

[COMMONPLACE LECTURES]

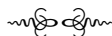
Against Nostalgia

*The Roots of a New Direction
for Architecture and Planning
in Oregon*



A LECTURE BY
Randy Gragg

commonplace lectures : connecting ideas and communities



commonplace (*L. locus communis*) : a general theme
or argument applicable to many particular cases;
a common or ordinary topic.

MATTHEW STADLER

At Liberty: A Town's History and a Theater's Story,
Astoria, the Liberty Theater, February 24, 2006

DONALD SNOW

'Round the Next Bend: Pendleton, Walla Walla, and the
Transformation of the Rural West,
Pendleton, Hamley's Western Store, May 19, 2006

MOTT GREENE

The Lab and the Flag:
Science, Democracy, and a New Worldview
Portland, Jean Vollum Natural Capital Center, October 20, 2006

RANDY GRAGG

Against Nostalgia: The Roots of a New Direction for
Architecture and Planning in Oregon
Portland, Temple Beth Israel, February 24, 2007

*Against Nostalgia: The Roots of a New Direction for
Architecture and Planning in Oregon by Randy Gragg.*
A lecture given at Temple Beth Israel in Portland,
Oregon, on February 24, 2007.



IN 1990, RABBI EMANUEL ROSE and the board here at Temple Beth Israel proposed a 5,600-square-foot addition to this building, designed in 1927 by Herman Brookman. It would have extended just beyond the wall behind me, down to Nineteenth Avenue. The Portland Landmarks Commission initially rejected the design in a 5–1 vote, but after Rabbi Rose applied his considerable persuasive skills—and the designers added some more “ecclesiastical” windows per the commission’s request—the scheme was approved.

The addition would have been built, but for the intervention of architect and activist John Yeon, who, behind the scenes, applied his own skills of persuasion with the patrons of the addition. In a 1990 letter to landmarks commissioner Richard Ritz, Yeon wrote:

A masterpiece has been defined as a work of art wherein any alteration (addition or subtraction) would damage its supremacy. The Temple is such a building. ... Religious buildings in Portland usually face the street. Their architecture, good or bad, is fully exposed while the ambience of their surroundings is beyond their control. ... The building is veiled from surrounding streets by its own oasis of majestic trees. ... The veil would be torn away completely from the space occupied by the addition.

Yeon argued that the “alien growth” would make the rear of the building its front. Moreover, it would also become the original building’s

base, subverting Brookman's original composition in which the dense stone foundation "braced against the pull of gravity." This is how Yeon looked at buildings: a holistic view of the architectural precedents and a deep understanding of their larger relationship with the landscape.

We now enjoy the fruits of his efforts by entering the temple through Brookman's originally intended "oasis," and we'll have a reception in the smartly designed addition that was ultimately built across the street.

I'm sure the process was painful for all involved. But as the congregation here begins its 150th year of worship and service to the community, it can take pride in having not only a unique sanctuary, but one that stands as a beautiful analogy for what the city is striving for: a gem in the green oasis of the region.

Many of you in this room have probably heard of John Yeon, the great architect. This afternoon, I would like to introduce you to some other John Yeons: the preservationist, the regional planner, the ecologist, the activist, and, near and dear to my heart, the critic. I'd also like to argue that he is the author of what to date remains the most coherent, holistic, distinctively Oregon philosophy toward the built and natural environments. Fundamental to this philosophy was Yeon's attitude toward the past: deeply informed but unsentimental, appreciative of beauty but without romance, he looked to history as a record of change from which to create theories for the future. I'd like to coin a term for this philosophy: deep history.

My argument is risky. I've lured you here with a talk entitled "Against Nostalgia," yet I'm presenting a historical figure and an attitude toward history as a model—a possible contradiction. So go ahead and prepare your attacks. You've got me cornered up here. But let me say, I'm not trying to resurrect John Yeon. What I hope is that by showing how he helped shape the city and state that we cherish, we will better understand how to more effectively shape it for the future. For those of you unfamiliar with Yeon the great architect, here's a quick review. In 1936, at

age twenty-six, he emerged on the scene with what remains one of the most sophisticated houses ever built in Portland. Designed for the lumber baron Aubrey Watzek, it appeared at the dawn of Modernism in the United States, but it also stands far apart from other examples of this style.

