

READING THE LANDSCAPE: USING DETAILS TO TELL A STORY IN
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

by

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(Under the Direction of David Spooner)

ABSTRACT

Storytelling is an instinctual method of communication that has been used by humans for thousands of years. Incorporating stories into the landscape is a way to communicate conceptual ideas, share facts or information, or embed a deeper meaning into a landscape design. Using landscape design details to communicate a story in the landscape is the most effective way in ensuring the narrative is recognized and understood by the landscape's visitors. One of the best examples of using landscape details for storytelling comes from Disney Imagineering's work in Disney Theme Parks and Resorts. This thesis explores Disney Imagineering's design process and analyzes case studies from Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park to create a modified version of Disney Imagineering's detail design process that landscape architects can use for landscape designs outside of the theme park setting. The modified storytelling design process will be applied to Bear Hollow Zoo in Athens, Georgia.

INDEX WORDS: Landscape Architecture, Storytelling, Landscape Details, Theme, Backstory, Theme Parks

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B.S. Wofford College, 2014

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2019

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August 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, David Spooner, for helping me through the thesis process with patience and encouragement. I would also like to thank committee members Brad Davis, Jack Crowley, and Cameron Berglund for your time and interest in reviewing the thesis.

I would also like to thank my fellow classmates for their support and friendship. The memories we have shared together over the last three years will never be forgotten.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The profession of landscape architecture is an interdisciplinary field that plays an integral role in land development. Landscape architects are trained to identify challenges or problems in an area and solve them using functional and creative solutions. These problems often deal with organization, circulation, or safety in a landscape. However, in addition to solving these problems in an effective manner, landscape architects also have the opportunity to use the landscape as a way to communicate larger concepts and ideas to the visitors of a space. A landscape architect can effectively communicate a story in a landscape design by prioritizing the importance of the story throughout the entire design process and ensuring all design decisions reinforce the story. Arguably, one of the best ways to do this is through careful consideration and design of landscape details. In this thesis, “details” does not refer to construction details, but rather the smaller components of a landscape design that come together to make a design more dynamic and unique. Designing a landscape with thoughtful details can allow a landscape to communicate a deeper message and provide an opportunity for visitors to more closely connect with a space.

Humans have always communicated through stories. Storytelling is a part of life in “all cultures over all eras in all parts of the world” and “is a powerful means of fostering social cooperation and teaching social norms,” (Kluger 2017). The format of storytelling is so familiar to humans that it is a common teaching tool

for almost anyone and anything. Stories assign an emotional value to a piece of information, and that is why humans often pay more attention and remember a story more vividly than just a factual piece of information (Delistraty 2014). The emotional element of a story is the reason why stories can unite groups of people and give people a sense of hope, identity, guidance, or inspiration. “Stories link the sense of time, event, experience, memory and other intangibles to the more tangible aspects of place,” (Potteiger and Purinton 1998).

Because storytelling is an instinctive method of communicating, landscape architects can incorporate stories in their landscape designs to more easily communicate to the visitors of a space. There are varying degrees of storytelling in the landscape in present-day landscape architecture projects. Some designs contain a subtle hint of a narrative, whereas others are explicit in their messages. However, if the narrative is too subtle, it can go unnoticed by the visitors of the landscape site. This thesis will explore Disney Imagineering’s explicit storytelling techniques as a guide for effective storytelling that is easily recognizable by the visitors of the site. This thesis will argue that successful storytelling in the landscape is best executed by assigning a theme or a backstory, or both, to a landscape design. A theme and a backstory are different in scale but they both contribute to the overall “big picture” story of a landscape design. A theme is a larger, more conceptual idea that creates a unifying message and brings the separate elements of a project or design together under that message. Examples of themes are adventure, mystery, fantasy, innovation, caution, and danger. Backstories are more specific – they take the theme a little bit further and distinguish a plot, setting, and characters for a specific story that ultimately reflects the theme and inspires the design choices. The

backstory is a more concrete explanation that can distinguish an area from another that may both reflect the same theme. This thesis will explore examples of both themes and backstories that landscape architects can include in a landscape design to communicate a larger message to visitors of a space.

Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton's book Landscape Narratives discusses some ways that landscapes can incorporate narratives and lists different types of narratives that have historically been used in landscape architecture. They argue that narratives or stories are a "more accessible design language" (Potteiger and Purinton 1998) and since the landscape already delivers a setting or backdrop for a story, adding in design elements that contribute to the narrative only makes the narrative stronger. Potteiger and Purinton use the term 'narrative' as a "more comprehensive and inclusive term than story," but this thesis will only focus on storytelling in terms of themes or backstories and will distinguish between the two where needed, but both contribute to the general overall story or larger message of a landscape design.

While not every landscape design project requires visitors to connect to a narrative within an outdoor space, such as projects that are purely functional or focused on circulation or safety, many projects can potentially benefit from highlighting themes or backstories and attempt to illustrate them within the design. Such locations can include historical monuments or sites, memorials, museums, children's gardens or playgrounds, visitor centers, zoos and aquariums, and many more. The type of built environment that relies on themes or backstories most often and effectively however, is theme parks. Theme parks exist because the area has been designed under at least one unifying theme, but individual areas can have their own specific themes or backstories. Without

incorporating themes or backstories, a theme park is no longer a theme park, but only an “amusement park” that simply contains attractions for entertainment that are not connected or related to each other. The idea of a theme park as it is known today was originated by Walt Disney in the early 1950s when he began building Disneyland in Anaheim, California. His intention was to build a “family fun park” in the same artistic manner that he used to create his animated films. He decided to “take his passion for storytelling far beyond the confines of two-dimensions” and wanted “visitors who stepped in to this new park should feel as though they stepped into a movie. Every inch of the place should be part of a story, as in a movie or television show,” (Rafferty and Gordon 1996). The success of Disneyland instigated a new era for the entire entertainment industry and over time, the Disney Theme Parks would prove their success by being the most visited theme parks across the globe, attracting almost 2.3 times as many visitors as the second most popular theme park group (TEA 2017).

Disney Imagineering (the theme park creative design branch of the Disney Company), along with their partnerships with other design firms, continuously builds and maintains the Disney theme parks in a way that engages the visitors with themes and backstories and keeps them returning to Disney Parks. Disney Imagineering’s primary method for illustrating themes and backstories in their projects is utilizing every detail within the designs to continuously reinforce the larger themes and backstories of a designed area. This thesis will evaluate Disney Imagineering’s design methods, explore case study areas within Disney Theme Parks, and argue that Disney Imagineering’s method is a very effective way for communicating themes and backstories to visitors that can be modified to use in other landscape design projects outside of a theme park.

Purpose and Significance

Storytelling in the landscape has historically been a way for designers to creatively share ideas and communicate to the visitors of the site by incorporating themes and backstories into their landscape designs. Examples of storytelling in the landscape throughout history will be examined in Chapter 2. Today, explicit storytelling in the landscape is not commonly practiced outside of a theme park or entertainment setting. If storytelling is attempted, it is not often effectively communicated, or may be too subtle to be recognized by the visitor. This thesis will argue that storytelling themes and backstories are most effectively communicated when they are reflected in the design choices of the details in a landscape design, as seen in Disney Imagineering's theme park landscapes. However, in a typical landscape architecture firm focusing on projects outside of a theme park, due to time or budget constraints and attempting to follow codes or regulations, designing custom details for a landscape theme or backstory might be viewed as superfluous. It is common for a landscape architect to eliminate custom details in an attempt to simplify the project timeline and budget. Reusing standard designs for typical project elements such as sidewalks, walls, and plazas is a common practice in landscape architecture. In his book The Art of Landscape Detail, Niall Kirkwood, ASLA, confirms that "in the design office, landscape details have often been repeated through the tradition of 'rules of thumb' that are institutionalized through professional office standards and company manuals," (Kirkwood 1999). Landscape architecture firms can limit liability and save time and money by using a previous design since it is already following any codes or regulations determined by the project's location. In Boston, Massachusetts for example, there has been a movement to replace the traditional brick

pavers that line the historical streets due to the potential problems from poor maintenance. Brick sidewalks that crack and shift present problems for the disabled community, and while many “landscape architects ... are concerned about restrictions on the [brick] material that is so closely associated with the city’s identity,” they are also required to follow ADA regulations to ensure equal accessibility on the sidewalks to all residents, (Padjen 2012). Instead of developing a custom sidewalk design that follows the rules and regulations for an individual area, it is easier to use a standard concrete sidewalk design that is already completed and guaranteed to follow the codes and regulations. Because of this example and many others, developing unique concepts and the accompanying designs and technical documents for individual projects is not a priority for practicing landscape architects. Professional landscape architecture firms typically have their own preexisting standard designs that can easily be tweaked to fit another project. The opportunity to fully commit to individual theming and backstories is not often available or encouraged for each project.

Niall Kirkwood argues for the importance of prioritizing detail design in the profession of landscape architecture. Kirkwood argues that details are “a source of creative expression” for landscape architects, and that there is a “poverty of generic landscape detail form found within current professional literature and academic instruction,” (Kirkwood 1999). Spending time developing details for a landscape project is important because “it is the specific area in which the activity of landscape design is carried out at the human scale,” (Kirkwood 1999) which makes details the perfect medium for storytelling. The more that visitors can experience, evaluate, and enjoy landscape details, the more likely they will be to recognize the meaning behind the

details. Kirkwood acknowledges that details have previously been categorized by other landscape architects as “special seasonings” that are “likened to minor accessories, features, or furniture added to the structure of parks, plazas, and streets,” (Kirkwood 1999). Some landscape architects may not give the design of site details much consideration, but this thesis argues that details such as paving and paving patterns, lights, benches, fountains, signs, gates, benches, kiosks, utility poles, trash cans, plant containers, and many more, can all be used to reinforce a theme and tell a story in a landscape design.

This thesis argues that storytelling (using themes and backstories) in landscape architecture projects is important because it is the best way to create a richer, more artistic and interesting design and tell a story with the landscape that visitors can experience. Details “have the ability to reflect or resonate with the characteristics of the site, place, and context in which they occur and with the scale and character of the surrounding environment,” and utilizing the details of a design is the best way to allow each space to effectively tell its own story (Kirkwood 1999). By focusing on individual details, the design will be more cohesive and able to reflect larger conceptual ideas. The collaboration of small details can bring more power to the design as a whole, resulting in a more creatively rich design that more effectively connects to its visitors.

Incorporating a theme or backstory into a landscape design is a way to add a deeper layer of creativity to the design and communicate more easily to the site’s visitors. This thesis will attempt to answer the questions: How can stories be told in the landscape? What is the best method for telling stories in the landscape? And what aspects

of Disney Imagineering's design methods can professional landscape architects use in their landscape design projects to more effectively tell stories in the landscape?

Methodology & Overview of Chapters

This thesis will present the argument that professional landscape architects do not often incorporate storytelling in their landscape designs, but they could potentially use aspects of Disney Imagineering's detail-oriented design method to more effectively incorporate storytelling in their landscape designs. Research and analysis of the landscape design work by Disney Imagineering in the Disney Theme Parks will be completed. Specifically, this research will focus on Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida.

Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park was chosen for a few key reasons. Firstly, Animal Kingdom is the newest theme park at Walt Disney World, and has plenty of written documentation about its development and construction. Secondly, it is easily accessible from Athens, GA and research was able to be done within the timeframe of this thesis. Thirdly, the park contains unique themes related to nature and conservation and backstories that are richer and more detailed than any other Disney theme park.

Chapter 2 will dive into the history of storytelling and what components make up a good story. Historical examples of landscape designs with storytelling components will be examined. An emphasis will be placed on the importance of telling stories in the landscape to communicate messages to the visitors of the space. Examples of storytelling in modern-day landscape architecture that succeed and examples that fail will be evaluated and discussed. The importance of prioritizing the design of landscape details to support storytelling in the landscape will be emphasized.

Chapter 3 will focus on Disney Imagineering's design methods and argue for their effectiveness in storytelling in the landscape. The history of Disney Parks and Disney Imagineering will be discussed. Case studies from Disney's Animal Kingdom will be analyzed to explain Disney Imagineering's detail-oriented design method and show how design details can reflect themes and backstories of an area. Photographs and first-hand accounts from Disney designers will be used to illustrate the intention and implementation behind the designs at the park.

Chapter 4 will take the most important aspects Disney Imagineering's design methods and modify them for a simplified version of detail-oriented design that current practicing landscape architects can use in their landscape designs.

Chapter 5 will apply the modified version of Disney Imagineering's design methods to a re-imagination of Bear Hollow Zoo in Athens, Georgia. Drawings will be done to show how landscape details could support themes and backstories assigned to the space. An argument for using the modified method in the profession of landscape architecture will be discussed. The thesis concludes with a self-critique and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THE VALUE OF STORYTELLING

Origins of Storytelling

As mentioned in Chapter 1, humans have always communicated through stories. Storytelling has been a method of communication since the dawn of human consciousness. Even before written language, early humans had to develop ways of communicating vital information to their families or groups. The first communication of stories was developed when early humans began to attempt to understand the world and their place in it. “Humans, unlike other species, see their individual and collective lives in terms of plot – of story and history,” and it is engrained in humans’ collective awareness to view every aspect of their lives as some part of a story (Leeming 1997). Storytelling allows people “to share their life experiences with each other, solidify ties within a community, and deal with the problems that they all face,” (Leeming 1997).

