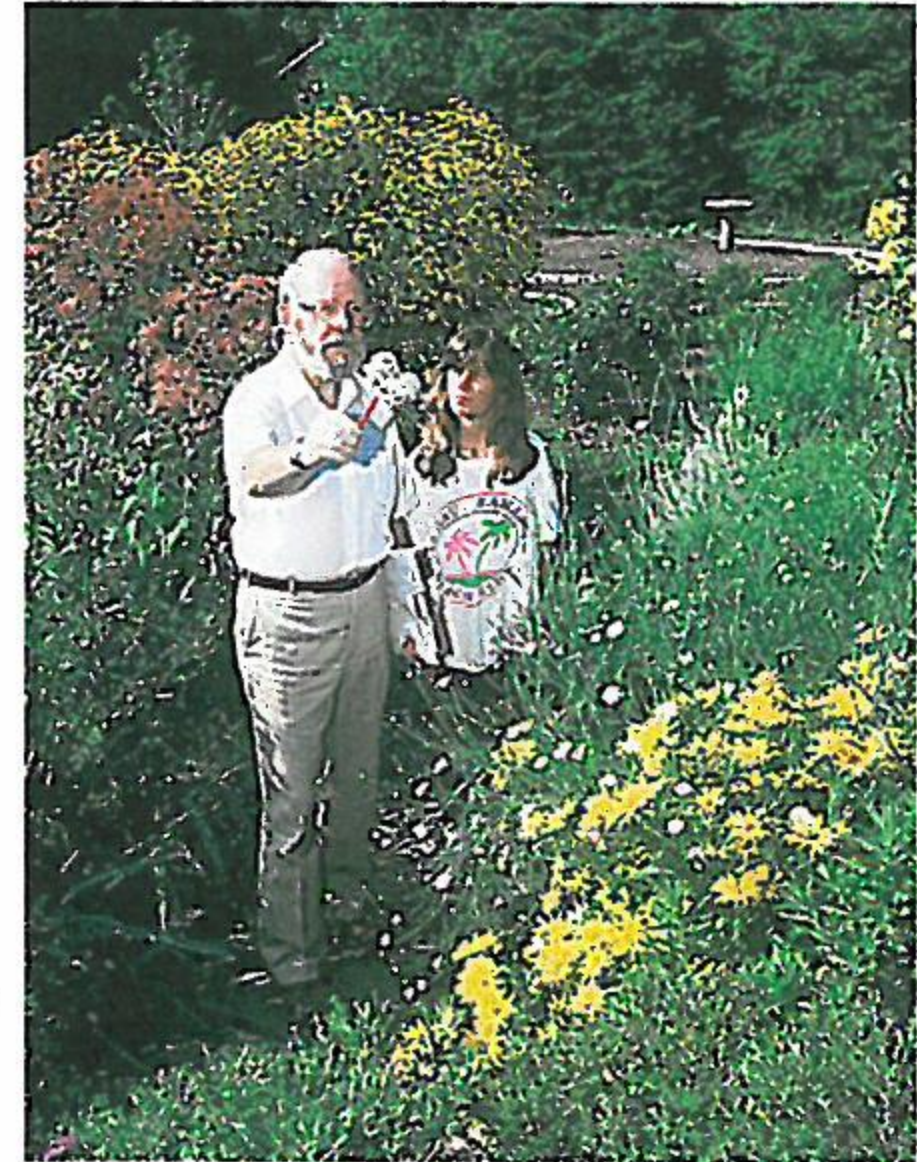


Jot D. Carpenter Medal Nominations  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

RE: Nomination of John F. Collins, FASLA  
Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal

Dear Jury members:

The Pennsylvania/Delaware Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects is pleased to put forth John F. Collins for the Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal. The Chapter considers John one of its most prominent “favorite sons.” John has had a long and distinguished career as a teacher, mentor, nurseryman and professional practitioner.



John Collins with one of his students in the gardens at Temple's Ambler College

John was a student of Hideo Sasaki, a professor in the Landscape Architecture program at the University of Pennsylvania under Ian McHarg, a designer of Ed Bacon's vision for Philadelphia, and Temple University, Ambler College's first chair of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture.

Throughout his career, John demonstrated a commitment to educating young professionals. He served as a lecturer, professor and visiting studio critic at major landscape architecture schools, including The University of Pennsylvania, Penn State, Harvard, Cornell, Drexel, Virginia, Louisiana State University and the School of Architecture and Planning in New Delhi, India. Additionally, he worked to institute community and teaching gardens for public school children in Philadelphia.

In 1982, John launched a program to teach prison inmates urban horticulture skills at the House of Corrections in Philadelphia. The program PLANT — Philadelphia Landscape and Nursery Training — trained inmates to plant and maintain greenery in public spaces. The PLANT program continues, on a smaller scale, to this day. “The prisoners learned how to nurture a plant through its life cycle, how to make a garden, how to start and finish a job. John Collins grew plants, and he grew people too” said James M. Dickerson, Nursery Superintendent of PLANT from 1982 to 1989.

Because of his teaching and mentoring, an entire generation of landscape architects has adopted an ethic of community service through projects that “improve the place” and the quality of life of residents in surrounding, often underprivileged, communities.

In honor of his professional contributions, teaching, mentoring and environmentally responsible design, Temple University prepared an exhibit to commemorate John's professional life and influence to the Philadelphia/Delaware Valley in 2007.

One of his most enduring contributions was his advocacy in designating Temple's Ambler campus as an arboretum thus creating an environment for learning and to promote ecologically



sound planning, design, development and management. Due largely to his efforts, the American Public Gardens Association granted the campus arboretum status in 2000.

From its inception as a four-year landscape architecture program in 1989 until his retirement in 2004, John's hand was evident in all aspects of Temple's program. John instilled sensitivity to design, including promotion of natural resource preservation, focus on the use of native plant materials, and strongly held belief that all, regardless of background and domicile, should be exposed to good design and have a meaningful connection to nature. He encouraged his faculty to do likewise.

We cannot think of anyone more deserving than John Collins, for this honor.

Sincerely,

Carl R. Kelemen, RLA, FASLA  
Trustee, PA/DE ASLA

Richard Rauso, RLA, ASLA  
President, PA/DE ASLA

Carolyn Mitchell, Honors and Awards Coordinator  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

REFERENCE: Jot D Carpenter Medal Nomination- JOHN F. COLLINS

John Collins is the most dedicated, creative and uniquely talented educator/practitioner I have known and has been a colleague and friend for more than fifty years. We worked together at Sasaki Associates in Boston and subsequently set up the partnership of Adleman, Collins & DuTor in Philadelphia. My professional association with John and his uncompromisingly high design standards have always been a learning experience and an inspiration. John's talent for drawing is remarkable and sets a goal for emulation by his students. The publication, *Livable Landscape*, which we prepared together, continues to be used by students throughout the nation.

John has a mission to teach as well as practice and he has taught numerous courses part time at the University of Pennsylvania. Penn alumni I have met reflect on John's knowledgeable, down to earth teaching abilities and his ability to relate exceptionally well to students at every level. The joy and satisfaction that John gets from teaching has even led him to initiate and teach hand-on nursery/ landscape training program at a Philadelphia prison so that inmates could be employable by landscape contractors or nurseries when they were released.

John saw the need for new landscape architectural programs that could help correct the deficit of landscape architects in the United States. In establishing and chairing the Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture at the Ambler Campus of Temple University, John implemented his vision of an educational curriculum that integrates the work of the landscape architect, the nurseryman and the landscape contractor. Many classes that he has taught have been hands-on in the field and John has never been afraid to get his hands dirty.

Sincerely,

Marvin I. Adleman, FASLA  
Professor





## OLIN

Executive Committee  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
Jot D. Carpenter Medal Nominations  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Re: American Society of Landscape Architects Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal  
Letter of Nomination for John F. Collins, FASLA

Dear Members of the Executive Committee:

It is with enormous respect for both the ASLA and John F. Collins that I submit, this Letter of Nomination for the Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal.

Upon reviewing the Selection Criteria, I believe that few can exemplify the desired qualities in such a comprehensive manner and in a way that so completely integrates the teaching and practice of landscape architecture. John F. Collins is truly one of the few.

As one of many who have had the privilege of being both John's student and colleague, I can think of no greater demonstration of excellence in classroom instruction resulting in positive educational outcomes than the legacy of practicing landscape architects who have been taught by John or who have worked with him. His dedication and excellence in teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level have given the profession perhaps thousands of well trained landscape architects.

His passion and enthusiasm for the profession are evident in that the teaching and practice of landscape architecture have been inseparable for John. His achievements in both are numerous and prestigious. John Collins and his colleagues at the Delta Group have won many awards for their commitment to improving the urban environment through design excellence, including numerous Honor Awards from the ASLA, and the Urban Design Award from the Foundation for Architecture. John also has been recognized for his outstanding professional achievements by receiving the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society for Distinguished Achievement Award; the Lifetime Achievement Award and the Distinguished Service Award from the ASLA Pennsylvania/Delaware Chapter. He has been inducted into the Council of Fellows of the American Society of Landscape Architects, selected for his executed works.

Throughout his entire life of outstanding practice, John's commitment to the growth and development of students and young professionals has been equally outstanding as demonstrated in his teaching as Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, from 1967





through 1988 and serving as lecturer, visiting professor and studio critic at Penn State, Harvard, Cornell, Drexel, LSU and the School of Architecture and Planning in New Delhi.

In 1988 John Collins became the Chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture at Temple University. Under his leadership the department achieved accreditation for the landscape architecture program, advanced academic standards and expanded its faculty. He started horticulture therapy programs for prison inmates that helped to establish numerous community and teaching gardens for Philadelphia.

Among his other innovative approaches to the teaching of landscape architecture was the introduction of the design build program at Temple's Ambler Campus. By engaging the landscape architecture and horticulture students, faculty and staff in student designed and built gardens, walls, trellises, pergolas, courtyards and a native plant nursery he also extended Temple's outreach to the community. John has always found a way to help students translate ideas and materials into comfortable, useful, beautifully designed and well- built places.

He encouraged his students and faculty to be active in their participation in the American Society of Landscape Architects - even if it meant hosting LABASH. As a frequent Juror for the ASLA Student Awards Program, he knew the value of students doing and exhibiting their best work.

John's commitment to the growth and development of students has never stopped at the classroom door. As a teacher and as the president of his own practice, John always found time to be available to teach and guide, but most importantly, to bring out the best in each of his students. He provided internships in his office or his nursery for his students and full time jobs for them once they graduated. For those who went on to practice in other offices, he remained a constant resource for professional advice on teaching and practice. As Chair of Temple's Landscape Architecture Department John sought out his former students to continue the tradition of practicing faculty.

From a profoundly personal view, few people have so selflessly shared with me so much of their knowledge, skill, talent, humor, and passion for landscape architecture in a way that has been so truly sustainable in so many ways. John inspired me, and hundreds like me at Penn, to be excellent landscape architects - because he shared with us his gift for teaching - and because of his extraordinary example of practice, community service and personal integrity. Later, he engaged me and my colleagues, as nascent teachers in his equally nascent Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture. Confident in my ability to teach, not only did he allow and encourage me to develop the landscape construction curriculum, but to teach it as a design studio. He also agreed to let me to teach it on Saturday mornings, where as the "phantom faculty member" I had the privileged of teaching the "non traditional" students. (Those future landscape architects, who could only take a five hour class on a Saturday morning, because they were so busy running their own businesses and families.) Since that first non-traditional class, I have taught many other classes and studios, and I have had the privilege of hiring my students. They are excellent landscape architects and now some of them too are teaching. What greater honor can teaching bring?





