

10 PRINCIPLES OF PACIFIC NORTHWEST LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: How Authenticity is the New Regional Commodity

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Introduction

Regionalism, according to Oregon State University historian William Robbins, is largely a mental construction, but one based in physiological fact. It “implies a broadly based common perception of social reality which, while not simply and lucidly defined, directs attention to the shared particularisms of one’s roots, values, and sense of purpose” (Robbins 1983). Regionalism emerges from the constructs of natural and cultural boundaries, which often overlap fluidly over time and space, and also from the desire for legitimacy and recognition of a regional identity. As the modern world becomes more globalized and hyper-connected, there are many great advantages to society in the access, availability and quality of goods, services and information. There are also significant problems of a globalized world: among these are the loss of local identity, traditions and culture, the loss of plant and animal communities, and the loss of meaningful and fulfilling connections to a specific place. Regionalism, as a conscious approach to landscape design, can be an antidote to these losses and to the homogenized ‘placelessness’ described by critical regionalists (Frampton 1983, Tzonis, Lefaivre, and Stagno 2001, Young 2000).

To combat the forces of conformity and homogeneity in landscape design we can take cues from the places that embody an intelligent and authentic distillation of regional character. Two such places are Salishan Lodge on the Oregon coast and Bloedel Reserve in the Puget Sound, which are iconic regionalist landscapes, designed by the landscape architects Barbara Fealy FASLA and Richard Haag FASLA, respectively. Fealy was known by the honorary title “Grande Dame of PNW Style” (McCormick 1993), winning the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Medal of Honor and the Centennial Medallion for her work at Salishan Lodge. Haag founded the department of landscape architecture at the University of Washington in 1969 and has been twice awarded the ASLA’s highest honor, the Medal of Excellence, for his designs at Gas Works Park and at Bloedel Reserve.

The built works of Haag and Fealy achieve authenticity through their irreproducibility and their resistance to globalizing, modernizing forces. They are anchored in time and place, both responding to and defining their context. This is achieved through the conscious, critical application of regional forms, materials, spatial arrangements, values, climatic conditions, craftsmanship, colors, plants and social history, among other factors. These technical considerations indicate the specific aspects of the PNW that are resistant to successful replication elsewhere. As Walter Benjamin clarifies, “The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical – and, of course, not only technical – reproducibility” (Benjamin 2006). In a market-driven society, the products of a place can define its identity. Historically the PNW has been an extractive, resource-based economy (Robbins 1983), with lumber as a prime commodity (Lang 2003). Today, many former logging lands are now repositioning their value, since the largest and most easily extracted old-growth forest products are all spent or protected. Salishan Lodge and Bloedel Reserve are two such PNW sites; both are tourist destinations conceived and funded directly by wealthy developers who made their fortunes in the lumber industry. Today Salishan Lodge and Bloedel Reserve still market their landscape features, but for the tourism market instead of the lumber market. The landscape is still sold as the commodity, but it is the experience of the landscape that is sold, rather than the material *from* the landscape.

Regarding this shift in priorities Barbara Fealy writes that, “Few parts of the American coast have been chopped up worse than the Pacific Northwest, where a generation of loggers carelessly cut the forests, leaving slash barrens and hundreds of miles of debris-clogged inlets and beaches. In common with the Silesian and Appalachian coalfields, worn-out cotton lands of the old South, and man-made wastelands everywhere, the Oregon coast became one long poverty road. So it remained until recent years, when tourism joined lumber as a major source of income, starting a regional revival” (Fealy 1967). These recovering landscapes were extensively documented, evaluated and analyzed as case studies of regionalist landscape design in the author’s master’s project from the University of Oregon (2015). The following list of principles and strategies are the result of this research and are intended to be used to

evaluate or create regionalist design under the new paradigm of 'authenticity as the regional commodity'. A full explanation of the research methods used in these case studies can be found in the original thesis (Guadagni 2015).

10 PRINCIPLES & 36 STRATEGIES FOR PNW REGIONALIST LANDSCAPE DESIGN

The following 10 design principles are derived from the dominant natural attributes and experiential qualities of the PNW, and can be thought of as abstractions of the region itself. The strategies used in the design of Bloedel Reserve and Salishan Lodge indicate how and why the PNW region should accept the landscape as a commodity that generates values not through the extraction of its parts, but through the experience of its unique character. The following section clarifies this character and indicates what is authentic, meaningful and appropriate to the region.

