

Moving Landscape Architecture into the Digital World: A Practical Approach

MADIS PIHLAK

Madis Pihlak is Associate Professor
of Landscape Architecture and
Architecture in the Department
of Landscape Architecture at the
Pennsylvania State University, 210 Eng
Unit D, Penn State, University Park,
PA 16801, United States of America.
Email: mxp51@psu.edu

KEY WORDS

Digital design media
Design computing courses
Computers
Software

THE INFORMATION AGE of the 1980s and 1990s has been challenging for landscape architects and designers. As the production of drawings as designed artefacts is challenged by the notion of drawings as changeable, information-rich data sources, some design professions have simply tried to avoid innovative digital technology. The presentation addresses this issue of non-innovative use of information technology and design computing positively. Many landscape architects still equate design computing with legacy, computer-aided drafting software from the 1960s and 1970s. Modern design computing software, such as Vectorworks Landmark, form • Z, Maya and SketchUp, are quite elegant design tools when compared to the legacy software packages.

The presentation focuses on the first steps any landscape architect or student of landscape architecture could take to integrate design computing fully into professional practice or any landscape architecture school. This will serve as an entry into the digital world of converging technologies. The United States federal government, through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS), provides extensive digital information for the entire country at a reasonable level of detail. Other federal government initiatives, such as Internet 2, will be searching for content to use with the 1000-times faster distribution speed. High definition television (HDTV), in its digital incarnation, will also be searching for digital content. Landscape architecture and design could provide some of the digital content.

The relatively brief history of the so-called digital revolution in the environmental design arts has recently stalled in the landscape architecture and design fields. The non-expressive visual quality of the lowest common denominator 'industry standard' graphic drawing products from software programs like AutoCAD 2004 and ArcGIS 8.3, provide ample evidence of the lack of visual and emotive qualities of the output. The presentation focuses on the highly expressive graphic quality of true digital output from software products such as Vectorworks Landmark, Sketchup and Alias Maya.

According to a design computing software company vice-president and a United States-registered landscape architect, landscape architecture is the least advanced environmental design profession in terms of design computing. The presentation discusses academic experimentation with design computing pedagogy. What are the barriers for landscape architects in academia and practice to the adoption and advancement of design computing?