming a new system of coordinates and acting as an effective navigational instrument for the landscape area on the campus of the University of Manitoba.

## *I Spy ... Angels*

What would I like to design next? I am dreaming of a runway for angels in the Prairies. But I will have to take a lot of hostile questioning. Will devils get clearance to land as well? Do you need a control tower? Or what happens if you don't believe in angels? I have to think about the answers to the first two questions. For the last one: Even if you don't believe in angels it is good to have one!

## NOTES:

PROJECT  
Active Living Centre, Fort Garry Campus, University of Manitoba

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
preliminary design: Fig 03-04  
Straub Thurmayer CSLA Landschaftsarchitekten und Stadtplaner  
Dietmar Straub + Anna Thurmayer

ARCHITECTURE  
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