Some of the first stories told in groups of early humans were creation stories, with each group or tribe of early indigenous peoples having their own stories and myths that were passed down orally from generation to generation through spoken word, sounds, song, and dance. As for written storytelling, there are early cave paintings that are viewed as the first evidence of human art, therefore the first tangible signs of higher human consciousness, and scientists have discovered some of the oldest in Indonesia to be around 35,400 years old (Marchant 2016). As humans evolved, so did their methods of communicating. Around 3000 B.C. in Egypt, picture-based hieroglyphs became a

common method of sharing information, stories, thoughts, and feelings (World History Project 1995-2006). Evolving even more, the Phoenicians developed the first written alphabet around 1800-1700 B.C., where “unique symbols stood for single consonants [and] written from right to left,” (Schumm 2014). Around 800 B.C., the Phoenician language evolved into the first official Greek alphabet that included all sounds, including vowels, and was read from left to right, (Schumm 2014). The Greek alphabet would create the Greek language, which would later spread to influence the language of Latin and then eventually, to all other languages known today.

The written language, with the invention of paper around 105 A.D., was able to be transmitted over longer distances. Fast forward to the invention of the printing press in 1350, and information was able to be spread even farther. Over time, written information would make its way across the globe and allow for stories to be preserved and passed along. Eventually, technology would allow for the inventions of the radio, photography, cinema, television, and the internet to spread information and stories even more rapidly. What remains the same is the tendency for humans to use stories to communicate, as it is a universally understood medium that the human species has been using for tens of thousands of years.

Stories help “map out the terrain” of the world and “reiterate messages that we sometimes forget” and even “improve understanding by building bridges of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual connections among peoples,” (Leeming 1997). Storytelling is a vital element to humans’ ability to communicate and ultimately survive, which is why “the longevity of the oral tradition is a testimony to the power of the told story,” (Leeming 1997). It is easy to understand then, why storytelling is at the core of art –

creating art and applying meaning to art. Art, in any form, is a way to tell a story, and “any design inevitably has its narratives,” (Potteiger and Purinton 1998). Landscape architecture originated as an artform that reflected meaning into the landscape, usually representing a reflection of the landowner’s wealth or status. Present-day landscape architecture is a profession that modifies and shapes the landscape in any way for any reason – but using the landscape to tell a story is still present in the profession and is most often used in projects for historical monuments or sites, memorials, museums, children’s gardens or playgrounds, visitor centers, zoos and aquariums, theme parks, and many more.

Elements of a Good Story

There are many different definitions for what constitutes the makeup of a story. An internet search will yield conflicting opinions on whether a good story should have three, four, five, or even seven distinguished sections, or if a story should have certain plot points or number of characters for conflicts. Award-winning children’s book writer Aaron Shepard argues that a good story should have equally strong elements of: theme, plot, story structure, characters, setting, style and tone. Shepard advertises on his website that “the strongest children’s stories have well-developed themes, engaging plots, suitable structure, memorable characters, well-chosen settings, and attractive style. For best results, build strength in *all* areas,” (Shepard 1998). Overall, authors agree that the three central elements of a good story are setting, plot and characters. The author, artist, or storyteller has full control over how those elements are arranged or revealed in their stories. But the overall consensus is that a story is a message, and that message must be communicated to the recipient of the story in some form or fashion.

Storytelling in the Landscape

Because a landscape cannot tell a story through written or spoken words (unless those are included in the form of signage, but this can be easily overdone), a landscape tells a story only through visual elements. Similarly to a silent film, painting, or sculpture, a landscape has to display its story through visual cues that communicate messages to its visitors. It is up to the landscape architect to carefully and thoughtfully include those visual cues in the final designs so that the landscape can effectively tell a story through the landscape. Potteiger and Purinton agree that “the power of the story realm lies in the devices that create a coherent sense of closure, an ordering of event, time, and place created and controlled by the intent of the designer,” (Potteiger and Purinton 1998). The “devices” Potteiger and Purinton refer to are the visual cues that are chosen by the designer to illustrate the story that is being told in the landscape. Visual cues in the landscape can be whatever the designer chooses to represent a theme or backstory within a landscape design. This thesis argues that the most effective way to include visual cues in a landscape design is to utilize as many details as possible that can contribute to the storytelling. Landscape details – the choices made about color, material, scale, orientation, additional elements – are more powerful when they all come together to illustrate a story in a landscape. Effective details are included in the landscape design to take the design to the next level by creating custom designs that directly represent a site’s unique theming or backstories. When more careful thought is put into the landscape details, the theme or backstory of a landscape can be more easily understood by the site’s visitors. Historically, stories have been told in the landscape by using different kinds of visual cues in many different ways to represent different kinds of stories. The next

section will evaluate historical examples in the field of Landscape Architecture and analyze their use of details, and whether or not they successfully contribute to the communication of the site's themes or storylines.

Historical Examples of Storytelling in the Landscape

As previously discussed, the practice of storytelling has been a method of human communication for tens of thousands of years. The practice of storytelling has also been used in the landscape as a medium for storytelling. Since the first humans developed a higher level of cognitive thinking and communication, storytelling was a part of their everyday lives for sharing information with each other and attempting to understand unexplainable phenomenon. Aboriginal people in Australia are estimated to have been living there as early as 65,000 years ago, and their traditions and cultures are heavily focused on communicating through art and storytelling (Wright 2017). Aboriginal Australians used art to primarily retell origin stories, also called Dreamtime stories, that explain the beginning of life on earth. The storytelling artwork could be displayed by painting on rocks, carving in rocks, or arranging rocks or other materials into shapes on the ground. The landscape was used to tell stories that the Aboriginal Australians wanted to communicate and share with each other. A typical piece of storytelling artwork would contain symbols that represented certain elements of the story, as shown Figure 2.1.

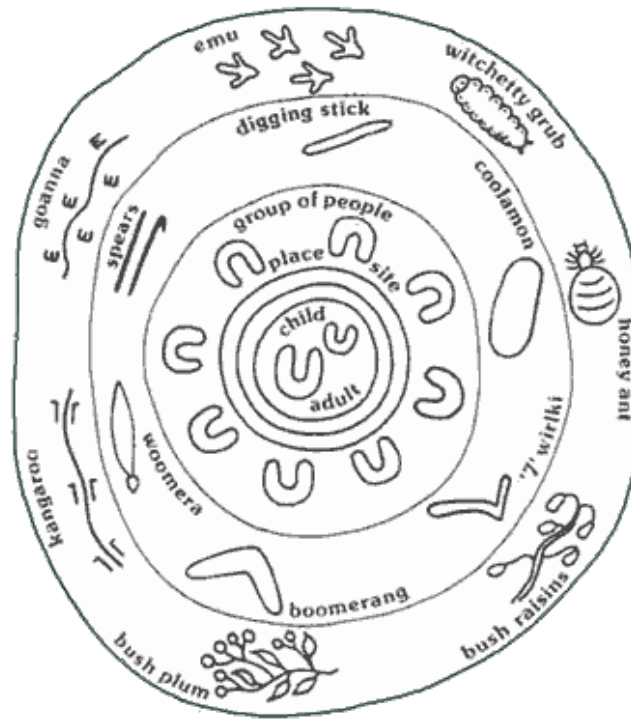


Figure 2.1: Iconography. Digital Image. Aboriginal Art & Culture. Accessed February 2019. <http://www.aboriginalart.com.au/gallery/iconography.html>

These symbols would be painted or carved into the landscape to re-create the Aboriginal Australians' creation stories to preserve them for future generations. This was typical for many groups of Aboriginal Australians and other early cultures of people all over the world and was one of the first methods of using the landscape to tell a story. Other ancient groups of people used the landscape to tell stories, especially creation stories or stories about cosmological events. Many ancient peoples used the landscape to diagram the arrangement of constellations, planets, or to illustrate the equinoxes or solstices. For example, at Stonehenge in England, the monoliths of rock seem to be arranged to align with the summer and winter solstices (shown in Figure 2.2), meaning the people who

built Stonehenge were aware of the cosmological events and had a desire to document it and illustrate that in the landscape.

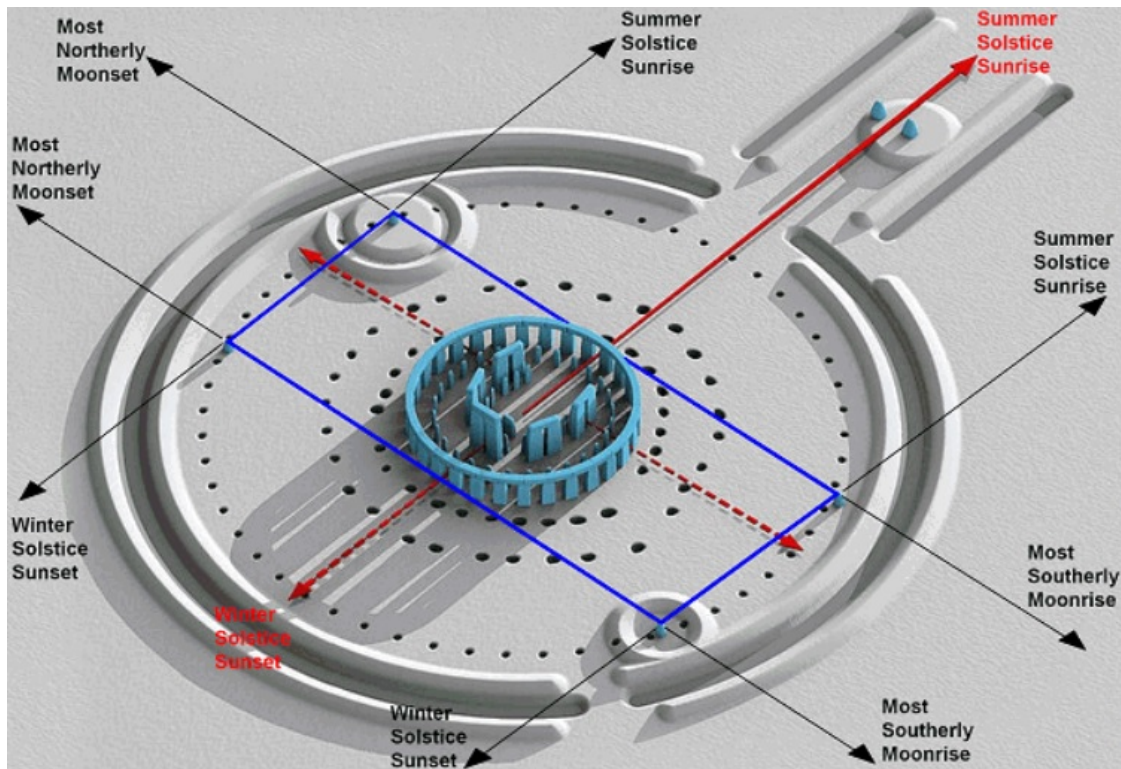


Figure 2.2: Stonehenge Station Stone Alignments. McNish, Larry. Digital Image. RASC Calgary Centre. March 16, 2015. <http://calgary.rasc.ca/calgary-stonehenge.htm>

When people began settling and building civilizations, the landscape would often be utilized as a sign of wealth and power. Estate gardens in Europe are great examples of landowners using the landscape to show off their high status in society by using the landscape to illustrate that wealth or recreate a story that mirrors their status. Villa Lante was built in Bagnaia, Italy in 1560s and 1570s during the Mannerist phase of the Italian Renaissance (Potteiger and Purinton 1998). The gardens of the villa were designed to represent Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which is a story about the creation of life and its change over time. Villa Lante is a great example of using the landscape to tell a story,

because the story of *Metamorphoses* is intentionally “designed into the landscape using specific icons, sculpture, topography, fountains, and vegetation,” (Potteiger and Purinton 1998). Potteiger and Purinton discuss the symbology of the garden in this description and Figure 2.3:

“In the beginning of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the ideal, timeless state of harmony of the golden age is destroyed by a great flood, after which the humans have to labor to cultivate and perfect nature. At Villa Lante this juxtaposition of a stable, timeless world and a linear historical narrative is structured by the division between the parco (or park), with its oak trees, fountains, and numerous references to life in the golden age, and the formal garden. The Grotto of the Deluge at the upper entrance of the formal garden represents the flood, the event that initiates a story,” (Potteiger and Purinton 1998).