While most of Yeon's peers of the era were striving for minimalist structural languages, open floor plans, and increasingly larger, panoramic spaces, Yeon's work on the Watzek House, by contrast, is a study in unfolding processions, controlled views, and careful juxtapositions of scale—or as Yeon called it, in a phrase that defines much about his perspective on design, “a sequence of revelations.”

Each room is an entirely separate composition, but as a whole, the house is unified by an overarching structural logic and a regional vernacular of materials and responses to the climate. In some ways, Yeon's seamless synthesis of so many styles of architecture could even be called postmodern, but thirty years ahead of the term's invention and considerably more sophisticated in its hide-and-seek game of historical quotation.

Yeon built dozens of residential designs, each as similarly sophisticated as their budgets allowed, including a series of simple houses made out of the then-new material of exterior plywood and completed for as little as \$3,300.

Over the years, I've made a ritual of taking visiting designers and writers to see the Watzek House, from celebrated architecture critics like Michael Sorkin and Robert Campbell, to the Pritzker Prize-winning Australian architect Glenn Murcutt to Kuang Zhen Yan, who designed Portland's Classical Chinese Garden. Murcutt, an architect of extreme economy whose touch on the land is always light, best put Yeon's work in context. After studying every detail, from the carefully integrated wood rain gutters and downspouts to the ventilation system to Yeon's wisely chosen native plantings, he shook his head and laughed, “Everything I have ever tried to do is here.”

Six years before the Watzek House, however, Yeon embarked on potentially even more far-reaching efforts in regional planning. At age twenty-one, he was appointed by Governor Julius Meier to the state's first Parks Commission. By twenty-three, he had authored a far-reaching treatise on road design. At twenty-four, he became chairman of the Columbia Gorge Planning Committee—the first state-level effort to preserve the Gorge.

His impressive early résumé grew, in part, from his name. His father, John Baptiste Yeon, rose from laborer to lumber baron, devoting his final years to building roads. Most famously, the elder Yeon managed the Columbia River Gorge Highway's construction, not only volunteering his time but personally importing Italian masons to sculpt the basalt guardrails and tunnel entries.

As John Yeon came of age in the 1930s, so too did the idea of planning, courtesy of the writings of Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford, and the work of the Regional Planning Association in establishing the Appalachian Trail. But the most critical influence here in Oregon was then under construction: the Bonneville Dam. The electrical generation, and the deep-water inland port it would provide, was poised to revolutionize Oregon's industry and agriculture, and expected to bring one million new residents to the state.

Yeon and fellow committee members like Samuel Lancaster and Jamieson Parker had seen the explosion of both tourism and trucking caused by the Gorge Highway. They understood just how threatened—and how valuable—the Gorge was, and they responded with a 1938 report that was, quite likely, the first environmental impact statement ever created on the West Coast. The purpose, Yeon wrote, was not to restrict “the economic forces released by Bonneville,” but “to prevent the usual waste of ... the equally real economic values of recreational facilities and scenery.”

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annual dividends as an exhibit of surpassing natural scenery.”

The report argued for the preservation of watersheds, the recycling of river-dredging spoils for roadbeds, and the creation of two-hundred-foot right-of-ways for future roads as both beauty screens and habitat corridors. It is as comprehensive as such a study might be today, arguably more so because of its unabashed focus on beauty and aesthetics. It’s a fascinating blend of early ecology and hard economics channeled through the history of English picturesque gardens.

Without a whiff of regret that most of his father’s highway would be wiped away by higher water and a new wider road, Yeon’s report argued for what would have been the West Coast’s first “freeway.” He saw its importance in two ways: A freeway’s limited access would spare the Gorge a death by a thousand cuts from little roadside businesses and communities, but Yeon also saw the thin concrete line drawn through the Gorge’s high, scenic panoramas as something potentially beautiful.

