

Garden Conservancy News

PRESERVING, SHARING, AND CELEBRATING AMERICA'S GARDENS

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Garden Conservancy to Support Renovation of Landmark Landscape Re-imagining Dan Kiley's Modernist Masterpiece at the Oakland Museum of California

Last year, the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) completed a thorough renovation of its extraordinary brutalist building, refreshing interior and exterior galleries and educational spaces, and launched a campaign to renovate its campus. In addition to revitalizing its plantings, a key goal is to better connect the museum's campus with the surrounding community. Kate Rittman, a former OMCA trustee who also recently became a member of the Garden Conservancy Society of Fellows, promptly reached out to James Brayton Hall, president of the Garden Conservancy.

Some twenty years earlier, on a visit to the San Francisco Bay Area, James, then a recent graduate of the landscape architecture program at the Rhode Island School of Design and in charge of the school's campus design, had been first introduced to OMCA by Kate, then a trustee of the Rhode Island School of Design. Upon hearing of the reno-

vation plans, he was eager to engage in dialogue with the museum.

Kate Rittman is passionate about the museum's collections as well as its architecture, educational programs (including docent tours and student programs), landscape, and place in the community. She notes that the museum's innovative landscape, which was designed by landscape architect Dan Kiley, "serves as the site of many public events, and, because of the way it is laid out, also offers quiet retreats on different levels."

OMCA, a historic mid-century modernist landmark by renowned architects Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo, contains exceptional collections of art, science, and history. Its distinctive tiered landscape serves as a popular gathering space, while also integrating seamlessly with the building. Access to the campus is free and open to the public.

In July 2018, the museum applied for

preservation assistance from the Garden Conservancy to support the renovation of the museum's gardens and campus. After review by our staff and approval from our board of directors, the two organizations have agreed to enter a five-year partnership beginning in 2020. "We are delighted with the opportunity to collaborate with this dynamic institution, a 'museum of the people' serving 400,000 individuals a year in one of the country's most diverse communities," says James.

A distinguished history

The Oakland Museum of California opened in 1969, merging three existing museums to "tell the extraordinary story of California." It was hailed as a breakthrough in combining museum and landscape design. Kevin Roche worked with landscape architect Dan Kiley to create an urban community

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An aerial perspective of the Oakland Museum of California's site plan, showing new entrances to enhance pedestrian access, new plantings, and a new permanent stage for public events HOOD DESIGN STUDIO

Oakland Museum to Renovate Landmark Modernist Landscape continued from page 1

campus, featuring a 24,600-square-foot, terraced roof garden that extends the museum's exhibition space and offers numerous spaces for public gatherings. Roche's and Kiley's designs integrated indoor and outdoor spaces, then a new approach to designing public spaces. The exterior landscapes include extensive terraces and rooftop gardens with sculpture. Kiley engaged Geraldine Knight Scott, landscape architect and founder of the California Horticultural Society, to select the plantings for his modern-day "hanging gardens of Babylon."

Acclaimed as a bold innovation in museum design, the OMCA gardens are a well-used and well-loved venue for many public and private events such as the weekly "Friday Nights," community festivals, school programs, holiday celebrations, weddings, and business gatherings.

Architect Kevin Roche and his partner, John Dinkeloo, are known for their distinctive modernist works, including additions to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Ford Foundation building, both New York City projects also designed in the mid-1960s.

The museum's renovation plans

OMCA recently launched a capital campaign to raise funds to revitalize the plantings and to better connect the garden and

the community by making the gardens more visible and accessible from the street. These changes will enhance OMCA's campus and better realize Roche and Kiley's original concept of the landscape as a village green and public gathering space integrated into the community as well as the museum.

OMCA has tapped two award-winning firms for the renovation. The Oakland-based Hood Design Studio, headed by Walter Hood, former chair of landscape architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, has been engaged to revitalize the gardens, working with Mark Cavagnero & Associates, the architecture firm that handled the museum's previous renovation in 2010-12.

The iconic terraced gardens, positioned at each of the museum's three stories, are at the heart of the renovations. The gardens will be refreshed with new, environmentally sensitive plantings native to California. Each terrace will represent one of the state's ecoregions, in a free and accessible space for the public to enjoy. These new plantings will be integrated around the garden's landmark redwood, oak, and olive trees. In addition, public sculptures on view throughout the gardens will now feature work by 24 major California artists, including Ruth Asawa, Bruce Beasley, Beniamino Bufano, Mark de Suvero, Viola Frey, George Rickey, and Peter Voulkos.

Equally important are a series of changes that will improve access to OMCA's campus. An exterior border wall along the museum's northern side, facing Oakland's Lake Merritt, will be replaced with three 20-foot openings, creating a new entrance and opening up the museum to the lakefront in

OMCA's terraces will include native California plantings, improved seating, sculpture, and more. OMCA's new 12th Street entrance will connect the museum with Lake Merritt.

HOOD DESIGN STUDIO





Tiered terraces and plantings created a “hanging gardens of Babylon” effect in the original Dan Kiley design. Sculpture by major California artists is featured in the gardens.

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ODELL HUSSEY PHOTOGRAPHY

downtown Oakland. Along the museum’s 10th Street side, to the south, better pedestrian access will also be made possible through alterations to provide direct entry into OMCA’s café and public event space and to improve the museum’s outdoor gathering spaces. The project will also add two new ADA-accessible ramps to the campus. These exterior changes, along with improved wayfinding, will also improve ease of access to the museum’s galleries.

Garden Conservancy Director of Preservation Pamela Governale comments, “Preservation of this significant brutalist landscape is essential. Doing it in a way that honors Dan Kiley’s vision and also embraces today’s and tomorrow’s challenges will provide important opportunities for people to connect with nature, art, and one another.”

A new, permanent stage will also be created to accommodate expanded outdoor performance, music, and film programs. Along with additional enhancements to the terraces and patios, central courtyard, and seating options throughout the campus, the renovations will provide a more welcoming and comfortable environment serving a wide range of recreational and community needs.

Our new partnership

The Garden Conservancy will provide financial support for the renovation of the gardens and will partner with OMCA on educational programming opportunities. The Conservancy will also help raise visibility for the renovation project.

Director of Public Programs and Education Patrick MacRae says that partnering on educational events “will help educate our members and others about the importance of America’s culturally significant landscapes, including their relevance to urban communities.”

The opportunity to help preserve an important brutalist landscape furthers the Garden Conservancy’s mission to preserve, share, and celebrate America’s gardens and diverse gardening traditions.

The renovation of OMCA’s landscape will make the gardens—which already serve as a popular village green—more accessible to the surrounding community.