John has a unique understanding of the breadth of knowledge applicable and vital to the learning and practice of landscape architecture. Nothing was beyond being added to the arsenal of a landscape architect in training. It was clear to me, and many others, that like his guidance, learning never ended at the classroom door. The integration of art and science - drawing, engineering, horticulture, sculpture, designing, building, writing, reading, travelling, service - John has an unusual way of reminding you: don't let your studies get in the way of your education.

Thank you for your consideration of this Letter of Nomination of John F. Collins, FASLA for the Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal.

Very truly yours,

Susan K. Weiler, FASLA  
Principal



Jot D. Carpenter Medal Nominations  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington DC 20001-3736

Re: Nomination of John F. Collins, FASLA  
Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal

Hello:

I am writing to support the nomination of John F. Collins, FASLA, for the Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal.

As a student, teaching associate, business partner and long-time friend of John, I have been lucky enough to experience John's teaching prowess for over 40 years.

John helped introduce me to the profession of Landscape Architecture in the late 1960's, when I had the great good fortune to have John as my professor of "Plants and Design" and "Site Engineering" in the Masters program at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Fine Arts, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning. His passion for teaching about the profession of Landscape Architecture was instrumental in focusing my professional education. John saw planting design and site engineering as technical expertise combined with design; one did not exist without the other.

Several years later, while working with John at The Delta Group, we co-taught a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Design Studio at Penn for several years, and I again was able to witness first-hand the enthusiasm and energy that John brought to teaching. Studios would routinely run well beyond the allotted time, in order for John to spend personal time with each student. John's only requirement was an equal dedication on the part of the students; all you had to do was to commit your time and energy, and he would work tirelessly with you to make sure you succeeded. Students most often completed the program feeling that they had worked incredibly hard, but had learned invaluable skills at John's hand. At first often overwhelmed, they found confidence in handling complex issues, working at several scales simultaneously, guided by John's personal commitment to each student's development.

John's strong personal conviction that Landscape Architecture was closely allied to the related professions of Architecture, Engineering, Urban Design, Fine Arts, etc., led to his forming a multi-disciplinary firm in The Delta Group, and this conviction carried over into his teaching methodologies. John's teaching sought to incorporate as wide a range of interests and skills as possible, and his design studio programs frequently drew upon other professional disciplines in order to develop in students a basic understanding on how Landscape Architects might best interact with these professionals. Landscape Architecture took a 'back-seat' to no one!!

This basic philosophy of teaching was maintained in his professional office development as well, where John sought out the more complex projects that necessarily depended on a consortium of professional expertise, most often driven and guided by Landscape Architectural concepts. Under John's direction, the firm developed a reputation for innovative design solutions for complex urban revitalization and environmental restoration issues, most often in the public / municipal area where it would serve the most good for the greatest number of people.



And the office became an extended teaching environment, as graduates of Penn's program (and later Temple) took advantage of work opportunities to continue their education and professional development with John and his partners, 5 of whom also had experience teaching at Penn.

John's teaching reputation, his willingness to leap into any situation to help, and his known interest in architecture and urban design led to many invitations to teach or lecture within architectural programs, including Drexel University and Cornell University Departments of Architecture. Besides not being able to say "no" to any request for help, John really had a love for teaching that could never be quenched. Every teaching opportunity, no matter how small, was one more chance to help students become better Landscape Architects, but also was an opportunity to help the profession, by strengthening the skills and expanding the interests of those being trained to work in this profession.

John developed close personal relationships with many students, and this often led to teaching opportunities abroad, such as John's time teaching Landscape Architecture as a visiting critic in New Delhi, India.

The opportunity for John to become Chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture at Temple University Amber enabled him to most fully express his ideas about teaching in a comprehensive program of curriculum and staff development, campus planning, and his usual "hand-on" approach to education and problem solving. He somehow managed to successfully maintain his working position of leadership with The Delta Group while re-structuring the Temple Amber program into a comprehensive program combining Horticulture with Landscape Architecture. This effort required tremendous energy and creative thinking, and John brought his usual enthusiasm and commitment for complex problem solving to this task. Hundreds of students at Temple benefited from his commitment.

Along with his career-long involvement in education, John used his extraordinary graphic skills to author several publications that proved very useful in his teaching. In particular, his *Livable Landscape Design*, published through Cornell University, remains a sought-after reference for teaching the fundamentals of Landscape Architecture.

Having known John for over 40 years both personally and professionally, I've seen the results of his love and enthusiasm for teaching in the highly skilled professionals that now work and teach in the profession.

Sincerely,  
THE DELTA GROUP

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas B. Schraudenbach', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Thomas B. Schraudenbach  
Vice President





American Society of Landscape Architects  
Jot D. Carpenter Medal Nominations  
c/o/ Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001-3736

Friends,

I am honored to support the nomination of John F. Collins, FASLA for the Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal for sustained and significant contribution to landscape architecture education.

It was my good fortune to be one of John's students while studying at the University of Pennsylvania's Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning 1984. John is a superb design instructor. He freely shares the wealth of his long and varied professional experience and steadfastly insists on the principles of good design. John demands that his students develop a consistent, professional design process: site and program analysis, concept, schematic design and design development. Unlike many conceptually oriented design instructors, John is a materialist who required students to complete the design process through to construction details and phasing implementation. He asks students to imagine the physical realities that their design ideas suggested and relish the textures of plants and site materials. He teaches students the age-old practice of hand drawn design with grace and subtlety. He thoroughly prepares his students for professional careers in landscape architecture.

John F. Collins towers over other teachers of landscape architecture as a tremendous humanist. He is a man of great personal integrity and a model of the highest professional standards and personal responsibility. He has a limitless well of empathy. John's teachings, writings, and publications reveal a philosophy and practice of design that provides equals access to the built environment and participation by all members of society. He inspires his students to maintain those same values.

John teaches his students that design is meaningful only as it benefits people and reconnects them to nature. He was very sensitive to the contemporary alienation of urban populations from nature long before it was intellectually popular. His perspective on design includes users or occupants and also contractors, maintenance workers,



horticulturalists, material suppliers – everyone engaged in the production and use of the built environment. He inspires his students to temper their conceptual urgency with the needs of real people of all ages, abilities, and persuasions.

John F. Collins has been a teacher, mentor, friend and inspiration for me. His example launched me on what is now a twenty-three year long career of teaching and public practice. John is the epitome of a principled, effective, talented teacher and practitioner of landscape architecture. He is most highly deserving of this prestigious recognition.

Sincerely,

Neil Korostoff, Associate Professor  
R.L.A., A.S.L.A.





Ambler College Programs

B S  
Landscape Architecture

A S & B S  
Horticulture

B S & M S  
Community & Regional Planning

Center for  
Sustainable Communities

Ambler Campus  
Landscape Arboretum

Certificates  
Environmental Sustainability  
Horticultural Therapy  
Landscape Plants

Jot D. Carpenter Medal Nomination  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Dear Members of the Jot Carpenter Medal Jury,

It is my distinct honor and privilege to nominate John F. Collins for the Jot D. Carpenter Metal.

I met John Collins in 2002 when I was Chair of the Landscape Architecture and Horticulture Department at Temple University. Since that time, I have learned about many of John's accomplishments and have developed a great appreciation for the contribution that John has made to landscape architecture education.

John served as the first Chair of the Temple's Landscape Architecture and Horticulture program in 1988. At that time, the four-year BSLA program was just beginning to be established. This was a major milestone for landscape architecture at Temple University. Historically, the program began as the 1910 Pennsylvania Horticulture School for Women (PHSW). From 1958-1988, the program expanded to offering associate degrees in horticulture and landscape design. When John became chair of the program, he played an important role in shaping the curriculum and in educating students into the next decade.

John was a visionary of his time. He was a teacher, a practitioner, a builder, and a nurseryman. John was a highly regarded practitioner who had received numerous awards and special recognition for his design achievements, and who was also a superior teacher. His talents and expertise played an important role in defining the mission of the landscape architecture program and the goals for the curriculum. He developed a program focused on sustainable design that addressed local, regional, and global challenges. He aligned his teaching with community outreach.



John combined the academic pursuits of landscape architecture and horticulture which made Temple's program distinctive and academically unique till today. He integrated a series of plant materials courses (i.e. landscape restoration, field ecology, and plant ecology) and design-build in the curriculum. To further enrich the pedagogy, he developed a native plant propagation area on the campus and grew plants that were not readily available in the trade at the time. He spearheaded the initiative to promote and educate the students and the community about the significance of using native plants.

John established design-build in the curriculum because he strongly believed in hands-on learning. This is impressive because even today, less than a hand full of schools offer design build in the curriculum (see Building to Learn, *Landscape Architecture*, 93 (3): 50-55, 86-87). He and his students designed and built many projects on campus as well as out in the local communities. Together, they designed and built a formal native plant garden on campus to demonstrate that native plants could be used in a formal setting. Many of the garden projects that were implemented within the campus contributed to a living and learning laboratory for the students to learn from. John's dedication to the growth and enhancement of the campus enabled Temple to be recognized and dedicated formally as an arboretum in 2000. Today, in addition to the traditional landscape architecture curriculum, Temple students maintain a strong working knowledge and understanding of plant materials and design-build. The students are highly regarded by practitioners because of the wide range of knowledge and skills that they bring to the firms.

Under John's leadership, he built a unique and impressive program. He recruited and hired outstanding new faculty. He achieved accreditation for the landscape architecture program. He championed for improving campus facilities and sought out Temple administrators for support. He was responsible for the design of many campus enhancement projects which contributed to student life. He reached out to North Philadelphia and various communities to engage in urban design-build projects. He established community and teaching gardens in Philadelphia for public school children. He also developed horticultural therapy programs to help prison inmates.

Today, we continue to build on our landscape architecture program based on the foundation originally laid out by John. The landscape architecture program is solid with a mission focused ecological based education supported by a strong curriculum. The program is currently developing a masters of landscape architecture degree with a concentration in landscape restoration. We have been fortunate to have maintained a positive reputation which have enabled us to successfully recruit and attract outstanding faculty. In 2004, we received outstanding marks from the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board and we are now well poised for the next visit in 2010. Our program sustains the legacy that John left us and we continue to engage in community outreach with projects such as the retrofit/reuse of vacant lots in Philadelphia (with Pennsylvania Horticulture Society); the riparian restoration and design of Pleasant Hill Park in Philadelphia (with Department of Conservation and Natural Resources); and the Pennypack River Watershed mapping and remediation project (with William Penn Foundation).