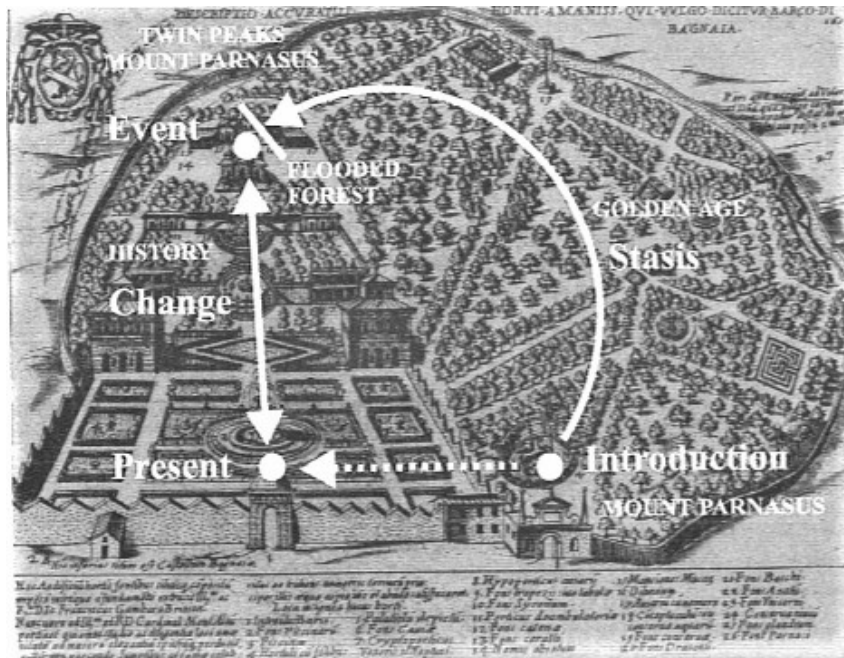


Figure 2.3: “Plot Map” of Villa Lante (Image source: Potteiger and Purinton 1998)

The gardens at Villa Lante are drenched in symbolism and all intentionally designed to illustrate the story of *Metamorphoses*. The story is told through visual cues in the pathways, fountains, sculptures, reflection pools, and the placement of all these elements on certain axes or facing certain directions. Important moments in the storyline are emphasized with details that offer literature references, like where “the terrace depicting the age of agriculture is flanked by the statues of Pomona and Flora, gods who produce the gifts of abundance of vegetables and fruit,” (Potteiger and Purinton 1998) because “through the trope of metamorphosis in Villa Lante, gods represent forces of nature that become human and turn into stone sculptures,” (Potteiger and Purinton 1998). By including details that serve as symbols and references to the story of *Metamorphoses*, the visitor can acknowledge them and “interpret the actions of the present through the myths and history of the past,” as shown through the design decisions in the landscape, (Potteiger and Purinton 1998).

Another example of explicit storytelling in the landscape is the Stourhead estate in Wiltshire, England. It was designed to re-create the story of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which is a story about the founding of Rome. The house and gardens were constructed and worked on beginning in 1719 and into the mid to late 1700s. Potteiger and Purinton discuss how “the temporal configuration of the plot becomes the spatial configuration of the gardens, as the storyline of the hero’s wanderings around the Mediterranean basin unfolds along a stroll around the lake, uniting story and topography,” and the landscape serves as a direct representation of the story of *Aeneid*, (Potteiger and Purinton 1998). Shown in Figure 2.4, the landscape includes plenty of details that serve as references to Rome, as shown in the architectural style of the re-creation of buildings like “the Pantheon, the Temple of Flora,

and the Temple of Apollo ... [and] this storehouse of images, and the substitution of lake for sea, create a landscape dense with associations,” (Potteiger and Purinton 1998). Adding architectural references that are familiar to the visitors is an effective way to ensure the story in the landscape is clearly translated to the visitor.

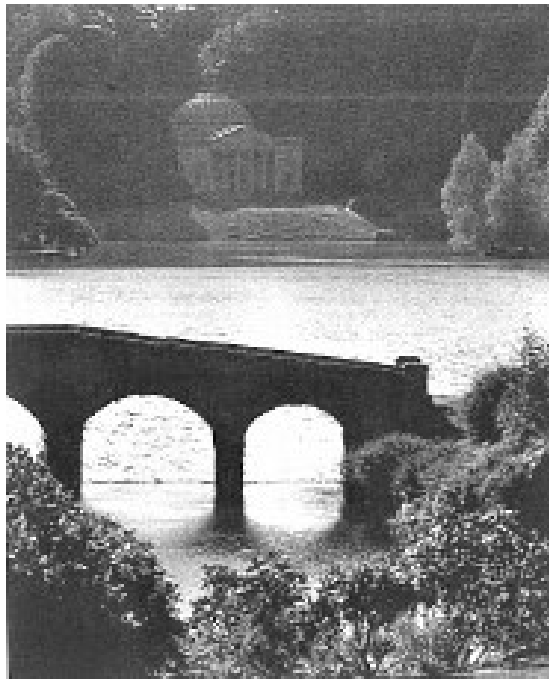


Figure 2.4: View of Stourhead's Pantheon (Image source: Potteiger and Purinton 1998)

Moving forward through time, landscape design would begin to move away from storytelling when people moved away from grand villas and estates and into cities, the need for urban infrastructure became more important. As populations grew and urban cities expanded, landscape design was focused on utility. Later, when cities became too overrun with buildings and concrete, parks, gardens, and greenspace were incorporated to make cities more desirable for its citizens. A great example of this is Fredrick Law Olmsted's design of Central Park in New York City. Landscape architecture then became more focused on both solving problems and creating more enjoyable spaces for its users,

as it is today. While those objectives are important and necessary, there seems to be a lack of explicit storytelling in the landscape or using landscapes as an artistic representation of a story. Because the urban setting is constantly changing, incorporating custom and unique narratives into the landscape is not always a priority for most urban or suburban areas. However, incorporating themes or backstories in a landscape does not have to be difficult or impossible. Simply using the details in a landscape to contribute to an overall story can be a way to include a story in the landscape without overcomplicating the project. The historical examples of storytelling in the landscape are all case studies that show how a landscape can be an effective medium for communicating a story to a visitor. In these examples, the visual cues that tell the story are displayed through the details of a landscape design that are able to constantly reinforce a theme or backstory in order to fully communicate the larger story to the visitor. The details must be intentionally included in all aspects of the design process, from the beginning concepts to the final design product in order for its effectiveness to be achieved.

Storytelling in Modern-day Landscape Architecture

A landscape architect's design process can vary based on their education, workplace standards, and personal preference. But it is very common to establish the "design concept" in the beginning of a project that will reflect the client's needs or desires for the project site. A concept can be broad or specific and can address the project's immediate needs as well as plan for any future goals for the site. Typically driven forward by the client's requests, the design concept is the starting point for making all other design decisions, including circulation routes for pedestrians or cars, choosing

forms and shapes for the layout, hardscape materials, plant materials, and special additions like water features or art pieces.

In some projects, the client can request that the concept include a theme or backstory within the design of a landscape project. It is common for the design of a memorial or monument to tell a story of a historical event through material choices, layout, or orientation. For example, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. uses layout and the wall material to portray a theme of solemn reflection. There are two walls that begin at ground level and slowly build in height, even though the visitor is technically walking downwards into the earth, and meet each other in the middle, (Blakemore 2017). The wall creates a sunken path that mirrors death by guiding the visitor towards a lower elevation, as shown in Figure 2.5.

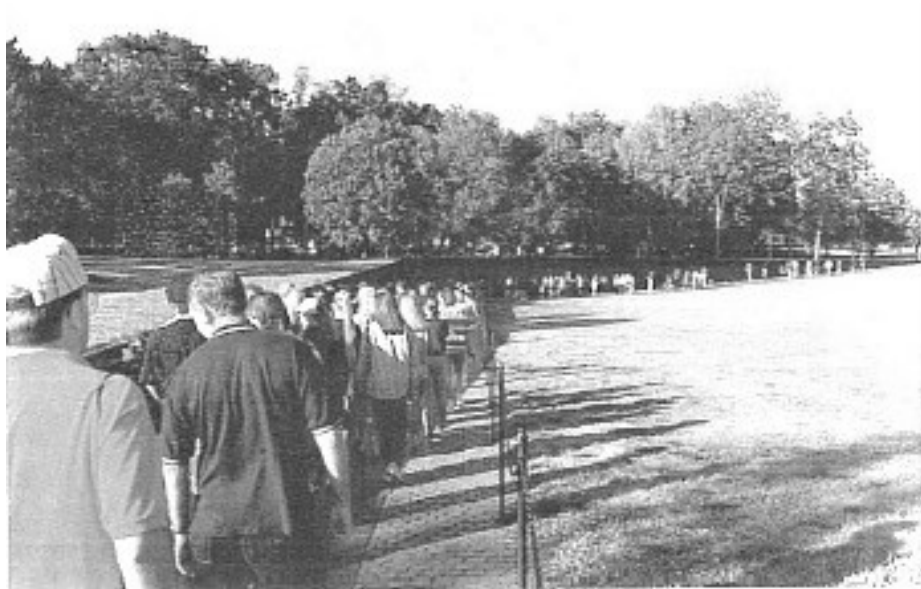


Figure 2.5: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall (Image source: Potteiger and Purinton 1998)

The wall material itself is a shiny black granite, that acts as a mirror for the visitor to see their reflection in the wall. The mirror effect makes visiting the wall and viewing the names of the deceased a personal experience for the visitor, reminding them of how great the sacrifice was that those people gave in the Vietnam War. The detailed elements of the memorial wall were chosen because they reflected the overall theme that the designer Maya Lin wanted to portray.

Other projects seek to incorporate the local history or culture of a project site to honor or celebrate the history of the site and educate the visitors. For example, the Lurie Garden in Chicago, Illinois paid homage to the city by using Carl Sandburg's description of Chicago as the "City of the Big Shoulders," as the design theme (Way 2014). The shoulders were literally included in the garden as a 15' planted hedge that is located on the north and west edge of the garden, as shown in Figure 2.6.



Figure 2.6: Lurie Garden Concept Drawing (Image source: Way 2014)

The boardwalk that goes through the center of the garden “evokes the former railway tracks and an old retaining wall between the lake and the city” is known as the “Seam,” (Way 2014). The center of the garden is filled with a meadow of perennial plants that represent the prairie landscape that surrounds Chicago, shown in Figure 2.7. The Lurie Garden is an example of how celebrating the local ecological history of the Chicago area became the designated theme of the garden.



Figure 2.7: Lurie Garden (Image source: Way 2014)

However, not every landscape project’s intention is to include a story, and not every landscape project that attempts to include a story is executed effectively. There are some projects that ineffectively communicate the theme, backstory, or overall message of a design to the site visitors. The Lurie Garden in Chicago incorporates the local history of

the area into the landscape design by using the “Shoulder” metaphor. However, the underlying message within the Lurie Garden design is often overlooked by the public because of how subtle the narratives seems to be. Today, more than ten years after the opening of the garden, the garden “is being celebrated more as a perennial garden than a work of landscape architecture,” (Way 2014). An article written by Thaisa Way, ASLA for Landscape Architecture Magazine acknowledges that “too often the work of landscape architecture is barely visible, either disguised because it seems so natural or as a garden about plants rather than its design,” (Way 2014).

The public sees the waves of colorful perennials as the focal point of the garden and does not recognize the “Shoulder” metaphor as easily as a designer might. The Lurie Garden is an example of a project that could have used more details in the design to further emphasize the theme. As shown in Figure 2.8, there is a lack of supporting details that add to the theme of the space. This photograph shows the garden in the winter without the tall perennials filling the garden. Without the perennials, there is not much left to the garden for the visitor to inspect. The pathway and retaining walls seem bare, and there is no site furniture or custom elements that could support the “Shoulder” metaphor or the theme of celebrating the local history of Chicago.

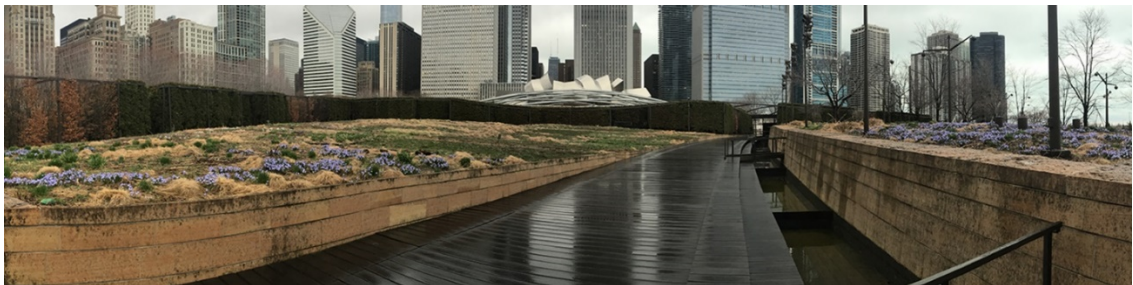


Figure 2.8: Lurie Garden Panorama. Digital Image. Lurie Garden. Accessed February 2019. <https://www.lurigarden.org/about/garden-features/>

Adding more details in the design that represent the theme could have allowed the theme to be more easily recognized by the visitors. The tall hedge intended to represent Chicago's nickname could be supported by more detailed elements in the landscape that could more effectively communicate the theme and message of the garden to its visitors.

After examining examples of storytelling in the landscape, it can be determined that incorporating stories in the landscape can be a powerful communication tool, and including thoughtful details in the landscape design is the most important step in communicating a story in the landscape. Niall Kirkwood argues that details are a powerful tool that, if used correctly, can define "the nature or spirit of a place ... [and] have the ability to reflect or resonate with the characteristics of the site, place, and context in which they occur," (Kirkwood 1999). Without landscape details to reinforce the message, visitors of the site will struggle to find the connection between the landscape and a story they are supposed to recognize. Disney Imagineering's design process aligns with Niall Kirkwood's argument that "landscape detail is a design activity, not an afterthought or embellishment... [and] the landscape detail process ... [should be] carried out as a design activity at the conceptual stages of a project rather than as the final implementation of a design proposal," (Kirkwood 1999). While Disney Imagineering's designs are on the extreme end of the storytelling scale, their design process highlights their dedication to storytelling using landscape details. The next chapter will evaluate how Disney Imagineering incorporates detail design in their projects to prioritize a theme or backstory in the landscape and analyze examples of their efforts in Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park.

