AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY
NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION
TASMANIAN BRANCH

Photographer: Rhonda Hamilton April 2024

Interviewee:	**JERRY de GRYSE**
Interviewer:	Jean Elder
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[JE] This is an interview with Jerry de Gryse recorded for the Australian Garden History Society's National Oral History Collection. I'll be speaking with Jerry about his life as a landscape architect and ideas man. He's based in Hobart.

This interview is taking place on Friday the 26th of April 2024 in Hobart, Tasmania. The interviewer is Jean Elder and our recorder is Rhonda Hamilton.

The Australian Garden History Society acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.

So welcome Jerry.

We'll start at the beginning and I'm going to ask you the year you were born and where you spent your early years?

> [JG] I was born in 1952, in the city of Detroit, Michigan, in the United States. Your listeners would understand Detroit as a city in decay at present, but as a child it was a great place to grow up. I lived in tree-lined streets with American Elms reaching all the way across the street from both sides, to create a cathedral-like avenue into the distance, Jeffersonian grid of streets so everything was in rectangles and we could play in the streets, we could walk to school, ride our bikes everywhere in the neighbourhood. It was really a great childhood and everybody had a neat and tidy front lawn.

No fences?

> No fences. Backyard fences, and that was one of the fun things to do as a child was to jump all the fences down the street to the next street.
>
> The front yards were all well-trimmed. That's sort of the beginning of my landscape roots in a way, because Mr Page's house was about four doors up and he let me push his lawnmower across the front lawn for $2 at aged eight and it all took off from there.
>
> So the lawnmowing side of landscaping was a big part of my childhood and later – at 12, 13 – I used to tow my lawnmower down into the wealthy neighbourhoods of Detroit. I'd have my bicycle with all my tools on and mow the lawns of some of the more wealthier people.

For more than two dollars?

> Twenty-five dollars a lawn. These were big corner blocks that my father helped me get started with and bought me a self-propelled lawnmower and I took it from there. So I was 12 or 13 and then …

And you were a collector at that point?

> Oh yes, as a child I collected everything and anything, stamp collection, coin collection, comic books, baseball player autographs. It went through phases, and I still have remnants of all of that. My brother sold my comic books but that's neither here nor there [laughs].

Were you part of a large family?

Five children – three boys, and that's more the childhood years. We were quite stretched out. My older brother and my younger sister never lived in the same house because he went away to university at 18 and she was born, I left four years later. So it was really two different families; a boy family (three boys) and then the two girls came late and it was quite a different sort of set-up. We were Mamma's boys and they were Daddy's girls [laughs].

And when you did your first degree, what happened in your secondary schooling? How did you get in to wanting to do science?

Well I graduated from high school. My brother had been in the art school at the University of Michigan and I used to spend the weekends visiting him and going to the art school – and the architecture school shared premises, so I nosed around in the studios and architecture and thought, 'Oh maybe I want to be an architect.' I liked the models.

So I enrolled in architecture and did some of the prerequisites. There was two-years of prerequisites before you could get in and at the end of that second year and before the start of the actual course, by that stage in life I had parlayed my lawnmowing businesses into estate gardening. I was an estate gardener for a wealthy family in Detroit. And while I was working on the estate I thought, 'I really don't want to be an architect; I think I want to be a landscape architect. I like this outdoor stuff, I like the plants, I like where I am today.'

I went back and changed into Science/Natural Resources as a way of preparing myself to enter landscape architecture later. I didn't want to change universities and go find a course somewhere else, I wanted to finish at Michigan. So I did Natural Resources and did a lot of the prerequisites that I thought might lead to landscape architecture. So I did an urban planning class, I did soils, I did woody plants where I learnt my plant materials. It had an interpretation class; they had a political science class. So I had a very wide-ranging degree in Natural Resources that set me up to get into landscape architecture later, after I graduated from Michigan.

5:33 There's not a similar – I'm not sure about this – is there (in Australia) a degree in Natural Resources?

There is one at Armidale, they call it Natural Resources, yes.

So natural resources grew out of the forestry school, forestry and ecology. It was largely around national parks and land management, so that's what the Natural Resources degree was. It was very wide-ranging. I mean you could've majored in forestry; you could've majored in (I don't know what), but I just did the generalist [strand] and a little bit of everything that the course offered. And then later, when I finally landed at Minnesota and asked to get in the course there, I had 90% of my prerequisites to get into that course.

I spent a year after my graduation from Michigan, working for my fraternity. I travelled widely in the western states; I visited 55 or 60 campuses that year, working for the fraternity, and while I was doing that I was checking out all the landscape architecture courses around, to see where I might want to go to school.

I finished that year and went back to Detroit, fixed my dad's windows for $150, put the money in my pocket, jumped in the car and headed west, and got as far as Minnesota, where I had tried to get in the course. They'd rejected me, and I went back and said, 'Why didn't I get in?' and they said, 'Well, we had hadn't met you and we only took people that we had met.' You needed an interview. He [then] said, 'Well, we've already started but if you hang around next year you're in.' So I hung around for a year and went hunting and fishing and shooting and hung out with friends and did a few prerequisites [including] art, surveying and a professional writing course, and then the following year (I don't know what year that would be – 1975 maybe), I started my landscape architecture degree – [a] three-year course.

And lived in Minnesota then?

I lived in Minneapolis yes, which was a wonderful place to live. Beautiful city, designed by landscape architects, really. The park system was laid out by a landscape architect named Horace Cleveland – I can't remember what his middle [name was] – HWS Cleveland.

