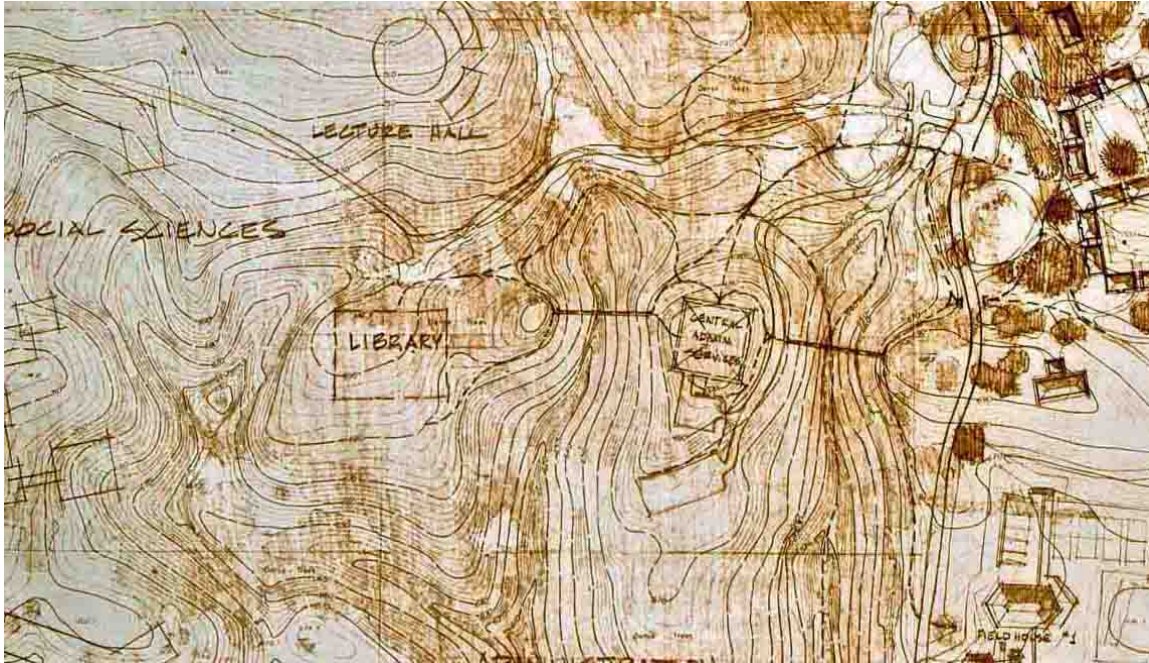


In the Ecotone

The UC Santa Cruz Campus

Part 2



James Clifford



“Gentle be the Hand...”

The person most responsible for shaping the built environment at UCSC was Thomas Dolliver Church. In the words of founding chancellor, Dean McHenry: “Tommy Church, probably more than any other single person off campus, has guided this campus in the way it's going and the use of land and the siting of buildings and all, and he's one of the authentic geniuses.” Church was Consulting Landscape Architect for the university when it opened in 1965. He served in that function during the dramatic first fifteen years of construction when seven colleges and a dozen large buildings appeared among the redwoods. The distinctive form of the new university was established under his guidance.

Church (“Tommy” to all who knew him) was not alone. He worked with a team of distinguished Bay Area architects, a group that included William Wurster, Theodore Bernardi, John Carl Warnecke, Stephen Allen, and the environmental designer Lawrence Halprin. Academic planners, notably Clark Kerr, Dean McHenry, and key members of the Board of Regents, fell under Church’s sway. Jack Wagstaff, UCSC’s first Campus Architect, who coordinated all the initial building projects, was a close associate. And successive Campus Architects, especially Frank Zwart and currently John Barnes, have respected, while adapting, the Church vision.

It is unusual and highly significant that a landscape architect played so influential a role. More commonly, architecture takes the lead, with landscaping considered an embellishment or mitigation. For Church, topography and flora were primary elements in any construction scheme. He articulated his vision for UCSC in a short memo just as the

first Long Range Development Plan was being formulated. “Random Notes on the Site” (1962) crystalized the planning group’s approach. Jack Wagstaff later called it an “aesthetic charter.” The text was sent to the UC Regents; it guided the LRDP and was included in packets supplied to all executive architects during the first decades of campus building.

When I first read Church’s memo—a thoroughly down-to-earth vision, composed, its author whimsically noted, on a transcontinental flight at 33,000 feet—I felt we were very lucky to have had this kind of guidance. No other UC campus has collaborated so sensitively with its physical setting, and some have done considerable damage. Church’s “aesthetic charter,” reproduced below, still inspires.

When he took on the Santa Cruz project Church was recognized as the primary creator of a Northern California approach to landscape gardening. Avoiding formal preconceptions and heavy construction, he preserved as much as possible a given site’s contours and established trees. In the 1930s and 1940s, Church and William Wurster perfected the California ranch house and landscape style that became nationally visible in the pages of *Sunset Magazine*. (Pasatiempo Estates in Santa Cruz is an early example of their collaboration.) No doubt Tommy Church was particularly influential among the UC Regents because he had designed so many of their gardens.