CHAPTER 3

THE DISNEY DIFFERENCE

Theme Park History

Today's Disney Theme Parks are the descendants of early European Pleasure Gardens. In Medieval Europe, pleasure gardens charged for admittance and hosted various forms of live entertainment. One of the most popular pleasure gardens is Vauxhall Gardens in London, which opened in 1661 (Younger 2016). The gardens were open in the evening and gave London residents opportunities to socialize and be entertained by the attractions after working during the day (Coke, 2005). They could enjoy the “gardens, walks, mazes, statuary, artworks, pavilions, animal menageries ... fireworks, balls and parties alongside elaborate spectacles such as recreations of the Battle of Waterloo and the eruption of Mount Etna,” (Younger 2016). Some pleasure gardens like Dyrehavsbakken and Tivoli Gardens, both in Denmark, would slowly begin to incorporate ride attractions. These early amusement parks would directly inspire Walt Disney, who frequently visited Tivoli Gardens when he was developing his idea for Disneyland (Younger 2016).

The Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s and throughout the 1800s was also an important part of the development of modern-day theme parks. New technologies were being developed rapidly, and inventors wanted to showcase their work for profit and recognition. World's Fairs were organized for representatives from different countries to come together and showcase their technological advances. The 1893 World's Columbian

Exposition was a very important year for the development of theme parks because it introduced the “gathering of various amusement activities along the mile-long Midway Plaisance park, separating them from the exhibition halls. So successful was this grouping that Midway has continued on as a term used to describe straight-line layouts for fairs, amusement parks, and theme parks,” (Younger 2016). The World’s Fair would eventually separate exhibition areas and group similar attractions in their own “themed lands” (Younger 2016). Walt Disney would later become more involved in the World’s Fairs in the 1960s to showcase his new company’s theme park technology.

The Industrial Revolution would also make way for the first Trolley Parks. The Trolley Parks were “areas of recreation purposefully built or funded by railroad companies at the end of their rail or trolley lines to encourage the public to travel aboard their trains,” (Younger 2016). Coney Island in Brooklyn, NY would grow in popularity and size to officially become the first full-fledged amusement park. The success of the early amusement parks and the continued development of new ride technology would open “more than two thousand amusement parks throughout the United States,” by the early 1900s (Younger 2016). However, the Great Depression and World War II would cause trouble for the American amusement parks, and many parks declined in attendance and maintenance. By the 1950s, most American amusement parks were dirty, crime-ridden, and unpopular with most Americans.

Walt Disney was the cause for the resurgence of the American amusement park, although what he created with Disneyland was not a traditional amusement park, but something new. Walt Disney, “irrevocably altering the course of the amusement industry,” (Adams 1991) opened Disneyland in 1955 in Anaheim, California and is

considered to be the world's first "theme park." Walt Disney was a filmmaker and cartoon illustrator and had a vision to take storytelling to a new level by creating a "family fun park" that felt like "stepping into a movie," (Rafferty and Gordon 1996). Disney was inspired to build Disneyland after spending an afternoon with his two young daughters in a park and wondered if there could be a more unique place where adults and children could spend quality time together having fun, but somewhere that was more pristine and unique than the traditional urban amusement park like those that already existed in America. He was inspired by European amusement parks that evolved from early Pleasure Gardens that "gathered together attractions amidst early attempts at theming in the form of follies – fanciful architectural and sculptural creations," (Younger 2016). Disney created the idea of a "theme park" where "storytelling and placemaking techniques were incorporated into the design so that the environment itself would become an attraction," (Younger 2016). Walt Disney's Disneyland was immediately successful, and it paved the way for all other modern theme parks that exist today. The Disney Company would go on to open theme parks all over the world, including the Walt Disney World Resort in 1971, followed by the Tokyo Disney Resort in 1983, Disneyland Paris in 1992, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort in 2005, and the Shanghai Disney Resort in 2016.

Imagineering

Walt Disney's background in filmmaking is one of the reasons why Disneyland was so unique in its creation. "By applying filmmaking techniques, the designers were able to raise the level of artistry within the spaces and incorporate a sophisticated approach to telling stories visually and spatially," which is what would set Disneyland apart from all other entertainment venues, (Younger 2016). Disney hired his friends in

the film industry to design something that had never been done before and invented the term “Imagineering” (a combination of “imagination” and “engineering”) to describe their intention – “to come up with ideas to build on, and then build those ideas,” (Rafferty and Gordon 1996). Disney and his Imagineers “invented the theme park business by inventing the process of ‘Imagineering’,” that still guides the designing of Disney theme parks today, (Rafferty and Gordon 1996). Imagineers are given complete creative freedom to conjure up any idea they want to explore and then given the opportunity to take the idea further. With plenty of financial resources available, the Disney Imagineers are able to hash out ideas with each other and with other professionals to determine if the idea could actually be built.

The Imagineering team started off with a group of filmmakers that had to experiment and figure out how to build Walt Disney’s grand ideas for Disneyland through lots of trial and error. Today, Disney Imagineering is filled with professionals from all different backgrounds including: show and concept design, illustration, show writing, architecture, interior design, engineering, lighting design, graphic design, prop design, sound design, media design, landscape architecture, show set design, character paint, character plaster, dimensional design, fabrication design, special effects, production design, master planning, research and development, project management, and construction management (Wright 2007). The Imagineers are “involved in projects all over the world in every stage of development, from initial conception right through to installation efforts,” and it is through this extremely hands-on approach that Imagineers are able to do what they do (Wright 2007).

The most important part of the design process for the Imagineers is the very beginning. Imagineer Joe Rohde, currently holding the title of Executive Designer and Vice President, Creative, describes Disney Imagineering's design process:

One thing we just naturally do at Imagineering is: **everything we do is based on story**. We build our entire work process around story ... all human beings are wired for story. It is one of the things that makes us human. It is what our brains do. When you organize around story, both organizationally and in terms of the product you're producing, it's this incredible lubricant toward getting things done, because the human brain itself is already a story machine. It's a very easy way to put together information to get humans to understand it ... It's a very Disney thing to do, but it actually has this very universal broad application in terms of how to organize, how to communicate, how to evaluate. (Rohde 2014).

The Imagineering team began as a group of filmmakers and have always used this method of designing around a story and using the story to dictate every design decision. Once the story is decided on, it drives the design forward and the Imagineers brainstorm for ways to illustrate the story in the theme park landscape. The Imagineers make sure that "every aspect and detail of area development – which includes everything outside a building, such as plant materials, walkways, ridges, waterways and lakes – is identified far in advance," (Rafferty and Gordon 1996) to ensure that every detail in the design reinforces the story. Prioritizing detail design in the beginning of the design process is Disney Imagineering's method of ensuring that the design represents the story so that the

message is effectively communicated to the visitors. The Imagineering attitude of “why not?” and “there are no rules” has led to the creation of unique and revolutionary theme park designs and should continue to be successful for many generations to come.

Building a Theme Park

Because the Disney Company was the first to transform the traditional amusement park into a theme park with distinct areas grouped by similar elements, they were the first to perfect the process of grouping attractions by their theming and assigning backstories to individual areas. There are twelve Disney Theme Parks across the world. Each theme park has its own predominant theme that unifies the individual “lands” in the park. Each individual land in a Disney park can have its own specific theme, plus one or more backstories that are told through the attractions. For example, the Magic Kingdom in the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida has six lands, each with their own themes and backstories, but they all fall under the overarching theme of Magic Kingdom, which is described through the popular slogan displayed as you enter the park: “Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy.” The lands within the Magic Kingdom, shown in Figure 3.1, celebrate these different “worlds” that fall under the categories of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy – but each land also hosts its own individual theme.



Figure 3.1: Magic Kingdom Guide Map. PDF. Disney. January 18, 2019.

<https://cdn1.parksmmedia.wdprapps.disney.com/dam/disney-world/destinations/magic-kingdom/mk-0119-en-os.pdf?1552705173163>

Adventureland is a land in the Magic Kingdom that displays a theme of exotic adventure, and there are multiple backstories that are told through the attractions, buildings, and landscapes that reinforce the theme of exotic adventure, but may all have different characters, time periods, and plots. Adventureland hosts attractions that represent a variety of stories that vary in “chronology and geography ... grouping medieval Arabia,

17th century Caribbean, 1930s Africa, and Victorian Polynesia,” together within the same land (Younger 2016). The backstories explain why the guest might be in that area and describes “the content of the experience: what happens, where it happens, why it happens,” (Younger 2016).

Theming is done to give a theme park “a key identity, [which] unifies the park together ... [and] contributes towards a brand, and differentiates it from its competitors,” (Younger 2016). While this is universally used by theme park companies today, it was Walt Disney that originated the idea of designing a park around themes and backstories. The Disney difference comes from putting a priority on bringing stories to life through design choices. John Hench, veteran Disney designer, explains Disney’s method of theme park design:

“When we design any area of a Disney Park, we transform a *space* into a *story place*. Every element must work together to create an identity that supports the story of that place – structures, entrances and exits, walkways, landscaping, water elements, and modes of transportation. Every element must in its form and color engage the guests’ imagination and appeal to their emotion,” (Younger 2016).

Once the Imagineers establish the story they want to tell, every design decision is a direct representation of that story, and this method is effective for immersing guests and communicating the themes and backstories that unite the theme park. Disney Imagineers have used this design method in all their theme parks and resorts, but one particular theme park stands out for using these techniques most effectively.

Animal Kingdom

Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park was completed in 1997, but the idea for the park was discussed as early as 1989, (Malmberg 1998). Walt Disney's love for animals, as depicted in his animated films, was the motivation for including live animals in a Disney theme park. Animals were "the catalyst for fascination, projection, and involvement. It was an overwhelmingly positive idea, something around which they could build stories – and a whole theme park. The park was not only to be about animals, but also about people's emotional reaction to animals," (Malmberg 1998). The concept development of Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park is heavily documented and proves that Disney Imagineering took their methods of storytelling to an even higher level with this park. The park, shown in Figure 3.2, portrays four main themes: "the transformative power of physical adventure, the intrinsic value of nature, the love of animals, and the call to action," (Younger 2016). The park's seven lands – Oasis, Discovery Island, Dinoland USA, Asia, Africa, Pandora, and Rafiki's Planet Watch – all display these themes plus a few more individual themes within each area.



Figure 3.2: Animal Kingdom Guide Map. PDF. Disney. January 7, 2019.

https://cdn1.parksmedia.wdprapps.disney.com/dam/disney-world/destinations/animal-kingdom/DAK_0119_EN-OS.pdf?1552705158320

Animal Kingdom is arguably the most unique Disney theme park in the world, partially due to the fact that it is the only park to host live animal exhibits as attractions. But the theming of Animal Kingdom is so unique because it displays deeper, more conceptual themes of education and conservation that no other Disney theme park does. Using the same theming and storytelling techniques in the design but incorporating the

authenticity of real animals and re-creating real cultures (in the Asia and Africa sections), makes Animal Kingdom a truly unique theme park experience that immerses the guests and incorporates them into the stories.

Immersion is more prevalent in Animal Kingdom than any other theme park because it is an essential part of portraying the themes of adventure and the power of nature. How could the power of nature be effectively communicated if the visitors did not truly feel like they were walking through a rainforest in the Oasis, or on a safari in Africa? The Oasis is the entryway into the central portion of the park, Discovery Island, and sets up the themes of Animal Kingdom by “creating a total immersion in the world of animals and nature, starting at the entry gate,” (Malmberg 1998), shown in Figure 3.3. The entrance sets the tone of the park by including animal motifs in the design of the entrance sign and uses unassuming architectural styles to reinforce the importance and dominance of nature.



Figure 3.3: Animal Kingdom Park Entrance. Digital Image. The DIS. Accessed March 2019. <https://www.wdwinfo.com/wdwinfo/guides/animalkingdom/ak-overview.htm>

The Oasis is different from other Disney theme park entryways because it is “an entry not through a traditional retail corridor ... but a cool, green decompression zone, a rockwork idyll of waterfalls and landscaping that allows guests an immediate contact with exotic, beautiful animals, like colorful birds and sloths and tree kangaroos. It’s a meandering path of discovery that keeps guests’ views controlled and contained until they cross the bridge over Discovery River,” (Malmberg 1998). The Oasis reinforces the dominance of nature by including towering trees and rockwork, making the visitor feel small in comparison. The guests enter the park gate and walk up a slight inclined walkway that snakes through the tall trees of the Oasis, shown in Figure 3.4 until they exit the Oasis and the center icon of the park is finally revealed.



Figure 3.4: Oasis Pathway. January 17, 2018. <https://med-i-kids.info/animal-kingdom-ticket-prices/animal-kingdom-ticket-prices-inspirational-2/>

The Tree of Life is a symbol of the park but also its themes: “Rising from a lush island, the 140-foot trunk [of the Tree of Life] is covered with animals that seem to

emerge from the bark - a potent symbol of the interconnectedness of all living things,” and is shown in Figure 3.5 (Malmberg 1998). It is from the central Discovery Island that guests can venture out to different lands.



Figure 3.5: Tree of Life on Discovery Island. Photo by author.