So it was a beautiful city, all connected; the lakes, cross country skiing in winter, groomed trails everywhere, walking trails around all the lakes in summer.

Hence your love of nature?

It just enhanced it; it was a beautiful place to be.

I'd been camping as a kid, a lot, so I always enjoyed the outdoors and, like I say, I played in the streets every day, so it was a very physical upbringing. Sport was part of that; baseball in the summer; basketball in the winter. So Minnesota was all of that on steroids in a lot of ways. You know, wilderness area to canoe in, in the north, lakes and rivers to canoe on, and then outdoor sport. Everything was there so it was a great place to study. I fell in with two different families who sort of adopted me into their lives, and 'Minnesota nice' is a thing, you know, people in Minnesota are lovely and these two families just took me in and one family was a hunting, fishing, shooting sort of family, and the other one was my professor and his eight kids, so I could go down to their house in the bush, or I could go out to the lakes and borrow the boat and go fishing and go to the cabin, you know, that type of thing, so Minnesota was wonderful to me.

And I thought that was where I was going to stay.

9:39 So what happened?

Oh, I was between jobs and I ...

Tell me about your first job then.

I graduated from landscape architecture in ’79 (I think) and my first job was with one of my lecturers, and we worked out of the basement of his house that he’d excavated – under the house – and all the dirt that went outside became the badminton court next to the house. And he was a great – technically really oriented – and, of course, landscape architecture in America was very technically oriented. We learnt structural engineering, we learnt road design, we learnt levels, earth-forming all our plant materials, whereas in Australia, at that time, landscape architecture was still very much sort of an ornamental gardening profession. You know, it may have been a little bit more advanced but it hadn’t cracked into the more hard landscape, urban stuff that the American system had.

Anyway, Jim Robin, my first job out was the guy who taught us Tech, so it was a great grounding for me to work there and I had by my side a good friend from my class who was also really technically skilled, so I learnt a lot of my craft from Jim. And I also learnt, I think, to trust your intuition. Jim was very quick. He would hit on an idea and it would be the right idea, because he’d trust himself to get a good idea straight up and then work from there.

The professor with the eight kids, Herb [Baldwin], was sort of my mentor. I spent a lot of time with him in the field or in the studio, just as a friend, and he showed me his work and he was the artiste, you know, beautiful, beautiful landscape architecture. So I had that really nice balance in my early training but then I was also thinking that I wanted to do further study. That was the thing to do; you’d graduate top of your class (which I did) and the expectation was you would go to Harvard. Well Harvard cost (at that time) $20 000 [USD] – that’s probably $2 million dollars now [laughs], $200 000 – but anyway, I didn’t really want to go to Harvard, everybody went to Harvard, I wanted to do something different. So I was casting around in England – to study in England because they spoke English – and anyway, while I was doing that (this is a long story), I needed a job. I went to see a professor of mine (another professor, Roger Martin, very influential, in Minnesota) and asked Roger for a job with his company. And he said, ‘Oh look I’m just back from my sabbatical in Australia at the University of Melbourne, I don’t have any work for you. What are you doing with your life?’

I explained to him what I was doing, about wanting to do a masters, and he said, ‘Well, you should go to Australia.’ And I said, ‘Oh really, ok.’ So they speak English, I’ll test that out and I’d sent a letter and, ‘What’s the possibilities and what would be the job opportunities while I was there …’ and they sent me a letter offering me a job as a tutor, in their master’s program.

I think, through the back door, Roger had said something, he won’t admit it, never admitted it, but I think he must have said something because it was just too quick. And it was more money than I was making in America with the exchange rate at the time.

This is 1980 I'm applying, so I arrived here in '81 for a one-year contract, that became two, that became three. I struggled at Melbourne University at the start, but I made friends in the industry, particularly at RMIT with Jim Sinatra, who I had met in America earlier when he was teaching in Iowa State. So I knew Jim and some of my classmates and some of his students and we fell in, and that was quite a creative time. We organised the first Students of Landscape Architecture conference called *The Edge,* which I think, people will say that it was a very influential moment in the profession of landscape architecture in Australia. We had about 300 people attended, fifty speakers, we had films showing, field trips, etc etc and again, it was about shifting the profession out of its ornamental gardening shell to the edge of the profession to say well, we work with all these people in all these different ways. We had eco philosophers, we had engineers, we had poets, we had musicians, we had all these different people that had influenced us as landscape architects, around us, at the edge of our profession and informing our profession; horticulturalists, painters. It was quite an event.

15:03 It sounds very exciting. What year was that?

That was 1983, so yes that was the first Students of Landscape Architecture conference: *The Edge*.

Was there a course in Australia then called Landscape Architecture?

Yes, there was a Masters of Landscape Architecture at Melbourne Uni where I was teaching, and RMIT had a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture, under Jim Sinatra. And there were others; there was the University of New South Wales, Finn Thorvaldson, Allan Corey at the University of Sydney (or maybe the other way round, I don't know). Brisbane had a course and I don't know who was teaching, I never met any of those folks at the time. Canberra had a course – Glen Wilson – a great Australian plantsman. And Ken Taylor was into cultural landscapes. So it was about to burst. You know, the profession was about to burst. *The Edge* I think, and IFLA conference the year before in Canberra, sort of pushed it over the edge to become the modern profession that it is now.

And what words would you use to describe landscape architecture now? You've described it as moving from a sort of horticultural, plants-based approach to … how would you describe it?

In writing the Australian Charter for Landscape Architects I defined it as planning and design for life outside. So I was trying to give some idea of the skills, the tools we use (planning and design) and who we do it for (which is life, human life or natural life), and outside. So it would distinguish us from buildings.