Principle 1. Express the Region's Sublimity

The PNW region is home to massive trees that can live for thousands of years. It is home to raging snow-fed rivers that pour from volcanic peaks. It is adjacent to the world's largest ocean and has spawned some of the world's largest companies. It is, in a word, a *sublime* landscape. (Figure 1) The word sublime is often used by philosophers and landscape theorists to describe places or concepts so large and overwhelming that they overpower our ability to understand or make comparisons (Shaw 2005). Originally associated with European religious revelation, the American sublime is often more strongly associated with Transcendentalism and the expression of divinity through the natural world (Emerson 1909). The American West in particular captures this essence of expansiveness, with landscapes that engulf and diminish the individual and impress not just with vastness of space but also with depth of time and spirit. The role of the designer in first understanding and then translating sublime experience can lead to powerful, enduring, authentic and truly regional landscapes.

The physical magnitude of big trees, boulders, water bodies, or other natural features in the landscape are often obscured or unnoticed; by selectively revealing the extent of large landscape features their sublime aesthetic can be enjoyed. Even one huge tree or boulder can evoke the larger regional context. In general, large posts, beams and structural members fit the PNW style. The surroundings of any PNW site are often replete with sublime forms and features that can be visually and psychologically brought into the site. Designing views to a powerful distant 'borrowed landscape' of mountains, ridgelines, waterfalls or the ocean will make any site seem more expansive and sublime.

Strategies to Express the Region's Sublimity:

- 1.1 Reveal the Size of Existing Landscape Features
- 1.2 Abstract from the Sublime Wilderness
- 1.3 Go BIG
- 1.4 Incorporate the 'Borrowed Landscape'

Principle 2. Make Time Visible

Time is the aspect of landscape that generates sublime form. (Figure 2) The true scale of landscape time is almost unimaginable to the human mind, so when we are confronted with evidence of time's great passage it is often a profound experience. Standing before a 200' tall, 20' wide, 1,000 year-old Western

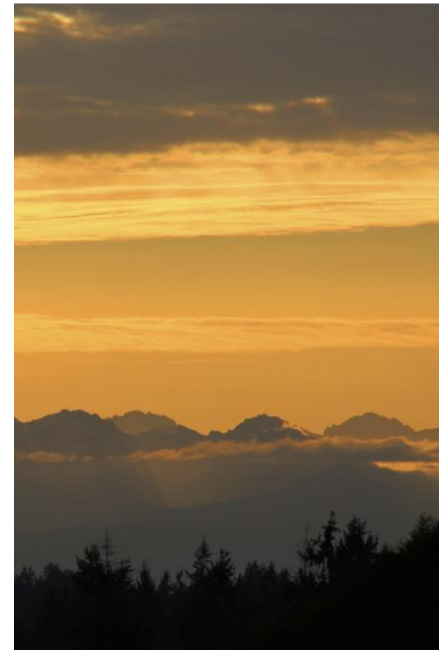


Figure 1: The sublime PNW is vast in space and deep in time. The Olympic Mountains, WA.

Red Cedar in Washington's Olympic Peninsula is both a humbling and an exhilarating experience. What is difficult to comprehend is what the PNW landscape experience was like when forest giants, hundreds or thousands of years old dominated this region. Old growth forests are now scarce and the power of the native landscape is rarely appreciated, understood or seen. To imbue the landscape with a sense of long time is to recognize and honor the climax condition of the PNW region. To design in a way that reveals and features the concept of time can vastly increase the authenticity of the landscape and connect to the ancient spirit of this place. Techniques for revealing the depth and span of time can take cues from the structured layers of the old-growth environment. Here the rambunctious growth of mosses, lichens, and other epiphytes coats every surface in soft greens, and the towering trunks of mature conifers structure space, dwarfing all other creatures and providing a wealth of resources.

If there are no existing features that invoke deep time on site, sometimes it is appropriate to bring them into the landscape. The transfer of large nurse logs, mossy boulders or salvaged timbers can add an instantaneous element of time and authenticity, and in general, materials should be chosen for their longevity and for the patinas that they develop. The rust on steel, the moss on stone or the weathering of wood reveals the passage of time and the endurance of life. All landscapes also need regular maintenance to survive, which should be included in the budgeting and long term planning of any project. Recording and communicating the design intentions with caretakers is also essential to the longevity of the intended design.