Case Studies

To examine the details in Disney’s Animal Kingdom Theme Park and how they work together to represent a theme or backstory, Catherine Dee’s book Form and Fabric in Landscape Architecture will provide the categories of details that will be analyzed. Dee’s book was chosen as a guide because it is a well-known, straightforward, simple introduction to landscape architecture that provides clear definitions and examples of landscape design elements. Dee’s book also focuses on the importance of the human experience in the landscape, which is relevant to the practice of storytelling in the landscape. Dee defines landscape details as the “physical fabric of landscape at a ‘close-

up’ or ‘immediate’ scale,” and “small-scale structural components of landscape,” – not to be confused with construction details (Dee 2001). Dee lists multiple categories and sub-categories under landscape details, including: surface texture (pattern, color, light), furniture (seating), earth and rock detail (sight, touch, sound, smell), vegetation detail (change over time, sight, touch, sound, smell, taste), built detail (sight, touch, sound, smell), and water detail (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell). This thesis will combine and abbreviate her list and discuss details in the following categories: earth and rock (including pathways), vegetation, built detail (architecture), color, and furniture (décor or site furnishings). The surface texture category was eliminated because it can potentially be too broad in terms of the large-scale case studies in this thesis. The water category was eliminated because it is not always present in every case study or in every other landscape architecture project. The details’ impact on individual human senses will not be discussed in this thesis. Sites in Disney’s Animal Kingdom will be evaluated within the five main categories, and the ways the details in each category reflect the themes or backstories of that area will be discussed.

Discovery Island

Discovery Island is the hub of the Animal Kingdom Theme Park. After entering the park and walking through the Oasis, guests arrive on Discovery Island and make a choice for their next steps. Discovery Island’s job as the hub is to strongly enforce the primary themes of Animal Kingdom, which again are: “the transformative power of physical adventure, the intrinsic value of nature, the love of animals, and the call to action,” (Younger 2016). Discovery Island illustrates these four primary themes of the

park along with backstories that support each theme, in the landscape details, which is explained in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Discovery Island themes, backstories, and details

THEMES	BACKSTORIES	DETAILS
The transformative power of physical adventure	Discovery Island is the hub of the park where guests decide on their next adventures	Winding paths around the Tree of Life encourage visitors to explore, vegetation conceals and reveals new areas and animal exhibits
The intrinsic value of nature	The Tree of Life is the life force of Discovery Island and represents the power and resilience of nature	The animal sculptures that make up the Tree of Life represent the interconnectedness of all life on Earth and how it should be admired and respected
The love of animals	The Safari Village, the primary shopping and dining locations for the park, was built around the Tree of Life, and attracted the Safari Village residents to the area	The architecture style, elements, and colors reflect a warm, inviting atmosphere that celebrates the villagers' love for animals
The call to action	Discovery Island gives visitors a chance to explore and admire the creations of nature, which can inspire them to take further action to preserve and conserve nature after they leave the park	The animal exhibits contain educational signage and Disney cast members that inform visitors about how they can help organizations protect the wildlife species that are shown in the Animal Kingdom park

The landscape details of Discovery Island will be evaluated through the lens of Catherine Dee's categories of landscape details, and the way in which each detail relates to a theme or backstory will be noted.

Earth and Rock

The pathways on Discovery Island are an adventure in themselves. Once guests exit the Oasis, they have four path options from Discovery Island that can take them to Dinoland U.S.A., Asia, Africa, or the newly-build land of Pandora. Or, they can remain on Discovery Island and explore the trails, gardens, and animal exhibits that surround the Tree of Life. The trails wind around the Tree of Life, slowly unveiling new vistas and views, and allow the visitor to individually experience their own adventure in their exploration around the trails (shown in Figure 3.6), discovering new and exciting elements along the way.



Figure 3.6: Discovery Island Trail. Photo by author.

The trails are a direct representation of one of the themes of the park: the transformative power of physical adventure. The winding trails are meant to encourage guests to explore and discover new things along the trail. The pathway material itself is a poured concrete that is usually grey, red, or brown in color, which is meant to represent dirt to emphasize the presence of a real, natural environment that the park emulates.

Vegetation

The vegetation on Discovery Island plays a key role in setting up the park theme of the intrinsic value of nature. Vegetation helps conceal elements in the park that the visitors are not meant to see, while also setting the scene to help the visitor feel like they

are someplace new and exotic. Tropical plants with thick foliage are used around the Tree of Life to control the views and vistas for the guests on the trails and to create believable and authentic environments for the animal exhibits. Imagineers also wanted the landscape design in Animal Kingdom to be unique from other theme parks in that “the plants are intended to grow, blossom, die, and rot in a cyclical system that will be different each time a Guest comes to visit,” (Wright 2007). The kangaroo exhibit, shown in Figure 3.7, is an example of using intentional vegetation choices to set the tone and enforce the backstory for the animal exhibit but also set up views and vistas to keep the visitor’s sight lines in the intended location.



Figure 3.7: Kangaroo Exhibit by the Tree of Life. Photo by author.

Built

The architecture in the Discovery Island village is meant to reflect a combination of architectural styles from multiple different countries. The smaller size of the buildings was an intentional element that the Imagineers wanted to include to illustrate the themes of the intrinsic value of nature and the dominance of nature over humans. The “building heights are restricted in the interest of maintaining the all-important balance between the landscaping and the architecture,” and “at no point ... is the architecture allowed to overwhelm the natural elements,” (Wright 2007). An aerial view of the park (shown in Figure 3.8) shows how the vegetation dominates the landscape, and the buildings are dwarfed in comparison.



Figure 3.8: Aerial view of Animal Kingdom. Easy WDW. October 6, 2017.

<https://www.easywdw.com/easy/blog/animal-kingdom-pandora-rope-drop-part-2-dinoland-asia-and-africa/>

The village architecture contrasts with the natural elements of Discovery Island but still mirrors the overall theme of the celebration of nature. The animal-centric “artwork here is integrated into the buildings in ways that are always organic to the architecture. The animal motifs are not just applied to surfaces as ornament – they are a core part of the building’s design,” as seen in Figure 3.9 (Wright 2007). The animal motifs support the backstory of Discovery Island’s Safari Village, where the villagers show their love and admiration of animals through their artwork.



Figure 3.9: Discovery Island Village Building Rooftop by Barrie Brewer, 2008.

<http://allears.net/2009/01/20/my-top-ten/>

Color

Apart from the obvious green plant palette that is the result of thick and lush plantings that exists all over the park, Discovery Island is home to a village where guests can shop and dine. The Safari Village “is not based on any single place in the world, but rather an amalgamation of many places... its style is based on the architecture and especially the folk art of cultures found on equatorial islands across the world,” which is the reason for the bright and colorful architecture of the buildings (Wright 2007). The bright colors help communicate the theme of a love for animals, and the backstory of the village, which Imagineers developed to be a village where the hypothetical residents “share an abiding love of animals – so much so that they are practically unable to contain themselves in their expression of this fascination. It finds its way out in everything the villagers produce – animals are seen on every building façade, sign, lamp, wall, and fountain in this land,” (Wright 2007). The bright colors of Discovery Island portray a positive, celebratory feeling that comes as a result of loving and appreciating animals and nature. Figure 3.10 shows the colorful details of the Flame Tree Barbeque restaurant, located on Discovery Island.



Figure 3.10: Flame Tree Barbeque Restaurant by WDW Shutterbug.

<https://www.dadsguidetowdw.com/flame-tree-bbq.html>

Furniture

Site furniture elements can include benches, waste bins, light fixtures, or any other additional décor. The choice of furniture can have a positive impact on the user experience and is an opportunity to further reinforce an area's theme or backstory. Shown in Figure 3.11, these colorful benches in Discovery Island are shaped like turtles, incorporating the overall theme of the love of animals and the bright colors that represent the fun, whimsical theme of Discovery Island. On closer inspection, visitors might notice that these benches are made from recycled plastic, which also mirrors the conservation theme of Animal Kingdom. Shown in Figure 3.12, even the plant pots are covered in animal motifs, which mirror the animal motifs on the buildings in the village. These are prime examples of using landscape details to continuously reinforce the areas themes or backstories, and never allowing the use of details that do not contribute to the theme or backstory in some way.



Figure 3.11: Benches in Discovery Island by Jack Spence.

<http://allears.net/2010/01/11/have-a-seat-in-walt-disney-world-part-3/>



Figure 3.12: Plant pot in Discovery Island by Jack Spence.

<http://allears.net/2014/09/15/landscaping-the-world-disneys-animal-kingdom/>

Asia

Imagineer Alex Wright describes the themes and backstories of the Asia land of Animal Kingdom: “Grab your gear and come along for a trek through the jungles and villages of southwest Asia. Our town of Anandapur can be the hub for all of your adventures – hiking through the ruins of a sultan’s palace, riding the whitewater of a mountain stream, or braving the face of the tallest mountain on Earth. Asia will provide you with animal encounters you’ll never forget,” (Wright 2007). The Asia land at Animal Kingdom is meant to represent a combination of Asian countries, including Nepal, India, Thailand, and Indonesia (Wright 2007). The Imagineers came up with the mythical town of Anandapur, which is Sanskrit for “Place of all delight,” and is meant to be located in “an unnamed country located in the floodplains and lower foothills of the Himalayas,” (Wright 2007.) The town of Anandapur serves as the hub for Asia, where visitors can explore shops and restaurants or choose to go an adventure in one of the three attractions in Asia. Table 3.2 shows the themes and backstories present in Asia and the details that represent them.

Table 3.2: Asia themes, backstories and details. Sources: Wright 2007 and Malmberg 1998.

THEMES	BACKSTORIES	DETAILS
A showcase of the intermingling of natural spaces and built environments	The setting of the Asian town of Anandapur is the hub for visitors to embark on their adventures through Asia	The architectural details of the buildings represent multiple cultures of Asia, which helps the visitors understand the setting of the land
	There are prayer ribbons on the prayer tree as you enter the land each represent a prayer left by a passing traveler	The prayer ribbons and prayer flags add a cultural element to the area, and also show the intermingling of nature and man as the flags and ribbons hang and become intertwined with vegetation
Supremacy of nature, mastery of nature over humans	The Maharajah Jungle Trek takes place in the ruins of a former sultan's village, previously used as a hunting retreat, but is now an animal sanctuary	The crumbling architecture is being taken over by vegetation
		The juxtaposition of the strong and powerful tigers in the animal exhibit within the crumbling palace ruins
The possibility of self-discovery through adventure	The Expedition Everest attraction is a journey up the Forbidden Mountain on the way to Everest, where guests choose to go an adventure that may end in a dangerous encounter with the legendary Yeti	Site furniture includes sculptures and shrines dedicated to the Yeti, which foreshadows a feeling of danger but also the exciting possibility of adventure



Figure 3.13: Entrance into Asia from Discovery Island. Photo by author.

Earth and Rock

The pathways in Asia carry significant details in their designs. The paving style was specifically designed for this area of the park and helps establish the setting of the land. Imagineers realized “they could embed stories into the Park footprint,” and set out to design pavements that could withstand heavy traffic but also held important design details, such as plant imprints, footprints, animal tracks, bicycle and truck tires, (Wright 2007). These details in the pavement signal to the visitor that the town of Anandapur is an old town with rich history and has seen many travelers (both animals and humans) pass through over time.



Figure 3.14: Pavement in Asia by Jack Spence. <http://allears.net/2012/01/09/pounding-the-pavement-at-walt-disney-world/>

Vegetation

The Imagineers wanted to ensure the lands of Animal Kingdom could easily be distinguished from each other, and to help accomplish that, the Imagineers decided to confine the use of the bamboo plant only to the Asia area of the park. The bamboo plant is commonly culturally tied to China, which helps reinforce to the visitor that they are in the Asia land of Animal Kingdom. The bamboo also helps with immersing the visitor into the land of Asia and blocks their view into other areas of the park.



Figure 3.15: Bamboo plants in Asia. Photo by author.

Another role vegetation plays in Asia is its obvious takeover of the built structures. Shown in Figure 3.16, this statue has been overtaken by the tree growing in and around it, showing the resilience of nature and its dominance over human creations.



Figure 3.16: Prayer flags in Asia. December 23, 2016.

<https://www.planetrainsandmonorails.com/great-places-for-photos-at-animal-kingdom/>

Built

The Maharajah Jungle trek is a walkthrough attraction with animal exhibits. The backstory for this attraction, described in Table 3.2, is a representation of the theme of nature overtaking human creations. The former sultan's palace, shown in Figure 3.17, is a crumbling ruin of what it once was, as the building infrastructure was designed to signal the dominance of nature and the fragility of human creation.



Figure 3.17: Maharajah Jungle Trek Palace Ruins. Photo by author.

The crumbling ruins seem even more fragile when compared to the powerful presence of live tigers in the animal exhibit. The tiger exhibit, shown in Figure 3.18, is the highlight of the Maharajah Jungle Trek and further emphasizes the dominance of nature over humans as the tigers make their home in the palace ruins.



Figure 3.18: Tiger exhibit in the Maharajah Jungle Trek. Photo by author.

Color

The land of Asia is very colorful – a result of the artifacts meant to represent the colorful Asian cultures that all come together in the town of Anandapur. There are prayer ribbons and flags all over the land, entwined in trees or hanging from buildings. Figure 3.19 shows the prayer flags with animal images on them, which reinforces the theme of humans and animals living together in harmony.