Hundred of graduates who are practicing and making a difference in shaping our environment today have been positively influenced under John Collins' tutelage. John served as a wonderful role model. He taught at Temple University until his departure from Temple University in 1998 due to his declining health. I cannot think of anyone who is more deserving of the Jot D. Carpenter Award and am proud to nominate him.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lolly Tai". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lolly Tai, Ph.D., FASLA, RLA  
Senior Associate Dean  
Professor of Landscape Architecture





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## Retrospective

### John F. Collins, FASLA

### Thursday, April 26, to Friday, June 15

### Ambler Campus Learning Center, 580 Meetinghouse Road

*Marking more than 40 years of  
connecting the city and the suburbs to  
the world of nature*

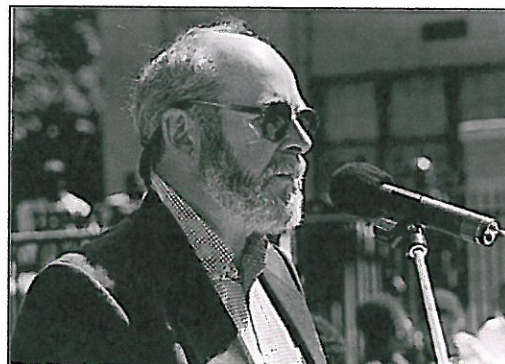
By James Searing and Dr. Mary Myers

<a href="#">Building a Legacy</a>
<a href="#">Changing the Face of Philadelphia One Project at a Time</a>
<a href="#">Mr. Collins Comes to Ambler</a>
<a href="#">Retrospective Sponsors and Supporters</a>



### Building a Legacy

Stroll the broad sidewalks of Market Street from City Hall to Front. Take a walk through Society Hill. Spend a few quiet moments in Chestnut Park near 17th Street. Bike along the river at Schuylkill River Park. Take in the quiet beauty of the Temple University Ambler campus. Wander along the banks of the Wissahickon Creek.



The legacy of John F. Collins, FASLA — his impact on urban and suburban landscapes — is everywhere you look in these places of superb design and natural beauty and many more throughout Philadelphia and its suburbs.

**On Thursday, April 26, Temple University Ambler will formally open a retrospective on Collins' remarkable body of award-winning work as a landscape architect, planner, nurseryman and educator — Collins founded Temple's Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture. The John F. Collins Retrospective opening will be held from 3 to 6 p.m. in the campus Learning Center, where examples of his impact on the region will be on display. The Retrospective will continue in the Learning Center through June 15, 2007.**

Collins began his professional career at a time when the challenges of urban sprawl were radically affecting cities throughout the country. It was a time when planners, developers, and landscape architects moved away from "bigger, grander, more," and began to embrace the idea of human-scale, walkable, and diverse communities.

"My interest in landscape architecture was pretty straightforward. I had a love of art — my mother was an art teacher and I always assumed I'd become an illustrator," Collins said, a resident of Glenside. "I had also cultivated a love of nature from a young age (he started a commercial nursery in his parents' backyard at the age of 15) and throughout my life. I felt that anything that combined those two elements would be a great deal of fun — and it was."

In 1963, Collins co-founded the firm of Adleman, Collins & DuTot in Philadelphia with colleagues Marvin Adleman and David DuTot. Later, this firm became Collins, DuTot & Associates and in 1971, the firm joined with others to form The Delta Group, a regional landscape architecture, planning, engineering and architecture firm with offices in Philadelphia and Baltimore.

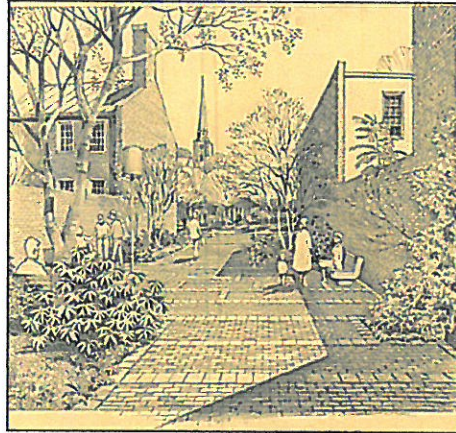
"The idea was to put together all of the major professional disciplines — architecture, landscape architecture, civil engineering, city planning, and graphics. We created designs — particularly public landscapes — with a clear premise; to place them where there people were and place them





well," Collins said. "There needed to be better facilities that were better maintained that were closely related to neighborhoods, towns, and each other. I thought, what a marvelous opportunity to be able to provide the public with places they otherwise can't afford, or wouldn't have the opportunity to participate in. It hit me very strongly that public landscapes were important."

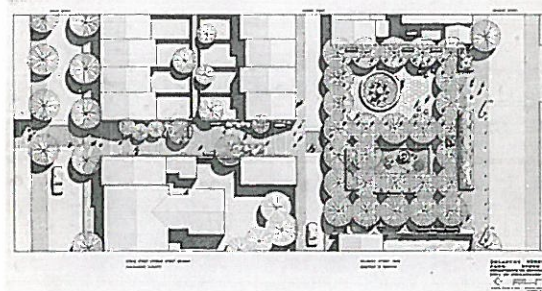
### Changing the Face of Philadelphia One Project at a Time



Collins's designs for Philadelphia's Society Hill, completed early in his professional career with Collins and DuTot, reflected an understanding of human proportion and behavior and how design can respond to this knowledge. Intimately scaled and comfortable, tree-lined brick and cobblestone streets evoke the days when Philadelphia was the nation's capital. A series of interior pedestrian ways, varying in size and character, provide multiple pathways linking the community and its parks to the rich historical sites of Philadelphia.

In 1965, Collins helped develop Delancey Park (now known as Three Bears Park) — a dynamic neighborhood landmark with greenways, fountain, sculpture, and playground facilities. He also created a master plan for the Fairmount Park Commission, centering around a 1.25 mile park along the Schuylkill River east bank from the Art Museum to South Street. For the next 40 years, Collins continued to work, often on a volunteer basis, to realize the vision of Schuylkill River Park, which was dedicated at a lighting ceremony in 2004.

"Schuylkill River Park joins Market Street East, the nationally recognized vest pocket park on Chestnut Street, and dozens of other public and private venues across our city and region as places that have been transformed by your talent," said Philadelphia Mayor John Street in a letter to Collins. "It's no wonder Ed Bacon has said your work deserves the highest accolades. On behalf of the people of Philadelphia, I extend my belated but heart-felt thanks not just for Schuylkill River Park but for your life-long efforts to make Philadelphia a more livable and beautiful city."

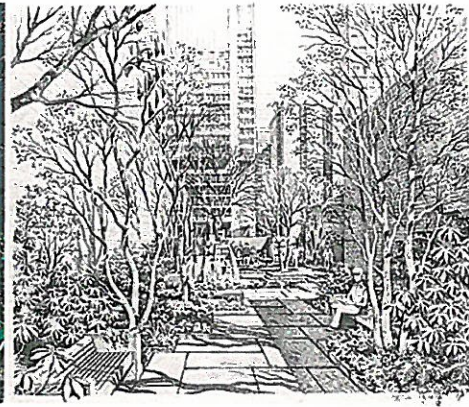


Collins efforts to ensure that there would remain an abundance of green amid the city's steel, glass, and stone certainly didn't end there. In the 1970s, the Delta Group designed a Fine Arts Plan for the University of Pennsylvania and received numerous awards and honors for their planning and involvement in environmental projects.

"The human element always should go hand-in-hand with the design element," Collins said. "You need to provide public spaces that are tough enough and big enough to withstand the test of time."

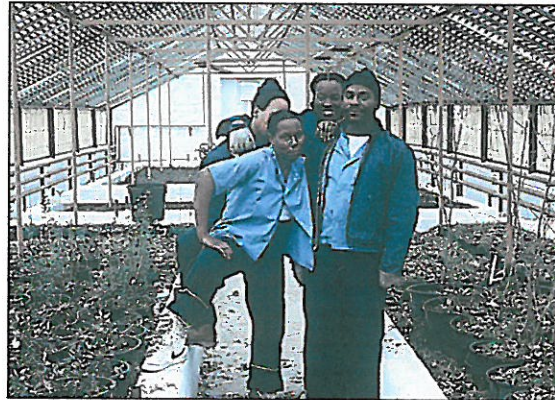
In 1978, Collins designed the award-winning Chestnut Street Park in Philadelphia to celebrate the region's natural landscape and native people.





"The William Penn Foundation has long shared John Collins's life-long belief that high quality green urban places, parks, and civic spaces are essential components of a healthy and vital city. We were fortunate to have had the opportunity to partner with John and to put into practice his beliefs as well as demonstrate his impressive design skills in creating the Chestnut Street Park," said Feather O. Houston, President of the William Penn Foundation.

"For nearly three decades this small oasis — comprised of only native plants and materials — has offered a delightful respite to Center City residents, workers, and visitors. And throughout its existence, John has personally cared for and tended the park further demonstrating his commitment to, and stewardship of, the green places that enhance the quality of life of the people of our great city."

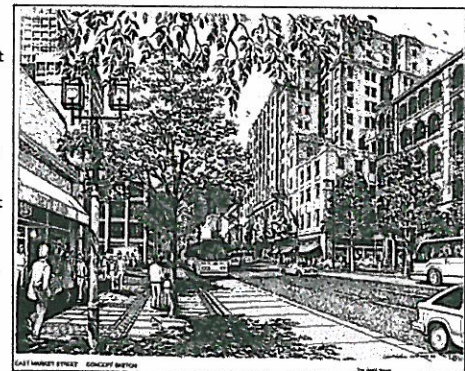


In 1982, Collins launched a program to train inmates in urban horticulture skills at the House of Corrections in Philadelphia. The program PLANT — Philadelphia Landscape and Nursery Training — trained inmates to plant and maintain greenery in public spaces. The program continues, on a smaller scale, to this day.

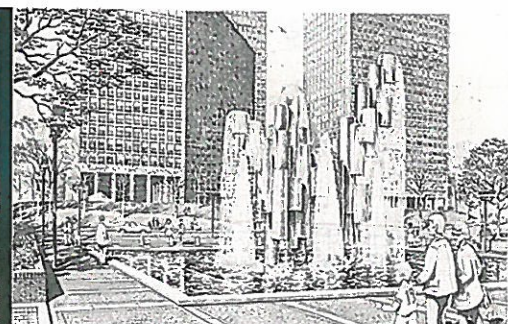
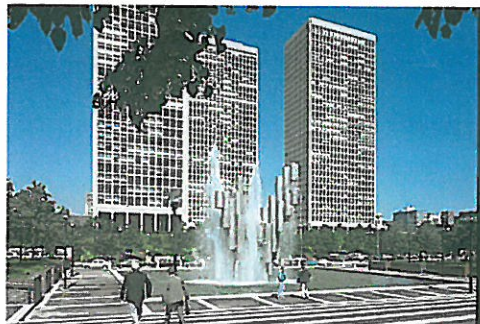
"I worked with John Collins training prisoners to raise and care for plants in the greenhouses at the House of Corrections and then to install those plants in community gardens across the city," said James M. Dickerson, Nursery Superintendent of PLANT from 1982 to 1989. "The prisoners learned how to nurture a plant through its life cycle, how to make a garden, how to start and finish a job. John Collins grew plants, and he grew people too."

Collins also helped the city retail district grow and flourish. He and his partners played an integral role in the 1980s revitalization of Market Street East — a project supported by local business under the leadership of G. Stockton Strawbridge, CEO of the Strawbridge & Clothier department stores.