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Yeon’s influence reached beyond the Gorge. At twenty-one, he cashed in a life insurance policy to buy Chapman Point, just north of Cannon Beach, saving it from becoming the site of a hotel. Best known as the foreground in what is arguably the most published view of the Oregon Coast—Haystack Rock as seen from Ecola State Park—Chapman is now, courtesy of Yeon, a state reserve.

Yeon went nose to nose with the powerful state road-master Robert Baldock, the inventor of the highly efficient model of geometric road design, who wanted to power straight-line roads through the Gorge and over Neahkahnie Mountain on the coast. Yeon even volunteered to design—for free—an alternative scheme for Neahkahnie. But when he

failed to persuade Baldock on either the Gorge or coast roads, he went around him, successfully lobbying the federal road-master to send his chief landscape architect to the region. The curving roads that we now enjoy in both places were the result of Yeon's vision and efforts.

The Depression and the war—and Oregon's typical cycle of great leadership followed by periods of carelessness and short-sightedness—left many of Yeon's far-reaching ideas to gather dust. Yeon himself came to refer to his early work in planning as “futile” and a “curious way to spend one's youth.” Nevertheless, he remained a life-long activist, working to conserve the Gorge and the northern Oregon Coast, but also to shape the city of Portland.

In 1974, Waterfront Park was on its way to becoming an episodic series of activity centers and clumps of trees, largely designed in response to the Portland Development Commission's (PDC) polling of Rose Festival crowds. But Yeon personally appealed to the local designer Robert Frasca and the PDC with his treatise, “For an Urban Park in an Urban Situation,” lobbying for the “daring orthodoxy” of a formal park. The landscape, he argued, needed to create “a bold, unifying element,” to contrast the “architecturally chaotic” city. The formal tree plantings now celebrated in so many pictures of the park were the result.

In 1972, when the marble First National Bank building was slated to become yet another downtown parking lot, Yeon convinced Ada Louise Huxtable, then the country's most powerful architecture critic, to write a blazing *New York Times* piece against the idea. First National scotched the demolition. The august building, now the Bank of the West, still stands, a little known starting point for historic preservation in Portland.

In articulating his vision, Yeon often went against prevailing wisdom. He opposed Governor Tom McCall's beach bill because he thought it would only result in the illusion, rather than the substantive practice, of coastal protection. He criticized the state's land-use program for its over-

reliance on zoning, in effect predicting the eventual reaction of Measure 37. He lambasted the city's landmark designation policy for its "heedless zest" of listing too many buildings that were merely old rather than "of exceptional significance in our evolving history and culture."

Nothing escaped his rigorous view of history and design, least of all, his own work. He lobbied for the demolition of the Portland Visitors Information Center that he designed—one of only a handful of buildings in Oregon that has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Built as an island in the asphalt between Front Avenue and Harbor Drive, to Yeon, the building's context changed with the creation of Waterfront Park. He believed a new use was incompatible with the original architectural idea, and he worried that a restaurant on the park would be the "camel's nose" under the tent and lead to further commercialization.

Drawing from the past and projecting far into the future, this deep historical view formed the foundation for every one of Yeon's arguments. His vision, unblurred by nostalgia, yet deeply informed by the picturesque tradition's hunger for revelations in the landscape, enabled him to see a horizon well beyond any imagined by most of his contemporaries. Shy and impatient, Yeon was an idealist—and, yes, an elitist—not a salesman or a politician. As he once described himself, "I suppose you could call me an ecologist, but not of the beautifully bearded sort."

He surely understood some of these limits and worked to inspire others to bolster his causes. It was at his urging in 1979, that Nancy Russell began her stride from housewife and Portland Garden Club aficionado to powerhouse advocate and, eventually, founder of the Friends of the Columbia Gorge, easily the most important force in establishing the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area. But even she and Yeon came to disagree over how the Gorge should be managed. Yeon believed the National Park Service would be the best steward, while Russell recognized that, given the diverse communities and political attitudes, the National Forest Service was the better political bet.