Strategies to Make Time Visible:

- 2.1 Mimic old-growth conditions
- 2.2 Cultivate material patinas
- 2.3 Design for durability and longevity

Principle 3. Celebrate the Region's 'Pacific' Climate

The Pacific Ocean delivers mild, temperate moisture to the region that rarely gets extremely cold in the winter nor extremely hot in the summer. The region's mild "temperatures across the Pacific Northwest are controlled by proximity to water and by elevation, the amount of clouds, and the position of major mountain barriers" (Mass 2008). Water is a powerful symbol of PNW character, necessitating design responses that not only protect and shelter from its saturating effects but also celebrate its life-sustaining qualities.

The predominance of tall evergreen trees in the PNW can lead to shady and dark conditions throughout the year. This is especially noticeable in the winter when natural light is at a minimum. Planting deciduous trees instead of evergreens along the southern aspect of landscape rooms will provide summer shade and also allow winter light and warmth into the landscape when the leaves have fallen. A lighting scheme is an important addition in PNW style landscapes, which can often use a boost in illumination to reveal the nuances of shady landscapes. Water bodies are one

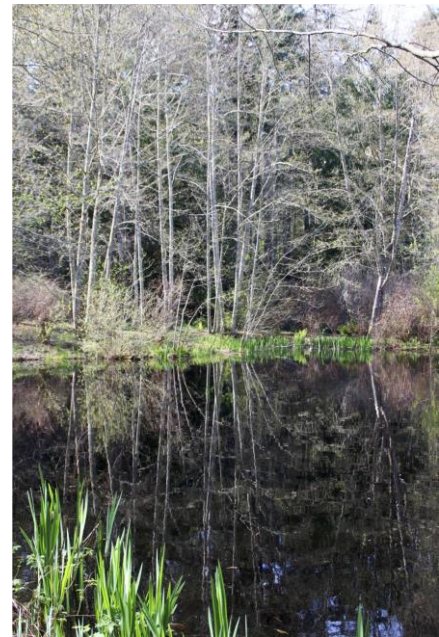


Figure 2: New trees emerge from the old, revealing time's passage. Bloedel Reserve forest walk.



Figure 3: Mild winters and warm summers drive PNW design. Bloedel Reserve guesthouse designed by Paul H. Kirk

way to amplify and scatter light from the sky and illuminate shady PNW landscapes, this reflective property can also be achieved with the strategic placement of mirrors.

Natives are the preferred plants to use in PNW landscapes because they are already adapted, appropriate and authentic to the region. If using non-natives, prioritize those that offer similar experiential qualities as the natives in properties such as color, form, texture, scale, or massing. Or use non-natives where particular functional performance is desired, such as drought tolerance, shade tolerance, or edibility that makes the plant a match for the PNW climate. Wet, cool winters and warm, dry summers make many parts of the PNW a 'Mediterranean climate', with the plant choices and cultural opportunities that this climate suggests. As wet as it can be throughout the fall, winter and spring, summers are remarkably dry and warm, which means that outdoor living is a significant part of PNW lifestyle. (Figure 3)

Strategies to Make Time Visible:

- 3.1 Design to Celebrate and Protect from Rain
- 3.2 Maximize the light
- 3.3 Use non-native plants and ideas selectively
- 3.4 Celebrate 'Mediterranean' summers

Figure 4: Constructed Bird Sanctuary and Habitat Islands. Bloedel Reserve

Principle 4. Honor the Region's Environmentalist Values

By specializing in a native plant and materials palette, and by designing to increase wildlife habitat (Figure 4) the result is what Elizabeth Meyer calls a "Sustaining Beauty," which is "particular, not generic. There will be as many forms of sustainability as there are places/cities/regions... These beauties will not emulate their physical context but act as a magnifying glass, increasing our ability to see and appreciate the context...It will be of its place whether an abandoned brownfield site, an obsolete navy shipyard, or a lumbered forest. And yet it will not simulate its place. It will be recognized as site-specific design, emerging out of its context but differentiated from it" (Meyer 1998).

Landscape design at times requires land to be raised or lowered to create desired landforms. This can be to improve grading and drainage, or to create a particular vantage or aspect. Ideally these landforms are sculpted to mimic the topography of the region, creating a microcosm of the larger landscape. Transportation costs and material waste is kept at a minimum by keeping cut/fill on site.

Strategies to Honor the Region's Environmentalist Values:

- 4.1 Minimize disturbance of landform, hydrology and soils
- 4.2 Choose plants appropriate to existing conditions
- 4.3 Retain or create nurse logs, habitat snags on site
- 4.4 Rebuild lost habitat for PNW native ecology

Principle 5. Value Regional Artistry & Craftsmanship

When quality, artistry and craftsmanship are part of the design concept, the relationship of the designer to the final product is one of care, respect and a desire to achieve something great.