The difference now I think is that we are much more technically proficient. There's a much stronger emphasis on the ecology of what we do as opposed to just purely decorating with plants. We're probably more systems oriented than we were than decorators. George Seddon said, 'We just put the rouge on the corpse,' you know, and we were

satraps to the rich and wealthy. I think now we're working across a much broader society of people in the projects we work for, and it's very diverse. It's as I say, as a profession people are working at scale.

One of my classmates was a landscape architect for the parks service in Alaska and she was on a committee of countries, designing, planning the Arctic Circle. So that's the regional scale that we work at and other friends are designing nuts and bolts. They're putting together things that at a different scale, and some people work at a wilderness edge of the world, other people work at the centre of the city; so there's scale and scope. Some people are visionary, they're just thinking up big ideas all the time and other people are very technically oriented. The difference between a Picasso drawing from the shoulder and a draftsman with a .18 pen [laughter].

Indeed. And your time in Melbourne, did you continue to pursue your outdoor interests or was that what drove you to Tasmania? How did you come to Tasmania?

Well in Melbourne yes, I still pursued the outdoors. I took up a friendship with a woman who was an outdoor educator at Wesley College and so she started taking me with her boys on camping trips, where I discovered how unfit I was. Then I took up running around Melbourne, from the university campus around Royal Park and all that. One of my students in my course, Francine Gilfedder, who's been very involved in the Garden History Society in Victoria, she was a rock climber, and I arrived in February and by Easter I was out at Mt Arapiles hanging on a rope, climbing with her and her cohorts.

I did bushwalking trips on the weekends and things like that. Kayaking, freshwater kayaking, I did a couple of trips, one with George Seddon, a famous trip with George down the Snowy River, which led him to write a book about the Snowy River.

My thesis topic was about alternative living and alternative lifestyles, so I would travel up to northern New South Wales and spend time living on communes and visiting communes and seeing how their lifestyle accorded with an ecological and environmental ethic. So yes, my passion for the outdoors continued. In fact, I did come down in my final year – at Melbourne Uni – I came down to go on a bushwalk. I was going to walk the South Coast Track of Tasmania with some friends, but it was also the time of the blockade – the Franklin River blockade – so while I was waiting for them to arrive I went over to Strahan and got engaged over there with the greenie acres and the blockade movement and ended up going upriver and abandoning my camping, my bushwalking idea, and stayed upriver as the cook for the upriver Franklin River camp, feeding 125 people a day and organising all the food deliveries and that kind of thing. So I was upriver for probably a couple of weeks. I got sick, came back to town, got well, went back upriver for the final stages of the upriver campaign.

21:17 That was an extraordinary time.

It was, and it was really when I would say that my environmental values hardened. I have to say I'm an American kid, conservative family, I'm interested in the outdoors, I'm interested in ecology and attending rallies and all that sort of stuff but really, it (the blockade) hardened my resolve to just take that straight line approach to environmental consciousness from then on.

The blockade was very formative. A funny story, when I got my first job here in Tasmania. I went back to uni and I finished off and came down here at the end of that (three years at Melbourne Uni) to say goodbye, because my visa was going to expire, and I went to a party and somebody said, 'Oh there's a job a Scott and Furphy engineers, you should go over there and see if they'll hire you.' So I went to Scott and Furphy and I got the job, and just after finishing negotiating the deal with the boss, I'm trying to walk out the door and leave and he says, 'By the way, you're not a greenie are you?' And I said, 'Well boss, I wouldn't call myself that but I have to say I agree with most of what they have to say.' And he said to me, 'Oh, alright, just don't tell anybody.' [Laughs] So, for the first month I kept quiet about it all but after a month, I went into the photocopy room and the two secretaries cornered me and made me tell my story, but by then I'd proven myself and so my green credentials were acceptable. And in that time at Scott and Furphy it was very good, as long as I made money for them, they let me do what I wanted to do and so I pioneered/practised in my way of training, doing my own levels, doing my own engineering, with their advice, but they were surprised that I could do a lot of the things that they were doing.

What sort of projects?

At that time it was largely Housing Commission and Department of Construction projects. So, Burnie Library, the Burnie Police Station, Burnie TAFE, New Norfolk Library, Orford Library. Those were some of the early projects. And then Housing Department subdivisions, all over.

But the thing that I was trying to do (also the satellite tracking station up the hill) and that project was the first demonstration of saying to people, 'Let's collect the seed for the plants that we're going to use from within one kilometre of the site.' So I engaged a young fellow who now runs a big landscaping company to go out, collect the seed, we grew it on and we used it as our plants. And I was doing a lot of work with indigenous plants, trying to use indigenous plants for everything. I was a bit of a plant fascist, about my selection of plants, trying to push that ecological line … the joke I would make if somebody dropped a neutron bomb, and all the people were gone, the plants would just take over and do their thing and the earth would be healed.

So we were doing a lot of that with Scott and Furphy. It was a really good time. I was able to work hard, I finished my master's thesis, using their computers at night, and I learnt a lot from the engineers. And I was able to pioneer ways of working that hadn't been in the profession, certainly not in Tasmania, but even elsewhere, very limited. The indigenous plant thing grew out of a group in Melbourne, they were pioneering it so I

wasn't far behind them really, in what they were doing. Certainly in Tasmania, it was a new thing.

25:30 So early in your time in Tasmania you were involved in bringing the British founder of Common Ground – Susan Clifford – to Tasmania. She was passionate about nature and a sense of place. Can you tell us about her visit and the response here to the ideals of Common Ground?