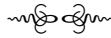
“Somebody like John is terribly important to have in these efforts—a star up there in the sky, a pure point of view,” Russell said recently. “But to get anything done with huge constituencies, you have to get a big parade marching down the street that the politicians want to jump in front of.”

Yeon, the star on the horizon, and Russell, in the parade marching toward it, made for a deep history dynamic duo. But where exactly is the line between success and failure, between good and good enough? It most certainly falls somewhere between a twenty-three-year-old’s dream scrawled in pencil in 1933 for “A Bill—for an Act creating the Columbia Gorge Game Preserve,” and the 1988 Bi-State Compact creating the scenic area. But was it in the power lines built, at Yeon’s urging, to the south of the new freeway so that drivers’ views of the river remained unmarred? Was it between Baldock’s ruler-straight highway and Yeon’s sensuous curves?

What other cherished features of Oregon’s landscape might we see differently or not at all, but for Yeon? What has been the role of unmarred views of Haystack Rock from Ecola State Park in establishing the Oregon Coast as a profoundly beautiful place, not just to Oregonians, but to the world? Would Waterfront Park be such a symbol of the city without the stunningly photographable composition of formal tree plantings rising against the jumble of the buildings behind? How many more demolished landmarks would have been required for the birth of Portland’s historic preservation movement had Yeon not convinced Ada Louise Huxtable to battle for the First National Bank?

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Of course, nobody can say. But even if each of these actions only mattered a little, together they add up to something large, coherent, and important. Each was a powerful assertion of sheer aesthetic will. I believe he saw his civic actions similarly to how he saw his own buildings, as he once put it, as “a landscape painter imagining what would look good in his landscape painting.”



YEON'S EFFORTS ARE HARDLY SINGULAR. Indeed, similar aesthetic acts have guided many of our region's most far-reaching successes. But, most of the time, we assign authorship too narrowly to politicians. And, in Oregon, we increasingly believe too much in the power of law, policy, and plans, instead of bright stars shining on the horizon.

I'd like to propose a revised deep history of two of our state's most cherished myths: the 1972 Downtown Plan and the creation of the Oregon land use system.

The Downtown Plan designed Portland as we know it, from the transit mall and Waterfront Park to Pioneer Courthouse Square. The state land use system, we have been taught, began with Senate Bill 100, the statute that mandated that cities must plan their growth, and set into motion our legendary urban growth boundaries. Sure, the big chiefs, Mayor Neil Goldschmidt and Governor Tom McCall, were important, as were great tribes like the activist groups Waterfront for People and 1000 Friends of Oregon. But let's zoom in on the sorcerer behind both: the landscape architect Lawrence Halprin.

In 1965, a few years before the business community and neighborhoods began the parallel efforts that grew into the Downtown Plan, Halprin collaborated with the firm Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill to create a sequence of plazas and corridors through the South Auditorium Urban Renewal Area. Halprin was at work on his book *Cities*, a deep

study of urban organization and, in particular, open space. He was also collaborating with his wife, the choreographer Anna Halprin, to create a language for communicating dance moves to non-dancers. What grew out of these profound inquiries into the nature of two kinds of movement—that of the individual and that of the city—was what we now know as Lovejoy Fountain and Forecourt Fountain.

Halprin had helpers. On Lovejoy, he collaborated with a young Charles Moore, who would later become one of the sophisticated practitioners of postmodern architecture, but then was fresh from completing a thesis on the history of fountains in Italy. On Forecourt, Halprin collaborated with a dynamic Bulgarian architect, Angela Danadjieva, who had come of age designing avant garde film sets. But his own research and his concurrent collaborations with Anna Halprin laid the foundation. Movement, urbanism, nature, dance, and theater combined to transform what might have been the empty spaces of a tower-in-the-park, urban renewal area into the most popular urban parks any city had created in decades. To a visiting Ada Louise Huxtable, the Forecourt was “the most important public space since the Renaissance.”