Salishan Lodge is "a tribute to Northwest Artists," (Stone 2006) which roots its identity and authenticity in the elements and energy of PNW nature – celebrating the symbols of the sea, forest, sand dunes and Salish tribes that have shaped the rugged Oregon coast for many millennia. The natural world, as the source of all art, is what inspired Barbara Fealy to create her masterpiece of landscape architecture. (Figure 5) Fealy's style at Salishan, "arises out of the Northwest – the land, the cedars, the rocks," according to Marge Hammond, the Oregon sculptor who created concrete sculptures for Salishan (McCormick 1993).

Landscape designers often employ a narrative sequencing of space to convey messages via landscape. Devices such as plot arcs, spiritual journeys, timelines, migrations, or natural successions can be used as concepts to drive design decisions.

Ancient and indigenous PNW symbols are of the mountain, forest, river, salmon and sea, and of the legends and people that have lived on this land for millennia. Native American culture and native flora and fauna imbue PNW landscapes with a connection to cultural and natural history. One way to honor this history is to use names and epithets that honor or reference native culture. Connecting with contemporary PNW Native cultures (without appropriation) is especially encouraged.

Layering several modes of meaning and expression in the landscape delivers a richer experience that can connect with people in a synaesthetic way. When the aesthetic experience of landscape combines with intellectual or poetic layers, the visitor can project additional thought and sensitivity onto their own understanding of the place.

Strategies to Value Regional Artistry & Craftsmanship

- 5.1 Incorporate artwork by regional artists and craftspeople into the landscape
- 5.2 Build upon preexisting artwork, differentiating new from old
- 5.3 Place regional elements in a new context to 'defamiliarize' them and provoke critical thought
- 5.4 Use meaningful PNW symbols, historic and contemporary
- 5.5 Accentuate the landscape design with complementary artforms

Principle 6. Use Regional Materials

The materiality of the built landscape refers to the way that materials are used in design. Generally, native materials are the most authentic to use since building with the materials of the place automatically infuses appropriate colors, textures, forms and even craftsmanship into the design. (Figure 6) Regionally sourced materials are also usually embedded with fewer extraction and transportation costs than imported ones, and often last longer under regional conditions. Regional materials are defined in this research as being materials that are extracted from, or appropriate to the region. Hani Attia argues that imported materials can still be appropriate if they are sustainable, which he defines as "durable materials that are locally harvested/manufactured and/or recycled/ recyclable" (Attia 2006).

Wood is the most characteristic regional material; use in all forms and stages when possible (living trees, stumps, rounds, chips, lumber, driftwood, snags, sculpture, mulch, needles, petrified, etc). Whenever possible build with native **stone**, or non-native stone that mimics native properties such as color, fracture patterns and texture. In general, more locally sourced stone is preferred due to the lower cost and smaller ecological footprint. Many kinds of **steel** are long-lasting in the PNW, such as Corten, which forms a coating of oxidation that protects the integrity of the metal while still showcasing a rustic and rusty look that is highly appropriate to the rainy PNW. **Concrete** is one of the most universal materials in the world, yet is regionally appropriate because it is so durable and malleable. The forms and uses of concrete can be designed to solve



Figure 5: Salishan Lodge breezeways designed by Barbara Fealy



Figure 6: Regionally sourced materials at Salishan Lodge

regional design problems and can also be repurposed in sustainable ways. **Glass** has a special relationship to the PNW region, both in the art world, where many ground-breaking techniques of glass blowing and fuming were developed in the region, and because glass creates partitions that protect from the elements while allowing light to penetrate, a vital need in the region.

If treating wood, stains are preferable to paint. However, the western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) doesn't require any stain or paint treatment to withstand the outdoor environment. The mature wood of these trees is saturated with a natural preservative called *thujaplicin*, which acts as a fungicide to resist rot (Stewart 1984). Its rich reddish brown color will eventually fade to a streaked light gray that blends perfectly into the PNW landscape



Strategies to Use Regional Materials

- 6.1 Wood, Stone, Steel, Concrete and Glass are highly appropriate PNW landscape materials
- 6.2 Retain and repurpose existing material resources
- 6.3 Limit material treatments
- 6.4 Use a variety of regional materials in combination

Principle 7. Create Indoor/Outdoor Connections

The connection between indoor and outdoor space is crucial in the PNW, where the moderate climate and dramatic landscapes encourage an outdoor lifestyle. Many established strategies for blurring the line between inside and outside come from the PNW regionalist style of architecture, which is, at its essence, a direct response to the landscape. According to David Miller, this architectural style is seen as a “regional variation of modernism and has its roots in the designs of Pietro Belluschi and John Yeon in Oregon during the late 1930s and 1940s. Working independently, these two developed a Northwest Contemporary style, characterized by close integration with the landscape, post-and-beam construction and the use of natural native woods.” Miller’s regionalist work follows in this vein, “Under an overriding roof, walls are superfluous and primarily form a barrier between the inside and the great outdoors...The uninterrupted relationship between interior and exterior is the focus” (D. Miller 2005).