As he conceived it, a garden was a space between nature and culture, reducible to neither. It was more than a recreational zone, a place to admire. In 1926-27, fresh out of college, Church undertook a study trip to Italy and southern Spain. There he studied gardens that

were adapted to a warm climate, functioning as “rooms” in an architecture that organized an indoor-outdoor flow. He would later translate this approach to the California ranch house, with its sliding glass doors, patio, and swimming pool. In his early report, “A study of Mediterranean Gardens and their Adaptability of California Conditions” (McHenry Library Special Collections) Church wrote: “Gardens are the transition from the formality of the house to the natural surroundings, and the transition is so subtle and the intimacy so complete that one scarcely notices the change.”

The sense of intimacy between natural surroundings and architectural forms that Church found in Mediterranean houses would find expression on a new scale at the university to be built on a forested Santa Cruz hilltop. The deep ravines and towering trees that defined the former Cowell Ranch property were not to be smoothed over or removed, but conceived as integral to the living-working spaces to be created. Church did not conceive of the site as a “natural” place, as so many others did. The university, to him, would be more like vast garden—a place sensitively linking nature and culture. His 1962 memo urged UCSC’s architects not to compete with the dramatic site (which would win, in any event). Instead, they should consider the existing forms, rhythms, and textures to be architectural elements.

A project of this size would necessarily transform the site, but it must do so with respect. In his early report on Mediterranean gardens Church invoked the principles of “sympathy” and “scale” that would guide UCSC’s development. “In practice, sympathy to surroundings, the most important asset to any garden, was obtained in many ways. The most important bond was scale.” Architecture must never overwhelm its surroundings. In the first

decades of university construction, no building would be higher than two thirds of the largest nearby redwood. Extensive ground clearing and pretentious buildings were ruled out.

Church, who owned a house in nearby Scotts Valley, had walked extensively on the Cowell Ranch. Jack Wagstaff recalled the terrain:

The Santa Cruz campus is composed of knolls and arroyos, and then more knolls, and the buildable sites are in the minority, really, because the central part of the campus is so rugged. The sites had to be pretty carefully selected, and one knoll relating to the next, you know, and those knolls in turn related to the functions of what ever went on. I remember Tommy and I wandering around one foggy, wet day and “discovering” where the Library was to be sited...on a beautiful knoll within a bowl.

It 's hard to imagine, today, what the campus was like without roads, bridges, or paved paths. How could a large university fit inside a dense forest on rugged terrain? Many new structures would have to find their footing on knolls and ridges that sloped sharply downhill on several sides. (Walk out of any college today and notice how quickly the land drops.)

Simply describing the topography would be a challenge--with limited help from aerial photography, given the forest cover. Only close observation and surveying could do the job. A topographic map from the first years of construction gives a sense of the terrain. Cowell College is visible at the upper right. Central Administrative Services (since re-named Hahn) occupies a knoll connected by two footbridges (one never built). The Library and Science Hill (with space marked for a clock tower) are undeveloped sites .



If the steep terrain wasn't enough, the subterranean campus provided more problems. Sterling Atkinson, an engineering geologist, reported to the architectural team in 1963. Marble Formations (Crystalline Limestone)

Because marbles are relatively soluble, the rock dissolves along bedding, joint and fault planes and is carried off in solution in the ground water, leaving voids or caves in the rock mass. Because of the lack of a significant picture of the rock structure, no prediction of the location of the caves can be made. However, the geologic history of the marbles suggests that random cavitation should be expected. Such cavities can assume a wide variety of shapes and dimensions. Many of the cavities that are evident on the site are large enough for a man to enter. Numerous topographic depressions are located throughout the site which for the most part have no drainage outlets yet are dry. It is suspected that these depressions represent subsurface marble which to some unknown degree is cavernous.

The final words "to some unknown degree...cavernous" cannot have been reassuring.

The earliest plans for the university placed it in the meadow. Construction there would probably have been simpler and less expensive, with shorter sewer and utilities lines and fewer bridges. Initial sketches show a rather conventional campus, with clustered buildings, esplanades, and a bell or clock tower. (This "vertical architectural element," deemed essential for a proper campus, survived in subsequent plans for a university among the trees, until Church vetoed it.) The City of Santa Cruz, which lobbied aggressively to attract the new UC campus, had proposed a university sited in the Cowell Ranch fields, accompanied by residential and commercial developments. UCSC was conceived as an outgrowth of the urban structure.

Thomas Church argued against building in the meadow. This change, perhaps the crucial choice defining the campus, was quickly accepted by the planning team, and after some arguments about added cost the Regents agreed. The whole operation moved uphill, into the ecotone and the forest. Church pointed out that since magnificent trees were abundant there, landscaping expenses could be reduced. Open fields would preserve the feeling of a ranch and were a dramatic feature of the site. The views from the tree line were, of course, incomparable. Aesthetic considerations (along with a sweet financial deal offered by the Cowell Foundation) had in fact played a pivotal role in the Regents' selection of Santa Cruz for the new campus.

