



**American Society of Landscape Architects  
Design Medal Nominations**

c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Dear Colleagues:

It is with great pleasure that we submit this awards package for your consideration for landscape architect **Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, OC FASLA FCSLA LMBCSLA** for the **ASLA Medal**. Cornelia's career, which spans more than 60 years, is characterized by precedent setting innovations that have helped shape and steer postwar landscape architecture. She was a pioneer in the profession's embrace of environmentally responsible design and an early champion of the green roof, a design idiom that has become nearly ubiquitous. As the enclosed submittal demonstrates, Oberlander – arguably the dean of postwar female landscape architects – has been and continues to be among our most important practitioners as measured by her built work, frequent lectures, influential publications and numerous awards. Cornelia has not only earned, but definitely deserves the highest level of honor from all her colleagues.

**Background**

Cornelia Hahn was born in Muelheim-Ruhr, Germany, and immigrated to the United States as a child with her mother and sisters. Realizing an early interest in landscape, she earned a diploma from Smith College in the early 1940s, and continued her studies at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, graduating in 1947. Trained during the tenure of Walter Gropius at Harvard, and later at Dan Kiley's studio in Charlotte, Vermont, she embraced modernist ideas and values that encouraged collaboration across disciplines – a concept that became an Oberlander hallmark.

From her early years of practice she has been concerned for the public's welfare. She worked as a community planner for the Citizens' Council on City Planning and on public housing projects with architects Oskar Stonorov and Louis Kahn in the early 1950s. In 1953, she moved to Vancouver, B.C. and continued her interest in public landscapes including her design of the Children's Creative Center for Expo '67 World's Fair in Montreal. The Expo commission led to her participation in the creation of national playground guidelines and the design of more than seventy playgrounds across Canada.

She established her own firm and became known for her collaborative, socially responsible, and environmentally thoughtful work. Other constants are Cornelia's thoroughness in researching each site on which she works and her embrace of new technologies to address issues of sustainability and climate change. Her belief that great projects stem from the integration of landscape and architecture has resulted in a long and distinguished career and numerous collaborations with noted architects including Arthur Erickson, Bing Thom, Moshe Safdie and Renzo Piano. Her more than 35-year collaboration with Arthur Erickson, Canada's leading architect, included several noteworthy projects in Canada and the U.S.: Robson Square Provincial Government Center and Courthouse complex and Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.; and the Canadian Chancery, Washington D.C.

Oberlander is a fellow of both the Canadian and the American Societies of Landscape Architects and the recipient of several prestigious awards including the Order of Canada (2010), Canada's highest civilian honor for outstanding achievement and service to the nation and the Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe Award (2011), the International Federation of Landscape Architect's (IFLA) highest tribute.

Cornelia remains active in the profession and impassioned, as always, to train the next generation. The excerpts (below) from her November 2010 presentation at the University of British Columbia, captures her core enthusiasm for and confidence in the future of the profession:

"What we need today are multidisciplinary landscape architects who think conceptually and perceptually to keep pace with present changing social needs which challenge us daily. If we want landscape architecture to become the 'art of the possible' we must discover new aesthetically pleasing solutions, ecologically and technically sound ones, while satisfying social and economic goals. We need what I call VIM, namely vision, imagination and motivation to accomplish these goals."

As a landscape architect I dream of a green city and strive to achieve meaningful fractions of the global garden by respecting biodiversity, bringing nature into the city. Such a dream can only be realized by teamwork with other disciplines, together with politicians and an aware, participating public of all ages."

#### **Selected Noteworthy Projects (1964 to Present)**

- **Children's Creative Center for the Expo '67 World's Fair**, Montreal (1964-67). Tens of thousands of children visited this unique playground that combined water, sand and moveable, wooden elements the children could assemble as they chose.
- **Robson Square Provincial Government Center and Courthouse complex**, Vancouver (1974-1979). This three block long roof garden with lush hanging gardens comprises an exceptional civic space and brings nature into downtown Vancouver. (Arthur Erickson, architect). Robson



Square was the recipient of The American Society of Landscape Architects President's Award for Excellence in 1979, for the "extraordinary integration of the landscape and architecture" and garnered the prestigious Architecture Canada 2011 Prix du XXe siècle.

