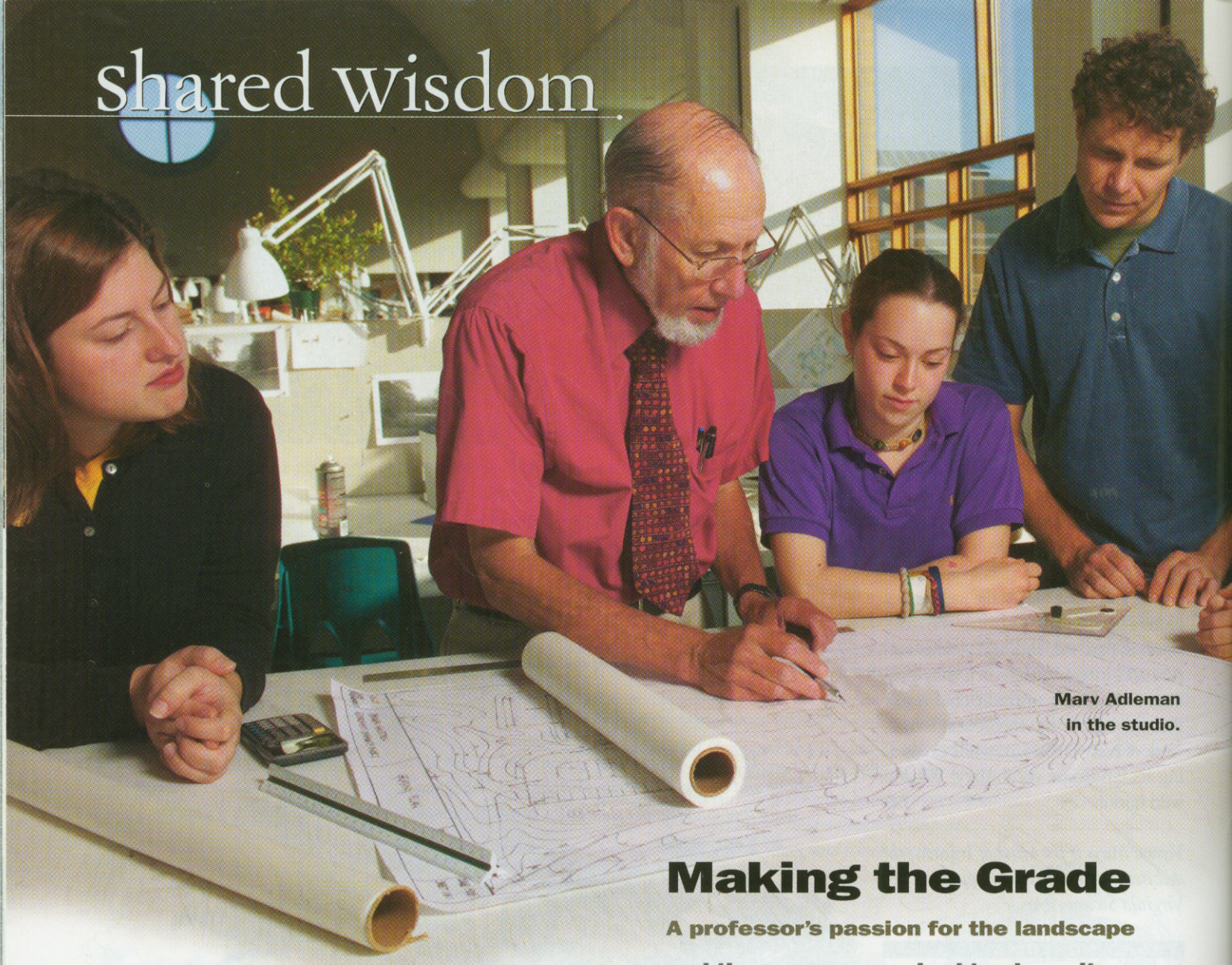

Marv Adleman in the studio.

Making the Grade

A professor's passion for the landscape and the process required to shape it provides students and professionals with a new understanding of the mysteries of site grading. BY HEATHER HAMMATT, ASLA

In early June, 20 or so students, mostly professionals back for a refresher course, enter a small lecture room that is part of Cornell University's landscape architecture facility. As they mill around, a quiet, unassuming man makes the rounds, shaking hands with each in turn. "Hello, I'm Professor Marv Adleman. And you are?" he asks. Then, after pausing to absorb the name, which 90 percent of the time will not need to be repeated, Adleman fixes the newcomer with a serious and assessing gaze, as if he is asking, "Are you ready?"

Those anxious to begin eagerly pore over the handouts by the door. After all, there are only 10 days in which to grasp the comprehensive and sometimes confounding subject of site grading and stormwater management.

The room quiets, and 22 pairs of eyes, the largest number in the 13-year history of the workshop, focus on the small, slightly stooped figure of Marvin Adleman, FASLA, who stands at the front of the room, backlit by the glow of an overhead projector. No high-tech gadgets here—no computers, no fancy projectors or PowerPoint presentations—just simple sheets of acetate, a handful of dry-erase markers, and one man's logical, mathematical approach to his subject.

Adleman surveys the group and begins with the basics. "Water always runs downhill. Remember that," he says.

Adleman, who has been teaching at Cornell for the past 25 years, began his site grading seminar while serving as a test grader for the Landscape Architecture Registration Examination (LARE), then known as the UNE (the Uniform National Examination for Landscape Architects). "I was shocked at how much people didn't know [about basic grading]," says Adleman. The resulting workshop, designed to help people pass the grading portion of the LARE, encapsulates a semester's worth of grading into a 10-day, total-immersion seminar, building from the simple concepts of slopes and ratios to the more difficult ideas behind how contours interact with steps, ramps, and retaining walls.

The key to understanding site grading is being able to visualize contour lines and slopes in three dimensions, according to Adleman, who recommends that students actually draw what

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