Well after Scott and Furphy, I set up my own business and I was always interested in the role of public art, the possibilities for public art in the landscape, and so through my early work with Scott and Furphy, at Rosny Library in particular, I was introduced to Arts Tasmania, Lynne Uptin (Lynne Smith at the time), and worked with Lynne quite a bit on projects. Every State Government project had to have public art. So I was working with her and we ended up at a conference in Melbourne at the same time and Susan was the keynote speaker, and from opposite sides of the room we both sort of made a b-line to her afterwards and said, 'We want you to come to Tasmania.' And so she agreed and a year later she came out, and around her visit (between Lynne and myself and others), we organised a whole series of events to try and raise awareness about the role of art – in Susan's words – as a prism through which to see nature.

We had a five-day or six-day event down at Fortescue Bay with sculptors doing works in nature down there. Ray Arnold did a thing up in Perth with truckies and their photographs. We had a poet and a double-bass player on the ferry going back and forth every night, reciting poetry and performing (what was called the Ferry's Project, Marjorie Luck at Clarence Council helped organise). And then we had a one-day seminar at the end, where we again, thinking about this edge of the profession, being a landscape architect, an architect, photographer, musician, poet – we had a range of speakers, all talking about the role of nature informing their work and the way that their work informed others about nature.

So that was the great thing about Susan's visit, it was very formative for about 125 people, it really took art, and the role of art in the landscape, out to a lot of people and opened the door for them. I remember Julie Payne, who is Robert Morris-Nunn's partner, saying how influential that was in her thinking and in her career, that moment. Yeah that was a really significant event. And for me it was one of several events that led to the book *Our Common Ground,* which was the first publication by the [Australian] Institute of Landscape Architects, which was the transcript of all the recordings from that day.

And it was one of a series of events. The next event involved Alan Gussow, the American painter, coming out. I organised for Alan to come, I had met Alan as a student at Minnesota and understood his emphasis on sense of place and the value of drawing out the essence of place into your work, rather than homogenising things in an international style. So we had a wonderful event with Alan when he was here. And then another year later, I was on a committee that organised the National Institute of Landscape Architects conference, in collaboration with the national

Architects then and national Planners. So I was able to influence the speakers' program for that, again in this broad sense, focussing on a sense of place as well. So that was a really intense period of activity in my life, in the '90s, early '90s, mid-'90s.

29:42 And a pretty groundbreaking kind of area, not just for Tasmania, Australia, but probably worldwide.

Yes and again, my profession, landscape architecture's evolving this whole time, internationally and nationally, to be the much more broad profession it is now. So that's sort of my extra-curricular vocational activities. Professionally, in 1986 or '87, I did the Waverley Flora Park Management Plan, and that [was] groundbreaking. The award over there, (I was just looking to see the date but I can't read it). The Waverley Flora Park Management Plan was a career-establishing project for me. I won two national awards – the first time any Tasmanian had won a national landscape architecture award and it was a land management plan for a natural area here in Hobart that had significant natural values, surrounded by suburbs but it had 280 species of plants and 20 species of orchids and some of them were rare and threatened.

In writing that management plan and winning that award it set off a ripple through the whole state, of other communities saying well we've got a Waverley Flora Park kind of project, so can you come to Latrobe, can you come to Devonport, can you do two or three more in Clarence and write these land management plans and they became increasingly bigger and more involved. We eventually, with my business partner, friend at the time, John Hepper, we won the job to do the land management plan for the Defence forces at Buckland; a 22 000-hectare site and on that project we had 20 sub-consultants working under us, to collect the data we needed to write a land management plan for Defence. That won the next national award for us, and then Wellington Park Management Plan.

I'd like you to talk more about that, because that seems to me, it captures a whole range of your experiences and your expertise in terms of that management plan and the focus on sense of place and the importance of kunanyi to Hobart and surrounds.

Yeah well that was off the back of these whole series of land management plans. John and I, and a group of others – I think there were six or eight others on the team – pulled together the information to write the first management plan for Mt Wellington. Our plan was rejected by our committee because we took quite a radical approach. We tried to base it on the intrinsic value of nature, which is the value of nature above and beyond human needs. There was quite a complex bit of philosophy in there but, again, it did touch on a lot of the things that I'd been thinking about and we'd been talking about professionally, at the edges. Again the deep ecology movement. I was heavily influenced by a couple of deep thinkers here are the University at the time.

Peter Hay was that?

Oh Peter, I mean I knew Pete, but Robin Eckersley and Warwick Fox were writing their PhDs at the time and they were both into this notion of trans-personal ecology, and Pete would've been too, because Pete was their supervisor. But I didn't know Pete as well then as I do now.

Yes, so Robin and Warwick managed to get Arne Naess to come to Australia. Arne and Bill Devall, who were, Arne was the originator of the idea of deep ecology. You know, it's deeper than just green, not just a utilitarian value for nature, but nature having a value of itself.

We tried to weave that into the management plan. It was all a bit too hard for Parks to manage, so they created zones in their usual way of managing things, but it was a really exciting time, and the volume that we wrote as a background document is still very highly regarded as the definitive work about Mt Wellington, in terms of depth of study. In fact, Jamie Kirkpatrick borrowed our bibliography to use in his book on Mt Wellington [laughs].

Mt Wellington's interesting for us, as a practice. Around 1996 (well I got married in 1996 [1994] so I must have had a baby in 1998 [1996]), we formed Inspiring Place about 1998. That came out of John and I having worked together on many projects over the previous ten years as independent practices, and in time our workload became more and more overlapping and we said, 'Well if we can ever come up with a good name, we'll make a company.'

