The Everyday
Informing the realm of routine practice through design

Kelvin Peter Webster

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Brian Katen
Chair

Jonathan Foote
Committee Member

Marcia Feuerstein
Committee Member

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When we think about the everyday, we tend to think of such words as familiar, ordinary, mundane, habitual, banal, and commonplace. Yet beyond these dictionary definitions lies a much deeper meaning and appreciation when understood as something that is experienced.

When it comes to informing and interpreting the everyday through design, contemporary theorists Michael De Certeau, Henri Lefebvre and Georges Perec to contemporary advocates of landscape architecture, such as Walter Hood and Laurie Olin, have provided a design oriented approach to the understanding on a subject of study that has long been neglected. There lies a relationship between the quotidian dimension and design that is attuned to experience of place and individual expression.

This thesis presents an approach to discovering and then interpreting the everyday with landscape architecture expressing such influences in the design of urban public places. My methodology involves the use of case studies to provide design guidelines that are translated from universal to site specific values.

By adapting the common vocabulary of landscape architecture through the realm of the routine practices, the city as a deep rooted, ephemeral, and evolving entity will transform the public realm into spaces that can occupy the desire to grow, change, and adapt.
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The very makings of everyday life are the objects around us, the places we inhabit, the habits we form, and the routines we perform (Blauvelt, 21). The everyday focuses on the “art’s of doing” concentrating not on urban design, but walking, not on language, but conversation. In the realm of routine practice, the success of a design can be measured by the way in which we engage our encounters with the everyday (Blauvelt, 18).

Understanding and experiencing the common vocabulary of the quotidian dimension provides an approach to design that connects city with nature. The conversation between the city as a breathing, changing, and evolving entity occupies the desire of nature to grow, change, and decay (Halprin, 16).

The everyday is revealed at the human scale. People are more likely to approach what is familiar and comfortable when given a relationship that they can easily understand. Edge conditions flank a wide range of relationships, touching on the physical and visual scales experienced in the urban context. Whether there is a change in surface material or a building façade, the success of an urban public plaza can be determined by the associations beginning with these edges.

Does the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary? In recent years, such artists as Jurgen Bey and Atelier Bow-Wow have taken the everyday occurrence and transformed it, revealing it in a different way. The camera has a similar effect as the mere idea of framing an ordinary view or object can heighten its level or significance. What is provided is a visual timeline of events, spaces, and objects recording the intense awareness of everyday life, yet in displaying the everyday events of the individual, they become unique and heightened in its appeal to others. The camera acts as an instrument for releasing the extraordinary within the ordinary.

The everyday event can occur in the interplay between the familiar and the new. We are constantly absorbing the new experience and consequently adapting to change. This is a continuous process that increases our everyday palette, but also changes the paths we take and the decisions we make. New and familiar spaces, objects, and messages are constantly changing our rhythms and flows within the private and public realms, continuously engaging the ground of daily life (Gehl, 31). When we acknowledge different materials and appreciate different spaces, we notice the un-noticed. Movement patterns and rhythms of the city can be characterized by anonymity, routine, and repetition, yet encounters with the unexpected, spontaneous, and unfamiliar also occur frequently.

Providing an everyday destination on varying levels of intensity, curiosity, and discovery will enhance participatory and sensory experiences, attuned to design not of controlled arrangement, but of exciting encounter (Halprin, 16).
The everyday has a deeper meaning rooted from the dictionary definition when applied to design. The dictionary definition of the everyday is stated as “encountered or used routinely or typically; ordinary. The everyday is a continuous process of adaptation to places, spaces, objects, and messages. The strength of the everyday is not revealed through the un-noticed, but through the occurrences of change that signify the un-noticed.

To investigate the everyday, one must be attuned to the many definitions beyond, yet still rooted from, such words as habitual, ordinary, mundane, commonplace, and familiar. The everyday is experiencing reality through the present condition, without past associations or future considerations. The quotidian responds through the ‘acts of doing’, such as walking and talking. When immersed in the present state of consciousness, one is experiencing only what is happening at those specific moments that are continuously moving through real time.