The landscape is brought into the building through planting and visual transparency and the building extends into the landscape with deep overhanging eaves and solid outdoor shelters. When outdoor structures simultaneously keep out the rain and let in the light they become most functional and appropriate to the PNW environment. (Figure 7) PNW landscape style blurs the line between landscape and architecture so that indoor and outdoor spaces overlap and interconnect. At Salishan, building thresholds extend into the planting and vice versa.

Strategies to Create Indoor/Outdoor Connections

- 7.1 Protect from rain, allow for light
- 7.2 Bring the inside out, and the outside in
- 7.3 Shelter primary circulation

Principle 8. Verticality is the Dominant Line

Verticality in the PNW landscape emerges primarily from the dominance of conifer species in the region. (Figure 8) Although native conifers and broad-leaved trees have about equal numbers of species, the conifers dominate, since that are better adapted to the PNW climate and because evergreens can photosynthesize all year long (Arno and Hammerly 2007). Ample moisture and a long growing season

allow conifers to reach massive size, which also provides many species with fire resistance. As a result, many PNW conifers can live for thousands of years, structuring the region with massive columns and providing a compelling visual and spatial verticality to the native landscape. As Midwest regionalist Wilhelm Miller writes, “The essence of landscape architecture is the accentuation of native scenery, and the strongest feature in mountainous countries is the vertical line” (Miller 1915).

A careful study of the native PNW landscape reveals many layers of vertical lines, from the geology, hydrology and the vegetation of the region. Conifer trunks, columnar basalt, waterfalls and rainfall are some vertical lines that can be successfully abstracted and repeated. According to landscape architect and minimalist artist Peter Walker, “Seriality is a form of repetition often found in patterns. When used with insistence, the pattern begins to visually dominate the nonrepetitive elements of its environment” (Walker and Blake 1990). Seriality of the vertical line is one of the strongest characteristics of PNW landscape design.

Figure 8: Vertical conifer trunks structure much of the PNW. Douglas Fir grove, Bloedel Reserve

Strategies to achieve Verticality in the landscape

- 8.1 Abstract verticality from PNW natural elements
- 8.2 Repeat vertical lines using seriality
- 8.3 Balance active verticality with restful horizontality

Principle 9. Enclosure is the Dominant Spatial Condition

In a forested native landscape, there is a high degree of enclosure from all sides and from above. This common PNW spatial condition is organized and designed by orchestrating the permeability, the placement and the proportions of spatial barriers (Robinson 2004), which modulate and direct our attention within the space. In general, a PNW style landscape should have a high degree of enclosure, however, this enclosure should be permeable both physically and visually so as to not feel oppressive. The location of seating can take advantage of an open ‘prospect’ to the front and an enclosed ‘refuge’ behind, which is a universally preferred spatial arrangement for humans (Appleton 1975).

The art of designing landscape enclosure lies in the manipulation of vertical and horizontal space as well as the degree of permeability. Dense vegetation creates cozy, private spaces, but can easily become claustrophobic if there is no visual or physical permeability. Intricate vegetation patterns and details also will also make a space seem larger if they are of a fine texture. Curving paths create a sense of mystery that is fitting in a landscape that naturally has a high degree of enclosure. The end of the path is obscured and curves away into the landscape, which piques the curiosity and entices further exploration.



Figure 9: Varying degrees of enclosure define PNW spaces. The Forest Walk at Bloedel Reserve.

Strategies to achieve Enclosure in the landscape

- 9.1 Mimic regional landscape enclosure using landform, structure, and plants
- 9.2 Modulate the degree of enclosure to fit the design
- 9.3 Create curving circulation

Principle 10. Prioritize ‘Local Color’

The idea of ‘local color’ in landscape architecture comes from Wilhelm Miller’s 1915 treatise on the Prairie Style of the Midwest, where “restoration” of local color is one of the primary tenets of the style. Miller writes, “The aim is to re-create the spirit of disappearing types of American scenery by restoring as much as possible of the “local color” or peculiar character impressed upon each scenic unit



by nature thru ages of experiment” (Miller 1915). For Miller, it was through the repetition of a small number of native plants that local color could be achieved in landscape design.