Figure 3.19: Colorful prayer flags in Asia. Photo by author.

Furniture

Many of the site décor in Asia consists of real artifacts the Imagineers brought back after their research trips to Asia. The queue line for the Expedition Everest attraction is one of the most detailed in the park, as it is filled with real artifacts from Nepal, and helps illustrate the storyline for the attraction. Visitors are embarking on an adventure up the Forbidden Mountain on their way to Everest, and make their way through base camp, which serves as the queue line for the attraction.



Figure 3.20: Expedition Everest queue. Photo by author.

The Expedition Everest queue is filled with tiny courtyards that contain site décor that reinforces Asian culture with shrines and figures of animals, specifically the legendary Yeti. Shown in Figure 3.21, this shrine features a Yeti-like creature with a unfriendly expression, signifying the threat of danger that the visitor might encounter on their expedition, which supports the backstory of the ride and sets up the possibility for self-discovery through adventure, which is one of the overall themes for Animal Kingdom.



Figure 3.21: Expedition Everest queue shrine. Photo by author.

Pandora: The World of Avatar

Pandora: The World of Avatar is Animal Kingdom's newest land and opened in May 2017. Animal Kingdom's original concept included a land for imaginary animals, but was put on hold due to budget cuts, and Pandora was built not only because it fills that role in the park, but also because the themes of the film directly match the themes of Animal Kingdom. The film's plot takes place on the moon Pandora, which is located in a distant galaxy and is home to the Na'vi creatures. Humans from Earth attempt to invade Pandora and strip the land of its natural resources, but the Na'vi fight back and eventually make peace with the human invaders.

With the added element of intellectual property that comes from the Avatar film, Imagineers had pre-established settings, characters, and plots they could use as inspiration to build the land in Animal Kingdom. The Imagineers decided to create new plots and backstories for the land and its attractions while taking inspiration from the film, and these are shown in Table 3.3. The Pandora land in Animal Kingdom is meant to specifically represent the Valley of Mo'ara, and the backstories of the land take place long after the film's plot, in a time where nature has recovered from the devastation left by humans. Guests are able to return to Pandora for their own adventures in a peaceful time with the help of Alpha Centauri Expeditions (ACE), an eco-tour company that has a partnership with the local Na'vi. Pandora is an appropriate addition to the Animal Kingdom and its themes fit nicely into the overall themes of the park. The land's design and attention to detail has been praised as some of Disney Imagineering's best work.

Table 3.3: Pandora themes, backstories, and details

THEMES	BACKSTORIES	DETAILS
Value of nature, importance of conserving nature	Pandora is a living and breathing landscape where every living thing is connected	The nighttime landscape of Pandora shows the interconnectedness of life by including glow-in-the-dark elements
Nature's ability to overcome adversity and restore itself	Pandora was previously devastated by the RDA (Resource Development Administration) mining company, but after fighting subsided, nature has reclaimed Pandora and taken over the RDA infrastructure	Vegetation is taking over old and rusting buildings left over from the RDA
Nature is beautiful and awe-inspiring	Pandora is a beautiful, lush landscape with exotic plants and animals that humans are now allowed to explore with the help of ACE (Alpha Centauri Expedition) eco-tours	Colorful and exotic plants
		Floating mountains
Humans coexisting in harmony with nature	The ACE (Alpha Centauri Expedition) eco-tour company has a positive partnership with the native Na'vi and are able to bring humans (the theme park visitors) on exciting adventures on Pandora	Cultural artifacts and art made by the Na'vi are displayed and celebrated throughout the land

Earth and Rock

The floating mountains in the center of Pandora are the central icons of the land. Taken directly from the film, the floating mountains defy gravity and use forced perspective to allow guests to feel small in comparison to the large mountains in the sky, which reflects the themes of the dominance of nature over humans and how nature is beautiful and awe-inspiring.



Figure 3.22: Pandora's floating mountains. Photo by author.

The entire land of Pandora is meant to be its own thriving ecosystem. Waterfalls, natural springs, and rock elements reflect Pandora's beauty and its resilience.



Figure 3.23: Pandora's lush landscape. Photo by author.

The pathways in Pandora are some of the most unique in the park. There are animal tracks and prints of fossils and plants in the pathways that symbolize the presence of animals and the fact that Pandora is their home, and it should be treated with respect. The details in the concrete pathways help tell the story of Pandora and explain the backstory of its inhabitants. The cracks in the pathways are also painted with a special paint so that they can glow in the dark when exposed to a blacklight, giving the ground an opportunity to come alive after dark. This detail plays into the idea that the land of Pandora is its own living and breathing entity that should be revered and respected by its visitors.



Figure 3.24: Leaf imprint in Pandora pathway. Photo by author.



Figure 3.25: Cracks in Pandora pathway. Photo by author.

Vegetation

The vegetation of Pandora is a mix of real and familiar tropical plants with Imagineering's sculpted creations of Pandora's plants. Pandora is covered with bright, colorful, exotic vegetation that reinforces the dominance of nature theme and creates an immersive atmosphere for the theme park guests to feel as though they are exploring a faraway land. All of Pandora's plants are also designed to light up at night.



Figure 3.26: Pandora Vegetation. Photo by author.

Built

The buildings and architecture in Pandora are the crumbling remains of the Resource Development Administration's (RDA) mining company that have been reclaimed by nature or repurposed by the Na'vi. Vegetation is growing in and out of the architecture to symbolize the theme of nature reclaiming Pandora and overcoming adversity. Figure 3.27 shows the rusty exterior of the restroom building that is being overtaken by vegetation.



Figure 3.27: Pandora Restroom Building. Main Street Gazette Blog. June 5, 2018.

<http://www.mainstgazette.com/2018/06/miners-decon.html>

Pandora's quick-service restaurant, Satu'li Canteen (shown in Figure 3.28) has its own backstory that is illustrated by the architecture and décor in and around the building. Originally built as a mess hall for the RDA workers, it has been redecorated by ACE and

filled with “Na’vi art and cultural items ... [and] reflects a new friendship and cultural understanding that exists between the humans on Pandora and the indigenous Na’vi,” (<https://wdwnt.com/2017/03/backstories-information-released-every-location-pandora-world-avatar-disneys-animal-kingdom/>).



Figure 3.28: Satu'li Canteen.

<https://www.easywdw.com/easy/blog/satuli-canteen-followup-review-at-pandora-world-of-avatar-at-disneys-animal-kingdom/>

Color

Imagineers used colors to represent the fact that the land of Pandora is meant to be a foreign planet with its own complete ecosystem and inspire visitors to become immersed in the world of Pandora and explore the landscape. One of the most interesting elements of Pandora is that it was designed to be enjoyed in both day and night. The land literally lights up at night and provides an even more immersive experience for the guests to explore Pandora. The director of the Avatar film, James Cameron, discusses how the vegetation and pathways were meant to light up in dreamlike colors of purple, cyan, and soft pastels to showcase how “night was the time when you saw the connectivity behind everything... almost the nervous system of the forest... how everything was tied together,” (Disney Parks 2017). The use of color in Pandora helps illustrate that the landscape and environment of Pandora is a living and breathing ecosystem that deserves to be respected and taken care of.



Figure 3.29: Pandora at night. Easy WDW. February 18, 2018

<https://www.easywdw.com/easy/blog/flight-of-passage-last-thing-at-night-and-pandora-update-at-disneys-animal-kingdom/>

Furniture

The site furniture and décor on Pandora is meant to represent the cultural traditions of the Na'vi as well as the remains of the RDA's abandoned mining company. Imagineers took research trips to Indonesia and studied the traditional weaving techniques that many cultures in that region practice and used it to represent the cultural art and artifacts of Pandora's indigenous Na'vi. Figure 3.30 shows a woven Na'vi creation that is in the Satu'li Canteen.



Figure 3.30: Na'vi artwork in Satu'li Canteen. Easy WDW. May 14, 2017.

<https://www.easywdw.com/easy/blog/satuli-canteen-followup-review-at-pandora-world-of-avatar-at-disneys-animal-kingdom/>

Additional site furnishings like benches, trashcans, and light fixtures all match the themes and backstories of Pandora. Figure 3.31 shows a flower light fixture, which contributes to the immersion of the area by covering the light bulb and represents how

nature is always at the forefront of the design focus of Pandora. Figure 3.32 shows tree branches made to be a seating area for guests and symbolizes the strength and dominance of nature.



Figure 3.31: Light fixture in Pandora. Photo by author.



Figure 3.32: Seating in Pandora. Photo by author.

Takeaway

Disney Imagineering's use of detail in their park designs shows how impactful design choices can be when communicating a theme or backstory in the landscape. Every design decision made for the landscape design and details is purposefully chosen to reinforce a theme or backstory, which creates a unified message that is easier for the visitor to recognize. Without incorporating the theme or backstory into every detail in the Animal Kingdom park, the park themes would not be as clearly displayed for the visitor to analyze and experience.

Even though Disney Imagineering's design methods are innovative and effective, not every landscape architect will be working on similar projects as Disney Imagineering. Theme park design projects are specialized and not present in the average landscape architecture firm. Theme park landscapes are designed to illustrate stories explicitly for visitors to easily recognize, which is not always the goal in other landscape design projects. But landscape architects have the opportunity to learn from Disney Imagineering and take certain aspects of their design process and apply it to other landscape design projects. The next chapter will present a guide for landscape architects to use a modified version of Disney Imagineering's storytelling methods in other landscape design projects.

CHAPTER 4

MODIFIED DISNEY DESIGN METHOD

As seen in the case studies in Chapter 3, Disney Imagineering's thoughtfully detailed spaces are able to communicate stories to visitors of Animal Kingdom. The details continuously reinforce the themes and backstories of each area. A deeper look into Disney Imagineering's design process will be taken to create a modified version for professional landscape architects to use in other landscape design projects.

The Disney Way

Disney Imagineering's design process starts with an idea. Imagineers are given the creative space to pursue any idea and take that idea all the way from a simple concept to complete implementation. However, Imagineers have almost unlimited resources to pursue their creative endeavors. With flexible time tables and plenty of funding, Disney Imagineers are able to create groundbreaking designs without the typical roadblocks that other professionals outside of the theme park industry have to endure.

Every Disney Imagineering project starts off as a simple spark of an idea. What Imagineers do with that idea, is what sets Disney Imagineering apart from other creative groups. An initial idea from an Imagineer is shared with a larger group of Imagineers, who spend time taking that idea through a brainstorming phase, where quick sketches are drawn to illustrate and explain the idea and its potential. There is no time limit on the brainstorming session, which allows each idea to be shaped and refined as much as Imagineers desire (Rafferty and Gordon 1996). This phase of the design process has no

set rules or steps, which allows Imagineers a great deal of creative freedom. The brainstorming process is finished “when the basic idea is defined, understood, and agreed upon by all group members,” making the brainstorming phase of a project an extremely collaborative process among many Imagineers from all different backgrounds, and may even include professionals outside of Imagineering (Rafferty and Gordon 1996).

The brainstorming process generates lots of sketches and diagrams, which get taken into the next phase of design – solidifying the story. Storytelling is at the core of everything Imagineering does, and this phase is what truly sets Imagineering apart from the rest. Sketches of the initial idea are “pinned onto large storyboards. Dozens of them are added, taken away, switched around, re-drawn, crumpled up and tossed out, then fetched from the trash can, uncrumpled, and put back up,” to ensure that the idea has a substantial story behind it that works within the theme park setting (Rafferty and Gordon 1996). The storyboard technique, shown in Figure 4.1, is a “tradition that dates back to the earliest days of film animation and is used to this day at both the Feature Animation Studios and at Imagineering,” proving its success in bringing simple, initial ideas to life within the context of a story (Rafferty and Gordon 1996).



Figure 4.1: Disney Imagineering Storyboard for the Splash Mountain Attraction

The Imagineers also construct three-dimensional models to help bring an idea to life and explain the story behind it. The model shown in Figure 4.2 was built to “study sight lines and as a sales tool that gave dimension to paintings and sketches,” (Malmberg 1998). Building models to illustrate the ideas and the story is a vital step in the design process, as it “both validates the strength of the concept and reveals its weaknesses,” so that Imagineers can decide if the idea needs tweaking (Rafferty and Gordon 1996). Sketches, storyboards, and models are meticulously revised multiple times until it is ready to be presented to leaders in Disney Imagineering and the Disney theme park management. The ideas that are received well by management are finalized and taken straight to the building phase. The story behind an area, an attraction, or a whole theme park has to be told successfully in order for the idea to be approved.