The following text refers to the everyday as a way of identifying events and places that are part of daily life. This term is used as a noun, which is convenient for expressing the idea of this thesis.
What is the relationship between the everyday and the design of urban public plazas? Many factors are involved in this inquiry. We must first understand what makes a public plaza successful, in the physical and social spectrum and in how it relates to the everyday. We have come to understand successful design for a plaza as a combination of elements that are arranged in such a fashion to establish social and physical harmony. A successful plaza allows one to lose their inhibitions and sense of exposure as individuals, and participate in a civic community. Such places blend different cultures, activities and events, into one thoughtful and powerful public display. A successful urban public plaza has the ability to absorb the fabric of the everyday into every aspect of the place. Public plazas are considered to be in a state of revival due to the tremendous appreciation for them. The pioneer for establishing criteria for successful public plazas was William Whyte. A sociologist in the 1960's and 70's, Whyte realized the disparity and decline of urban public place's use when he noticed that children were more attracted to the streets (Whyte, 10). The streets and sidewalks were places that held everyday opportunities, revealing the basic elements that constitute to the success of public plazas (Whyte, 12).
Public Plaza Analysis

My first critical study of the everyday was an examination of transformed space: How does our perception of the everyday change as spaces change through use. The farmer’s market at the City Hall plaza adjacent to King Street became the basis for developing my understanding of the role of perceptual adaptation to a space.

An important aspect of the everyday is spontaneity that derives from actions that are not controlled or expected. The “everyday” is synonymous with habits, rituals, and ordinary behaviors that are systematic and scheduled, yet the occurrence of chance encounters provide a balance that enhances the importance of the familiar.

Although the farmer’s market does not meet everyday, it still retains a familiarity that is characterized through its regularly scheduled occurrence. Accommodations of a farmer’s market enhancing the sense of place that can be enjoyed when the market is not currently the main activity.

The levels of everyday engagement with the urban plaza is directly related to the sidewalk. The market analysis sketch reveals the energy of the sidewalk carried through the edges between street and sidewalk, and sidewalk and plaza.
The relationship to the street is one of the most important aspects to plaza design, as it can either invite or repel; connect or break the two.”

(Whyte, 54)

Understanding possible critical and transitional points is important to effectively absorb the consistent everydayness of the sidewalk into the plaza (Marcus, 42). A sidewalk is defined by its mix of uses and opportunities collected along a park or plazas perimeter (Sellers, 4). This perimeter space holds a lot of character because it is open to flows of daily life that continuously engage the ground. It provides a function for the city as well as the plaza, as it can extend a presence beyond the limitations of a line (Gehl, 30).

Sidewalks offer the chance for viewing, listening, smelling, and tasting without the feeling of being part of a performance. This experience greatly enhances the appeal of a place because it is easily accessible or viewable from a distance. The sidewalk is the pedestrian street where people make subconscious decisions on where they stop and what they look at. This spontaneity directly relates to life and other people (Gehl, 30). This considerable amount of interest is observed in the ordinary, everyday events that take place on the street (Gehl, 31).

The commonality of the sidewalk and its successful attempts at providing everyday situations in context with its surroundings enables countless variations of passing journeys. Acting as an opportunity for the everyday to pass through, the sidewalk becomes an extension to the quotidian dimension, a gateway into the plaza and a means of either obvious or subtle exposure.
The Sidewalk

- Insightful about subtle qualities
- Sensible attachment to place
- Collective memory
- The uniqueness of place is actually consisting of the seemingly mundane daily routines.
- Private routines — public routines

In public places acknowledge the street?

Is scale valuable towards the everyday.
Out of scale can = intensification

Locals - familiar — everyday.
Tourists - unfamiliar - specialized.
Who are the spaces designed for?

The everyday

Who walks here?
Is there a separation between locals and
Tourists, everyday and specialized usage.

The everyday

The opening of many
Activities, celebrations,
Festivals that bring the
Immortals together.
Events that bring the everyday into the
Space of specialized roles these spaces usually occupy.
The transition from sidewalk to plaza is a crucial component towards the success of an urban public place. Critical points of entry usually occur at the corners, where intersections of activity present themselves. Different entrance conditions need to adjust to grade changes at the sidewalk.