- **Museum of Anthropology, at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver (1976 and 1997).** Oberlander's inspiration for the museum's meadows and mounds was derived from the Haida territories of British Columbia and its plantings were based on ethno-botanical research of that region. Oberlander and Erickson were reengaged for the 1997 expansion of the museum complex which honored their original design concepts. The Museum of Anthropology received the Architecture Canada Prix 2011 du XXe siècle award. (Arthur Erickson, architect).

- **National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (1986-1989).** The landscape design for this national museum was inspired by the museum's collection of the Canadian Group of Seven paintings and on the Taeger landscape of Northern Canada. (Moshe Safdie, architect).

- **The Canadian Chancery, Washington D.C. (1989).** For this noteworthy project, Oberlander incorporated one of the earliest built roof gardens in the United States. (Arthur Erickson, architect).

- **Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly Building, Yellowknife (1994).** This project was designed to fit harmoniously into the site, conserving biological diversity and supporting ecological processes. (Matsuzaki Wright, architects).

- **CK Choi Building at (U.B.C.) Vancouver, (1995).** In this project, Oberlander developed design solutions that considered the impact on the biosphere and set new standards of sustainability. (Matsuzaki Wright, architects).

- **Public Library, Vancouver (1995).** Oberlander designed a roof garden where data on air and runoff water temperature, soil moisture, relative humidity, rainfall, and solar radiation are being collected to analyze its performance. (Moshe Safdie, architect).

- **Landscape Master Plan of Smith College, Northampton, MA (1995-1997).** Oberlander and landscape architects Rolland/Towers developed a Master Plan that respects the original Olmsted design and provides for the future.

- **New York Time Building Courtyard, New York, NY (2007).** This interior courtyard, featuring the artful use of Northern Birch trees and planted mounds, is the focal point of the new headquarters of the New York Times. (Renzo Piano, architect, in collaboration with HM White Architects).

- **VanDusen Botanic Garden, Vancouver (2007- present).** Oberlander working with Busby Perkins + Will developed a Master Plan for new demonstration gardens and visitor center which will accommodate a green roof. Design choices for the building and the garden exhibit the best in environmental stewardship.

### **Lasting Legacy**

Cornelia Oberlander continues to be a leader in the field of landscape architecture even after more than a half century of practice. She continues to demonstrate through her own practice how landscape architects can be in a leadership role when they collaborate, innovate, publish, lecture, and foster sustainability and responsible design; that, along with her humor, creative spirit, and indefatigable and unrelentingly positive attitude represent the best of her and reflect well on the profession. She has lectured extensively and written articles and books that have enriched the profession including, *Trees in the City* with Ira B. Nadel, *Green Roofs – A Design Guide & Review of the Relevant Technologies*, with Elisabeth Whitelaw and Eva Matsuzaki. She inspires students and colleagues, and is one of our best public ambassadors.

Cornelia believes our profession can make the world a better place – and she has done more than her fair share to prove that point. TCLF has already filmed and posted interviews with Oberlander as part of our *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* oral history project. However, I believe the ASLA Medal would be the most appropriate way to honor Cornelia’s inspiring life and unequalled legacy.

It has been my pleasure and honor to prepare this nomination. If I can be of further assistance to the committee please do not hesitate to call.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'C' and 'B' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR  
Founder + President, The Cultural Landscape Foundation

Enclosure/letters

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Board of Trustees  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
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Dear Trustees:

It gives me great pleasure to recommend Cornelia Hahn Oberlander for the ASLA Medal.