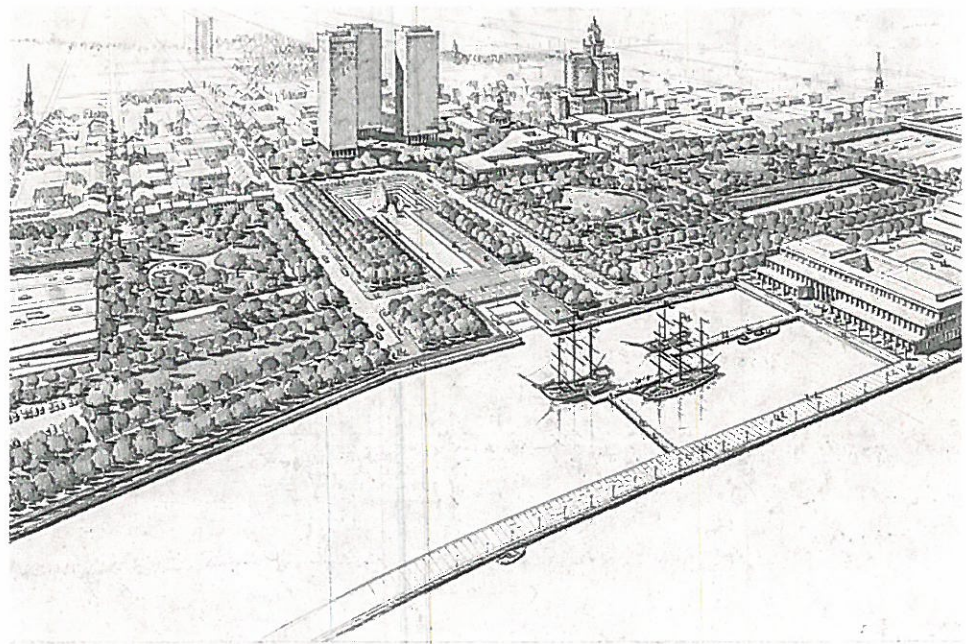
The Delta Group's design eliminated unnecessary and ugly traffic islands and signals, established "lay-by" bus lanes, widened sidewalks, installed new passenger shelters and benches, added lighting fixtures with planters and banners, all while accommodating the street's busy commercial and rush-hour traffic. The project was extended to the eastern portion of Market Street through the historic Old City section. Collins personally went door-to-door and met with retailers to advocate the creation of a Center City business improvement district (BID) to ensure that the street and improvements would be maintained. Between 5th and Front Streets, Collins' design recaptured the feel of 18th Century Philadelphia. The Delta Group was part of the team that constructed the Irish Memorial at Penn's Landing.



"Here is a man who cares deeply about his fellow human beings, their well-being and their relationship to the world around them. (Collins') whole life is a seamless totality of dedicated service through education, environmental planning and design and horticulture," stated the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society Program for Collins's Distinguished Achievement Award in 1995. (Collins has) brought together business executives and inner city youth, prison inmates and community volunteers, revitalized neighborhoods with green spaces and livable landscapes in scale with the people they serve."



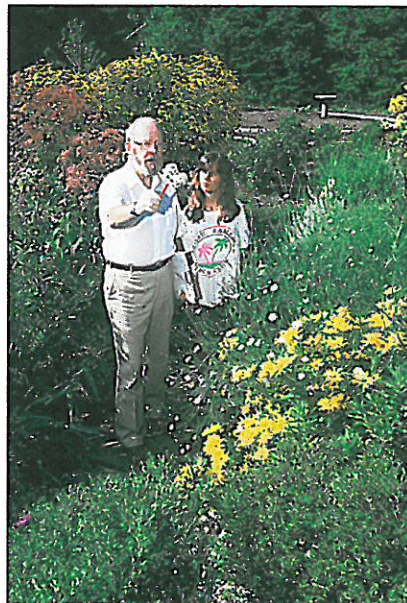




Aerial View to West Delaware Expressway Corner

Collins Dufol & Associates 12/27/80

### Mr. Collins Comes to Ambler



Throughout his career, Collins demonstrated a commitment to educating young professionals, serving as a lecturer, professor, and visiting studio critic at major landscape architecture programs at Penn, Penn State, Harvard, Cornell, Drexel, Virginia and Louisiana State. He also taught at the School of Architecture and Planning in New Delhi, India. In addition to developing horticultural therapy programs to help prison inmates, he also established community and teaching gardens in Philadelphia for public school children.

In 1988, Collins became the founding Chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture at Temple University. Under his leadership, the department advanced in academic standards, achieving accreditation for the landscape architecture program; hired new faculty; and reached out to the community with urban design-build programs. From a small horticultural school for women with just three students and one instructor to home of a strong Landscape Architecture and Horticulture Department offering full four-year degree programs and highly regarded faculty, Temple University Ambler — where the new department was established building upon the legacy of the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women — had certainly come a long way.

"The Horticulture and Landscape Architecture programs were developed into strong programs that were appropriate for an urban university," said James Blackhurst, dean at the Ambler campus from 1984 to 1995. "They started focusing on urban environmental planning, which was something that hadn't been done before."

In practice with his own landscape architecture and environmental planning firm for 25 years at that time, Collins said he "needed some soldiers," in the battle to preserve the environment.

"I wanted students that would look at nature, not pave over it. The thing that really excited me was the potential combination of horticulture and landscape architecture," he said. "Nationally they had been growing further and further apart. I can't separate the two. I don't see them as isolated entities. If you are going to be involved with land planning, land development, or civil engineering,

you should have appropriate knowledge of the plants you're working with."

In the first year that bachelor's degree programs were offered in the two disciplines, the Landscape Architecture and Horticulture programs took home a "Best of Show" award from the Philadelphia Flower Show, an achievement repeated in 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1997, 2002, 2003, 2005, and 2007.

In 1989, the Landscape Architecture program received accreditation from the American Society of Landscape Architects, a measure Collins said was critical for the program and its graduates.

"By state law, you must graduate from an accredited program in order to take the licensing test," he said. "It was a lot of fun putting together the curriculum. I approached it as bringing ecological understanding to the design phase; expanding and including an environmental approach to land development and construction."

In addition to creating a new master plan for the campus, Collins led an extensive program to directly involve students in design-build projects. Many new projects were completed on campus, including the Cottage Hall courtyard; new pergolas and stonework around the entrance near the Administration building; gardens for native plants, groundcovers and herbs; handicapped ramps and new ramps leading from Dixon Hall to the formal gardens; a ring road to route traffic around the campus; and a sustainable wetland garden. Collins also established a native plant nursery as a teaching, research, and plant production facility.





The central campus roadways became primarily for pedestrian traffic, removing the "noise and fumes from the main drive, which were horrendous," Collins said.

"I think the design-build aspect of the programs at Ambler is critical — you need to develop respect for the landscape. I don't see how you can attempt to design something without the knowledge and training necessary to actually construct it," he said. "Construction is a continuation of the artistic process — I don't distinguish between hardscape aspects such as pavement, walls, and built elements and the organic aspects of plants and soil. The boundaries between disciplines should be blurred, with design intermingled with construction, landscape architecture, planning, and horticulture."

While at Temple, Collins continued his involvement in neighborhood revitalization. He created a partnership between the University, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Philadelphia Green program and Sea Change, Inc. to establish an urban tree farm in North Philadelphia's Cecil B. Moore neighborhood. Collins established a campus greenery program and proposed a Center for Sustainable Environment at Temple University Ambler. Today, the Center for Sustainable Communities at the Ambler campus develops and promotes new approaches to protect and preserve quality of life through sustainable development, improving public health and safety, and balancing the relationship between environmental integrity, economic prosperity, public safety and social equity.

Collins has also spent years planning and advocating the restoration of the Wissahickon Creek. In 1999, The Delta Group completed a Wissahickon Creek conservation plan for a 21 mile-long corridor in southeast Pennsylvania.

"If there is one project that I would like to continue working on, Wissahickon Creek conservation and restoration would be it. As a country, historically, we haven't been able to protect these smaller hunks of landscape, but it is critical that we do," Collins said. "I've provided an idea to develop a nursery that all municipalities within the watershed would support jointly. It could be done simply and they could share the cost."



One of Collins's most enduring contributions was the early advocacy for designating the Ambler campus as an arboretum to create an environment for learning and promoting ecologically sound planning, design, development, and management. In 2000, the campus was formally registered as an arboretum by the American Public Gardens Association.

"John Collins's legacy is in his built works and in the people whose lives were changed as a result of his advocacy, teaching, and professional example. His enthusiasm, confidence, integrity and devotion to the highest professional ideals have inspired several generations of landscape architects," said James Searing, a student in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture who has been extensively researching Collins' legacy for the retrospective. "He anticipated the need to reach out across disciplines to solve complex problems, while helping government officials, community leaders and the public see the consequences of their decisions and actions. As a result, he has advanced the region's ability to work cooperatively toward meeting major, social and environmental challenges."

Dr. Mary Myers, Acting Chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture agreed,

adding that perhaps most important "is his celebration of creativity, the notion that cities can be civilizing places that promote an enduring human connection with the natural world."

**For more information on the John F. Collins Retrospective at Temple University Ambler, please contact Kathy Beveridge, Director of Development and Alumni Affairs at 267-468-8440 or [kathy.beveridge@temple.edu](mailto:kathy.beveridge@temple.edu).**