The width and direction of the sidewalk can also determine the effectiveness of plaza invitation. Successful sidewalks can increase the interplay of everyday encounters with the plaza or park. A wide sidewalk acts a promenade, decreasing the degree of invitation with adjacent spaces. Narrow sidewalks can either be awkward or successful in bringing people into the space depending on the orientation of the sidewalk.
The edge condition has important implications relating to the physical and experiential qualities of a place both at a conscious and unconscious level. It defines points along a horizontal and vertical plane in order to associate different spaces. The edge between sidewalk and street is different than sidewalk and plaza, but what is important is how they meet. The edge between plaza and sidewalk can vary in intensity and scale from buildings to surface material changes. Edges are critical in allowing the continued movement between spaces, not only in a physical way, but also in an emotional and cognitive one (Seller, 3). The everyday does not see an edge as a given physical moment that occurs when two elements meet, but instead as moments of opportunity to connect or separate, reveal or conceal (Seller, 3). An edge is more than a distinction between crossing a line or a space of habitation. It denotes a continuous change through our journey within the everyday that can be abrupt, transitional, or disconnected from the familiar. Healthy edge conditions foster the everyday, strengthening the continuity of the urban experience (Sellers, 4), or they can diminish the opportunity for true intimacy between the space and the daily life of the city (Seller, 7). The everyday can be described as the settlement of the unfamiliar, a filtering process that alters the flow and movements of the familiar. The un-noticed is subtle presence intimately tying open space to the lives of those living and working it (Sellers, 4).
The Senses

The relationship between distance & intensity, closeness and warmth has a correlation with street width, sidewalk width and plaza success.
The quotidian relationship with design holds strong correlations that suggest how it can impact the success of a plaza. New spaces are constantly stimulating people into new habits (Whyte, 16). The stimulation is from direct and indirect engagements with the senses. An approach to increase these levels of engagement is to increase the comfort related to their surroundings, encouraging a more public display of individual expressiveness.

The everyday has a relationship with human comfort beyond the visual level. The sense of touch can identify how the body rests against material surface. The aural sense can provide a rhythm of symmetry removing outside distractions. The heightening of the senses concentrates heavily on what you have connected with, promoting direct encounters with parts of the everyday.

The filtering of this process is based on the experience within the range of immediate receptors.

**The Sensory Scale**

1. The sense of smell for weak odors is less than 39” and stronger smells travel a distance of 7 to 10 feet.
2. Sense of hearing for conversations is comfortable between 3 and 10 feet. At 100 feet you can hear lectures, but not engage in actual conversation. Over 100 feet it is hard to hear unless they are loud noises (Gehl, 66).
3. Social field of vision: One can see others and perceive that they are people at a distance between 1600’ to 3200’. At 325’ human individuals can be seen, but not what they are doing. Between 250’ and 325’ it begins to be possible to perceive a person’s sex, age and what they are doing. At 250’, people can be recognized by their clothes and the way they walk. At 100’, facial features begin to appear and people recently met can be recognized. Between 60’ and 80’, people can perceive feelings and moods of others. Between 3 and 10 feet, the other senses start to appear (Gehl, 67).
Sensory edge conditions offer the opportunities of directing people’s journeys. The sensory dimensions are based on distance and immediate receptors that can attract certain senses. To provide a successful urban public space, the five senses of touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste need to be recognized at the human scale.

Figure 2-11. Study models showing different paths of the individual journey and how they meet at certain points along the path, providing moments of encounter. (2006)
Case Studies: Dupont Circle

Dupont Circle, located at the intersection of eight streets in Washington, D.C., is a great example of both a destination and walk through park. The roads and sidewalks draw you into the center of the park, engaging the users directly within the 360 degree frame. Dupont Circle acts as a facilitator to the everyday habits, details, and subtleties. It is a place of constant energy and creativity emitting individual expressiveness.