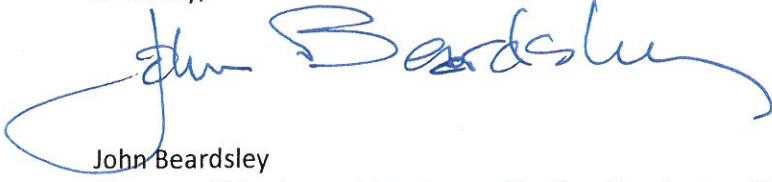
Over the past generation, Cornelia Oberlander has been one of the guiding lights of landscape architecture, moving design toward more sustainable and culturally-informed practice. She has achieved some of the modern era's most successful integrations of architecture and landscape, notably in collaboration with architects like Arthur Erickson and Moshe Safdie and Associates. Her collaborations with Erickson have been especially significant, including Robson Square, a provincial government center and Courthouse complex (1974-1979) in Vancouver, which features a robustly planted three-block roof garden. Ms. Oberlander also designed the landscape for Erickson's Museum of Anthropology (1975-1977) at the University of British Columbia. Conceiving of the landscape as an outdoor museum, she specified native vegetation based on ethnographic research, surrounding a lake made to suggest the coastal communities of First Americans. I have such high respect for this project that I wrote a "critic at large" column for *Landscape Architecture Magazine* a decade ago praising the design and lamenting its then-unfinished condition. Oberlander has also been a leader in advancing more sustainable practice: the C.K. Choi Building/Institute for Asian Research at the University of British Columbia, by Matsuzaki Architects with Cornelia Oberlander, was one of the first and is still among the most appealing building-landscape combinations to include on-site water treatment and storm water management. It was cited by the American Institute of Architects as one North America's best examples of environmentally responsible design.

Ms. Oberlander has also contributed significant service to the field, including a term as president of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects from 1986 to 1987. Beyond this, however, as one of the first women in the post-World War II era to establish her own practice, she has been an inspiration to the many women who have entered the profession in her wake. In recognition of her achievements and her leadership, I included Ms. Oberlander as a featured speaker in a colloquium on "Women and Modernism in Landscape Architecture" that I organized for the Harvard Graduate School of Design in February, 2011.

I hope that you will decide that Cornelia Oberlander has earned recognition as an ASLA Medal recipient. Please let me know if I might be of further assistance.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Beardsley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning of the word "John".

John Beardsley

Director of Garden and Landscape Studies, Dumbarton Oaks

Adjunct Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture  
Harvard University Graduate School of Design

## Susan Cohen Landscape Architect

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Board of Trustees  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
Attention: Carolyn Mitchell  
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Dear ASLA Trustees:

It is a great pleasure to write in support of awarding the annual ASLA Medal to Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, one of the great visionary landscape architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries – a consummate professional whose creativity, work ethic and energy are rivaled only by her generosity toward the younger landscape architects to whom she enthusiastically offers encouragement and support. For many, she has provided an inspiring example of the highest standards of practice. She has inspired me for close to thirty years.

It would be most appropriate for Cornelia to join the distinguished group of those who have received this honor, as she exemplifies the criteria of *“a landscape architect whose lifetime achievements and contributions to the profession have had a unique and lasting impact on the welfare of the public and the environment.”*

Certainly, in this year of her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday, it would be a fitting tribute.

Last summer in Zurich, the International Federation of Landscape Architects honored Cornelia with its Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe Award in recognition of her long and productive career and her contributions to the profession. She is only the third recipient of this award. In addition, she has received several honorary degrees and Fellowship in both the American and Canadian Societies of Landscape Architecture, and she was awarded the Order of Canada for *“a lifetime of outstanding achievement, dedication to the community and service to the nation.”*

By any standard, her body of work has been exceptional, from her early innovative playgrounds of the 1960s to, most recently, Vancouver’s VanDusen Gardens Visitor Centre, which is pursuing certification under the new Living Building Challenge, an advanced standard for sustainability in Canada. For this project, Cornelia specified the use of plants catalogued as native in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

All of Cornelia's designs are informed by diligent research and imbued with a deep sense of humanity and attention to those who will occupy her landscapes. These qualities were especially clear to me during her process of creating the Landscape Master Plan (with Rolland/Towers) for her alma mater, Smith College. Cornelia's proposal to realign a major path system by creating a bridge over a gorge of native rhododendrons is brilliant.