*James F. Duffy contributed to this report.*

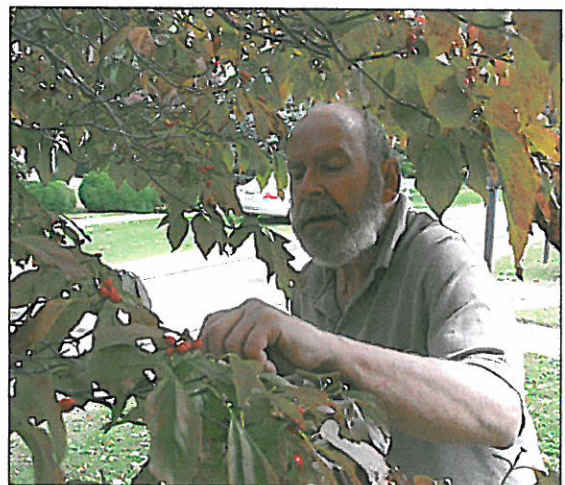
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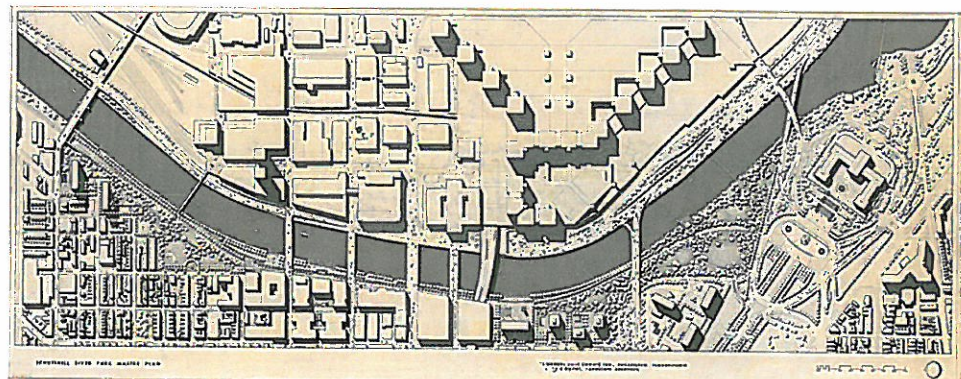
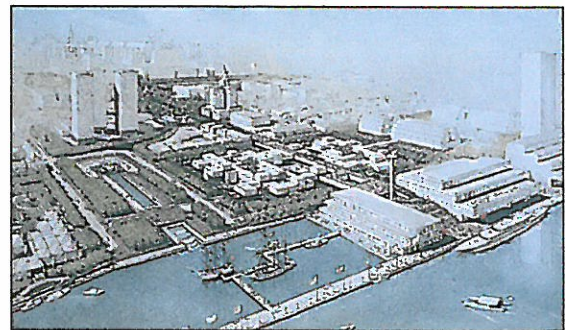
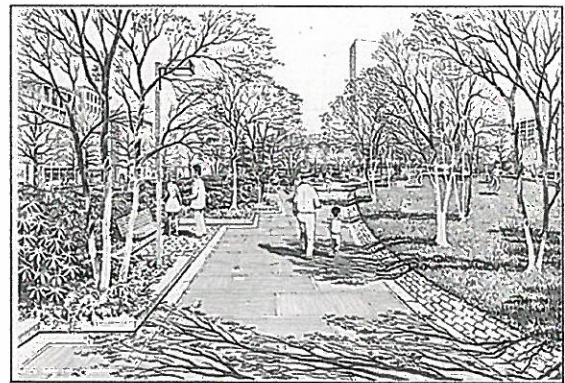
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# DOWNTOWN SALEM — CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT PLAN — HERITAGE PLAZA EAST/WEST

THE DELTA GROUP, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

**Location**

Salem, Massachusetts

**Owner/Client**

City of Salem Redevelopment  
Authority

**Contractor**

DeIulis Bros. Construction

**Consultants**

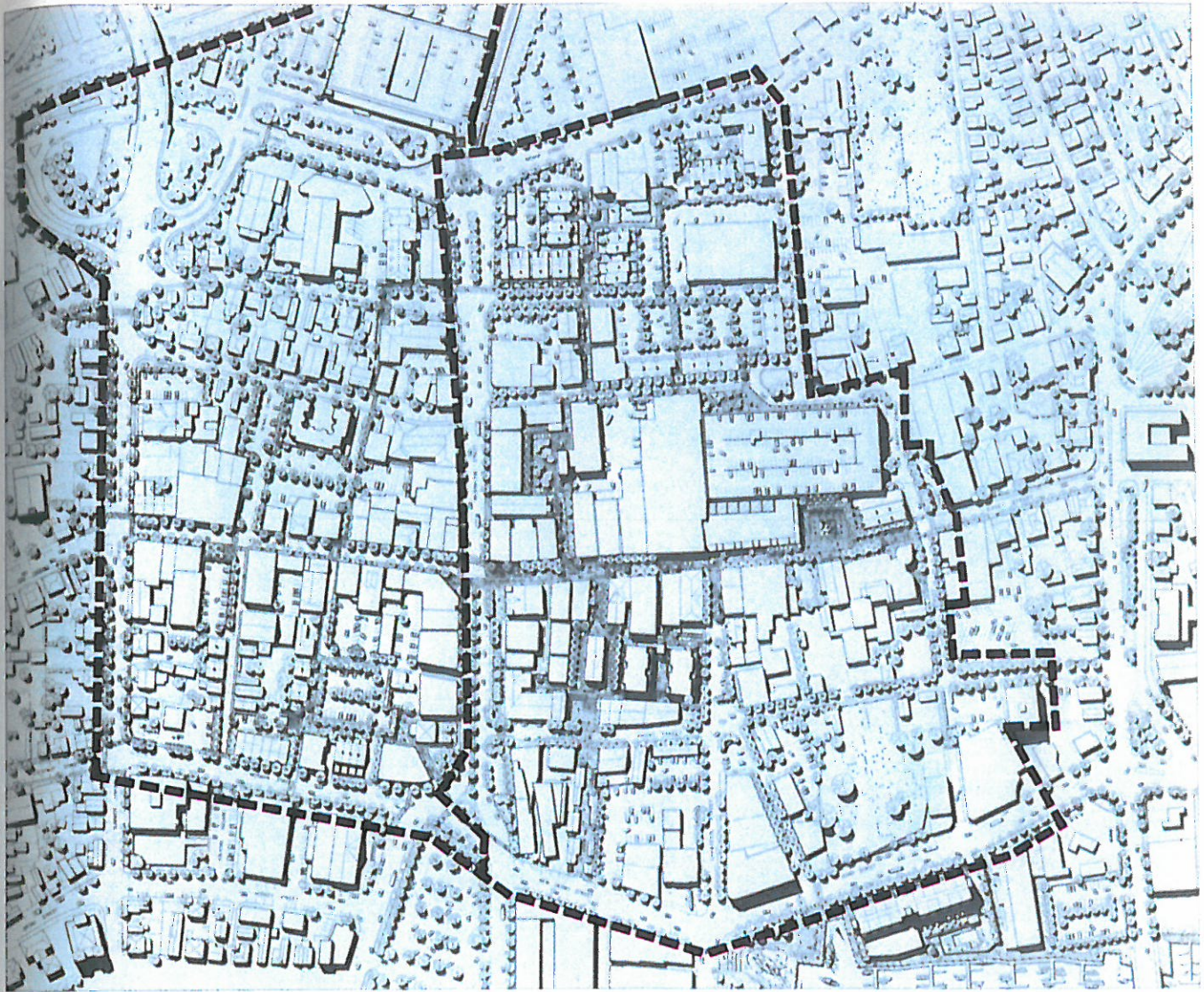
Sherl Joseph Winter  
Whitman and Howard, Inc.

Travelers to the historic (1626) whaling port of Salem, Massachusetts, 15 miles north of Boston, inevitably confront a red-brick colonial town, one that is even more re-bricked today as a result of eleven years of consistent design attention.

Over a decade ago, the town fathers turned their backs on earlier,







simplistic renewal efforts and accepted proposals from The Delta Group. Since 1972, this landscape architectural firm has had overall responsibility for the work of landscape architects, civil and traffic engineers, and a consultant sculptor, and has helped coordinate the work of numerous architects with Salem's urban design plan.

The Delta Group's initial analysis, design concept, and urban design master plan formed the basis for a seven-stage implementation program; major components of the plan have now been completed. The firm was also responsible for detailed design and documentation for roadways and parking, pedestrian malls, market sheds, plazas, graphics, fountains, and

lighting, as well as construction inspection and design review.

Inescapable for visitors — in part because of a new, one-way circulation system — the historic core possesses an unusual collection of 17th- and 18th-century structures, many of them enhanced by their own new courts, plazas, or pedestrian malls.

It was the designers' intent to link the two main bodies of water that once floated the ships which brought overseas wealth — pepper, indigo, spices, tea, coffee — to little Salem. But the complete linkage between South River and a proposed, new marina/harbor never came about.

Still, seven contracts later, the Delta Group's intent has remained

**Above:** Following an urban design framework established in 1972, improvements to downtown Salem have linked key buildings to new and old spaces in the central area. Several red-brick streets are now limited to pedestrians and/or reduced traffic. **Opposite Below:** Essential to downtown's revitalization was the conversion of Essex Street into a pedestrian mall. Its most prominent public space is the forecourt to the historic East India Marine Hall, now the Peabody Museum. **Opposite Above:** In front of the old Town Hall, a parking lot has been converted into a mini plaza-amphitheater where many public events are staged. City and developer jointly provided the space.









clear, and the once-dying center has considerable new life. Tourists flock to these historic places, local trade has revived, and the \$19 million in public investments has generated over \$70 million in private developments: this is a town of 40,000 population! Retail sales, property value, and tax return to the city are far beyond what was expected. Majestic Salem Common, northeast of the town's center, has a new and quite different echo in the form of Salem Green, a smaller, village-green-type space provided jointly by the city and a developer of adjacent commercial property.

**Opposite: Outdoor markets and other public events animate the "new" Salem. Above: During tourist season, this placid scene turns busy. Widened sidewalks and new trees make room for outdoor dining in front of Chuck's, just north of old Town Hall.**

*"An 'urban reclamation' project that exhibits a clear pursuit of design excellence beyond that of the most expedient solution. It embodies a self-image revitalization in an area where the industrial age was born, then virtually died. The economy of the area has been revived by tourism and high-tech industry, and the Salem CBD development is both a barometer of, and a magnet for, that development. It is commendable that the design team met the challenge of coordinating the myriad aspects of restoring several city blocks — planning, engineering, political road-blocks — and was able to produce an inviting, built result. The project is a credit to all Salem, and it says a great deal about the civic spirit of the town administration and the people who have impact on it.*

*"The delicate architectural scale of the 18th-century buildings in Salem is acknowledged and reinforced (in most instances) by the choice of indigenous materials for the streetscape. Granite, brick, and the placement of street trees give the area wholeness — an important design feature. The design elements are of excellent quality, but are not particularly unique. It was the outstanding level of effort required to organize and coordinate the various human and institutional elements toward realization which carried the project into this award category. Exemplifies the increasingly important 'design facilitation' role of the landscape architect." — THE JURY*



# CHESTNUT PARK

THE DELTA GROUP, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

**Location**

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Owner/Client**

PENJERDEL Regional Foundation

**Architects**

The Delta Group

**Contractors**

Sullivan Inc.

Heyser Landscaping

**Consultant**

Christopher Ray

Philadelphia's Penjerdel — a tri-state transportation agency responsible for planning vast highway systems — has shown how to think small in its own neighborhood. Its privately financed and owned Chestnut Park has become one of downtown's most heavily trafficked and pleasant shortcuts.

The park, designed and maintained by The Delta Group, was made pos-

sible by a gift from the William Penn Foundation to Penjerdel. This paid for the original purchase of the site, and the \$180,000 cost of the park itself. Penjerdel, collaborating with the City Planning Commission, picked the site, then bought it, demolishing two old commercial buildings. After the park was completed, a new store was built adjacent.