Figure 3-1. Aerial view of Dupont Circle (2006)

Figure 3-2. A social harmony exists between performer and spectator, identified through the different stages of viewing and engaging. The flat site incorporating low hedges and tree canopies frame the views across the whole site, establishing a visual connection before you enter. The inside space acts as the stage for displaying, the in-between space is more intimately expressive, as the perimeter acts as a personal destination for observing. The further you are from the center, the more secluded and personal the space becomes. (2006)

Figure 3-3. The park plays with the views into and out of the site. Sitting on the steps of the fountain, you can see through the site and down the street corridors, extending the line of sight beyond the boundaries. (2006)
Dupont Circle Analysis
Dimensions of the Everyday

The investigations and analysis into the everyday and its context to design have allowed me to categorize the dimensions accordingly. The everyday is a process of transformation, continuously shaped through time and experience. The markings of change reference the familiar and allow the everyday to be classified through a filtering process. Providing these distinctions will enhance the understanding of the everyday experience between people and their environments.

The New

The beauty of the everyday is its ability to keep up with the pace of technology and culture, adapting and absorbing change and variation with the surroundings. The everyday functions through repeated adaptations of new layers consistently added and overlapped. The trace of the everyday blends into the background as it continuously keeps up with the pace of societies changing needs. The modern world is changing at a faster pace with the increase in technological advances. These advances are quickly being absorbed and adapted into our immediate surroundings, forming the backgrounds of our everyday lives (Blauvert, 15).

The Background

The everyday is predominantly attached to that which is familiar and understood, habitual and routine, mundane and ordinary, banal and commonplace. The accumulation of such layers forms the background dimension. As the new becomes familiar, it attains the background status, forming the basis of our everyday lives. Our daily surroundings become dependent on the objects and spaces that we understand and are aware of subconsciously. It assumes a spatial and temporal role, storing memories that are acknowledged and revealed through heightened experience.

The Hidden

The layers of the hidden dimension are deeply rooted in the subconscious state. Moments of chance encounter and spontaneity occur through points of contact between place, person, and object. The landscape is a catalyst supporting more than what we are familiar with. Levels reached from the hidden state are surfaced, tightening and enhancing the experience of the journey, making people aware of this acknowledged state.
Landscape architecture has taken a subtle approach to the thoughts surrounding the commonality of design, as the everyday has only recently been examined more critically in the profession with advocates such as Laurie Olin and Walter Hood.

Walter Hood’s outlook came from his everyday exploration of the commonality of individuals, asking, “How do you design a park for 16 specific user groups?” His approach explores, develops, and applies a design vocabulary based on human action and process, inviting participation and exploration through the quotidian dimension. He attempts to justify his questioning by designing an individual park for each of the specific users: a thief, inventor, musician, anarchist, workaholic, apathetic, addict, loner, lover, dreamer, cook, optimist, single parent, doubter, revolutionary, and bureaucrat. His methodology includes taking similar geometric forms that we are all commonly familiar with and arranging them in various ways to provide individual spaces. His approach to consistently favor familiar forms is considered even if they are not habitually experienced. The resulting ordinary, yet consequential landscapes immediately put inhabitants at ease (Rowe, 64). Walter Hood individually tackles the situation of the everyday and design, hinging on the aspects of merging and providing a collective space. Hood describes his approach to the everyday with certain principles of design that reflect the soul, the self, and the community at the human scale including:

1. Culture: a collective set of experiences in time
2. Space and Order: the arrangement or sequence of objects
3. The framework
4. The soul: Manipulating space to reinforce a standard “acceptable” series of use that can render a space lifeless
5. A transformation of site needs to reflect the people who use it
6. Inspiration comes from direct knowledge of a place and people (Hood, 5).

The everyday represents a functionally defined ribbon that can be transformed and adapted to changing needs of user groups and technology. Such needs are built into the landscape according to the quantity necessary to satisfy the users (Baglivo, 43). The series of graphs attempt to find relationships between users, time, and space.
Lafayette Square Analysis

A 1.5 acre site situated in Oakland, California, this 19th century urban common had severely been neglected. This prompted a renovation of the 145 year old wide open urban square that has been vigourously used by all (DelVecchio, 1).

Walter Hood’s proposal aims at accommodating the people who already use the park, including the homeless. He focuses on allowing the present, and not active social programs, to create poetic moments between the landscape and the people (Fraker, 2).