In addition to her originality as a designer, Cornelia always has been ahead of her time in recognizing and promoting the critical importance of sustainability in landscape architecture. As stated in the IFLA award citation, she *"has been producing designs for a greener future for six decades."*

This citation also refers to her writing and lectures, and, as I can attest, these "writings" and "lectures" often have been quite direct and personal. She long ago persuaded me of the importance of environmental responsibility, and she has written notes and given individual "lectures" on the topic to many others she has mentored. She has, in fact, created a legacy, not only with her built work, but also by guiding legions of young landscape professionals, some of whom she has known since their student days. Always willing to share information and ideas, Cornelia continues to be an inspiration.

Cornelia Oberlander credits her training at the Harvard GSD with fostering a desire to work with allied professionals as part of a team. From the beginning of her career, she recognized the importance of collaboration, and she relishes working with engineers, architects and planners. She once told me that she would like best to be remembered for working in this collaborative way.

As a frequent speaker and panel member at ASLA Annual Meetings and as a member of the Council of Fellows, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander is well known to the Trustees both as someone who is completely invested in the profession and as a landscape architect who has a 60-year record of creating outstanding, thoughtful and sustainable designs that are well loved by those who enjoy them.

I sincerely hope she will be recognized for her achievements as the recipient of this year's ASLA Medal.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Cohen".

Susan Cohen FASLA





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ASLA Medal Nominations  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been asked to endorse the nomination of Cornelia Oberlander as the recipient of the ASLA Medal. I do so with the greatest enthusiasm, for no one could be more deserving of this highly significant award.

Dr. Oberlander is most thoughtful, innovative, straight thinking and talking, and deeply imbued in her profession. Oberlander went on from her early playgrounds for children in Philadelphia and at Expo 67 in Montreal to design some seventy more in Canada. In an extraordinarily productive working relationship, she and architect Arthur Erickson created an outstanding fusion of landscape and architecture: a circle of academic building surrounding a vast greensward at Simon Fraser University; the extraordinary three-block-long interweaving of government buildings and lush gardens composing Robson Square in downtown Vancouver (1974-1979), which remains the exemplar conceptualizing the green city, and the remarkable University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology set within a landscape respecting and evoking the values of the indigenous people and their land (1975-77). In addition to these prominent, paradigmatic-changing masterpieces, since 1990 Oberlander has created some fifty works, among them the roof garden of the Library Square in Vancouver, projects in the Northwest Territories, in Ontario including the park-like setting for the Ottawa City Hall, the well noted roof garden for the Canadian Embassy in Berlin, a large mixed use project in Seattle, Washington, a master landscape plan for Smith College in Massachusetts, and the courtyard and roof garden of Renzo Piano's New York Times Building in New York City. Dr. Oberlander's papers are conserved at the Canadian Centre for Architecture where her working method may be studied together with the work of her contemporaries, including that of Arthur Erickson.

This brief account of accomplishments does not tell of the qualities that make a great artist. I will therefore try to give some sense of Cornelia Oberlander, as I have known her for numerous decades. Cornelia has become a fearless innovator in the field of landscape architecture, in which nothing has been too small or too big in engaging her keen analysis and the creation of sustainable landscapes. A clear, straight-talker, a dedicated unflinching persistent worker who will not let go, Cornelia is at the same time fun, funny and charming. Cornelia is like a child celebrating when projects go well, or more certainly they go well because she never lets go, because she knows what every plant needs, and she solves the problems, such as those attendant on finally re-installing the pond at the Museum of Anthropology at University of British Columbia, which plays a key role in the landscape integrating the museum. Cornelia was determined that the pool would be completed for June 14, 2010, on what would have been Arthur Erickson's 86<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her gentle but dogged persistence overcomes the bureaucracy and many needless hurdles in her way. I witnessed late night telephone calls, early morning telephone calls, early morning and late evening site meetings added to the diurnal ones, during which she explained endlessly how the waterproofing should work, made small adjustments to the shape of the pond's perimeter, and other technicalities and design issues. At the same time, Cornelia was attending to the growing medium at Robson Square where trees were being replanted (after the waterproof layer was renewed), and also had to explain why the new ill-considered installation of low plastic walls bordering planting beds recently installed, was building up heat that was killing the plants. Cornelia will continue until these thoughtless and unnecessary intrusions are removed. And there are other elements of the unity of design of this iconic architecture and landscape by Arthur and Cornelia that have been over the years constantly threatened. It is Cornelia's three Ps, Politeness, Patience and Persistence, also applied to ski weekends with her grandchildren, that keep her centered.