35:16 My wife and I were brainstorming one night the name of [the company] and came up with the notion of inspiring place. Kate thought of it and my memory's not that good [laughs], so I'll credit Kate with finding the name Inspiring Place. And I rang John and said, 'John, it's Inspiring Place.' He said, 'That's it,' and two weeks later the company was formed, papers signed and Inspiring Place was off and running from 1998.

Wellington Park Management Plan was before that, but after that we've come down in scales. We've done site plans for The Springs, so coming down from that whole-of-park 52 000-hectares down to a site management/master plan, down to detailed designs. Just recently we designed the playground at Fern Tree Park.

So we get down to nuts and bolts, there's that professional scale thing. The scope from policy all the way through to detailed design, from the wild through to the urban. Mt Wellington is a good demonstration of how I see the profession.

I've got a little diagram that – it's a series of nested circles – it starts at politics, then it goes to policy, goes to planning, goes to design, goes to construction. These nested things, and they happen within the milieu of values; economy; the biophysical environment; and something else (I can't remember what that other one is), but those things inform those different layers and, at any one time, you can be working – you should be thinking about the next layer up and the next layer down – so if we're doing a master plan we're actually thinking about how it's going to be designed. Some master plans are just a series of bubbles. We tend to go

into it even further, to make sure that it's going to work and if we're doing a master plan we also try to understand it within the policy framework – what's the recreation strategy for this community, what's the open space strategy, how does this park master plan say, fit into that, and sometimes we end up in the political realm, you know, where it's a political decision to do something or not to do something, or the job comes out of politics for some reason. Or the politicians come down on you and say you can't do that. We had one said, 'If you do that all of this is going to fall over for you', so you know, we've had the pointed finger from a minister once upon a time.

So the Mt Wellington – the Management Plan – in fact stood in good stead with the latest proposal for having a cable car. It would have run totally counter to all the basic principles in the management plan.

It did. At the time though, the Act, the Wellington Park Management Act that we were working under back then, again 1996 or something, had provision for the skyway in it, and so when we wrote the management plan we also wrote the guidelines against which the skyway had to be assessed, and so we wrote a very rigorous set of principles that they had to address and process that they had to go through before they would get approval.

That helped?

I don't know if it helped or not but I know that people were digging around for it, coming in here asking us for copies of our plan and asking us for copies of all that, to see how they could put it to use. But it certainly again, with our own hardened resolve we were definitely opposed to it and did everything we could to support the people around it.

My best friend is the lawyer that ran the case and we recommended the visual management expert that did the work for the community. That was quite influential in the cable car being rejected, so as professionals we have to, sort of, keep our powder dry, or we get blackballed. So we tend to support in other ways, we do pro bono work for people. Rosny Hill group, we did pro bono work for them. We've said no to working on any number of other projects, including the current proposal for a high-performance AFL centre over in Clarence.

If we had an influence on Mt Wellington that's great, if you think that, that's wonderful [laughs].

40:24 **I find it a contrast … (the other project I wanted to ask you about was the development of Saffire in Freycinet), and I was just amused when I read – having just heard you describe the complexity of approach for Mt Wellington and the Management Plan – the project's architect came to you to help with the development and they said the brief was 'Prepare landscape designs for the area around our building.' That was their brief. I'm thinking, what understanding did they have about landscape architecture? Tell me about it.**

Well, there's two different architects, right. The project started with one firm who were very determinist in how they treated the landscape and we were there to facilitate their vision of what the landscape should be. They really didn't want our opinion, in a lot of ways. We managed to change that in time and we managed to create a philosophy around the project that would have worked and would have made their building better, but then they were moved on – I don't know what the agreement was – but they moved on and then Morris-Nunn Architects took over: Peter Walker, and Peter was much more engaged with us as landscape architects and what we could do to extend the value of their architecture.

So different architects work in slightly different ways. Some only want you to facilitate their vision, and if that's clear at the outset, we can do that, or we're happy to do that. You know, if they want an X in the landscape, we'll make an X and make it work. Others say, well, there's a whole alphabet of possibilities, just show us what those possibilities are. So Peter was much more open to that, and we advanced an ecological vision for the site. Again, we collected seed, we grew that on, we grew 700 advanced trees, we grew 3 000 shrubs before we even started work.

But the first architects, they went to tender and in advance of the tender they cleared the building site, which was huge. And so in clearing the site we collected the soil, took that off-site and stored it in a way that the soil stayed healthy. We took whole plants and we moved them into areas that were disturbed but weren't going to be built on. So we started the process of ecological restoration early on. We had ideas like, we use terms like 'keep healthy landscapes healthy,' 'repair damage that we've done,' 'manage the waters of life.' We worked out how to manage the water on the site so that we didn't have to put in stormwater and ship it off. We talked about managing the night light; all the lights have to project down, no bright lights, no car park lighting … because we wanted to put telescopes in every room so that people could look at the stars at night because the East Coast stars are amazing. We had a whole series of principles that we then applied to the site and most of it eventuated. And noise, noise was another thing, we didn't want to hear a lot of air conditioners at night, so they're all sound-proofed so the quiet of the place was respected.