The new design provides multiple entries that encourage users to freely enter, and once inside the park, take in the surrounding city environment. The square became a collection of semi-transparent walls, allowing inhabitants to be conscious of others while still maintaining a sense of privacy (Marcus, 3).

Design Principles synthesized through the analysis of Lafayette Square in regards to the everyday include:

1. Arrangement of forms used in a simple juxtaposition
2. Displaying a variety of forms
3. Bending the symmetry
4. Inserting difference, yet retains visual integration
5. Diversity of edges
6. Understanding chance encounter as opposed to control
7. Layering new ideas on the old.

Figure 3-4. Aerial view of Lafayette Square. (Google Earth, 2006)
Laurie Olin has laid significant stress on the ‘ordinary’, with Peter Rowe explaining Olin’s interest in the everyday:

“Hanna/Olin’s interest in the ordinary seems to stem from a conviction that commonplace and everyday environments can bring us most directly into contact with the essence of many things and, in so doing, provide us with an intimacy with our existence and an excitement about the world we inhabit. Moreover, if we can render the realm of daily spatial experience in ordinary terms, both the meaningfulness and congeniality of our public life will be enhanced appreciatively. Far from being mundane and inconsequential, this spatial experience of the ordinary allows us a profound capacity to glimpse, simultaneously, familiar and unfamiliar, common and exceptional, as well as ordinary and extraordinary aspects of our lives.”

(Rowe, 60)

In making ordinary landscapes, Hanna/Olin frequently seem to naturalize, through design, what may otherwise be highly artificial and alien circumstances, thus bringing them conceptually down to earth to the familiar frame of common experience (Rowe, 61). For example, designing a wild flower meadow to blend with the surroundings can signify the strength between intended and un-noticed design. Instead of designing something radically different, he brings in the realm of the readily acceptable (Rowe, 61).

Olin aims at engaging the public realm in the assemblage and enlargement of things ordinary to render remarkable places of significance (Rowe, 63). He sees the public realm as a filtering process intent on reaching primarily a form of settlement where acts of display inspire to one’s best behavior.

The success of well-designed plazas allows people to bring in and engage within their own activities as opposed to pre-designed functions (Rowe, 63), demanding that the everyday reach into the public realm and connect individually. Hanna/Olin consistently favors familiar forms, or at least forms and compositional devices that might easily be called to mind, even if they are not habitually experienced. The resulting ordinary, yet consequential landscapes immediately put inhabitants at ease (Rowe, 64).

Although Olin speaks highly of the commonality of encounter, he still feels that in order to appreciate the ordinary it must be reshaped. This often results in a profound, yet still recognizable, transformation of common places within a landscape. There is a clear reinforcement of the process of transformation (Rowe, 64).
Bryant Park

Located behind New York’s Public Library, this six acre landmark urban park in midtown Manhattan displays the grandeur of history and geography.

The decline of the park, through the secluded and intimate dead end spaces ideal for drug dealing (Saltzman and Amateau, 13), diminished its once glorious outlook. Social scientist William Whyte was at the forefront of the park’s revival. Amongst other problems, he noted the park as being cut off from the street by the walls, fences, and shrubbery. “You can’t see in; you can’t see out. Only a few entry points” (Whyte, 58).

The completed restoration of the park in 1992 included increased visibility and circulation into and within the park, an increase in seating, and active concessions.

Bryant Park re-established itself as part of the language of the New York City palette, with the language of context and the relaxed vernacular of the neighborhood (Kay, 39).

“Bryant Park has the connotation of seeming to follow on effortlessly, and without apparent effect, while still being consequential, yet in an almost preordained, expected, and familiar manner. It follows its time and place and readily take up New York’s urban tradition in a manner that clearly belies their newness” (Rowe 65).

The park is less about function, and more about location. A city park, full of New York subtleties has become an oasis for the people of NYC (Bryant Park website, 4).

