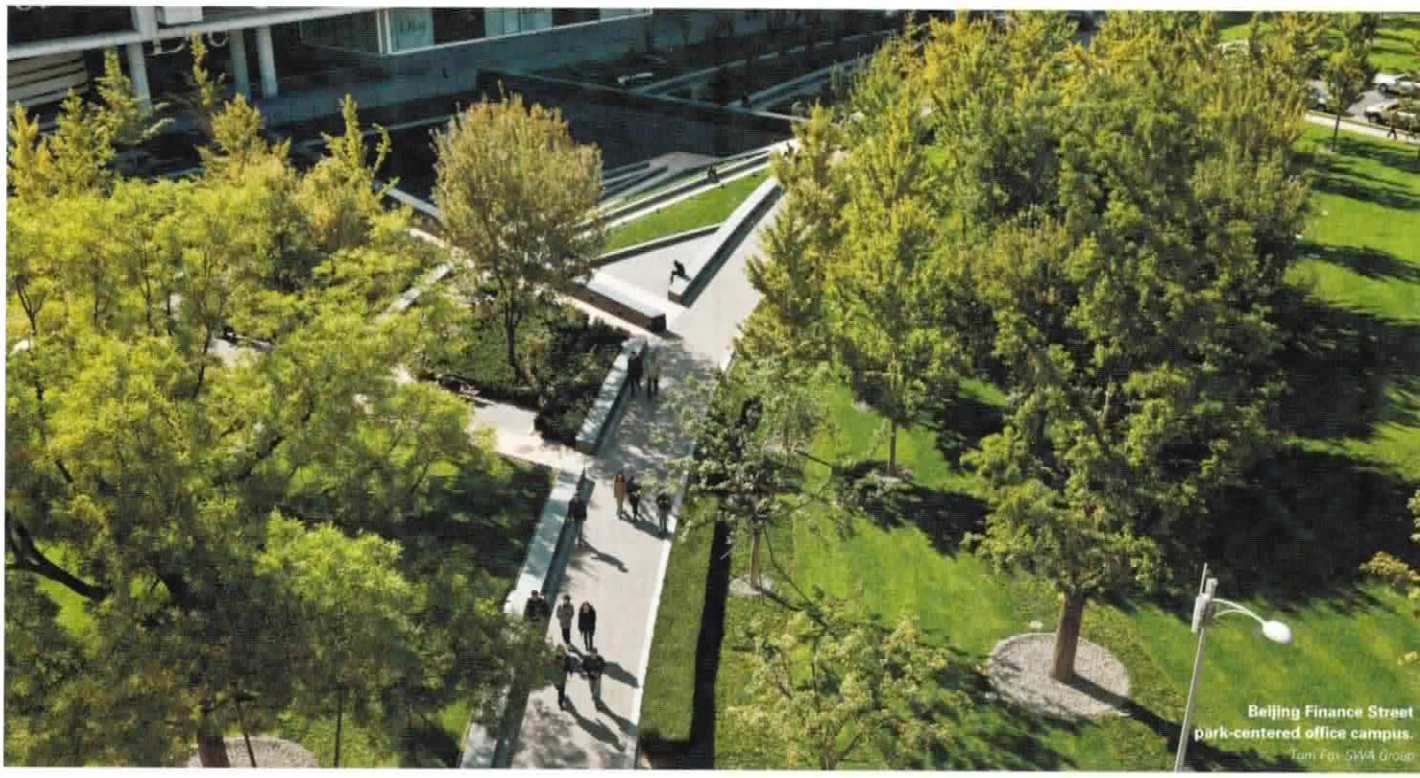

Beijing Finance Street park-centered office campus.
Tom Fox SWA Group

Cultural Urbanism and Landscape Urbanism:

Corporate Campus 3.0

BY RENE BIHAN

As populations have begun a trend toward 're-urbanization,' companies are faced with creating workplaces that centralize their business while also giving employees the sustainable, community-driven environment they desire. There is no greater place to see this creative tension than in the hotbed of the technology industry – Silicon Valley.

Demographic and sociological changes are transforming how a campus "works" for companies attracting mobile, educated, talented employees. These knowledge workers seek out the best fit for their career, of course, but they are also highly motivated by sociological and lifestyle aspirations. That means companies find they can no longer just 'build it, and they will come," but are creating workplaces that are often a key reason an employee chooses the company, and more importantly, stays.

