

After my first quarter studying Biological Science at U.C. Santa Barbara, I found myself on academic probation. I was carrying a full 16-unit load, with Chemistry and Calculus proving to be my downfall. As a freshman who loved science, I assumed studying biological science was the correct path. After receiving a D+ in calculus and a C- in chemistry, the letters from the dean's office politely informed me I was officially on academic probation and better turn it around in the next two quarters or face (gulp) expulsion from the university. I hired academic tutors, learned the knack of studying for exams and by the end of the first year I was officially off the dean's probation list.

The second year of college started with organic chemistry and statistics, courses that caused me to rethink my career path. During high school, my parents hired Mr. Tom Lockett, a landscape architect to design the landscape for our new home in the San Fernando Valley. I was fascinated by the plans he developed and when the landscape contractor began construction, I worked daily with the contractor, not as an employee, just as a kid who loved construction and particularly the landscape and planting aspects of the project.



Photo by Brendan Wypich posted on Flickr

So, when it came time to change majors, I decided to study landscape architecture, only problem was U.C. Santa Barbara did not offer that major. After much investigation and college visits, I made the fortunate decision to speak with Mr. Tom Lockett, [Tom Lockett, principal at Land Images](#) the Landscape Architect my parents hired to design their house.

The conversation with Tom convinced me to pursue studies in landscape architecture, and the following term I was accepted at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. In some ways, the first year studies in landscape architecture mirrored the first year studies in biological science. Courses seemed designed to weed out students not willing to pull frequent "all-nighters" for projects with intentionally designed intense time frames. I'm sure many landscape architects learned those "all nighters" are simply a part of their profession. I learned a great deal my first year, yet never had a course taught by a landscape architect, or any courses about the field of landscape architecture, it was all about basics, from drafting to perspective drawing etc.

Another difficulty encountered was after two years spent in the beautiful setting offered at U.C. Santa Barbara, the Cal Poly Pomona campus did not compare favorably. I was fortunate to land a job working at the OH unit, a small on campus nursery, my first day of work at the nursery was spent in 100 degree heat and smog so severe you could not see Mt. Baldy, a 10,000 foot peak just five miles from campus. By the start of my second year at Cal Poly, I was unable to continue my studies, I simply hated being at the school and was not interested in continuing, but had no idea what to do.



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My parents had recently visited Hawaii; Mom stepped up with a great suggestion. "Why don't you take a leave of absence and go explore Hawaii, you'll love the plants!" Two weeks later, armed with a round trip ticket, backpack, tent and \$400.00 I stood outside Hilo airport hitchhiking to a local park where my four-month adventure and motivation for my future career in horticulture, arboriculture landscape contracting and land development began. When I returned to Cal



Poly Pomona, I immediately changed my major to Ornamental Horticulture where I completed my studies and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Ornamental Horticulture, emphasis in landscape design and contracting.

Fast forward 33 years later, I read a great article in the August edition of the North Park News entitled Landscape Architects: Artists with the Earth as a Canvas. The article focused on women who became very successful landscape architects and reside in San Diego. According the Delle Willett, the author of the article, professions for women in the 1960's were limited to being a teacher, secretary or nurse, perhaps an airline stewardess if met the airline chauvinistic standards.

However, woman had been involved with landscape architecture dating back over a century, practicing their trade as gardeners, designers, horticulturists and fine artists. The article highlights Ms. Vicki Estrada, Ms. Kathy Garcia and Ms. Robin Shifflet, three successful local landscape architects who have influenced and shaped the beautiful city of San Diego. For many years, had heard of Vicki Estrada and her firm, Estrada Land Planning <http://www.estradalandplan.com> and recently had the great fortune of working as a sub-consultant for her company as a certified arborist and certified tree risk assessor on a City of San Diego capital improvement project called North Torrey Pines Median Enhancement.

RESTORING PARK'S GRAND PLAZA



Photo by Joe Wolf, posted on Flickr

bestowed their highest honor, making her a “Fellow” for her numerous contributions to the profession and society at large.

Although I do not know Ms. Kathy Garcia personally, I am very familiar with her early work in the mid-1980s where she initiated the planning of the Otay Ranch. At that time, I worked for the Baldwin Company as their landscape and off-site grading superintendent. It was the Baldwin Company that made the largest land purchase in San Diego history, purchasing over 20,000 acres of the Otay Ranch. Her accomplishment include park planning for the East Mesa of Balboa Park, Mission Bay Park and many other park system master plans.

Ms. Robin Shifflet reminded me of my early college stints of starting in a college major to later discovering it was not the correct path of study. She apparently blew up the bioscience lab at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and decided bio-sci might not be her calling, something I can relate to. Soon after graduating, she began her career at the well-known firm of Wimmer Yamada and Associates. She formed her own firm in 1992 and worked as the landscape planner for the City of San Diego in 1995.

To this day, she continues her work with the city, working on long-range planning for the city community planning areas. Her major accomplishments include the San Diego River Park Master Plan, a policy document that will guide future development along 17.5 miles of the San Diego River. This plan is a vision to “reclaim the valley as a common, a synergy of water, wildlife and people”. She wrote new code language that will implement the plan over the next 20 years.



Photo by Don Haugum posted on Flickr

Management plans, be they for the urban forest or park management, are meant to implement ordinances over time. The best management plans are resilient, meaning they are able to withstand changes in personnel, jurisdiction boundaries, budgets or any number of changes that might derail a lesser management plan. There is no doubt that Ms. Shifflet has drafted an enduring

management plan for the betterment of San Diego. In 2009, San Diego ASLA awarded the Urban Design Merit Award for thoughtful planning and sustainability of the Otay Valley Regional park trail system design, a joint effort between the county of San Diego and City of Chula Vista.

These three dedicated landscape architects have each made significant contributions to improving the functionality, beauty, and aesthetics of San Diego, yet they are not alone. Throughout my career, whether as a [landscape contractor](#) or consultant, [certified arborist](#), professional [horticulturist](#), [land development](#) superintendent or director of land development, I have had the honor and privilege to work with many outstanding landscape architects throughout Southern California, this is my opportunity to personally acknowledge them, because each one of them has had a major, positive affect on my professional career and have beautified cities throughout Southern California. So thank you to:

Mr. Thomas A. Lockett, Land Images
Mr. Patrick Murphy, Summers/Murphy and Partners
Mr. Wil Pinaroc, Summers/Murphy and Partners
Mr. Dennis Otsuji, Wimmer Yamada and Caughey
Ms. Vicki Estrada, Estrada Land Planning
Mr. David McCullough, McCullough Landscape Architecture
Ms. Delores Marquez, Marquez Consulting
Mr. Steve Ahles, Ahles Landscape Architecture
Mr. John Patterson, Gillespie Moody Patterson
Mr. Bill Burton, Burton Landscape Architecture Studio
Mr. Joe Esposito, Estrada Land Planning
Mr. Nicholas DeLorenzo, DeLorenzo International
Mr. Jim Hogan, HRP LanDesign
Mr. Kurt Carlson, KTU&A

[Female Landscape Architects Making Significant Contributions to the City of San Diego](#)