Design guidelines synthesized through the analysis of Bryant Park include:

1. Seeing into and through the park. Sidewalk provides invitation through visual stimulation.
2. Classical European garden symmetry is easy to read. Puts inhabitants at ease and portrays a safer and comfortable environment.
3. Clear geometry; clear connection; clear distinctions.
4. Buildings surrounding the park are significant in their architectural strength through scale, connection, and symbolism. Park compliments their presence.
5. Movable chairs give people ownership and control of how they interact with the space, however small it may be.
Located in Old Town, Alexandria, Virginia, the site is located along the King Street corridor between the Masonic temple and the Potomac River. The symbolic and monumental expressions are evident at the site of the city hall. King Street provides this connection as the main pedestrian route through old town, displaying a variety of characteristics that cater to diverse needs.

The plaza was complete in 1967 as part of the Gadsby Commercial Urban Renewal Project. The project intent, encompassing several blocks, was to create a commercial destination for Old Town.

The formality of the plaza is guided by the symbolism associated with city hall. Founded in 1749, Alexandria immediately designated the site for the market and city hall, establishing the strength of place.
LAND USE PLANS
The Site: ‘Market Square’

The investigations into the quotidian dimension and through the case study approach, have provided enough insight to suggest the re-design and re-activation of Market Square. The City Hall plaza has all the makings of a space lacking the everyday attributes of Old Town. My thesis proposes a method of informing the everyday towards the design of an urban public park.

The rhythm of King Street continues through the site, unintentionally discouraging the appeal to enter. The design does not acknowledge the approach at the human scale, prompting the pedestrian to continue their everyday rhythms along the sidewalk.
Site Analysis

Design guidelines from the site based on the research:

1. Initiating contact with plaza before pedestrians reach it. Bring the street back to the pedestrian.
2. Break the symmetry of the site with surprises.
3. Create an intersection, a moment in the journey where there is an acknowledged presence.
4. Provide a destination through the culmination of Old Town details and subtleties.
5. Lower the plaza to the level of the sidewalk. The space becomes a series of ramps. Reduce the effort to enter.
6. Don’t make the space predictable.
7. Provide a place of human proportions and a range of scales.

The use of familiar forms provides a common palette for which users can identify with initially, then experience the place at different scales.
Site Synthesis

The site analysis extracted crucial components that need to be addressed through the design.

**Destination**
Dispersed individuals converge at points along a journey. These points act as destinations for moments of scheduled and spontaneous encounters. The sidewalk and the City Hall supports reasons for stopping.

**Symmetry**
The geometry of the plaza is influenced by the symbolic expression of the City Hall and the grid of Old Town. The symmetry becomes a reference for marking the transformation.

**Scale**
The scale and arrangement of forms are in tune with the buildings surrounding the plaza. The verticality intimidates the space, removing the intimacy. There needs to be an emerging balance with the City Hall, providing strength to

**Comfort**
Although continuous, journeys still provide moments to pause. Comfort is an essential component to allowing someone to feel as if the space removes the sense of time. Creating places to rest and relax will ease tension and support.
Unearthing the Site History

A container is designed to hold smaller parts in a certain arrangement. The intention of a container in regards to the everyday is to capture and hold a collective set of memories that are revealed through a desired intention or within spontaneous encounters.

The history of a site becomes a container of overlapping layers through time, sequentially recording moments of experience, events, objects, and messages, woven underneath the surface. The old layers are adsorbed into the background, waiting to be revealed through a catalyst that changes the experience and understanding of a place and surrounding context.

Seeing through the eye of the beholder. Recording the ordinary can be interpreted to reveal the extraordinary.

Figure 5-1. The Farmers Market along the City Hall adjacent to Royal Street. (Photograph courtesy of the Alexandria Library, Local History/Special Collections. Wm. Smith Coll. ca. 1895)

Figure 5-2. View within the market stalls that were surrounded by the City Hall. (Photograph courtesy of the Alexandria Library, Local History/Special Collections. Wm. Smith Coll.)

Drawing showing the intensity of circulation around the City Hall prior to the plaza construction.
The Timeline of City Hall

Figure 5-3. One of the old building facades. (Photograph courtesy of the Alexandria Library, Local History/Special Collections. Cox Coll. 1965)

Drawing showing the potential for revealing the strengths of the past including circulation, scale, the farmers market, and the intimacy with City Hall.