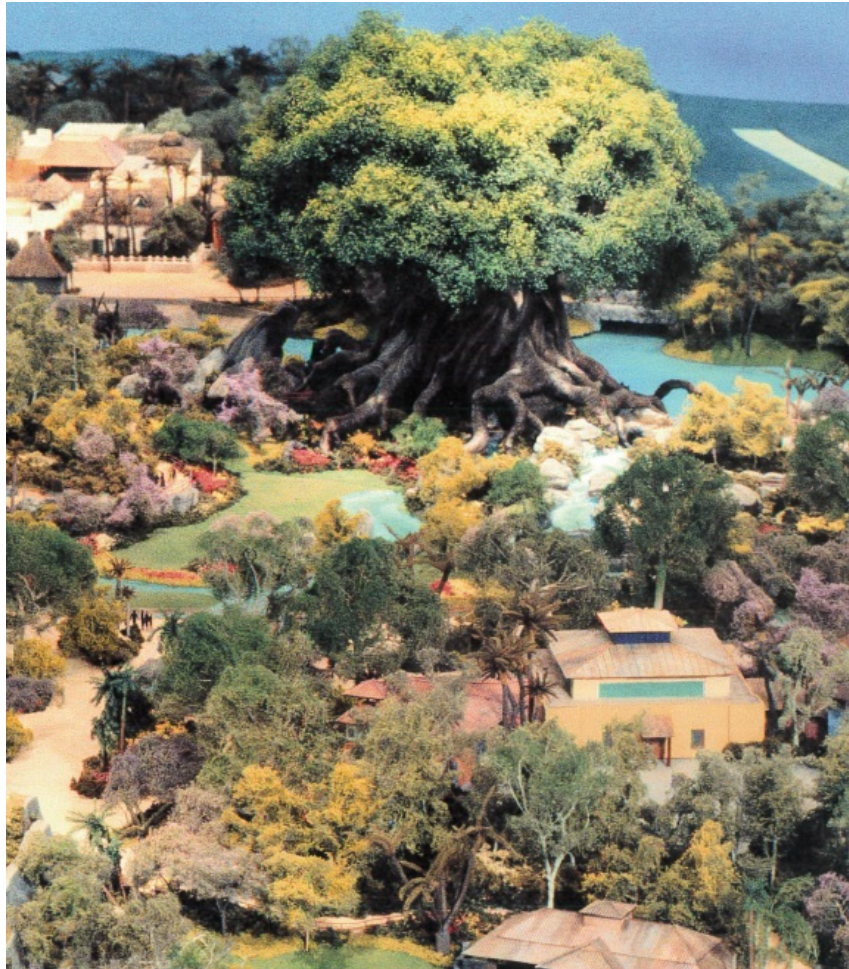


Figure 4.2: Model of Safari Village at Animal Kingdom. (Source: Malmberg 1998)

Once the initial idea and concept is approved, the Imagineers take the idea and solidify it by making decisions about any building materials, styles, colors, characters, and many other additional elements. These additional elements make up the details that communicate the story behind the attraction, and no detail is overlooked by the Imagineers in the design process. Every detail in any design is purposefully chosen for its ability to support or communicate a theme or backstory for an attraction in a theme park. Instead of waiting to choose details as an afterthought later in the design process, Imagineers use details to solidify their themes and backstories early in the design process.

Spending plenty of time on the initial concept story, and then more time choosing or designing custom details that support that story, is the core of the Disney Imagineering design method.

Modified Disney Design Method

Because not every professional landscape architect or design firm has the resources that Disney Imagineering has, a modified method of Disney Imagineering's design process can help landscape architects develop designs that communicate themes and backstories to the visitors of the landscape by incorporating details similar to what Disney Imagineering does. While most landscape architecture firms or professionals have limits on the amount of time and money they can spend during the concept development phase of a design project, this method is meant to show designers a simpler way for prioritizing themes, backstories, and details in their design process. With this method, a landscape architect can learn how to incorporate landscape storytelling more effectively by creating a theme or backstory and then choosing the appropriate details that will support the theme or backstory. First, locations for types of projects that could benefit from this storytelling design process will be listed. Then, an outline for building a theme or backstory is explained. Finally, a list of categories of landscape details is included with suggestions for landscape architects to add to their designs. The list of detail categories are the same categories from Catherine Dee's book, Form and Fabric in Landscape Architecture, that were used to evaluate the Animal Kingdom case study areas in Chapter 3. Again, these categories of details (earth and rock, vegetation, built, color, and furniture) were chosen to simplify Dee's list of details from her book and create an easier way to categorize details that are often included in most landscape design projects.

Project Types

Not every landscape design project needs to have an assigned theme or backstory, but locations like historical monuments or sites, memorials, museums, children's gardens or playgrounds, visitor centers, zoos and aquariums can greatly benefit from it. These types of sites typically attempt to combine an educational element with entertainment, and assigning a theme or backstory is a way to communicate the educational message to the visitors with the bonus of creating a more engaging experience for the visitor.

Historical Sites / Monuments / Memorials

- Priority: remembrance, respect, or celebration
- Storytelling focus: Remembering or re-creating real events or real people

Children's Gardens or Playgrounds

- Priority: entertainment or education
- Storytelling focus: making the entertainment or educational aspect accessible to children

Visitor / Information Centers

- Priority: communicating information
- Storytelling focus: making information accessible, increasing visitor engagement

Zoos, Aquariums, Wildlife Centers

- Priority: education and awareness
- Storytelling focus: Adding entertainment value to more easily communicate educational aspects

Public Realm: City Center / Park / Waterfront

- Priority: accessibility and utility
- Storytelling focus: optional, can add entertainment value

Private Realm: Residence

- Priority: client desires
- Storytelling focus: optional, can add entertainment value

Template

The case studies in Animal Kingdom showed how design details help reinforce a theme or backstory for an area in the park. In Chapter 3, tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 showed the relationship between the themes, backstories, and details within each case study. This table template can also be used by landscape architects looking to include themes, backstories, and supporting details in their designs to ensure all the elements correspond to one another. A theme can inspire decisions about one or more backstories as well as one or more details. Every detail in the park corresponds to at least one theme or backstory. Table 4.1 can help designers construct an overall narrative or story in the landscape that can effectively be communicated to visitors because the themes, backstories, and details are all interconnected and cohesive.

Table 4.1: Storytelling Template

THEMES	BACKSTORIES	DETAILS
Theme A	Backstory A	Detail A
		Detail B
	Backstory B	Detail C
Theme B	Backstory C	Detail D
		Detail E

Every landscape design project is different – some will be large projects that have room for multiple themes and backstories to be illustrated in the design, but some projects will be small and only have room for one theme and one backstory. It is also

possible for a landscape design project to only have one theme alone, or a theme with a supporting backstory, or just a backstory. However, to effectively communicate a message in the landscape, it is recommended to have at least one theme with at least one supporting backstory. It is also recommended to have at least one detail from each of Catherine Dee's categories (earth and rock, vegetation, built, color, and furniture) that directly represents the themes and/or backstory. Having at least one theme and backstory will allow a visitor of the site to at least recognize that there is a larger narrative within the design and having at least one detail from each category allows the narrative to be told and communicated. Including more backstories and details helps the theme and overall narrative become more present and more easily recognizable.

Building the Story

The theme is the largest, most conceptual aspect, and should be the first decision made. In his book Theme Park Design, David Younger discusses how theme can be broken down into two parts: the manifestation theme and the dramatic theme. The manifestation theme can simply be the setting and subject of an area. The setting explains the time or place, or both, that the themed area takes place in, which "may span millennia or be as specific as a decade, a year, or a specific day. The location can be as large as a planet or continent, or get narrower: a country, a region, a city, or smaller, either as specific places or generic places," (Younger 2016). Some examples are Ancient Egypt, Victorian England, or Contemporary Hollywood. In addition to the setting, the subject "is something the themed attraction is about, which is not intrinsically tied to a place or time," (Younger 2016). Subjects can be tangible or intangible. Tangible subject examples

are pirates, fairy tales, or a safari. Intangible subject examples are history, imagination, or holidays, like Christmas or Halloween.

Dramatic theme describes a feeling or emotion that should be felt by the guests. It can be “an idea to be illustrated or explored, ranging from a single emotion the designer wishes to evoke in the guest, such as fun, fright, or wonder, to a simple concept, such as reassurance or inspiration, through to a relatively complex idea, such as the intrinsic value of nature,” as seen in Animal Kingdom (Younger 2016). The combination of manifestation theme and dramatic theme help create an overall cohesive theme that has enough substance to be able to be communicated in the landscape. Designers should choose themes that have both aspects.

After a theme is established, a backstory should be created to give the theme more tangible meaning. A backstory describes the content of the experience: what happens, where it happens, and why it happens. A backstory “describes any part of the story that has happened before the guests begin their experience, and might encompass who set up a restaurant, why a shipwreck was sunk, why the guests need to battle the giant robots, and any other similar information,” (Younger 2016). A backstory can be anything the designer chooses and can be as simple or as complex as they choose. However, the more complex the backstory, the more details will be needed to communicate the backstory, but this can also make for a more immersive experience for the guest. The backstory helps bring the theme to life for the visitor, because it gives them context for the overall story and helps them understand what they are experiencing.

After the theme and backstories are decided and agreed upon, all of the design decisions that follow should support them. No detail should be generic or put into the

decision without reason. Imagineer Joe Rohde explains how easy it is to make design decisions once a story is decided on, and once designers have answered the questions: “Why did we start? What are we trying to say? What is the story of our effort to get this done? Why are we here? That’s what [Imagineers] do. That makes it much easier for us later when someone has to decide: Do you want *that* lighting fixture or *that* one? Oh well, I want *that* one, because that one says why we’re here. You have to cut something – you can’t afford three of these things, which one do you cut? Well, I cut *that* one because that one the least says why we’re here. It’s really easy as you go down the line to do it. And I think that is something we could teach the world of organization that is a very Disney way of behaving,” (Rohde 2014). Establishing themes and backstories for an area make detail decisions easier, because there is already a guide for making the decision.

The order of choosing a theme, including a manifestation theme and a dramatic theme, then creating a backstory, then picking out certain details that support the theme and backstory, is summarized by Figure 4.3:

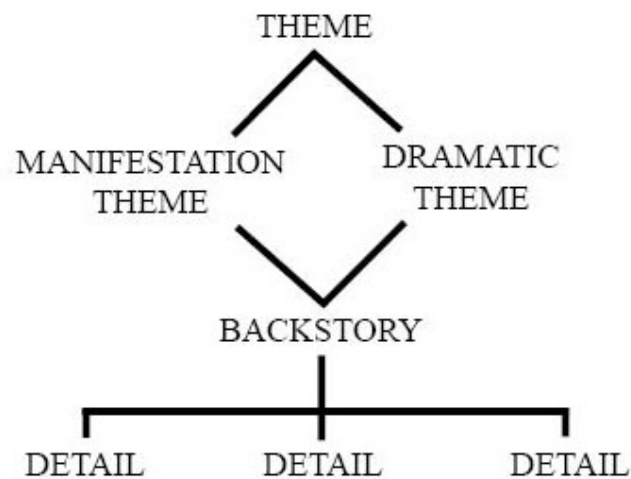


Figure 4.3: Design flow chart

Using Details

Using the same categories of Catherine Dee's details as discussed in the Animal Kingdom case studies in Chapter 3, Table 4.2 lists some primary design elements that fit into each category. The suggested categories in Table 4.2 are not the only ones that can play a role in storytelling, but they are a simple starting point for designers to choose which elements they can use to illustrate their themes and backstories in the landscape. These categories can also help give designers additional ideas for how to further illustrate a theme or backstory in a landscape. Each design element represents a chance for a designer to support a theme or backstory, depending on what they choose to do with each design element. Not every design element must be used, but if each design element that ends up being used in a design corresponds to the chosen theme or backstory, then the overall narrative of the design is more likely to be understood by the site visitors. It is recommended to choose at least one element from each category that supports the theme and backstory for the design of a space. But if there is the opportunity to use more than one element in each category, then the themes and backstories will be better supported with the addition of more supporting details. Storytelling details are more effective in a group when they come together to tell a cohesive narrative.

Table 4.2: Detail categories with detail opportunities

Earth and Rock	Vegetation	Built	Color	Furniture
Pathways, sidewalks, walkways	Plant palette	Pre-existing buildings or structures	Overall color palette	Utilities
Groundcovers	Pre-existing plants	Newly planned buildings or structures	Plant color palette	Light fixtures
Overall site	Newly installed plants	Architectural style	Built color palette	Seating, tables, chairs, benches
Materials	Borrowed scenery	Building materials	Color contrast between different elements	Trash cans, waste receptacles
Overall texture	Plant texture	Building or structure size and shape	Mood or emotion from color	Signage
Size of individual spaces	Plant density	Amount of built structures compared to natural landscape	Using color for emphasis	Art
	Plant sizes	Fencing		Sculptures
				Water features

Table 4.2 gives suggestions for what details designers can include to support the themes and backstories in their designs. For example: a particular children’s garden has themes of adventure, taking a journey, and discovering new things, and the backstory is the re-creation of the Wizard of Oz. From the earth and rock detail category, a designer might choose to use the pathways to support the backstory by making them a literal “yellow brick road.” If that was the only element chosen from that category, the backstory could still be communicated, but the more details from each category that could be used, the better.

Conclusion

By using Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, landscape designers can create their own (or strengthen preexisting) themes, backstories, and details for their designs to successfully communicate a narrative to visitors through the landscape. While this method is not required or necessary for every landscape design project, it can help certain landscapes (as discussed earlier in the chapter) include an entertainment or education aspect in the overall message of the landscape site. The modified method is not as thorough or intensive as the official Disney Imagineering method, but it is a simplified version that can more easily be incorporated into landscape design projects by professionals on a limited timeline and budget. Chapter 5 will show how this method can be used in a re-imagination of Bear Hollow Zoo in Athens, GA.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION & CONCLUSION

The Modified Disney Design Method discussed in Chapter 4 will be applied to a re-imagining of Bear Hollow Zoo in Athens, Georgia. Bear Hollow Zoo is a part of the park system of Athens-Clarke County and it is open to the public. It houses rehabilitated wildlife native to the state of Georgia that cannot be re-released into the wild for health or behavioral reasons. The goal of the zoo is to educate the residents of Athens about these animal species and create a fun environment for children to learn about local wildlife. Since the design priority of the zoo would be focused on education, adding an easily recognizable storytelling element to the landscape can help bring entertainment value to the zoo and make the information about the wildlife more accessible to children.