That was Saffire. I mean we moved the soil back onto the site later on and used that. And the one place the plants have failed was where we had to use imported soil. We ran out [laughs]. We were able to use stone from the site for various decorative elements. We did everything we could to make it of the place, and we did a thing later on with the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects wanted to test the American LEED system – which is an environmental accreditation system – and so we ran Saffire through that, their process, and came out at the top of their ... It would have been a top-rated environmental project if it had been done under this American system. So, I'm very happy with that result and I think the client's very happy with what they have. They trim it a bit too much now – I've seen pictures of hedge cut and stuff and the banksias that we planted in the little courtyards, which were sort of

bonsai-shaped when they went in are just enormous now [laughs]. You live and learn. But the 700 trees have taken off and it is ecologically sound. Even though they're pruned, the plants are of the place, so the habitat values hopefully are there and hopefully the New Holland mouse, which was on-site, has survived and the areas that didn't get used are very healthy and that, so very happy with Saffire. As George Seddon has said, 'It is though a palace eunuch for the filthy rich.' [laughs]

But I'd rather have one tourist spending $2000 a night than 2000 tourists spending $1 a night because I think the impact is less.

46:16 And another project you were involved in was at Rosny Park and you've had the privilege of going back looking at what happened 30 years later.

Oh the library, yeah. The library, that was a Scott and Furphy project and it was the first real expression of a philosophy or a concept that I've ended up applying all through my career, of a cultured core and a wild edge. The cultured core is where, the closer you get to the back door, the more edible the landscape should be. So you can go out of the kitchen and pick a piece of parsley or whatever, and then the further away you go, you should be moving back into nature. On that project the cultured core was an avenue of crab apple trees.

First of all there was a re-orientation of the site. The architect had it wrong, the site planning was wrong and didn't allow for good movement through the site and it didn't connect with the Mines Department on the one end and the council chambers on the other and the shopping centre further along. I re-oriented the car parking, created a spine through the site that connected all those different elements within the city; mines, library, council chambers and Eastlands, and then having done that, used that spine as an avenue of crab apple trees which were beautiful in the spring – our own Sakura. But the avenue of crab apple trees, I framed that within a wild exterior of indigenous trees from the area and in doing that it connects physically through the cultured core, but it connects visually with the hillsides around and if you stand back, it's hard to tell where the site begins and ends because the trees on the wild perimeter are the same trees that are on the hills around, and that was the idea of it. And also to create ecological connections, so that Swift parrots can move through the site, or whatever kind of birds, can move through the site; native hens can come up and peck at the lawn.

And you did go back 30 years later and it's survived?

The framework is there and that was, in fact, I wrote that article for a friend who was writing a book about the framework: what's the influence of the people maintaining … you know, we have an idea, we put it there, we build it and walk away and somebody takes care of it and in the maintenance what changes? And I was very pleased to see that the framework had remained and that the gardeners had understood. Some plants that I used that I wanted to become a hedge in time, to create screened courtyards, they understood that, they trimmed it. The corridor of crab apples have survived, the indigenous trees were still all there, the

understorey plantings were still all indigenous, so I was very happy with that one.

So much of our special Tasmanian landscapes have been lost to development so it's really good to hear that one has survived and has been a really good development.

I have to say, my profession suffers from people not understanding what you've done and not appreciating the value of what you've done and what you went through and, 'Oh, we'll just chop that tree down because we can just grow another one.' And instead of valuing longevity, a lot of projects do suffer a lot of turnover.

It's hard to see where you've been sometimes, you know. You go back to a site and say, 'What did I manage to do here?' All that's left is this step or fence or whatever, none of the trees, none of the shrubs, everything's changed.

50:19 Yes, I'm just thinking, there's a furore going on in Melbourne with councils now declaring, moving by-laws (did you see that in some of the suburbs?) that they need to get permission before they cut trees down … and there's … some of the outer suburbs.

Melbourne's been very good at tightening up on tree removal and they've got a very good greening strategy, street trees in particular, and they have a lot of good protections around that, that I've tried to institute here, when I wrote the City of Hobart Street Tree Master Plan.

And what's the status of this now? How's that's developed?

Well Ruby [Wilson] the arborist, has implemented – I think she says 28 out of 30 recommendations. She's been sensational at implementing and getting it going and you can start to see – I mean trees take a long time to mature and get big and achieve what you want to achieve – but I walk around the city and I can see where Ruby's been, with her team planting trees and maintaining trees and sticking them in wherever they can. I think, in time, the city will get to its target of whatever canopy cover it was, 40% or something.

We set targets and again, we relied on Melbourne. In fact the woman who wrote the Melbourne Street Tree Strategy was a peer-reviewer for my work on that project, and it drew a lot on theirs. I think the value of what I tried to do was, there's a lot of statements around, motherhood statements or parenthood statements around trees, that trees make you healthy, and trees get rid of this and that, so I went to try and find the real sources of that information and put it into the strategy so someone could go to the journal article – you know medicine, that says 'Green is good for your health.' Rather than just the parenthood statement that 'green is good for your health,' this is the scientific evidence that somebody accumulated and wrote up.

The Australian Garden History Society, in Tasmania, we've joined forces with National Trust to resurrect the Significant Tree Project which is

encouraging people to protect and get on to the Register, the National Trust Significant Trees Register. And City of Hobart was probably instrumental in creating their own register, but the Master Plan was also pushing that further.

Well the Master Plan, off the back of the Master Plan, Ruby really went for it on the Significant Tree Register and they really expanded it dramatically in the last couple of years. It includes my tree out the front.

You've talked about some pro bono work but you've done a lot of it over your career; the South Hobart Community Garden – are you still involved with that? And Mona's 24 Carrot Gardens?

Yes. Well South Hobart Community Garden's just me needing a plot of land. I live here in the city and don't have any room for vegetables, so I gave it a crack but we travel too much and so I've abandoned my plot up there, but I was the plot manager. I helped by organising them. When somebody said they would like a plot, I said, 'Well there's one free' and I did that for five years maybe, so that was a bit of fun and I still go up (I take my compost up there) and say hello and grab a Chilian guava off a plant or something, every now and again. And I have a raspberry. So that's that.