The historic role of these plazas can't be overemphasized. Not only did they trigger an international revolution in urban landscape design, they mark a key turning point in Portland history. Instead of only driving downtown to work or maybe to shop at Meier & Frank, and then leaving, people, particularly youth, rediscovered the joys of convening and cavorting in the urban core.

Two weeks before the Forecourt's opening in June 1970, students and police clashed at Portland State University in what became Portland's most violent antiwar protests. At the fountain's dedication, a group of students lined up on the fountain's upper ridge like a war party out of an old Western movie. But as the dignitaries quivered below, Halprin beckoned the students to join him and jumped into the water. Five months later twenty-nine-year-old Neil Goldschmidt was elected City


Commissioner, and in two years he became the youngest mayor in the country, the chief of a generation ready to turn from protesting the government to joining it to reinvent the city.

Halprin played an equally interesting, though lesser-known, role in Oregon's land-use planning system. Sure, Tom McCall had the drive, the credibility, and the salesmanship to sell a statewide land-use plan to the public and the legislature. But the plan was mere words. What was the vision?

With reams of research that McCall had commissioned on future demographic trends, Halprin crafted a study called "Willamette Valley: Choices for the Future." He spelled out two scenarios for the one million new residents projected to arrive by the turn of the century. Growth could happen through a status quo of development patterns, or it could be directed through a program of open space preservation and transit-oriented development that would turn the larger landscape into a sequence of compact towns in the green of forests and farms. The report was mailed to thousands, published in the newspapers, and presented at dozens of public meetings.

Would McCall's bill have passed without Halprin's clear articulation of these scenarios? Maybe. But again, where was the line between success and failure? Certainly a charismatic governor putting his convictions on the line was a formidable force. But the Willamette Choices study was, at the very least, a critical sales tool. It also stands out as a clear, accessible vision for the future that Oregonians could point to as a contract that McCall and their other elected leaders would carry out.

This is deep history at its best: the long vision that engages the wider public in a theory of change.



THE LINEAGE OF IMPORTANT architectural and planning advances hardly begins or ends with Yeon and Halprin. But together they offered a full spectrum of stars—from regional plans to well-aimed letters—that sparkled brightly in front of parades that were sometimes made up of one key decision-maker and sometimes thousands of citizens. The common denominator of their success is their understanding of the scale of deep history: What might create a bold, new idea of a “city,” a “region,” or a “state” in our collective minds.

I’d argue that Portlandia attests to Michael Graves’s understanding of the deep historical possibilities of oversized human sculptures. We enjoy the Eastbank Esplanade because an architect and parks department bureaucrat named Zari Santner understood the deep history of humans’ urge to promenade. I think the aerial tram will stand as an inspired expression of medical science’s deep history of connection, not to mention Portland’s ever-deepening love of alternative transportation.

Yet, I worry that we’re missing the deep historical possibilities—and, perhaps, necessities—of this time. I worry that we are becoming nearsighted to the challenges looming ahead. I worry that the history we are mining has become too shallow. I worry that our theories of change are too short.

The city, Metro, and the state are all engaged in large-scale exercises of thinking about the future. Mayor Tom Potter’s Vision PDX is the first city-wide visioning effort Portland has ever undertaken. Metro’s New Look is an effort to give our region’s fifty-year plan, Metro 2040, a twelve-year tune-up. And the state’s Big Look is the first serious reexamination of the state’s land use program since its inception thirty-four years ago. All three are needed. But the critical question is whether they truly will tackle the theories of the future or merely the perceptions of the present.

Potter’s Vision PDX has reached fifteen thousand people by survey. But in this case, the public is surveying the public: Volunteers came up

with the questions, collected the data, and compiled it. The results are what you'd expect, focused on important things like schools, race relations, and gentrification. It's most certainly building up to a parade, but will any stars rise for it to march toward?