Figure 5-4. One of the old building facades. (Photograph courtesy of the Alexandria Library, Local History/Special Collections. Cox Coll. 1965)

Figure 5-5. The Alexandria National Bank prominently sits at the intersection of Royal and King street, with the City Hall clock tower to the left. (Photograph courtesy of the Alexandria Library, Local History/Special Collections. Wm. Smith Coll.)

Figure 5-6. Another view from Royal Street. (Photograph courtesy of the Alexandria Library, Local History/Special Collections. Wm. Smith Coll. ca. 1961)
Sketch showing the activity between the grid of the old building footprint with the energy of the alley ways connecting the streets perpendicular and parallel to the City Hall.

Figure 5-7. Displaying the character of the street through the building facades. (Alexandria Library, Local History/Special Collections. Sampson Coll. ca. 1968)

Figure 5-8. The vertical layering of the new and old buildings. The City hall becomes the reference, signifying the strength and character of the old structures. (Alexandria Library, Local History/Special Collections. Creegan Coll. ca. 1962)
Figure 5-9. Photomontage of the old buildings adjacent to King Street.

Figure 5-10. Photomontage of the plaza as it is today. (2006)
Photographs capture moments of the everyday that have disappeared, continuing the presence of the everyday through moments of memory. Eugene Atget (1856-1927) gave permanent reality through his photographs. He captured the miracle of daily reality, making the medium speak for itself in a superb rendering of materials, textures, surfaces, and details. For him, the camera was an instrument for expressing his intense awareness of everyday life. The everyday can be captured in frames, one overlapping the other to form a continuous yet transparent timeline of events, spaces, objects that provide a sequential display of uniqueness to one's individuality. Photos leave a record of the everyday, relying on other people's memories to continue to capture and re-emerge the experiences through different interpretations.
Framing Views

Photograph angles provide a frame work consistent in establishing views. These views become moments along a journey.

Superimposing the angles above the footprint of the old buildings suggesting a series of walls that lead views in certain directions around the site. Framing the ordinary transforms its appeal to invite curiosity.

Showing photographs of the site history through the angles. The concentration of angles imply the relationship between people and City Hall as a center of activity.
Early design sketches looking at the arrangement of forms and how they filter cohesively through the site. Providing edges that transform into different conditions. Brick patterns are seen as an aesthetic surface mural, yet changes to become boundaries for market stalls.

Looking at vertical and horizontal circulation. Bridging the intimacy of the sidewalk with the intimidating presence of the City Hall.

Early design of the walls and plantings, hierarchy of invitation and certain points of entrance into the plaza.
Concept Design

Design Guidelines:

1. Staggered views into site are created through the arrangement of trees, constantly framing different perceptions.

2. Sidewalks have material changes acknowledging the edge conditions present.

3. Variety through the interplay of hard and soft palettes.

4. Pedestrian street capturing the heart of Old Town, revealing the history of the intimacy between the City Hall and the farmer's market.

5. Complementing the scale of monumental City Hall through formal vegetation arrangement.

6. Informing and providing the opportunity for interaction. Individuals adapt through their own journey of the everyday.

Walls emerge from the ground, pulling the history of the site above the surface, creating raised, angled terraces.

Walls overlap and taper down towards each other, opening up views continuously through the site.

Walls emerge from the ground, pulling the history of the site above the surface, creating raised, angled terraces.
Design Development

The sequence of walls vary in height, shape, and level, offering the chance for discovery. Undulating across the site, these waves depict the connection between land and water, Old Town and the Potomac River.

Light from the parking garage below emits a glow, providing shadows and reflection upon the walls.

“What delights us is finding a violation of symmetry.”
(Author unknown)

“In public space its about inserting difference.”
(Hood, “Metropolis Magazine” 2)

The walls provide the grid of the design, shifted slightly to encourage people to notice. The initial layout allows people to quickly understand the geometry, inviting their senses inside. Once inside, details and subtleties appear in varying degrees of comprehension through the walls, level changes, material changes, and views. The curiosity of the site is heightened, creating an impression on the individuals.

The series of seating sketches reveals the idea of scratching away the surface layer to release the buildup of the background. The aspects of the history can be interpreted in a contemporary manner, illustrating a significance that is not necessarily understood, but continuously promoting awareness and appreciation for the new.

