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HOMES

Sunday, August 22, 2004

[E-mail this story to a friend](#)**Designing for future generations**

By TOM ATWELL, Portland Press Herald Writer

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Sunday Chat is a weekly conversation with Maine people pursuing pastimes and vocations with unusual energy, resourcefulness and ingenuity.

Terry DeWan believes that when you work on a piece of land, whatever you do is going to affect that land not only for your lifetime, but for generations that follow you.

He takes that attitude with his own life as well as the land on which he works.

In his profession he makes an impact in designs for an interpretive improvement to the Kancamagus Highway, for the reuse of the Maine State Prison in Thomaston, for improvements to Route 1 in Camden and hundreds of other projects. But he also is a lecturer in public art, a teacher in landscape courses for the Garden Club Federation of Maine, active in state and national boards, an authority on the ethics of photo simulation technology and more.

He and his wife have four children ages 26 to 18 - a photographer daughter in Chicago, a son who works for Apple Computer in California, a daughter studying music at the University of Southern Maine and a daughter taking a year off after high school to work in Guatemala before going to school at Syracuse.

He was born in Illinois, moved to New Jersey in the sixth grade, and went to college at State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University, graduating in 1968. He worked for a landscape architect in Rye, N.Y., for a year, decided he needed more practical experience, so went to Helena, Mont., as a Vista volunteer working with off-reservation Indians, affordable housing and Model Cities projects and a home for unwed mothers. As a declared conscientious objector he got a draft-lottery number of 46, and found



Staff photo by Gordon Chibroski
Terry DeWan is the principal in Terrence J. DeWan & Associates, a landscape architecture and planning firm in Yarmouth.

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He worked for two years in West Philadelphia. In addition to doing planning for communities, he worked with a group called the Graffiti Alternative Workshop and helped give art lessons to inner-city youth.

He came to Maine partly because his wife is a weaver and spinner and liked the lively craft community here. He got a job with Richard Berman, bought a house the next day and moved a couple of weeks later.

He now is the principal in Terrence J. DeWan & Associates, a landscape architecture and planning firm in Yarmouth.

Q: What is landscape architecture? Do you learn to design buildings first and then specialize in landscapes, or is it its own field?

A: It's not a specialty of architecture. It's its own profession, and has been a profession for 100 years now. One of its earliest and most notable practitioners was Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed Central Park and was very influential in a lot of the park-planning projects in most major cities in the United States and who did a lot of work in Maine.

And Apteryx Forehand was another early landscape architect who had an office up on Mount Desert Island. Right now the professional degree programs throughout the United States and Canada are generally five-year programs at an undergraduate level. You take a wide variety of courses with an emphasis in both art and science. Our professional definition calls it an art and a science.

Q: When did you decide this was what you wanted to do?

A: I was a nature counselor at a Boy Scout camp and always had a love of the outdoors and thought forestry would be a natural extension of that, and when I got to the forestry school my adviser said I probably could make better use of my talents by doing something else. So I just looked around, and then I walked by the Landscape Architecture Department one day, and they were doing some amazing drawings and creating places that were really appealing to me.

Q: You've been doing this for more than 30 years, with hundreds of projects. Are there one or two favorites?

A: One of my favorites was the interpretive master plan at the White Mountain National Forest. The Forest Service put out a request for proposals nationally for someone to help them design a series of 17 or 20 stops along the Kancamagus Highway. If you know the Kanc, it's a wonderful roadway, and the Forest Service had been designing an interpretive plan for years. They needed to let the public know who the Forest Service is, that they are not a national park or a state forest, but their own entity. They had identified these 20 different places along the Kanc where they wanted the story to be told.

We were awarded the contract to lead a team of museum design

professionals, interpretive specialists, writers, public relations people, traffic engineers, wildlife biologists, who worked with an equally amazing group of Forest Service people that developed the interpretive plan.

The plan resulted in 80 different interpretive signs, two visitor centers on either end, a children's guide to the Kancamagus Highway, a script for an audiotape that you can plug into your car, some new trails and overlooks, picnic areas, a demonstration forest and it went on and on.