Based on observations of the case studies and the larger regional context, the native color palette in the PNW tends to be cool colors, which is appropriate to our cool climate and the region’s ‘mellow’ demeanor. These cool colors are of the rocks, trees, waters and skies of the region, which are often accented with small but powerful highlights of warm color. (Figure 10) Greens, Blues and Grays are the most prominent and pervasive year-round colors in the PNW region. These are the dominant natural colors of the vegetation the skies, waters and rocks of the native PNW landscape. These cool colors are accented by flowers in warm yellows, reds, pinks, and whites or by seasonal fall colors, which are generally brownish yellow with the occasional orange or red leaf. PNW fall color is once again a warm accent against the dominant evergreen of the conifers.

No matter which annual, perennial or deciduous plants go into the landscape, they should be supported by evergreens, which are the essence of the PNW region. There are many types of plant that can form this backbone, from conifers and broadleaf evergreens to vines and groundcovers, native or non-native - what matters is that evergreens form a permanent benchmark to which other plants respond and harmonize as they change seasonally.

Strategies to Prioritize ‘Local Color’

10.1 PNW local colors are cool, with warm accents

10.2 Make frequent combination of a few native species

10.3 When planting, create an evergreen backbone that supports seasonal color, texture and form

Conclusion

The goal of this research is to establish a list of regional design principles and strategies that derive from emblematic Pacific Northwest landscapes and which can be applied at a variety of scales in landscape design. The issue of regionalism is increasingly important in a hyper-connected, globalized world, which tends to subjugate local and particular expressions under generic and universal standards, which can sap authenticity and meaning from both people and places. Using the theoretical lens of critical regionalism is a useful way to understand the role of localized space in the context of a globalized world.

Landscape historian Kenneth Helphand explains that, “Critical regionalism attempts to synthesize the relationship between the universal and the local by employing the particularities of regional culture, conditions, and context, while simultaneously acknowledging their relationships to universal and international forces” (Helphand 2002). It is this tension between the universal and the local, the generic and the specific that is the crux of a critical regionalism, which attempts to harness through design the energy and friction that is created by holding a position between opposing forces. Regarding this dichotomy Laurie Olin writes that “...regionalist work inevitably looks in two directions simultaneously: back to a past tradition and to aspects of the vernacular and folk culture on the one hand; and forward to new forces, ideas, and styles emanating from elsewhere that must be dealt with lest they overwhelm whatever traditions and regional character may remain on the other. Central to the concept of regionalism is the notion of giving a particular version, a “regional” variation to some thing, force, or activity that is widespread ... This strategy opposes co-option by the rapacious and image hungry market through the production of works that are so grounded in a particular time and place that neither

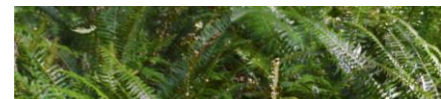
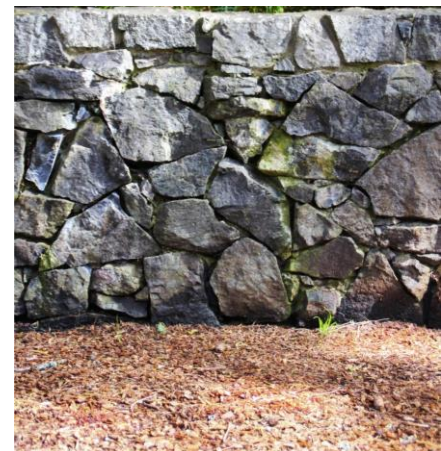


Figure 10: Local colors tend to be cool with warm accents



their image nor their particular formal organization can be copied or repeated elsewhere with success” (Olin 1995).

The final list of 10 principles and 36 strategies of PNW regionalist landscape design are an attempt to clarify and contribute to the emergence of a PNW Style in landscape architecture, which is the result of universal design principles and precedents being applied critically to the regional context of the PNW. In this emerging style the region’s natural and cultural forces converge with history and innovation to generate new meanings and methods of design that are appropriate and authentic to a place that is constantly reshaping its identity. The application of these principles is useful not just to achieve “visual eloquence of a wished for world” (Roncken et al 2011), these principles and strategies also aim towards the appropriate landscape functions that enhance the health and spirit of the Pacific Northwest.

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