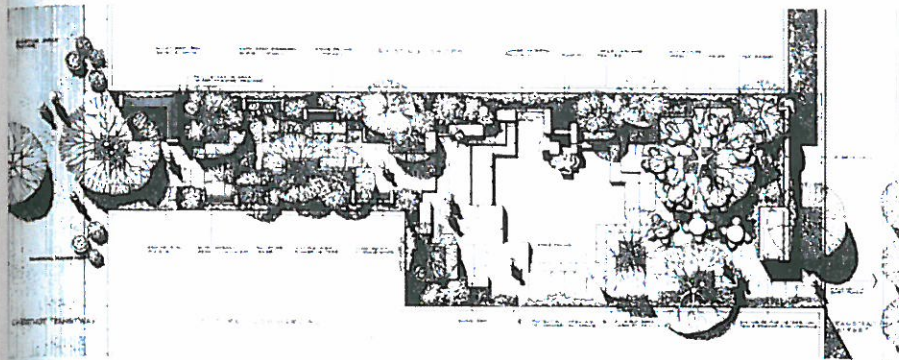
Thus, the new green space links Chestnut, a busy shopping street, with a service alley (Ranstead Street) in mid-block, then the large open plaza adjacent to the United Engineers Building, and finally the Transitway, or transit mall. The latter is a key downtown circulator, 13 blocks long, restricted to buses after 7 P.M. And since the neighborhood is almost





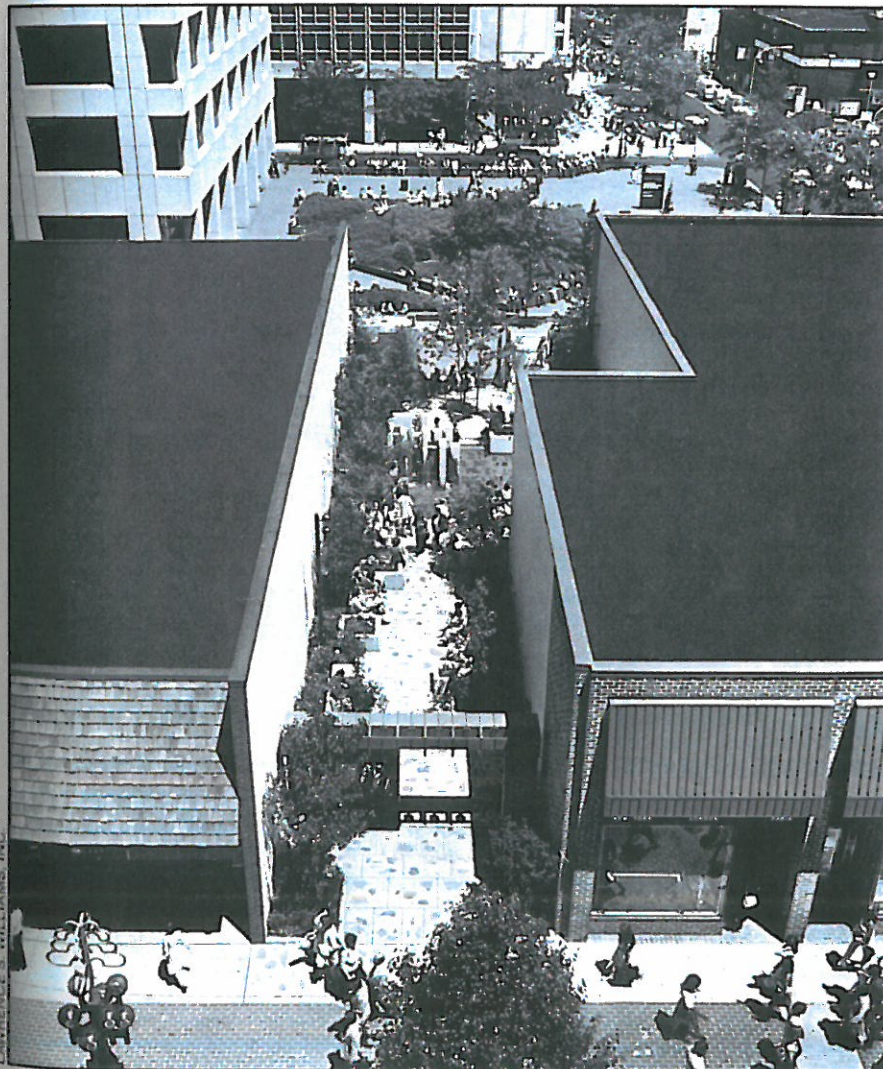


Section



Plan

CHESTNUT STREET PARK COMPETITION



devoid of 24-hour residents, Chestnut Park is closed and locked at 7 P.M.

"Our inspiration was Trevi Fountain in Rome — using similar materials for the sculpture fountain and paving; everything cut from the same cloth. The other inspiration was a trip to Japan. It gave me the courage to think I could do this sort of delicacy in texture in the heart of the city," says John Collins, a partner in the design firm.

The fountain includes bronze gargoyles representing totems of the Unami, Munsee, and Unilachtigo Indians, original inhabitants of Philadelphia. An unusual local palette of indigenous plants went in: witch hazel, shadbush, red oak, red maple, laurel, rhododendron, hemlock, ferns, and wildflower. Sculptured gates of wrought-iron at the north and south entrances express in whimsical form the regional wildlife, landform, and vegetation.

The designers went to great pains to provide root and growing space for heavy planting, including English ivy which now covers the walls of adjacent buildings.

Local plant and building materials were used throughout the park, including a local mica gneiss schist, which is embedded in the paving blocks and adds a glittery punctuation. The pavers, cast in place, have three-quarter-inch open joints every fourth-score line to provide more water and air for plant roots.

With such a public-spirited client, The Delta Group also has a contract for continuing maintenance. "I still maintain the individual plants and fountain," says Collins. "Even though I'm not really supposed to, I do a lot of clean up — once a week — and pruning whenever it's needed." Even when new signs are needed, Delta provides.

**Left:** Slotted into busy downtown Philadelphia, Chestnut Park was financed by a local transportation foundation to link Chestnut Street, at bottom, with a major office plaza to the north. **Opposite:** Greened seclusion around the central fountain is reinforced by English ivy, which has, since 1979, covered the walls of the adjoining buildings.





*"Outstanding in the way that it combines the attractiveness of a great amount of detail with a very straightforward scheme. There is a lot going on, but it is very simply handled. Unique in its whimsical incorporation of local elements which go beyond studio design — sacred stones and animal totems of the original Indian tribes in the Philadelphia region are handled in a deft fashion; plant and wildlife imagery is woven into the ironwork of the gates. This craftsmanship adds a strong sense of place to a very crisp design. There is a special intimacy here, not found in the standard idioms of other vest-pocket parks. The evocative symbology provides a refreshingly private and 'high touch' place in a very public landscape. Highly expressive of the craft of the profession. A real charmer — there can probably never be enough of these." — THE JURY*



**Above:** Formed of sandblasted concrete, the fountain expresses continuity with its manmade surroundings. The pool bottom goes dry in winter. **Right:** This bronze turtle is one of the fountain's three totems, representing the Unami, Munsee, and Unilachtigo Indians, Philadelphia's original natives.





## WINNING PROFILE



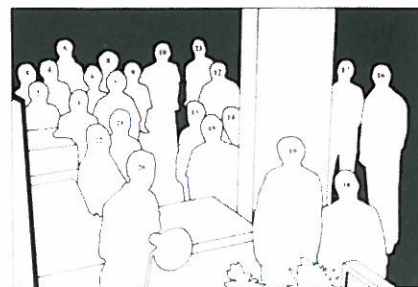
F. R. COLLINS

Thirty major design awards have come to John Collins' firm, now The Delta Group of Philadelphia, since he began practice in 1963. The ASLA awards, in Collins' view, is essential, so that professionals can know how their work compares with that of others.

"Such awards also reinforce our belief that landscape architects, architects, and engineers must work as members of a full-time team, and that urban design and planning can only be successful when all the design disciplines are fully involved from analysis to maintenance."

Unusually, in a field that is often rigidly compartmented, The Delta Group — in both the Salem and Chestnut Park projects — was responsible for establishing an ongoing maintenance program. The firm prepared maintenance and operating manuals and conducted hands-on demonstrations and training.

Originally a partner in the Collins, Dutot Partnership, Collins formed The Delta Group in 1971. His major involvement in design has included both the Salem and Chestnut Park projects; the new towns of Reston, Virginia, and Coldspring, Maryland; restoration of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline right-of-way; Schuylkill Park, Philadelphia; Penn Square, Reading, Pennsylvania; the environmental planning program for the South Fork of Long Island; and a master plan for Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania. Collins founded and directs the Philadelphia Landscape and Nursery Training Program at the Philadelphia Prison. A graduate of Pennsylvania State University and Harvard Graduate School of Design, he was a 1962 recipient of the Charles Eliot Traveling Fellowship from Harvard.



**The Delta Group:** 1. John Collins, 2. David DuTot, 3. Walter Green, 4. David Loudermilk, 5. Martin Troutman, 6. Elizabeth Chace, 7. Mario Schack, 8. Corey Singletary, 9. Burt Tanoue, 10. Rob Pulcifer, 11. Bill Collins, 12. Nathan Sullivan, 13. Ed Hollander, 14. Marie Komansky, 15. Jim Pearson, 16. Sam Little, 17. Jack Smyth, 18. Elmore Boles, 19. Ann Butcher, 20. Tom Schraudembach, 21. Patsy Eubanks, 22. Ken Jenkins. Not present: Neal Belanger, Charles Dorff, Peter Heaven, Walter DeLury.



Changing Skyline By Inga Saffron

# With his pocket parks, Philadelphian enriched the city



A colorized image shows Collins' idea for Schuykill Banks park, with stairs to the water. He conceived it back in 1978.

The name John F. Collins may be unfamiliar, but if you've spent any time wearing down shoe leather in Center City, you've probably passed through his world. A landscape architect, Collins has made a specialty out of slipping pocket parks into the cracks in Philadelphia's street grid. Stumbling upon one of his secret gardens today is like finding a \$10 bill on the sidewalk — better, in fact.

**John F. Collins' huge imprint can be seen in an exhibit on his career.**

It was Collins, 70, who provided city planner Edmund Bacon with the idea in 1965 for the pedestrian walk that now hopscoches among the townhouses and gardens of Society Hill. Known as St. Peter's Way, it almost does take you to heaven — a shaft of open space that Philadelphians call Three Bears Park. That's another one of the outdoor rooms Collins furnished with nothing more than con-

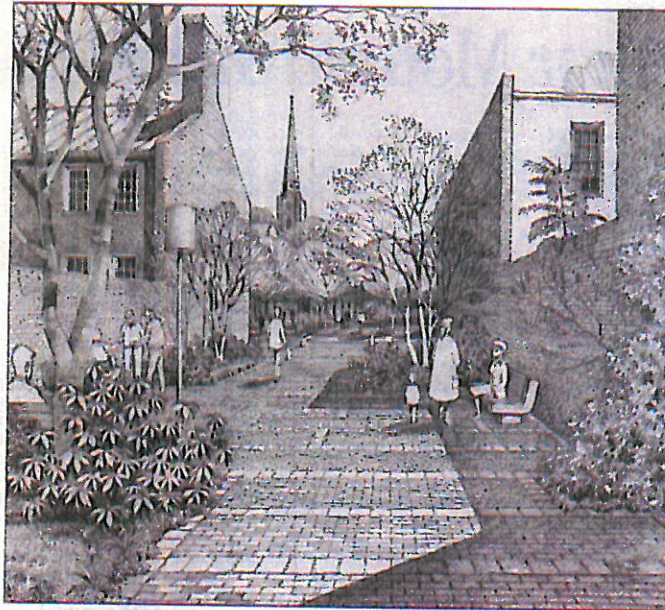
crete, brick paving stones, and plants.