Sketches showing the harmony between nature and the built forms.
Establishing a hierarchy of importance. Steel strip embedded into the surface, then wrapping over the granite stone wall, continuing its path.

Walls provide edge conditions at a site and material scale. The placement of aquia sandstone marks the footprint of the old buildings.

The strength of the everyday is not revealed through the stages of the un-noticed, but through the occurrences of change that signify the un-noticed.

The structure of the design is based on a series of layers laid on top of each other. A hierarchy of layers determines the strength and significance of each and how they absorb together to create a powerful public display of the past and present condition of the everyday site, neighborhood, and city scales (Sellers, 21).
Applying The Layers of Design

The next series of drawings represent the individual layers that are associated with the dimensions of the everyday. The new, background and hidden layers are individually revealed in the site through the case study, research, and historical investigations.

The everyday is informed through these layers, characterizing the components necessary to discover the qualities of the site.

Inserting difference: “Instead of erasing everything, to begin to layer new ideas on the old” (Hood, 5). The new layer will be absorbed into the everyday. The shifted geometry of the walls gives the site a new symmetry.

Aldo Van Eyck’s Sculpture Pavilion plays on the theme of walls on a grid. The curved walls and breaks strengthen the grid.

Marking the verticality of the old buildings with the City Hall. Defining the once lost edge condition.

The old building footprint: The background to the present everyday condition of the site is unearthed, exposing the markings of history. The foundation stones are referenced through the corners of each building, leaving a new footprint.
The two levels of parking below are disconnected from the plaza. The hidden layers below the surface need to be incorporated to show the depth of the site. This is a process of peeling off the surface.

The layer of vegetation: The arrangement of the soft landscape ties the design together, showing the hierarchy of invitation at the different point of entrance into the site. The southeast corner is at the lowest grade, requiring a different means of engaging the site through the sidewalk. The trees become an extension of the sidewalk, engaging the pedestrian and forcing the acknowledgment of their presence.
The layering of wall, column, old building footprint, and vegetation grids in sequence with the categorized dimensions of the everyday encourages a new symmetry to emerge.

The history of the site has influences on how the plaza can be a successful place. The energy of the history needs to surface onto the plaza. The motion of turning over and revealing the transformation and consequent adaptation.

Directions of movement into and through the plaza at a visual and physical level are offered through the hierarchy of layering systems.
The City Hall building
Aquia Sandstone
Granite stone walls and surface strips
Stone laid vertically
Cobblestone strips
Alexandria Heritage brick pavers
Zelcova serrata
Crape Myrtle
Grass
Stainless steel display sculptures
Long wooden bench
Parking garage entrance
Stairwell into parking garage

King Street
Royal Street
Fairfax Street
Wall Elevation References

A0
B0
C0
D0
E0
F0
G0
H0
I0
J0
K0
L0
A1
B1
C1
D1
E1
F1
G1
H1
I1
J1
K1
L1

King Street
The series of wall elevations cater to the variety and diversity of place, accommodating to transformation, adaptation, and discovery. They provide the opportunity to find the individual niche.
The significance of the everyday lies in its reality, yet by studying it, it becomes a reference to the real, a depiction of the ordinary, and an illusion to the common place (Blauvelt, 35). This very act of responding to the everyday reveals its artificiality. Design however provides the opportunity to create places that are harmonious and respond to the everyday without sacrificing innovation, inventiveness, novelty, or newness. We as landscape architects are able to offer expressive compositions for routine practices (Blauvelt, 37).
Bibliography


Kelvin Peter Webster

Born: 1980, Birmingham, England

Education

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
College of Architecture and Urban Studies
Department of Landscape Architecture, Alexandria, Virginia
Masters of Landscape Architecture
ASLA Merit Award, 2006

University of Central England, Birmingham, England
Bachelor of Arts Undergraduate degree in Landscape Architecture
2002

Pershore College of Horticulture
BTEC National Certificate in Horticulture
1999

Professional Experience

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Graduate Teaching Assistant, Alexandria, Virginia, responsible for wood shop operations

Private Clients
Work includes building field stone walls, stone patios, and water features