Cultural urbanism and landscape urbanism, two design trends that have been taking on a strong influence in real estate development, are springing up in Silicon Valley and San Francisco and resonating in places from Beijing to Salt Lake City. What do these guideposts offer facility designers worldwide?

In Northern California, workplace design is creating spaces that take into account the cultural and physical surroundings that make the area unique and attractive in the first place. This 'cultural urbanism' borrows from a place's context so that facilities enhance the work experience as well as contribute to the communities in which they're built.[1] In purely urban environments like San Francisco, companies such as **Twitter**, **Salesforce** and others are adopting spaces that reflect the urban vibe and excitement of living and working in one of the world's great cities.

It's a slightly different story in Silicon Valley, whose origins were orchards and farms before technology took root. The context and attractions of this suburban environment derive more from the landscapes and outdoors – and also bring the outdoors in. 'Landscape urbanism' suggests that facility designers approach a campus here even more through the lens of the land and natural systems and literally build upon those cues.[2] But even Silicon Valley is becoming more urban as densities increase along highway and rail corridors.

According to a report published by the **Silicon Valley Community Foundation** in 2012, 30 percent of the total

population of Silicon Valley is 25-44 years old. While this is essentially average for American cities, it's unusual for this once-suburban locale whose very name – Silicon Valley – eludes having a main city or "address." Every day, masses of young professionals commute from surrounding areas. They want to work in the technology industry, but also want aspects of an urban lifestyle with the conveniences of a city.

In all these situations, corporate real estate directors and developers are changing the standards of the corporate campus – urban and suburban alike – from one dictated by the car and an interior-focused workplace, to one of landscape-driven, culturally-resonant urban design. These workplaces incorporate a sensibility of their individual settings, while maximizing the opportunities of sustainable design, ample public space and local infrastructure.

The question, then, is how do developers and designers create places that promote cultural identity and foster more frequent and higher-quality social interaction, both within the workplace to foster ideas and creativity, and within the community to enhance responsible corporate citizenship?

The Background: Silicon Valley 1.0 and 2.0, Ornamental and Programmatic

Silicon Valley, known as the 'Valley of Heart's Delight' when the landscape was predominately fruit orchards, evolved its facility design around a local context of ornamental landscape design, whereas the facilities themselves were purely functional.

At the time, the land was inexpensive, which produced a high value from a natural systems point of view, but a low value from the development perspective. **Stanford University**'s research and development programs, along with private support from companies like **Bell Telephone Laboratories**, **Fairchild**, and **Xerox PARC**, were incubators driving creation of Stanford Research Park and follow-on spaces that defined the classic corporate campus. Because of the low value of land, development consisted of tilt-up construction without much thought for the workplace environment. In what might be called **Silicon Valley 1.0**, design was dominated by standard floor area ratios, a parking space for each person, and a working environment with no cultural connections or community characteristics. And while workers have long hailed the area's great outdoors, the workplace "green space" was primarily for circulation routes to car parks and was fixed and sculptural in its aesthetic. People were not encouraged to gather outdoors, but rather to work inside and use the interstitial outdoor space primarily for direct movement.

Next Generation, 2.0 Programmatic Landscapes

As the computing and technology industry grew, corporations began to recognize the need to create a campus-like environment, with landscapes specially-designed for more social interaction. Referred to as **Silicon Valley 2.0**, the late 1980s saw the shift from a parking-centric office park to a corporate campus based on the concept of clustering and shared facilities. Still providing areas for surface parking, the clustering allowed for some outdoor interaction and common spaces.

The car-to-cubicle days of large corporate office parks were shifting, leading to an innovative project, the **Silicon Graphics Inc.** (SGI) campus, which set the stage for new trends of development. The campus for SGI, which is now **Google**'s headquarters, was completed in 1997 and was groundbreaking for its implementation of structured parking, high-density buildings and public open space. Formerly a brownfield site, the toxic plumes radiating from the ground had to be managed by the design team. This decreased the allowable building footprint, pushing the designers to rethink strategies on parking, circulation and public open space. The plans, initiated by environmental requirements, actually led to the understanding that working in a high-density environment results in higher productivity. The result of putting the parking in a structure and new public parks in front of the office buildings allowed for new types of social interaction and a sense of corporate community.