Though Collins' best parks tend to be small, his imprint on our daily experience of city life has been huge. To appreciate just how much of Center City's park space has his handprints on it, you have to hike over to Ambler, where Temple University's landscape architecture department has put together a retrospective of his career. The show, which runs until June 15, includes gorgeous original pencil renderings from Collins' many Philadelphia projects, as well as selections from such far-flung locales as Alaska and Virginia.

Like all good architecture surveys, this one simultaneously helps put the past in perspective and makes us see the present more critically. As you lose yourself in the

See **SKYLINE** on E11





**John F. Collins' pencil drawing of St. Peter's Way, a pedestrian walk completed during Edmund Bacon's reign as city planner. Drawings of Collins' projects are in a retrospective at Temple's Ambler campus.**

## Landscape architect's vision enriched city's public spaces

**SKYLINE** from E1 rich graphite shadings of Collins' drawings, you can't help but wonder why Philadelphia doesn't build urban oases like Chestnut Street Park or Markward Playground any more. Couldn't at least one of the derelict lots that was cleared under the Street administration's \$250 million blight program have been formally landscaped as a neighborhood park?

Collins, who founded a firm called the Delta Group, designed nearly all his parks between the mid-1960s and the early '80s, when Philadelphia was awash in federal money for urban-renewal projects. Collins would be called in to camouflage the harsh effects of highway and housing projects.

You get a sense of the era's ambition by looking at the landscaped deck he designed in the late '60s to hide the gash of Interstate 95 as it rips through Center City. If only his plan to extend Society Hill's streets gently and seamlessly down to a two-lane Columbus Boulevard had been realized, then Philadelphia wouldn't be having a tortured conversation today about how to reconnect Center City with its Delaware waterfront.

Collins' design for the I-95 deck isn't perfect, by the way. Like so many landscape plans conceived under Bacon's reign, this one includes far too much landscape and not enough real urban stuff — streets, buildings, shops. It's an abstract composition that looks good only from above. But the version that was built can't even claim the easy waterfront connections that Collins envisioned. No wonder it's a dead place.

Collins, who shares some of fellow landscape architect Lawrence Halperin's environmental sensibility, did his best work on a smaller canvas. He could whip up a charming civic nook with a scrap of empty land

### philly.com

See a preview of the Collins retrospective via <http://go.philly.com/collins>.

### If You Go

The John F. Collins Retrospective, sponsored by Temple University, is on the second floor of the Learning Center at Temple's Ambler Campus, 580 Meetinghouse Rd. The center is open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily, and the exhibit is free. For more information, call 267-468-8000.

and some spare city funds. Yet the addition of a modest amenity, like the Markward Playground on Pine Street, alongside the Schuylkill, instantly made that neighborhood a more desirable place to live. Collins was the one who conceived the adjacent Schuylkill Banks park — back in 1978. It took 25 years for the city to get around to building a stripped-down version of his design. Yet the skinny river park was so warmly embraced that the public was using it even before the recreation trail was finished.

My favorite Collins design has always been Chestnut Street Park, a slip of a public space just west of 17th Street. The park was a gift to the city from the Haas family, which organized a competition in 1978 to pick an architect. Collins won with a design that inserts a secret outdoor room between a row of retail stores. When you're sitting within its dense umbra, with the water softly plucking at the fountain's concrete pillars, you almost feel you are resting in a mountain grotto. Since the

park is also open to Ranstead Street, you can easily use it as a cut-through, for a fleeting alpine pick-me-up between meetings.

One of Collins' innovations was to insist that his parks and streetscapes be endowed with a maintenance fund. When the money for Chestnut Street Park proved insufficient, Collins and his family would stop by to tidy up.

Compare the civic generosity that shaped Chestnut Street Park with the gated space next door, at the high-rise offices of Duane Morris. Once, the tower's plaza was a place where the public could loll in the sunshine with a cup of coffee, but the law firm has installed a fence to keep people away from Roy Lichtenstein's *Brushstrokes* sculpture. A tall, awkward metal fence now blocks views into Collins' refuge. Both public spaces have been diminished.

Walking through the Temple retrospective of Collins' career on the second floor of the Ambler Campus' Learning Center, you realize that our city has become a lot more stingy about its public spaces.

The Center City District's Paul Levy, who recently launched a proposal to landscape Dilworth Plaza, believes that "you could never get Three Bears Park built today." The neighborhood probably wouldn't allow it, he said. The city wouldn't want to pay for it. People would argue that it couldn't be maintained.

Yet it's there now, alive with noisy children who clamber around the bronze family of bears. The neighbors recently raised the money to renovate the park. Philadelphia can only be grateful that someone like Collins was around to imagine it.

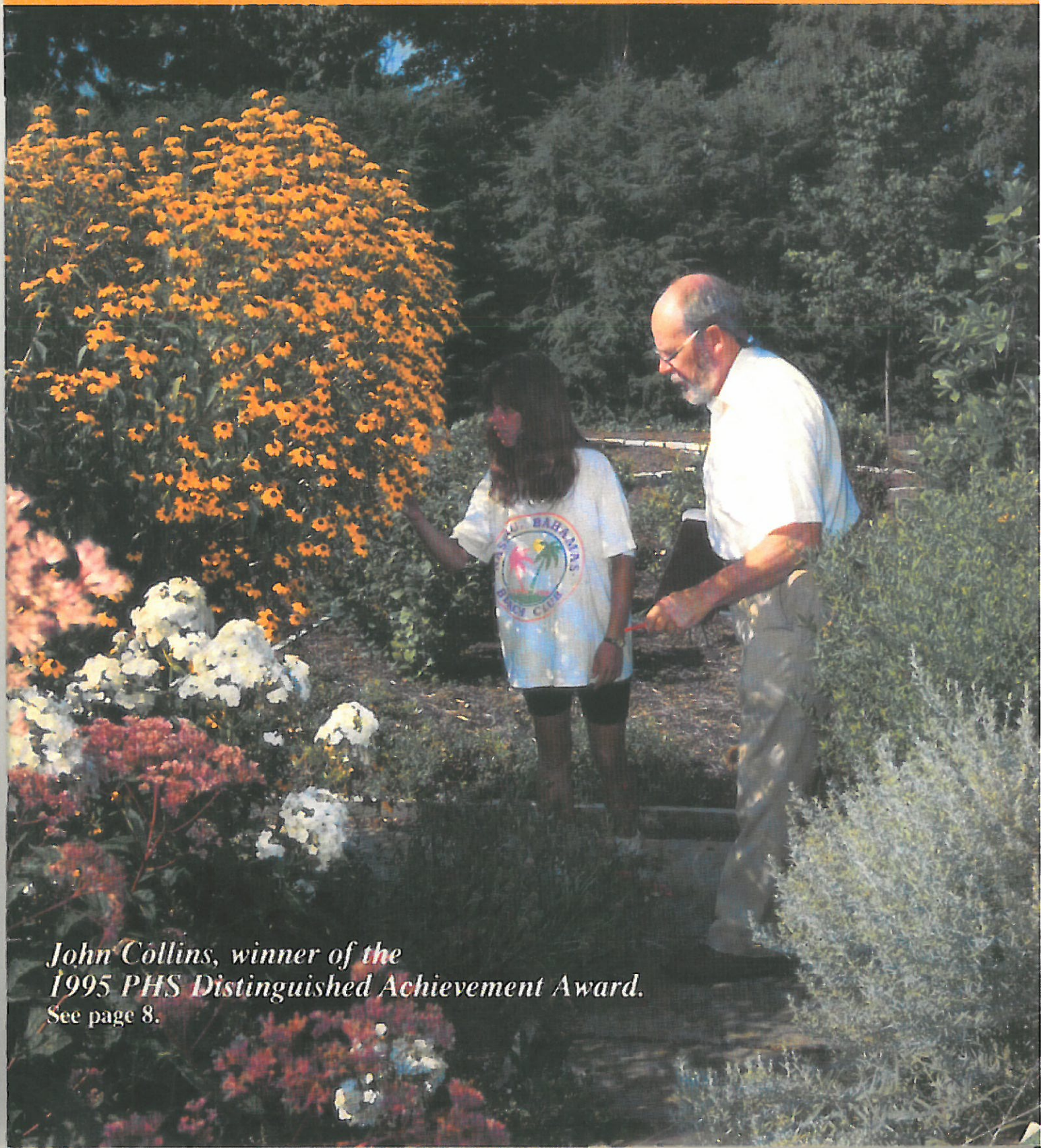
Contact architecture critic Inga Saffron at 215-654-2213 or [isaffron@phillynews.com](mailto:isaffron@phillynews.com).





# GREEN SCENE


THE PENNSYLVANIA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY • Nov./Dec. 1995 \$2.75



*John Collins, winner of the  
1995 PHS Distinguished Achievement Award.  
See page 8.*



# *In John Collins's Liveable Landscapes, Plants are the Medium; Native is the Message*

 by Judy Mathe Foley

**W**ant John Collins to build you a park? Give him an idea, a pencil, and a napkin and he'll draw you one. That drawing will be so detailed, says Alice Sjolander, department manager and Collins's assistant at Temple University's Ambler campus where Collins is a professor and chair of the Department of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture, "You can take that napkin and build from it!"

"John thinks with a pencil," Sjolander says. "It's a big joke around here that if you have an idea John will pick up whatever's available — even a napkin — and draw what you're saying. That drawing will be beautiful — and done from several perspectives."

When those drawings of Collins's, the professional landscape designer, come off the paper, they are likely to reside in an urban environment of macadam and concrete. But the true soul of John Collins, artist and plantsman, lies in richer soil, attuned more to nature's creations than to people-made structures of concrete and steel. "John Collins is more than simply a landscape architect. He is strongly bonded to the earth and the plants themselves — and to the people who interact with them," says John Randolph of the Schuylkill River Development Council, Inc., which helped to raise approximately \$5 million to begin construction of the Schuylkill River Park, which John began designing 30 years ago.

Spreading like zucchini over Philadelphia's landscape with quiet productivity, Collins is at Temple's Ambler campus four days a week; at his landscape design firm, The Delta Group, in center city, "in pieces" one day a week; and at either or both places three or four nights a week until about 10 p.m. Saturdays he spends "the whole day, if I can, in my nursery in Conshohocken. It's my therapy. I dig and pot trees."

Hands-on and always helpful, he's a professor who always has time for a student's question. "He's generous with his knowledge, truly interested in helping people. Really a caring guy," says Caroline I. Friede, a Temple staff horticulturist.

Adaptability is the quality mentioned by Dolie Green, a Temple landscape intern. "He knows what has to be done, and knows the parameters that will allow you to accomplish what he wants, as well as what

you perceive should be done. So where someone else might find conflict because they've set something in motion and can't get the job done, with John, there's always room to adapt or adjust. You have to be many things to succeed in public landscaping and he's all of them."

When Collins was developing a naturalized area on 20 acres of a 150-acre Rohm and Haas research facility in Spring House,

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***Maintenance is his mantra. Ask John Collins what he considers the mark of success of a public landscape, and he responds without hesitation: "One that lasts." Market Street East ranks high on his satisfying project list because it has a well-developed maintenance program that became a model to help launch the Center City District idea.***

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Pa., "he would come out on his own time, bring his own truck, and we would dig and plant," says Will Brouwers of Rohm and Haas. "John was extremely generous with his time."