For Metro, the key question is how to overcome the failure of one of 2040's key initiatives: the planned, high-intensity development of dozens of proposed town centers across the region. So far, only a handful of these centers have grown according to the so-called "Smart Growth" principles laid out by 2040. Housing has grown denser, but it remains largely disconnected from jobs and shopping centers by distances and patterns largely connectable only by car.

The Big Look is possibly the most worrisome. Borne from Measure 37's wake-up call to the government to rebalance Oregon's storied land-use system with individual property rights, the Big Look is late and seriously underfunded. With the current legislative session packed with property owners and pundits on both sides, the governor and state lawmakers are far more interested in a Big Fix.

The dirty little secret is that while Oregonians invented some important ideas for planning and have spent more than three decades practicing them, the stewards have grown more and more intent on preserving the system, rather than advancing the foundational goals of creating an economically sustainable landscape. The best term for this

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would be “shallow history,” a fealty toward the past that precludes any theories of change. Yes, urban growth boundaries have preserved some land. But the agricultural and forest economies have outgrown simplistic designations like “Exclusive Farm and Forest Use.” We need more industrial land. As the recent crippling cutoff of federal welfare payments to traditional lumber counties shows, much of the state has barely progressed from being a resource extraction economy.

In the meantime, within Portland’s much-lauded Urban Growth Boundary, the city is still not as dense as cities like Seattle that don’t have a UGB. Urban planners may love New Urbanist, transit-oriented developments like Orenco Station, but investors prefer the villages of Tanasbourne and Bridgeport shopping centers. And the unresolved tension between the two impulses is turning the region into a sequence of mediocrities. So the question becomes, what are we preserving all this land for? And what exactly are we protecting it from?

At a brainstorming session assembled by Harvard University’s Bruner-Loeb Forum soon after Measure 37 passed, Chris Nelson, a nationally noted planner and Virginia Polytechnic University professor, said, “You need to do another one of these,” and tossed a copy of Halprin’s “Willamette Valley: Choices for the Future” on the table.

Indeed, we might start by rereading it. The vision Halprin created and Tom McCall sold to the public says nothing about urban growth boundaries at all, but it says a lot about compensation to landowners whose property is being zoned for preservation. The chief tool Halprin proposed for guiding growth was transportation investment. But the most important lesson to be learned from Halprin and McCall’s vision lies in a simple word in the title: “choices.” As it was in 1938 and 1971, there are another million people coming to Oregon in the near future. We are not prepared for them. We need to reengage the state’s citizens in understanding the hard choices of growth. We need to renegotiate the contract between Oregon and the future.

We need to *make* some deep history.

On the state level, that may mean abandoning urban growth boundaries as an exclusive strategy in favor of controlling new development with the lure of transportation—much like Halprin proposed. You're a timber company with land you want to develop? You want the infrastructure? *Earn it* by meeting development standards for density, environmental stewardship, design, and social infrastructure. If China can absorb a rural-to-urban migration like the world has never before seen with new towns, why do we limit ourselves to incremental expansions of urban growth boundaries? If Utah can create a state commission setting standards on new development, surely Oregon can.

Regionwide, TriMet owns the equivalent of fifty-four city blocks of “Park and Ride” stations along the light rail lines. In many cases these have become the holes in the donuts of rather drab, medium-density housing built by blow-and-go developers. TriMet needs to make every one of these important, dense, and iconic—worthy of a ride on light rail just to see. If the price points aren't yet there to build with a significantly higher quality and density, TriMet should wait. As the old real estate saw goes, they aren't making any more land—particularly next to the light rail.

In Portland we have critical opportunities in PDC-owned land like Centennial Mill and future parks such as those on the South Waterfront. But we also have now-vacant or soon-to-be-vacant lands owned by the Portland School District. With each, there's an opportunity to meld affordable family housing with new parks, pea patches, and community gardens. We could incorporate flexible work space that could, one day, become schools again. Buildings and parks no longer need to be mutually exclusive. We can, after all, grow nearly anything here. So why not grow a different, profoundly Oregon-type of urbanism? With each piece of property—public land in particular, but any land where the developers need public investment—we need to consider the

deep history of how new development fits into the landscape, how the landscape fits into it, and how the entire product fulfills our contract with the future.

