

# UC Berkeley

## Places

### Title

An East Central Illinois Garden: A Regional Garden [Transforming the American Garden: 12 New Landscape Designs-Exhibitor]

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5fn150b5>

### Journal

Places, 3(3)

### ISSN

0731-0455

### Author

Harkness, Terence

### Publication Date

1986-12-01

Peer reviewed

One's vision of the world is a part of the feeling behind—and the subject of—much of one's work. This garden expresses my deep affection for the Illinois landscape. As expressed in this garden, the vision originates in the rural Middle West. The garden reflects my preoccupation with the visual qualities of these places, and my attempt to confirm and reveal them to others. Its creation has required a conscious acknowledgement of the importance and power of both past and current experience.

Living in the Middle West and experiencing its particular light, the expanse of sky and horizon, and the effect of sunset on the flat plane of farm lands—these have been particularly powerful components of my visual sense. During the summer, impressions of changing field patterns have provided experience in spaciousness, incised pattern and exploration. Such experiences have enhanced my visual sense of the power and friendliness of this distinctive landscape.

The goal of the East Central Illinois garden is to recreate the extreme flatness of the landscape—the strong horizon, the essentially open and treeless terrain, the tension

between the crispness of edge and the warping of the land plane. The sky acts as an important backdrop for changing light and objects seen against it. This setting and the garden in which it is replicated display dramatic seasonal change at planting, harvest and in the starkness of winter. This is the eye-level carving of grain fields by machine; the asymmetrical slicing of edge, field and distance by huge tractors, plows and combines; field lines changing and disappearing on the horizon in late October light; the visual tension between the empty, harvested field of soybeans and the unpicked field of corn. The patterns are seldom symmetrical, but all are contained in the Jeffersonian square-mile grid.