The 24 Carrot Gardens started – the first couple were pro bono – but we've become a little bit more commercial about that: the rest of the team's doing those projects. We're getting paid a little bit, we're trying to cover staffing costs, but very proud of our work at Bridgewater, Kingston, Kingston High School, Kingston Primary School, Ravenswood. Yeah the community gardening's ongoing, and that's a nice thing.

I volunteered us to do that, when I was still a director of the company. Adam, who's one of the new directors has taken it on with a passion. He's from a horticultural background and has his own vegie patch and all that, so it's been a really good extension and part of the evolution of Inspiring Place into a new ownership, new mindsets. Jordan and Adam have taken over but they're very like-minded to us, which is nice, and maybe even do what we do better. Certainly Adam's a better gardener than I am. I had terrible success; I'm not a green thumb [laughs]. I was good at maintenance, really good at maintenance. I could mow a lawn with the best of them, take care of a garden bed, keep it weed-free, etc etc, but actually getting things to grow myself, that's Kate's job, that's my wife's job.

55:41 **We're leading in to where you're talking about what the future of – not only your company – but landscape architecture. Do you have comments about – as we move into the future – where do you see landscape architecture going?**

Look as far as where the company's going I think the company's staying on the course that we've been on over the years. Jordan and Adam have a good range of skills; not quite the breadth that John and I had, so we're looking for people to fill some of the roles that John and I played in the

company. But I think the company will continue to do excellent work and will break ground as new ideas come and evolve.

As far as the profession goes it's interesting. I think the profession has gained a lot of credibility, a lot of respect, particularly through the success of some projects. I'm thinking of Taylor Cullity and Lethlean and the work that they've done over the years interstate and overseas, particularly the Australian Garden at Cranbourne.

People see that we're capable of taking things on and capable of leading projects and that there's an alternative way to do the landscape that isn't led by an architect. Architects want to build things, we want to grow things, so when we lead projects they take a different emphasis. We still put buildings in the landscape or shelters or whatever, toilet blocks, but our emphasis is different. It's not so hard-scaped as an architect might make it. So we're getting more and more respect from clients and from architects to let us have those roles and take those approaches. I do feel like, having created a very broad profession, particularly going to the edges and working at all those edges, that some of those edges are being clipped off a little bit, by specialists.

To survive in Tasmania for as long as we have – John and I – we've had to be generalists. We've done one visual impact analysis a year, one park master plan a year … But over thirty years, we've done 30 of each of those, so you're a generalist working across a really broad range of ideas and piecing those ideas together into a singular project, bringing the ecology in, bringing this in, bringing that in, to make a project. But if those were silos, those silos are being picked off a little bit. So where we used to do lots of recreation management plans for municipalities and shires, there's now companies that specialise in recreation management planning, so they're doing that. And I think they're not doing as good a job because they're not seeing it across that breadth. Again we would bring into a recreation management plan, we would bring open space management, we would bring ecology, we would bring urban design or architecture, all those things into it and give it a depth that the specialist in that area isn't giving it.

My theory is that those – you know, horticulture – some landscape architects, Paul Thomson, Glen Wilson, Michael Wright, Cath Rush – all really excellent horticulturalists, but more and more firms are hiring horticulturalists to support them, so landscape architects are losing. If you don't have that skill, you hire somebody. There's now people, horticulturalists, that are just doing the job, rather than us leading it and designing with it. And so it becomes a collection of plants rather than an organisation of plants, shaping a landscape, articulating the way the plants are used.

59:46 So you think you need, again, this is what happens, the wheels go round, your conference of the 1980s – *The Edge* – bringing all those people together.

Yes it's funny you say that because I've been talking about it with a colleague in Victoria, about doing a conference and it would be very much along those lines again.

So yeah, keeping the … I don't want to say that … even with levels planning – earth-forming – you know, let the engineers do that, stay away from it, it's too risky. And I think I don't want the engineers telling me how to shape it, where the pits have to be because there's nothing worse than a pit in the middle of your footpath, because that's where the engineer says it should be to make it work right. I understand that pit could have been off to the side or it could have been over here, or we could shape it around and do it differently, so I think that's what we might be losing and I keep reminding these guys not to let it go.

Hand-drawing skills have disappeared. You know, I don't think I draw that well but they're all going, 'Wow, look at that.' Because I'm drawing by hand still and I can't open a computer file. And that capacity to draw freehand and to think by hand first is really valuable. It opens up things; I'll trace every contour, just to get a sense of what the land's doing at that level before I then start to try and change it. But also in discussion with the client, I can draw in front of them in a way that inspires them to accept my ideas, whereas you can't do that on a computer. So I think that there's something being lost in the computerisation of things.

Let alone AI.

Yeah, and all the precedent images thing. We now rely on precedent images a lot to try and illustrate to client's what they might be getting, or the general sense of what they might be getting. But on the other hand there's always been that issue of taking the precedent images and just repeating it, and AI, that's what AI does. AI says, 'here's all the precedents, I'll grab this and put it here,' and that's a worry, just repeating the same thing from somewhere else, so you lose that connection with place, you lose that specificity of the local condition and the local opportunity and the local community, whether it be plant community or people community.

