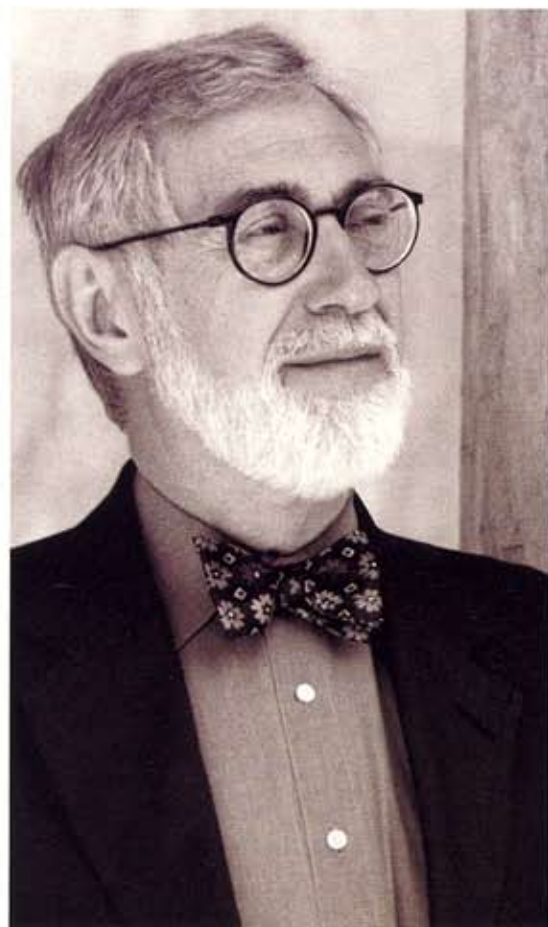




The Metropolis Observed



Laurie Olin integrates subtle security measures into his landscape designs. He is currently designing the landscaping for the new development at New York's Columbus Circle (above).

Discreet Landscapes

Q&A

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Laurie Olin's graceful greenspaces are also secret security systems.

Laurie Olin has been in the landscape architecture game for more than three decades, most recently as a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and as principal of the Philadelphia-based Olin Partnership. His credits include the Vila Olimpica complex, in Barcelona; New York's Bryant Park; and London's Canary Wharf, King's Cross, and Bishopsgate urban-renewal projects. Lately he has also been sharing headlines with his old friend Frank Gehry. The two are completing the 2.8-acre Ray and Maria Stata Center at MIT, are part of a short-listed concern vying for the Grand Avenue project in downtown Los Angeles, and are on Bruce Ratner's dream team for the proposed Nets arena development in Brooklyn.

But Olin's practice also has a quieter concern: landscape security. Long de rigueur for state

embassies, corporate campuses, and select private residences, the field draws upon techniques of landscape architecture to create discreet defenses against attack. Since 9/11 the United States Government has embraced the approach wholeheartedly. In January 2002 the National Capitol Planning Commission tapped Olin Partnership as one of three landscape architecture firms to upgrade security-sensitive districts in Washington, D.C. Among the firm's responsibilities were the Independence and Constitution Street areas, as well as the Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson Monuments. In January *Metropolis* Web editor Julie Taraska spoke with Olin about bombs, bollards, and public access, and how in this time of Homeland Security we can maintain safety without fencing ourselves in. ■

How can a landscape architect help secure an area?

It has to do with what devices are in your repertoire. Some of them are very old, like fences and railings. Some of them are ancient, like moats, ditches, water bodies, and ha-has, which are basically dry moats.

In a landscape we can only do a few things: we can stop vehicles or people or both, but we can't deal with mortars or airplanes. As for bombing, that gets one into what are the proper distances for different kinds of structures. Various security and Secret Service folks have worked out that the charge needed to take down a reinforced-concrete buildings is this, and for a steel one, it's this, and so on. You're always looking at what will bring a structure down versus what will seriously damage it. One of the things the Israelis have discovered is that about the most someone can strap on himself and walk around with is less **continued on page 34**

Courtesy Olin Partnership

james tufenkian

william georges

james tufenkian

vicente wolf

james tufenkian



cracked stone grey sand

bamboo maple

igloo black pool

ven gravel

flip side water

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Olin's scheme for the Washington Monument provides security without the need for oppressive concrete Jersey barriers.

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than 100 pounds, including the backpack.

By the way, let me stop and say I hate all this stuff. I never wanted to know any of this. But at a certain point in trying to restore the public realm to some degree of free access and dignity you end up having to know about this.

Would you say your firm's security work is concerned as much with public access as it is with safety?

We really try to be—and it's really hard. I was troubled by some of the studies that [landscape architecture firm] EDAW and others had done in D.C., where they took all of the street furniture and hardened it. It was like a different version of tank traps: all of these big planters and heavy benches. The thing is to not have the elements be too heavy, too repetitive, or too bombastic. It's like composing music: when to have long straight passages, when to have little flourishes. When do you use a cluster of bollards, then a kind of low wall, then add two planters, then do something else?

There are two or three serious dilemmas in D.C.: the buildings are located in a city, and there are streets. If you don't close the streets, then vehicles can be on them. And if there are vehicles on the streets, they might be the ones with the big bombs like you just saw in Baghdad yesterday. That truck went off with about 1,000 pounds of explosives.

There's not much you can do about that except take the parking off the street, narrow the streets, and have a bigger pedestrian realm; make railing and fences that are actually crash barriers; and have gaps in between for benches that are also barriers. It's a design problem, like it used to be with handicapped ramps. When the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed we said, "Oh, jeez," and struggled to retrofit everything until it became such a habit that we now start projects just knowing what to do. It takes a certain mind shift to not think of it as a problem but to say, "Oh, it's just one more thing." You just absorb it, and it becomes part of what you do.

