

The Real World Site Visit – Kevin J. Pfeiffer, 3rd year BLA

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March 4, 2015



Behind the fountain in Forsyth Park, Savannah

Often while wrapped in projects while in the studio one can become so focused on a single problem. A line doesn't show up right, you can't figure out a method in Photoshop, or designer's block stalls a project in the dirt. This designer's block is crucial to know how to handle while pursuing a career in landscape architecture. One of the best methods I have found to cope with this rut is site visits. See what you are studying, walk the streets you are grading, feel the bench you site from 100 scale. Seeing these real world examples of what a student aims for as a landscape architect is prime fodder for good design and getting over that rut. Through site visits we all collect a data bank of ideas and concepts to play and tweak with when we return to the drafting table.

This past month through great planning and commitment from the professors of my 3rd year studio my class took a trip to site visit the likes of Charleston, Hilton Head, and Savannah – all prime South Eastern places of design. Charleston with its historic coastal charm, Hilton Head with its lavish and high end residence, and Savannah with its low country colonial gridded street culture – all of these cities embracing its culture that are designed by the landscape architects working in them.





Down an alley in Charleston

This three day trip went by rapidly with our first stop in Charleston, South Carolina. Even though our class drove in during the night in the pouring rain most of us made sure to get a glimpse of the city while we could. In the morning we visited the firm Seamon Whiteside & Associates which had a hand in the design process of the I'on development in Charleston to which we visited after the meeting. This large master planned development mimicked the architecture and style of downtown but was only twelve years old. Pocked with alleys and large street trees, I'on conveyed to us that it's possible to have a neighborhood that isn't a cookie cutter subdivision. From there we visited downtown Charleston and walked the streets for hours. As well as the city of Beaufort and Habersham – all of these places showing different real world design concepts. Getting out of the studio and experiencing these sites first hand is so vital to understanding how to design well. You can read day and night about Frank Lloyd Wright, but until you visit Falling Water can one get a scale of the site and how it moves. This can help any student of design, not just landscape architecture.

From there we made our last stop in South Carolina, Hilton Head. A complete 180 compared to what we had been visiting before. Hilton Head seemed like a resort, trimmed lawns on every corner and Mercedes on every street. And in fact we visited two resorts! Design of this type can be a huge market for landscape architects. It is so nice our professors want us to experience projects like this even if we may not go into that specific field. In Hilton Head we visited Westin and Marriot Resort as well as paid Wood+Planners and Witmer-Jones-Keefer visits. Meeting UGA grads in both offices, which is prodigiously rewarding as a student in the program. Most of my classmates have never been inside a firm before and it seemed to reveal to them what post grad life will actually look like. The class visited the stunning development Palmetto Bluffs that Witmer-Jones-Keefer is handling, to which we were all blown away by.



Talking to the principal of the firm, Brian Witmer, revealed the layers of the design and the thought that went into every square foot of the development. From there we rounded out our trip in Savannah, observing the historic gridded city and large greens along the roads.



Time and time again on these trips I am struck with inspiration for back in the studio. That's what I find so important with site visits and networking. It exposes you, as a student of design, to new ideas and ideals. These trips become a dictionary for you to interpret the landscape. For this reason I am a strong advocate for any site visits that can be afforded. A trip to the real world will not only make you a more robust landscape architect but a more versatile designer as well. As well helping you get over that designers block!