But John Collins would not be receiving the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's 1995 Distinguished Achievement Award if he were just a nice guy with a talent for drawing. The award recognizes 30 years of "dedicated service through education, environmental planning and design, and horticulture." Much of that service has been in public places and with a wide array of people from corporate executives like G. Stockton Strawbridge, the guiding force behind Market Street East's renewal, to prison inmates who mowed the grass and pruned the trees at Schuylkill River Park.

In North Philadelphia, for example, Collins provides steady and gentle direction for ambitious human and economic development programs. Temple Park Builders, a program to train unemployed inner city residents, constructed a Collins-designed teaching garden at the Meade School at 18th and Oxford in a project led by Philadelphia Green. And four trainees are now at work on a park near St. Joseph's Prep in North Philadelphia. Collins works with the community organization, Sea Change, at 15th Street and Cecil B. Moore Avenue to

provide advice on caring for a tree nursery that aims for economic development in that neglected part of the city. Near Lehigh Avenue, Collins has worked with People United Together, "a marvelous crew of ex-inmates helping other released folks find ways to survive in the city with jobs and alcohol and drug-counseling programs."

Variety and innovation are marks of the man. One reason he decided to have Temple students grow the plants used in the hanging baskets on the light poles on Market Street East, Collins says with a slow, sly smile, was "just to prove it could be done."

Delta Group Vice President Tom Schraudenbach says the only thing that riles the usually unflappable Collins is when people won't try new things, take on new challenges. "He's never content with just solving problems. He wants to open people's minds to all the potential." In North Philadelphia, Schraudenbach says, "John looks at revitalization of the environment in an area that desperately needs to capture people's imaginations and make them want to be there."

"John is always looking for something new and different," says David Dutot, founding partner of the Delta Group. "His overriding concern is that anything we design has to be functional. The form the project takes is a fairly individual one."

## ***A Superman trick at 17th and Market***

To find the essence of a Collins design, visit tiny Chestnut Park. Take a brown bag lunch to 17th Street and search between the shops on the north side of Chestnut Street for a set of sculpted iron gates. Walk through those gates and the change of scenery is so abrupt as to make you glance back to get your bearings. The Clark Kent-to-Superman transformation occurs in a space only a bit larger than Kent's telephone booth dressing room. Though the park is crowded, you will be able to find one of the 50 seating spaces — and a bit of privacy — on a wall or bench. All the details — the native *Wissahickon* schist, the cascading water, the cool, vine-covered walls — create an almost instant sense of refreshment. Such is the Collins magic that when you leave, you will be sure you walked the soft forest floor even though Chestnut Park is covered by paving stones.





Ask John Collins a question and he immediately starts sketching. His *Liveable Landscape Design*, co-authored by Marvin Adleman and published by Cornell Cooperative Extension, shows 61 pages of beautiful, clear sketches designed to assist the homeowner, the landscape designer, the nurseryman and contractor in understanding and applying the basic principles of design to the landscape. Shown with student Kathleen McBride.

A Collins-created green space is not a generic, regurgitated idea, but has a strong sense of place. It reflects and celebrates its surroundings and history, often in pieces of sculpture like Chestnut Park's fountain, which contains totems of the local Leni-Lenape Indians. It is a soft, and passive place where trees provide a cooling canopy that creates, where possible, a woodland floor beneath. It contains native plants — maybe even some he grew himself from seed in his nurseries in Conshohocken or in Ambler. His designs, as serene as the man himself, come complete with plans to sustain people and plant life into the future.

Collins extols pastoral, passive landscapes. "We tend to think of parks as baseball diamonds and basketball courts and playground equipment," Collins says. "We've been slowly phasing the bucolic landscape character out of our parks. In America we really let active sports dominate. But there is an equal need for some



Collins's master plan for Schuylkill River Park included a community garden that required considerable lobbying to convince people that horticulture is as beneficial as baseball or hockey.





Collins discussed pruning details with Shari Stewart, who cares for the Sea Change tree farm in North Central Philadelphia (near Temple University). This tree farm is part of an urban horticulture center that Collins master-planned: it includes an herb garden, a special events garden and a farmer's market.

passive, soft, less urbanized space as well."

When in the first phase of the development of Schuylkill River Park some 10 to 15 years ago, his master plan included a community garden, "it was seen by some people as an intrusion into the park in space that might better be used for more active uses. We lobbied very hard for the gardens.

***It's a big world out there, and John Collins is bringing it to us piece by piece.***

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Fairmount Park Commissioner Ernesta Ballard was a big help in trying to convince people that horticulture is an equally valuable recreational activity, just as beneficial as basketball or hockey. And it's been very successful."

Inspired by Fairmount Park, Collins decided early to use his love of drawing and painting in public landscape design. "I think I first realized the importance of public landscapes when I worked as a gardener before I went to Penn State. I was driving on East River Drive with Mrs. Arthur Paul and she described some of the places her husband had designed, like the Glendenning Rock Garden. And I thought, "What a marvelous opportunity to be able to provide the public with neat places they otherwise can't afford, or wouldn't have the opportunity to participate in. It hit me very strongly that public landscapes were important."

He came of professional age at the

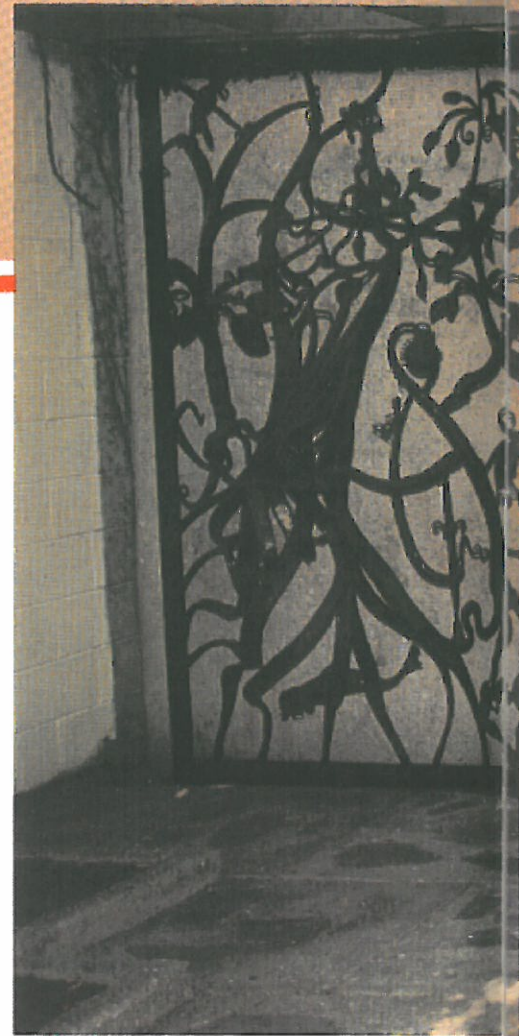
height of urban renewal when the popularity of shopping malls was destroying the historic character of older cities. Collins's son, John R. Collins, Jr., an architect who recently joined The Delta Group, says the reality of bad design decisions came right to the front door of his father's hometown of Conshohocken when it became a ghost town after the Plymouth Meeting Mall was built.

***A strong sense of identity***

Preservation prevails in his designs. In Salem, Massachusetts, where Collins and Schraudenbach spent 10 years and many all-nighters, he haunted the public library to research local history. As a result, the Collins-designed fountains there reflect Nathaniel Hawthorne's writings and the city's part in the China trade. "John always asks, 'How can we make sure these beautiful things can be preserved? How can we reveal things about their own special place in history?'" Schraudenbach says.

"The best part of the experience in Salem," Collins wrote, "is the proof that an old community with a strong sense of identity, hard work and a good urban design team can successfully compete with, and best, the faceless, wasteful suburban malls."

Preservation was at issue, too, at Navan Fort, in Armagh, Northern Ireland, where Collins helped fight expansion of an "evil limestone quarry" which threatened an ancient religious site near where St. Patrick founded his mission. Collins's latest project



is working with a small committee to guide the design of a memorial to the Irish potato famine on the cover park over I-95 near Chestnut Street in Philadelphia.

Collins celebrates local landscapes because "architecture and building technology are the same all over the world, but the landscape is one of the few things that can express the regional character of each particular place. If you pick up a book on architecture and see dense groves of white birch, those trees immediately express the special character of Scandinavia," he says. "We have such a rich natural landscape in our region, one that can withstand a lot of the urban stresses if you make the right selections."

Making the right selections, "knowing not to put the wrong plant in the wrong place," was one of the reasons Ernesta D. Ballard, a member of the committee that called Collins to Temple, felt he was perfect for the job. "He's a plantsman. His design work makes sense. He knows what people want and what makes them com-





Collins designed Chestnut Park, a tiny garden filled with plants native to the Greater Philadelphia area, at 17th and Chestnut Street. So ingeniously designed and planted, this small garden, delightfully unexpected on a busy thoroughfare, enables people to find serenity and privacy at any of the 50 seating spaces.

fortable, what is beautiful, and what works. In his designs he thinks about how the people and the designs will interact in the years to come."

#### **Maintenance, maintenance, maintenance**

Maintenance is his mantra. Ask John Collins what he considers the mark of success of a public landscape, and he responds without hesitation: "One that lasts." Market Street East ranks high on his satisfying project list because it has a well-developed maintenance program that became a model to help launch the Center City District concept. More and more, he says, community groups are taking responsibility for maintenance of public greenspaces, a heartening development.

Intensively involved in Chestnut Park for 15 years, Collins often cared for it himself without compensation when it began to look shabby from over-use and under-care. In 1994 the pocket park found a new patron, the Center City District, and Collins went back and refurbished it. He

did the same with Circus Plaza on the west side of 12th Street between Market and Chestnut. Originally designed by Collins and paid for by PSFS, the park outlived that banking institution, and he refurbished it in late October 1994. "You know you're getting old," Collins told Paul Steinke of the Center City District, "when you've rehabbed your work a second time!" If it needs to be done again, he'll do it again because he's in for the long haul. "He feels a responsibility to the region and to the plants," says Caroline Friede, "because he has a sense that what we do here affects the region, the country, and the planet."

The interdependence of people, plants and wildlife is at the root of the Collins philosophy. As he wrote in the book, *Liveable Landscapes*, "What you do on your land is likely to have a visual and environmental impact well beyond your property lines."

John Collins wants to share his landscapes with others, to bring his well-developed sense of living in harmony with

nature to city dwellers who haven't experienced it. "It's really exciting to see grade school kids at the Meade School making posters about the Piedmont and Coastal Plains natural regions, which most college students don't even know about," he says.

"One of the things missing for urban kids is contact with nature. Without access to distant vacations that suburban kids have, they grow up on pavement without ever understanding how a plant grows or what the characteristics of soil are, without any appreciation for wildlife. They need this contact with the natural world to be healthy human beings."

Alice Sjolander captures her boss's mission and accomplishments well when she says, "It's a big world out there, and John Collins is bringing it to us piece by piece."

Author Judy Mathe Foley, a new Philadelphian, grew up in a part of the state near the 70 acres of woodland where John Collins built what he calls "a wooden tent — without running anything."