Is there such a thing as too much security?

We don't want security to be oppressive and overwhelm ourselves with a Fortress America quality, but there are reasons to want to know what your limits are, what's private, and that at certain

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outdoors



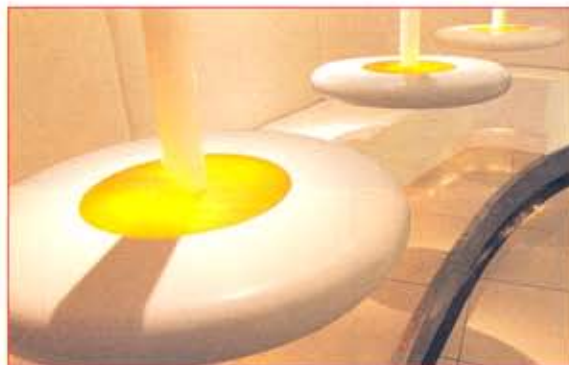
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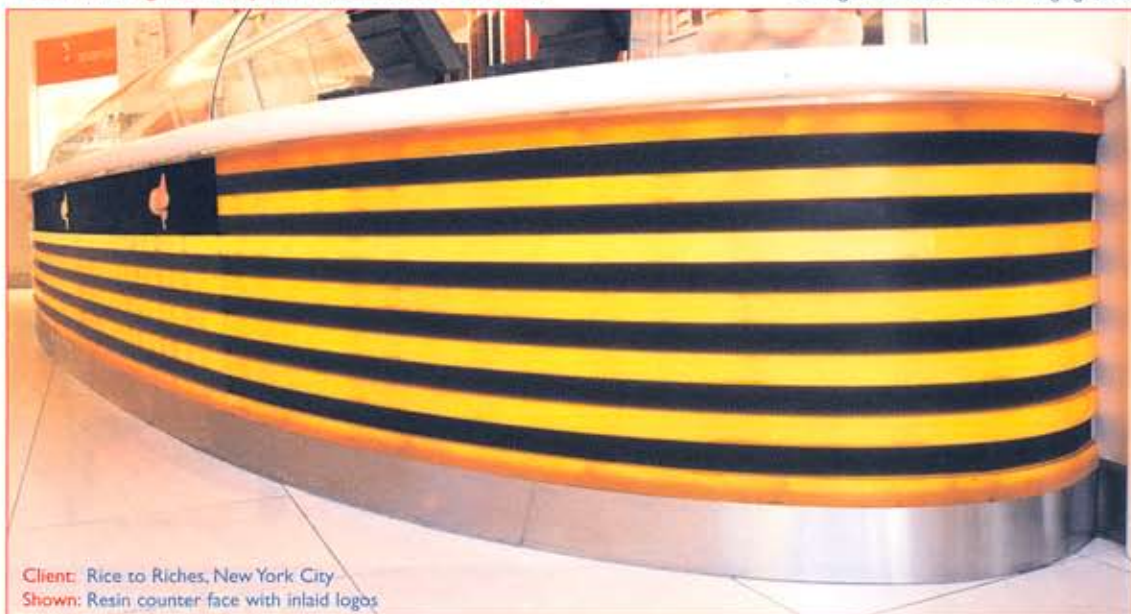
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Orange resin discs inlaid in hanging tables



Client: Rice to Riches, New York City
Shown: Resin counter face with inlaid logos

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points there is security. Some security measures aren't really that important. But what agency head is not going to want to have a lot of visible security? That would be admitting that he doesn't think anyone cares about his agency or will attack them. So it's security envy: Agency A sees Agency B do something and then thinks, "I'd better do something too." Everyone tries to escalate. The business of trying to sort out levels of real danger and security is an issue. And secure from what? Right now people are worried about Islamic fundamentalists who hate America, but there are other people who go around doing terrible things.

Are we going down a path in security design from which there is no return?

When we were working in New York recently, trying to come up with a redesign for Columbus Circle, the developer for Time Warner said they were concerned about security and wanted to have bollards around the building. I said, "Forget it, it doesn't make sense. It's an office and residential building with a bunch of stores in it." But Time Warner felt that everyone hated them so much, that they were the big commercial bad-die and so somebody was going to attack them. I said, "Yes, but why would they attack you at the ground when the new style is something more dramatic from the air?" They looked at me like I was the devil with two horns. In the end it was city planning director Amanda Burden who said, "For Christ's sake! If we let Time Warner do that then every office building in town will want to do it, and the sidewalks in New York will be so that you can't walk in this town. We've got to stop it!" She was pounding the table as she said this, and I thought, "Right on, Amanda!"

Have these issues caused an increased delineation between private and public space?

There has been a resurgence of interest in trying to throw up some sort of line, sign, and barrier about private versus public. It's an interesting thing. I was born in 1938, and the realm I grew up in—the Eisenhower years after the war—was this sort of naive, open America that was obviously an aberration. The fences of the nineteenth century had come down, and the gated communities of the twentieth century hadn't gone up. It was this strangely open world where everybody just wandered around innocently with plate-glass windows and no fences and uninterrupted lawns between houses. But nowadays I've noticed all of these fences, hedges, and barriers going up between houses. This is also by people who don't go out and use their lawns much, which I find interesting too. There's a hunkering-down-in-the-dark-with-your-television quality of this moment that troubles me. But I'm a hopeless optimist. I do think a lot of things that come as waves of bad habits can be dealt with through design and common sense. □