None of these ideas are new. In our best moments, we've always been constructing our Eden. Think of the last two regional open space bonds the region's voters passed to acquire new park lands, critical watersheds, and habitats. Think of the forty-mile loop, the region's

interconnected trail system now

more than two-hundred miles

long. Think of John Baptiste

Yeon and the others who built

the Columbia Gorge Highway,

creating an unprecedented meld-

ing of landscape and road. Think

of the 1972 Downtown Plan that most certainly understood the dream when it shaped the city's skyline with view corridors framing the distant volcanoes. Consider the mysterious, picturesque geometry that inspired Lovejoy and Pettygrove to carve the forest into a new town of two-hundred-foot blocks, thereby assigning half of a future city to public streets and sidewalks with wide views to the hills beyond.

Yes, we need to preserve important landmarks, critical habitat, and good soil to grow our food. But as soon as we imagine we can protect a neighborhood, or a city, or region, or a state, a land-use system or even a way of life from change—we fall victim to nostalgia. The future is coming. We can battle it, we can be victimized by it, or we can shape it.

I'd like to close by circling—or rather, I hope, cycling—back to John Yeon. The twenty-three-year-old who dared to scrawl the dream of “A Bill for an Act to Preserve the Columbia River Gorge” became a fifty-four-year-old who bought a one-mile stretch of the river's shore directly across from Multnomah Falls. Over the next few years, he sculpted the land and shaped the flora into what he dubbed “The Shire.”

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There is, quite simply, nothing like this place. Yeon turned the landscape into a series of processions and rooms—a sequence of revelations—that reference the great traditions of English and Chinese gardens while anticipating the soon-to-come American movement of land art. But at the heart of The Shire's beauty and imagination is a deep historical ambiguity: Where the traditions of English picturesque and Chinese gardens used buildings as follies, nostalgically recalling the faded glory of civilizations past, Yeon drew on views of Multnomah Falls to provoke the same kind of playful, but potentially dark, profound memory.

It now is the property of the University of Oregon and, as a center for landscape studies, will be available to teach and inspire the coming generations. But it is quite literally the star that inspired the ultimately successful movement to create the scenic area, sparkling in the eyes of Nancy Russell. Her significant role in Gorge activism began, she recalls, with her first meeting of Yeon at a dinner he invited her to at The Shire.

I wonder what moment of that evening turned Russell's appreciation of a beautiful place into resolve to protect it. Was it as the day's final rays of sun danced across the basalt cliffs? Was it walking one of the trails Yeon carved where the dead end forces you to turn around only to discover the captured view of Multnomah Falls cut through the trees? Was it watching what she described as the evening's *pièce de résistance*: the full moon rising over the water? Did Yeon know where that line would be for this woman in whom he saw so much promise to carry on his five-decade cause?

In what may be the clearest insight into the difference Yeon himself saw between the deep history of success and failure—or maybe how bright the star needed to shine that evening—Russell tells of how many times Yeon scheduled their dinner and then, mysteriously, called the morning of to cancel it.

Turns out, he was waiting for exactly the right weather.

RANDY GRAGG

Randy Gragg has written for the Oregonian since 1989, first on arts and cultural politics, and for the last decade on architecture and planning. He was a 2005–06 Loeb Fellow at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design and a 1994–95 National Arts Journalism Fellow at the Columbia University School of Journalism. Gragg has written on design for a wide range of national publications, among them, Metropolis, Architecture, Architectural Record, Harper’s, American Heritage, and the New York Times Magazine. In 2004, he conceived and coorganized Core Sample, an exhibition and catalog of art and performance by 125 Portland artists. A native Nevadan, Gragg earned a BA in journalism from the University of Nevada and an MFA in photography from the University of Washington.





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