The transition from the office park typology to a community-centered workplace environment at SGI/Google began to address the cultural and social needs of employees, initiating a trend for the rest of Silicon Valley. Increasingly, companies followed the lead of SGI, creating all-inclusive working environments based on the performance of the landscape to support employees. Google, the next tenants of the SGI site, began offering amenities to their employees such as fitness classes, increased outdoor gathering spaces and company-sponsored cafes. The corporate campus began, through a freer expression of space, to address the demographics of the typical Silicon Valley worker. Employees living as far away as San Francisco choose to live an urban life, giving up their cars for the greener, less expensive bike and pedestrian-centric lifestyle. In response, and in order to attract the best possible talent, companies like Google began offering shuttles to transport people to and from work, providing Internet access to increase and encourage productivity, and generally creating an environment that their employees could enjoy for the long workdays.

SGI/Google campus
Tom Fox SWA Group

Silicon Valley 3.0: Performance-Based Spaces

Responses to employee culture and lifestyle have triggered a shift in design thinking towards **Silicon Valley 3.0**, introducing ideas of 'place-making' into the corporate campus, understanding that in order to maximize employee production and retention, the workplace needs to reflect and support their culture and lifestyles. Principles learned from several recent international projects show the shift in trend toward an urbanist approach to the workplace environment. Projects located in high-density areas, like the one million sq.ft (92,903 sq.m-) **Beijing Finance Street** in China, demonstrate that the landscape can shape and enhance public space and building, drive opportunities for social interaction and foster the cultural identity of the place. Looking to Asia and other international

examples, Silicon Valley can learn the importance of urban design in fostering a viable and sustainable local economy, supporting local restaurants and business, utilizing transit and infrastructure and providing amenities typically seen in cities.[3]

New High-Performing Cultural and Landscape Design

Closer to home, the urban block typology typically exists in cities with mixed-use developments. The 23-acre **City Creek Center** in Salt Lake City, Utah is a vibrant, urban-centered project that utilizes the principles of cultural urbanism to create a micro community within downtown. Its 2.1 million square feet (185, 806 square meters) of office space, half of it new as a result of City Creek's 2009 transformation, creates an "urban business park" all its own. Street level amenities percolate the linear site, providing people working and living in the adjacent buildings access to locally sourced restaurants, coffee shops and more.

Developers in Mountain View in Silicon Valley are echoing the trend, bringing urban-oriented densities and amenities that knowledge workers seek out. The **Four Corners Development Group**, taking the old **Hewlett-Packard** training facility, is creating a mixed-use office and retail project called San Antonio Station, where workers and local residents can shop, dine and interact all within walking distance to their office. Similarly, **Merlone Geier Partners** is almost finished building a 20-acre mixed-use community with housing, retail, cinemas and 500,000 square feet (46,451 square meters) of office space – three blocks from a Caltrain rail station. Yet this Village at San Antonio Center still boasts two acres for parks and gathering spaces, hearkening to the area's suburban context while providing amenities that urban workers demand.[4/5]

Silicon Valley 3.0 has begun to catch on with forward-thinking owners, developers and designers. New plans by **Frank Gehry** for **Facebook**'s expansion project emphasize a community environment, allowing employees to enjoy outdoor public space, a rooftop garden and cafes, while respecting the historical characteristics of the site. Gehry's design "aims to provide a system that's not precious, that they [Facebook] can manipulate. Work benches line up in curving arcs like swarming fish, organizing the 420,000 sq.ft. (39,019 sq.m.-) facility into 'neighborhoods' that softly flow into each other in an attempt to foster a collaborative, community-like environment."[5]

The new design provides a living example of the legitimacy of applying cultural urbanism to the corporate campus. Strategies for the creation of a neighborhood provide employees with a home away from home, improving both the working environment and corporate efficiency and production.

The continued trend towards a comprehensive vision for infrastructural development is needed in order to ensure Silicon Valley remains socially and economically sustainable in the long term. Landscape-driven urban design incorporating cultural urbanism allows companies to create self-sustaining environments that encourage economic growth and maximize individual and collective productivity. As seen in Beijing Finance Street, Facebook and City Creek Center, using outdoor public space as the driver for the building framework supports companies, communities and their local cultural fabric.

Using Urban- and Landscape-Context to Attract Knowledge Workers

The corporate campus – suburban, urban and increasingly a mix of the two – continues to be a hotbed of ideas and innovation, requiring corporate real estate directors, developers and designers to shift the thinking of the workplace to reflect cultural norms. In response to the rising corporate and population growth facing a limited availability of land, Silicon Valley and other job centers must understand changes in the traditional corporate office typology and look to the future social, cultural, economic implications of development in the region.

Designers and developers must understand the context of the place and its people, and use it as a framework for creating high-quality urban and working environments that seek to maximize opportunities for economic viability for the future.

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