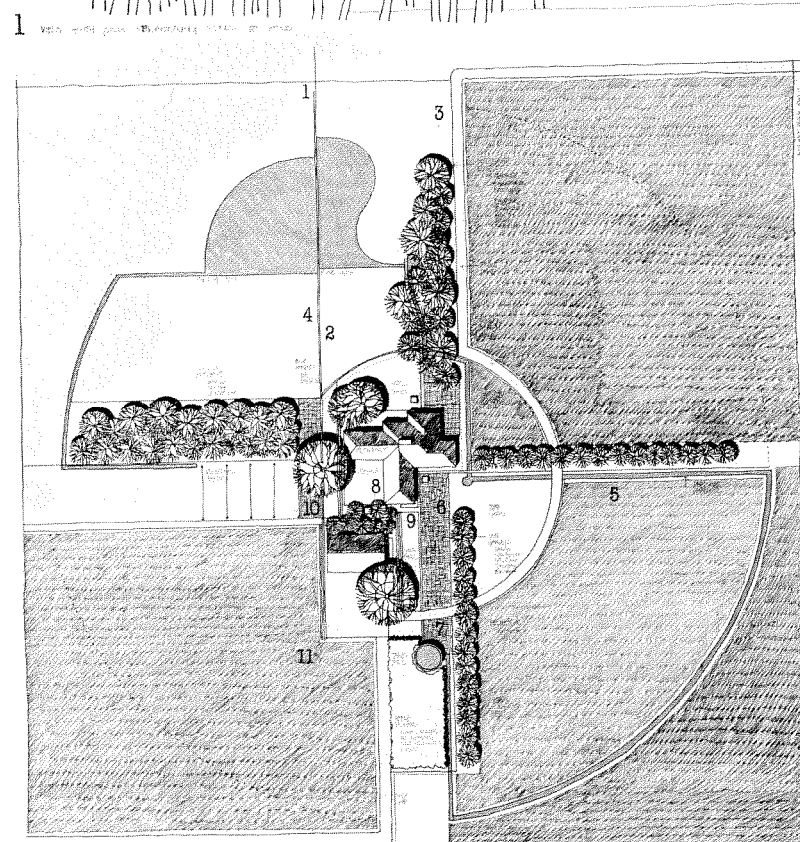
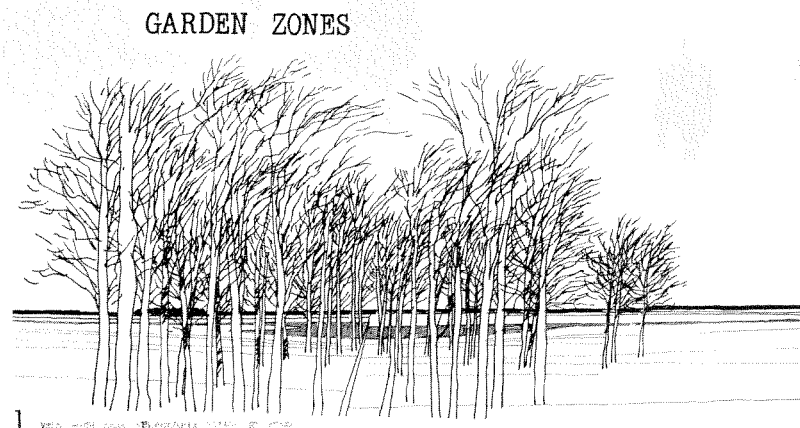
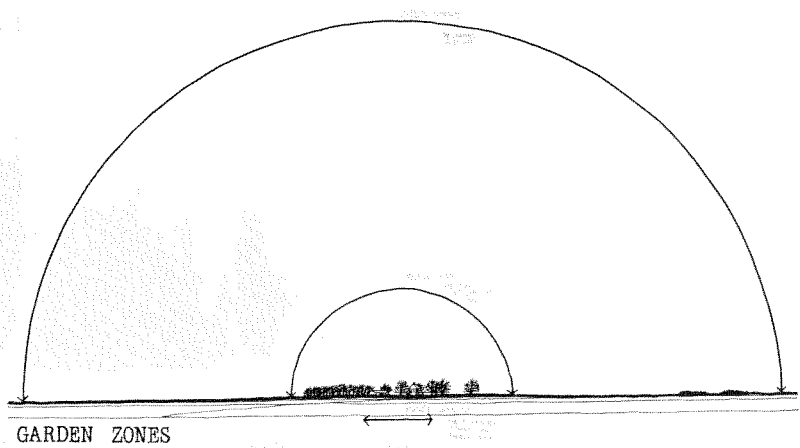
Across this regular/irregular pattern, the eye continually tracks along the field, road and ditch. The eye either follows the field line to the horizon, or it jumps from field line to field line to the horizon. Although the eye seeks built structures for scale, orientation and distance, the cumulative visual sense is of the entire scene's profound openness. This visual experience requires movement or shifting of viewpoint and direction to reveal the changing variety of pattern.

There are other important qualities present in the landscape of East Central Illinois: The richness and detail of winter trees, for example, seen against the sky. Ground fog of late fall shrouds the intermittent lines of hedge-rows. The aspect of age and its effects are revealed in trees and structures: the visual quality of growth originally controlled and confined, but now aging or escaping.

Another profound quality of the region is the directness and economy of its people, and its distinctive places and their materials. There is a congruence between the landscape and the independent, practical farmers who live there. The unadorned quality of plain concrete, metal grain bins and white clapboard siding bespeak an austerity and functional practicality that is visually direct and uncompromising—utilitarian in its economy, austere in its directness.

This garden's purpose is to reflect these characteristics as a visible, built expression, to be experienced through time, seasons and changing light. A change of climate such as the dusting and drifting of dry snow should reveal the region's winds and the variability of the continental climate. The tem-

porary flooding of the front lawn during and after a summer storm should invite barefoot wading. The garden focuses on and celebrates the landscape; it should demonstrate the power and qualities of this unique place. The design sources for this garden are in the landscape itself. The garden and the landscape are inseparable.



an EAST CENTRAL ILLINOIS GARDEN