I think on the positive side, our profession is engaging much more thoroughly and meaningfully with the Aboriginal communities around us, in understanding their ways of being in the landscape and trying to bring that into a modern landscape environment. That's a real positive gain that's happening and I think that the profession continues to expand and gain credibility. It's much different … I mean, when I moved here there were three or four of us in landscape architecture and now there's 25. And you could almost name all the practices on the mainland and now there's hundreds. And hundreds, to the point where people are moving out into the regions and setting up practices in Ballarat and Bendigo and on the Gold Coast and Broken Hill. There's practices out in the regions which I think is important. So bringing those values from our profession into those areas that might be very conservative in their thinking, or the politics or whatever, but also just not exposed to what's happening in the cities that might be valuable to them out there.

Important.

We're coming to the end I think – are there any other areas that I haven't covered?

Well one other project I'm quite proud of and really enjoyed was …

Oh, that was one of my questions.

The work on Cape Barren Island, because that was a remote community, 90 people live on the island, 90% of them are Aboriginal people, a lot of unemployment, and the invitation to go up there and design around their new community hub. So they built three buildings; they built an admin centre, a post office and a shop altogether and to be able to do the landscaping around that.

I invited an artist friend, Maggie Fooke; a trained horticultural teacher Paul Rigby; and myself and then Herbert Staubmann grew the plants (from Habitat Nursery), and we provided not only the design in the landscape but we also provided the training. We used four of the local unemployed people to build the landscape and we brought TAFE to the project. And TAFE ran courses for these, they learnt OH&S skills, they learnt concrete, they learnt horticulture, they got certificates in a number of different things and then Maggie worked with the community to bring art into the landscape. The kids in the schools identified three or four different things on their place; grass trees, Cape Barren geese, something else, and so Maggie worked with them to do clay things that we inserted into the pavement, of those ideas. And then the conceptual design was based around kelp on the beach, you know the strandlines on the beach, and so Maggie identified how to do that by creating concrete sets. A set is a small block like a granite paver but we did them in concrete. And to do that we collected all of the milk cartons on the island. You know the milk that comes in box cartons, you cut that in half, it's a perfect formwork for concrete. So she put coloured concrete in that and then that became the kelp beads running through the concrete areas.

And in the end, most of the materials came from the island, other than the plants, which again we collected seed and cuttings and grew them on and brought them back. All the granite that we used to make the retaining walls, all the tea-tree we used for the screens and fencing, everything except cement, really, came from the island.

Out of the project budget I would say that 90% of the money stayed on the island in wages and in purchasing materials and accommodation and food for us when we were there and I think that was a real benefit. It had all the aspects of sustainability, including a sustainable economy. So I'm really pleased with that. That won a couple of awards, but really the value was in working with the people and being there and it was a great experience, really great experience. So that's one project that I'm quite happy with but … Waverley Flora Park, Cape Barren Island, Buckland Military Training Area, Wellington Park, those are all noteworthy projects. And in recent times working with the team here while they developed the

lily pads in the Botanic Gardens, which won a national Award of Excellence, so that's one of the more recent big wins for us; Edwina, Chris Sherman, Adam, Jordan, myself, all had a hand in that in different ways.

67:07 **And I think I would encourage anybody who's listening to this to come and see the lily pads at Hobart's Botanic Gardens; they're truly beautiful.**

A final question which picks up a bit on your talking about Cape Barren Island and sustainability, how do you think climate change is impacting the preservation of cultural landscapes? What are you seeing?

Well it's certainly in our mind. I mean we have to, daily, with projects we're having to deal with potential sea-level rise, looking at floor levels, looking at potential inundations, that kind of thing. In the plant world we're starting to talk about, and starting to listen to, the experts about how the plant materials are going to shift, how things are going to change. I just said something the other day to somebody, 'We should use a lily pilly here on this project.' And she said, 'Oh, it's not native to Tasmania,' and I said, 'Well it will be [laughs], one day soon.'

So we need to start thinking about what plants are going to replace. My favourite street tree is a lime *Tilia cordata* but the experts are telling us that that might not be appropriate in Tasmania anymore, in the long-term. I've got to start finding a new plant – maybe it's lily pilly, I don't know. Yeah, new street trees. So there's certainly a lot of thought going into that, from a climate change perspective.

And then our own contribution, trying to minimise our use of concrete or using the newer carbon-reduced concrete and carbon-reduced materials. Thinking about clay pavers versus concrete, when we can afford it. Many clients won't afford you the investment to do things properly, so it's harder. But yeah, materiality, we're trying to think, we're thinking about dark skies all the time, which isn't a climate change issue, but certainly light pollution, and emissions and life cycle, trying to use wood rather than plastic in our play equipment. But there's horses for courses sometimes when recycled plastic materials are the right thing too. It's a constant point of discussion and for Mona we did look into it quite deeply. We looked at all – we had a system called REDD I think, and it's a system of evaluating the environmental impact of your materials in their life-cycle cost and that kind of thing. So we did quite a deep investigation at that time, around that.

Well, thank you so much.

In conclusion I just wanted to say that, more than 30 years ago you wrote of the Common Ground movement that their work 'shows us that by being in touch with and being touched by nature, we find our place in the scheme of things and learn to see the planet as not only a gift and opportunity but also as a responsibility to be nurtured and cherished.' I think you would still hold this now, in 2024.

Absolutely. I'm very proud to have said that and continue trying to meet those ideals.

It's been a great pleasure to speak with you today and, as you know, the Australian Garden History Society aims to promote awareness and conservation of significant gardens and cultural landscapes and I think you have clearly demonstrated the contribution your profession is making to this aim. So thank you Jerry.

Thank you, it's a pleasure.

TOTAL 71:50

Recording ends.

Interview ends.