Currently, there has been no direct contact with the coordinators of the zoo or the county government regarding this thesis and the re-imagination of Bear Hollow Zoo. This re-imagination is an example to show how the Modified Disney Design Method could work in a landscape design outside of a theme park. Constraints on building efforts, time, and costs will not be considered. The design suggestions will only be focused on site details, and not a complete re-design of the site.

To begin the re-design with the Modified Disney Design Method, the overall theme, including manifestation and dramatic themes, must be chosen first, then the backstories must enforce those themes, (refer to Figure 4.3 on page 82). An easy way to choose a theme is to evaluate the current conditions and original intent for the zoo. The

zoo is in good condition and is currently enjoyed by children of all ages, as well as adults. However, there is room for improvement in the overall design, as the zoo currently lacks a unifying theme. The objective of the zoo re-design will be to use a theme to create a backstory that children can identify with and recognize in the landscape and help them understand the educational information about the animals and their habitats more easily. Therefore, the dramatic themes will focus on education and a respect for wildlife. Since Bear Hollow Zoo is located in the middle of a residential area in Athens, the manifestation theme is portrayed as an animal “neighborhood.” The backstory, which is meant to explain the themes, is the more detailed narrative that explains why the animals live in the neighborhood. The proposed backstory is: the featured animals in the zoo discovered each other living in the wild and quickly became best friends. They wanted a community to live in together to “retire” from the wilderness and live out their lives in relaxation. Inspired by the Athens neighborhoods in the Five Points area, they settled on a location for their animal “retirement community.” The animals came together to build their neighborhood with a unified look that includes a home for each animal with some of their favorite possessions and activities. The residents of the “Bear Hollow Retirement Community” now invite the local Athens human residents to come visit their homes in their retirement neighborhood community to learn more about the animal species and their habitats. This backstory works because visiting the animal exhibits is like visiting their “homes,” and the retirement neighborhood motif can help add a touch of whimsy to the zoo to make the experience more fun and engaging for visitors.

The details included in the neighborhood will all support the themes and backstories. The details that will be included in the re-design are listed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Bear Hollow Zoo Themes, Backstories, and Details

THEMES	BACKSTORIES	DETAILS
Respect for wildlife	The animals in the zoo are non-releasable into the wild for health or behavioral reasons, but they serve as ambassadors for their species in the zoo. The animals want a relaxing place to live out their “glory years” and created their own “retirement community.” The animals are opening their “neighborhood” for people to come explore their homes and learn about their habitats and see what the animals are up to in their retirement community.	Neighborhood-style entrance sign (built) (Figure 5.2)
		Bright, colorful houses, signage and décor (color) (Figures 5.1, 5.4, 5.5)
		Add a welcome mat to each exhibit entrance (furniture) (Figure 5.6)
		Bright, colorful flowers in front of each exhibit to mimic a garden or a front yard. Tropical-looking plants will provide a lush and vacation-like scene (vegetation) (Figures 5.1, 5.3, 5.4)
		White picket fences to replace other fencing (built) (Figures 5.1, 5.4)
Education	Each animal exhibit is their “home,” which will include elements that reflect the natural habitat that each animal lives in to educate visitors about the animals and their habitats.	Each animal has their own standard house that creates the unity of a neighborhood, but each exhibit has added elements that are unique to each animal species that represent their hobbies (built) (Figures 5.1, 5.3, 5.4)
		Pathways have animal prints leading to each animal’s exhibit (earth and rock) (Figures 5.1, 5.6)
		Add a mailbox with the animal’s name at the entrance of each exhibit (furniture) (Figures 5.1, 5.6)

Details

Each detail chosen to represent the themes and backstories for Bear Hollow Zoo will be explained individually to show their connection to the themes and backstories. They are divided into each detail category. There could have been more details chosen to create a more elaborate narrative, but for the sake of brevity and following the minimum suggested steps for the Modified Disney Design Methods, at least one detail in every category is shown.

Earth and Rock

Pathways

This re-design proposal for Bear Hollow Zoo does not include changing the layout of the animal exhibits or the pathways. While keeping the pathways the same, a simple but effective addition of animal footprints can support the idea that the prints belong to the animals that live in the Zoo neighborhood and add a fun element for children to learn about the animals' tracks. The prints could be embedded into the pavement if it was re-paved, or they can simply be painted on. An example is shown in Figure 5.1 on the following page shows the owl tracks leading up to the owl exhibits, and the bobcat tracks leading to the bobcat exhibit. This feature can also help visitors with wayfinding in addition to the educational component for children.



Figure 5.1: Pathway Perspective 1



Figure 5.1a: Existing zoo pathway

Vegetation

The zoo is already located in a forested area of Athens, which provides a nice backdrop of existing trees. The zoo already has some planted areas but adding the neighborhood theme calls for more manicured plantings, like planting beds filled with colorful annuals, perennials and grasses. Colorful flowers or planting beds can be placed with each animal exhibit to suggest that the animal keeps its own garden in their “yard,” (shown in Figure 5.3 on page 93) and makes the neighborhood look and feel more like a real, friendly, and colorful neighborhood. In addition to each animal’s garden, tropical-looking plants can be added to give the retirement community neighborhood a more vacation-like feel, because this neighborhood was made for the animals to relax and enjoy their lives here. An example of tropical palm trees and large-leafed plants such as elephant ears or banana plants is also shown in Figure 5.1 on page 90.

Built

Neighborhood Entrance Sign

The current entrance sign for Bear Hollow Zoo is very simple. But by adding the retirement neighborhood theme, the zoo should have an entrance sign similar to a traditional neighborhood or subdivision sign, to help visitors pick up on the neighborhood motif. The traditional neighborhood entrance sign could be surrounded by manicured plantings with tropical-looking leaves to imply the vacation-like feel of the animal retirement community.

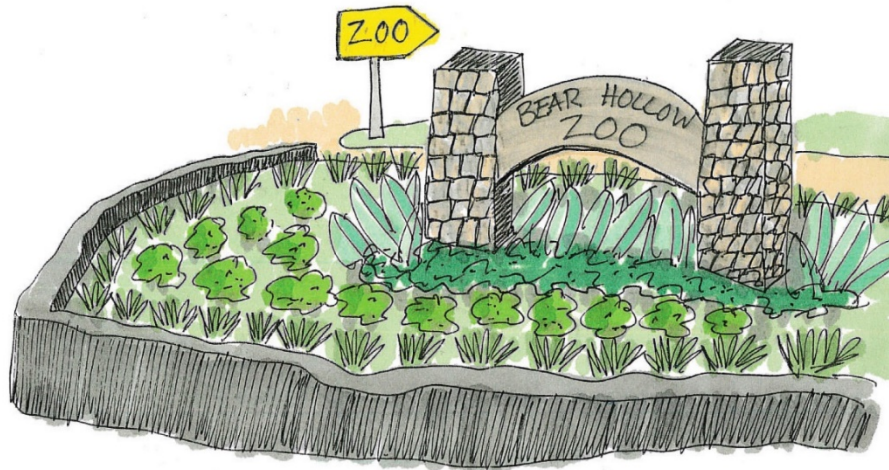


Figure 5.2: Neighborhood Entrance Sign



Figure 5.2a: Existing Entrance Signage

Animal “houses” in each exhibit

Each animal already has its own shelter, but to add another element for the neighborhood backstory, each animal should have their own “house” in their exhibit. Each “house” could be unique to each animal, like the Otter’s tent shown in Figure 5.4 on the following page. The otter’s natural habitat, the river, informs the design of its exhibit at the zoo. Each animal exhibit could also contain extra details that show how the animals spend their free time. For example, the Otter exhibit contains his swimming pool with a float and canoe, which characterizes a river habitat but also reinforces the backstory and shows how he spends his days relaxing in the Bear Hollow Retirement Community. Figure 5.3 below is another example of a standard animal home and yard with a small garden and a place for relaxing under an umbrella. Each animal home has the potential to be unique to each animal, or like the figure below, look like a traditional retirement neighborhood home. Each option supports the neighborhood backstory, but the custom houses add more unique details.



Figure 5.3: Animal’s house and yard



Figure 5.4: Otter Exhibit



Figure 5.4a: Existing Otter Exhibit

White picket fencing

Another traditional staple of American neighborhoods, a white picket fence can be added to unify the area and reinforce the neighborhood motif. The animal enclosures will remain the same, but the white picket fence could be added in front of the current animal enclosures as an overlay. But there are standard wooden fences in the zoo currently that could be replaced by a white picket fence, which would bring the separate animal exhibits together. Examples of the white picket fencing can be seen in Figures 5.1 on page 90, Figure 5.4 on page 94, and Figure 5.6 on page 98.

Color

Bright and colorful signage and décor

Colorful signage and décor could be added to bring more life and vibrancy into the zoo re-design. The current signage is informational but basic and simple. Adding bright colors and images to the zoo signage can make the informational more appealing to children. Figure 5.5 below shows an example of a new colorful sign that could replace the existing wooden sign at the entrance of the zoo.



Figure 5.5: Neighborhood Rules Signage



Figure 5.5a: Existing Signage

Furniture

To explain the neighborhood backstory, props like welcome mats and mailboxes (shown in Figure 5.6 on the following page) can be added to each animal exhibit to show that their exhibit is their “home.” The mailboxes could be functional, holding cards or “letters” with animal facts, and become an opportunity for children to look inside and find out more information inside about the animal. The mailboxes can also be customized for each animal’s name that was given to them, which gives children another way to more easily connect with the animals.

Welcome mats can be placed at the entrance to each animal’s exhibit, which helps signify the entrance to each exhibit, but is also a playful way to reinforce the neighborhood backstory.

Additional props like the shuffleboard table shown in Figure 5.1 on page 90 and the garden set in Figure 5.3 on page 93 show what the animals fill their time with in the retirement neighborhood. The shuffleboard table could be life-size, creating an opportunity for visitors to use it and engage in the neighborhood activities.



Figure 5.6: Pathway perspective 2



Figure 5.6a: Existing zoo pathway

Conclusion

The proposed re-imagination of Bear Hollow Zoo is a simple suggestion of how Disney's Modified Design Method could be used in a landscape design project outside of a theme park. Choosing a theme, backstories, and details that support them can help communicate a message through the landscape for visitors to recognize and enjoy. These elements can come together to tell a story in the landscape, which was mentioned in Chapter 2 as an important and instinctual method for communicating that can add a deeper meaning to a landscape design. With the added storytelling element, the zoo transforms from a simple area with basic animal exhibits to a unified attraction that gives the visitor more to recognize in the landscape and find enjoyment in discovering the story behind the details. The Bear Hollow Zoo re-imagination was done to show how storytelling can be included in a pre-existing design by adding details that support themes and backstories.

Self-Critique & Future Opportunities

The intention of this thesis was to research, study, and evaluate Disney Imagineering's design process, how they use details to tell stories in their theme park landscapes, and create a simpler, modified design method that could be used by other landscape designers. The Modified Disney Design Method is truly modified – it is assumed that professional landscape architects and designers that might use the method are not working for Disney Imagineering or working at the same scale as a theme park. I believe the Modified Disney Design Method is a simpler design method that can help landscape designers think about adding themes and backstories into their designs. However, it is not as thorough as Disney Imagineering's methods, but the intention of the

new method was to be condensed and easy to follow. The reason Disney Imagineering can produce their intricate and heavily detailed designs is due to their vast resources and the nature of the designs themselves – they have full creative freedom and are typically building from scratch. Most other landscape design projects are modifying existing areas or are financially limited, and they cannot construct their designs from scratch.

One element of the Disney Modified Design Method that I believe could be improved is the selection of the theme and backstories. This part of the method is more open-ended and would benefit from having a team of designers come together for creating ideas for the themes and backstories. Applying the method to the zoo by myself was simple, but the themes and backstories could have been more elaborate or expanded if I had more people collaborating on the storytelling other than just myself.

I believe this thesis properly investigated Disney Imagineering's successful attempts at incorporating stories into the landscape and explained how their designs use details to tell their stories. Using the Modified Disney Design Method for a re-imagining of Bear Hollow Zoo was meant to be a simple example of using the method in a pre-existing location. The time frame for the thesis was a limiting factor, and I decided against fully re-designing Bear Hollow Zoo in an effort to keep it simple. Additionally, after reaching out to Bear Hollow Zoo administration, I received no response. Therefore, I was not able to discuss my thesis with any of the zoo officials, and that lack of contact meant I did not have access to any official zoo master plans to help me with a more in-depth re-design of the space. Collaborating with the zoo management could have provided a more involved process for creating the themes and backstories based on the wants and needs of the officials who own and operate the zoo. In the future, if contact can

be established with the zoo administration, a more involved re-design using the Modified Disney Design Method could be done. Additionally, future research could be done to test the method by using it on a different type of site. As mentioned on the project types list on page 78, there are many different types of recommended sites that could benefit from a storytelling element, and the method should be tested on different types of sites to further test the method.

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