Cornelia Oberlander shares her knowledge and convictions through many lectures and published articles, including one recently co-authored with Elisabeth Whitelaw and Eva Matsuzaki, *Introductory Manual for Greening Roofs for Public Works and Government Services Canada*. Her outstanding qualities have led to the many distinctions she has received: among them are Fellowships in both the Canadian and the American Societies of Landscape Architects; honorary doctoral degrees from the University of British Columbia (1991), Ryerson Polytechnic University (1999), Simon Fraser University (2002), Smith College (2003), and Dalhousie (2008). Oberlander has also served as president of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects from

1986 to 1987 and last year the Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe Award of the International Federation of Landscape Architects was bestowed on her. The ASLA Medal will proclaim the importance of the values Cornelia stands for and the great distinction of her work. It will be a crowning glory.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phyllis Lambert". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Phyllis Lambert, CC, GOQ, MS Arch, LL D, FRAIC  
Founding Director and Chair of the Board of Trustees



Board of Trustees  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
636 Eye Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Trustees,

It is with great pleasure that I write in support of the nomination of Cornelia Oberlander for the ASLA Medal. I have known Cornelia for my entire professional life, which is almost five decades. I became aware of her landscape work and great talent when I began practicing architecture. Upon the first opportunity, indeed, my first Canadian project after Habitat 67, I invited her to collaborate with me on the National Gallery in Ottawa; for which she designed the internal and external gardens, a major component of the gallery's design. Later on we collaborated on Ottawa City Hall, and in Cornelia's home territory, at the Vancouver Public Library, including its seminal roof garden.

In each of these projects Cornelia excelled. She created memorable, sustainable and joyous public places.

I am intimately familiar with her many other projects, in particular, of her collaboration with Arthur Erickson. With Erikson no longer with us to write personally of his appreciation of Cornelia, I should say that on many occasion he shared with me his admiration and respect for her great talent. Indeed, we spoke about her pursuit of excellence, and how she always stuck to her fundamental values.

Cornelia is one of the significant landscape architects of her generation. I strongly endorse and support her nomination for the ASLA Medal.

Sincerely,



Moshe Safdie

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ASLA Board of Trustees  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
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ASLA Medal Nomination  
Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, FASLA

Dear Trustees:

It gives me great pleasure to write in strong and enthusiastic support of the nomination of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander FASLA for the ASLA Medal.

Cornelia is enchanting, endearing, and always inspiring...she also knows her stuff, does her research, and works tirelessly....or so I found in 1995-96 collaborating with her on the Landscape Master Plan for Smith College, our shared Alma Mater, albeit 27 years apart. I called her "Our Environmental Conscience" and she seemed to sit on my shoulder throughout the project; and, in characteristic fashion, she has ever since...but I am far from alone in this regard.

Cornelia has always been ahead of the environmental curve.. more concerned with sustainability, roofdeck development, soil characteristics, plant sourcing from local genomes, etc., etc., long before most of the rest of the profession; her related commitment to connecting children and natural environment goes back even further to her earliest work in the 1940s. Her genius, however, lies with her ability to motivate: she has been an advocate and mentor to generations of design professionals and policy makers alike. It is amazing what a large presence such a small figure can project by force of will and conviction. Her dedication to environmental and social responsibility informs not only all of her design decisions, but also her interactions with students, professionals, and those with the administrative power to affect the change she seeks.

While her designs have frequently been groundbreaking and are now recognized as iconic, perhaps more importantly, they have awakened a pride of place. Whatever Cornelia does, she adds a special aura to any landscape she touches, be it a campus, an urban rooftop, a private garden or a playground. She endows landscapes with a deeper meaning which is rooted in both ecology and culture. She has truly led by example.

Respectfully,

  
Shavaun Towers, FASLA

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