But spectacular views were not Church's main concern. He was more inspired by the chance to build sensitively in a uniquely striking and complex environment. Abstract plans were of no use here; specific accommodations to the site, immediate relationships of scale and form, had to prevail. Church's 1962 memo recognized that constructing a university among the redwoods and ravines would require a special architectural sensibility.

THOMAS D. CHURCH AND ASSOCIATES
L A N D S C A P E A R C H I T E C T S
402 JACKSON STREET SAN FRANCISCO 11 DOUGLAS 2-8465

JUNE MEEHAN
JACK G. STAFFORD

Mr. J. E. Wagstaff
721 University Hall
University of California
Berkeley, Calif.

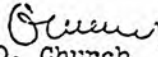
Re: Santa Cruz

Dear Jack:

The enclosed notes were written in the plane
coming home. If it makes no sense, blame it on
the 33,000 feet we had to fly to get over a storm.

I'm looking forward to our next meeting.

Sincerely,


Thomas D. Church

TDC/hp

Encl: (1)
cc & encl to Mr. John Carl Warnecke

NOV 1 1962

THOMAS D. CHURCH AND ASSOCIATES
L A N D S C A P E A R C H I T E C T S
402 JACKSON STREET SAN FRANCISCO 11 DOUGLAS 2-8455

JUNE MEEHAN
JACK C. STAFFORD

10-29-62

University of California at Santa Cruz

Random Notes on the Site:

Among all the natural features which make the site both provocative and difficult, it is the size of the redwood groves which must concern us the most. These towers of trees are "out-scale" and more related to the rugged knolls and deep ravines than they are to an academic landscape. They are, therefore, to be thought of less as trees to enhance, screen and shelter buildings (although this they will do), but more as great vertical elements of the topography having form, mass and density against which to compose the architecture. The problem is more like building at the foot of cliffs or in the Pinnacles National Monument.

To accept them as trees in the normal building-landscape relationship would be a miscalculation of their potential in the grand design. Trees, as we have known them, are there in the oaks, madrones, pines and bays.

This influence of the great trees on the site plan and the architecture and the search for form to compliment them becomes an immediate challenge to the architects, for I know no past examples where a comparable site and program have been successfully

University of California at Santa Cruz
Random Notes on the Site (continued)

solved. (The forest at Ankor Vat came after the fact). To be influenced by current examples of building in the Redwoods (the Sequoia cabin, the ski hut, Camp Curry, Bohemian Grove) might lead into pleasant but innocuous solutions suitable only for lesser and more sentimental projects.

Further, it is important to think clearly and with imagination before accepting the standards and clichés of modern monumental, or normal campus, building types. An architecture here must grow out of the problems, restrictions and potentialities of the site. Usual relationships of building groups in a formal pattern may violate the topography beyond repair. Grading and reforming of the land there will be, but kept to a minimum. Tree-clearing will be inevitable, not because the architecture forces it, but because the ultimate landscape demands it. There will be no indiscriminate removal of major redwood groves to accommodate preconceived architectural schemes. To a greater extent than any of us have faced heretofore, the buildings are less important in the visual composition than the trees. Instead of remaking the land, the land must remake our standard conceptions of building and plaza and parking lot.

The past is not without monumental examples of men having built with a full realization of the grandeur of his site and a knowledge of how to build to enhance or glorify it, as well as meet a specific program. The pyramids, the Greek temples, medieval castles, Tibetan monasteries and gothic spires attest to this.

University of California at Santa Cruz
Random Notes on the Site (continued)

Reverse examples are also plentiful. If the Victor Emanuel Monument is too obvious, consider the man who dared plunge the Campanile into the Piazza San Marco. Contrast the serenity of the domed cyclotron in the Berkeley hills to some of the more recent buildings being erected there. Look what happened to the Golden Triangle in Pittsburg -- one of the most talked of sites in the country ten years ago. How could anyone have crowded Wright's Museum into a block of dull buildings when light and air and trees were just across the street? The University of Mexico may be controversial but courage was not lacking.

It would be foolish and highly undesirable to think that a new startling architecture will appear here. Any attempt of a designer to compete in grandeur with this site is doomed to failure. Since the site is going to win, in any case, it's possible that the twin theories of delicate contrast and protective coloring are most likely to succeed. Hence color and texture will be as important as form. The strong horizontal, the dome, the gable may all find their place here. Bridges, wide cantilevers, sudden departures from the rectangular plan -- cliches on a flat site -- will become logical outgrowths of the siting problems.

It must be kept in mind, to avoid future recrimination, that one of the inevitable results of building in a forest is that as man enters, nature recedes. Romantics must be warned that covers of fern, johnny jump-ups and shooting stars prefer to disappear

University of California at Santa Cruz
Random Notes on the Site (continued)

rather than face our advanced civilization. With the exception of areas especially preserved in their natural state the general effect in the main campus areas must be one of sensitive collaboration between the designer and this spectacular environment with the intent that neither shall impose unduly upon the other. The wall to wall forest carpet will disappear and in its place must come -- not the asphalt jungle, not the standard campus we have always known, not an automobile under every redwood -- but a vast area in which to live and study. It must be magnificent in conception, daring and forthright in its architecture -- but gentle be the hand it lays upon the land.

TDC/hp













