Much to the Forest Service's credit they have actually taken this plan and implemented it. You can drive out there today and find that a lot of the signs have been built, several of the overlooks have been built, they are working on trails, they have one of the visitor centers that was under construction the last time we were there.

The other project I like to talk about is the master plan we did for the city of Portland for trail connections throughout the city. It ultimately led to the creation of Portland Trails. When we made the presentation to the City Council a group of wonderfully dedicated people in the audience said this is a great plan and we have to do something to make sure that this is championed. Alix Hopkins coming on as director and a list of people too long to mention, Tom Jewell for example, formed this to develop trails, work with other nonprofits, with developers, the city and the schools.

Q: In addition to your profession, you speak at landscape courses for the garden club, work with Congress for New Urbanism, speak on the ethics of photo simulation technology. How do you find the time?

A: You haven't even heard of some of my other things. I'm also very involved in the Councils of Landscape Architecture Registration Board, on the Maine State Board of the Licensure of Landscape Architects and Interior Designers and do an awful lot of work with the national organization.

I help with strategic planning, I helped write and grade the examination, I've just been appointed to the Landscape Architects accreditation Board, which helps schools in the United States and Canada get accredited. The profession is a fascinating one. What you do this year may be totally different from what you do in five years.

The use of photo simulation, for example, is an area of practice that the public is demanding. With computers, they need to be shown exactly what development projects will look like. It's not enough just to show the so-called pretty picture anymore. We're doing this right now on the Route 1 improvements up in Camden.

We take existing digital photos and in Photoshop we are adding new sidewalks, curbing, removing some trees. People can look at that and judge the plans. People have become very savvy. They know how to ask the right questions and how to get involved,

how to prod and make their voices heard. And I must say that on DOT's part they have become very responsive, going out of their way to work with local communities. So, how do I do it? Like any small businessman, I just work and work and squeeze in time with family and friends.

Q: You recently gave a lecture on public art through the ages. How does that relate?

A: One of my real passions is photographing works of art in the landscape. And I would love to see more art in public places in Maine, and I was working with the Olmsted Alliance in developing topics for their annual presentation. I had been pushing this whole notion of public art in the landscape or the public landscape as public art, and I was one of the speakers.

They also had Eloise Damrosch, public art director for Portland, Ore., on what the other Portland is doing. It's good to compare cities around the country and look at what public art can do to the landscape.

Q: Some practical advice. Someone has bought a brand new house, a blank slate. What do you advise?

A: Live with it for a while and get to know the land, get to know the shadow patterns and how the ground smells in the morning and where the wind patterns are and get a sense of what your long-term and shorter goals are.

If you wanted to work with a landscape architect we'd have the client couple - and I have to stress that, each half of the equation - fill out a five- or six-page form that asks about their goals, their pastimes, maintenance loves, the colors they like, if they are allergic to bees, all the things that go into deciding what to do with the land.

We counsel people that you can't do it all at once. The beauty of having a long-term idea of what you want to do is so you only do things once. You don't put in a walkway and find out two years later you wish you had installed a conduit for lighting under the walkway. With a master plan you would have thought of all the above-ground and below-ground layers that go in the landscape

Q: This is your soapbox. What do you want to tell the world?

A: Well, let's look at the Thomaston Prison project. One of the messages in going to Thomaston was to look at this available site as an opportunity. We say this to all of our clients. You are given a responsibility to be stewards of the property, of the land. You are going to be here for a finite period, but your actions are going to be carried on for many, many lifetimes beyond you, and you have to think long-term.

What is the best use of this site and how is it going to affect the way people regard your property, your community, your neighborhood? You then have to ask what are the best uses of this land and who should be making these decisions?

We were one of four design firms asked to come up with use plans for the prison site, and the town wisely decided as a result of looking at these plans that this is an opportunity that the townspeople should do something with even though it may not be done in the next generation. People are going to see an amazing transformation in that town because of the actions of the people in 2004.

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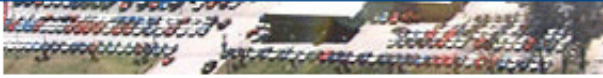
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