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A STUDY OF MINIMALIST LANDSCAPE

By

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This topical studies is submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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“In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious and Most Merciful”

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ABSTRACT

Over the past 20 years, the landscape architecture and design profession has had to struggle to find acceptance for design, which relate to the realities of contemporary. The existence of the term minimalism resulting from exploration that seeks a new richer, deeper and more spiritual fulfilling approach that allows and fulfills to have a livable and flexible environment. Landscape profession is engaged in a practice that is as entangle in the cultural as it is the natural, the artificial as much as the real. Most value landscape because of their roles in our culture. They looked for new landscape to complement the new ideas in design that instead of applying old styles to new problems, they allowed the problems to generate new forms. In tune with contemporary thought, the minimalist garden are responding to the pace and challenge of the twenty-first century, bringing confidence in the future and the new rather than retrospection. The approach does not represent an abandoning of past values; instead it advocates an alternatives and more expansive view of the garden that has meaning for the present century that reflect modern lifestyle. The minimalism design's style accentuate on minimalist art in their design. Minimalism is an expression of the objective; a focus on the object itself and dealing with simplicity of shape, unitary of forms and visually could be well described by shape, size, and color. The simplicity of design here does not necessarily associate with simplicity of experience that one could not be understood without the actual experience of walking through them. The minimalism design focuses on the designed of the landscape itself, its own energy and space that exist in the larger context of environment rather than its surrounding context or interpretation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Landscape is an essential aspect since the beginning of human civilization that can be traced back to the Palaeolithic period. It is also proved that primitive man set his mark on the landscape by raising artificial hills or rearranging stones. The first designed landscape of civilizations was in southern Mesopotamia, emerging from extreme severity and hardship (Jellicoe, 1995).

During the sixteenth to eighteenth century, the western civilization began to transform themselves from restrictive to a liberal society and the universal interchange of ideas that ultimately lifted landscape arts from the level of local and domestic design to the modern concept of comprehensive planning.

Components of the built environment are created from human needs, thoughts and action. Landscape design is part of built environment that exist and created from the human needs and thought which had been realized from the earliest of human civilization. Landscape design involves much more than placing trees, shrubs and other plants on the property. It is an art, which deals with conscious arrangement or organization of outdoor space for human satisfaction and enjoyment.

The new development and landscape design is not only to satisfy the user's needs and requirements, it also must accommodate to the problems of spaces and safety but most importantly, in relation with the art of nature

(Booth, 1991). The truth of the statement proved that the satisfaction of the users will also effect their behavioral and lifestyle. It is an intention that it will be able to provide human enjoyment and environmental enhance that within an area which is close with the users. There are several landscape approaches in dealing with providing enjoyment and environmental enhancement such as contemporary, thematic design, minimalist, etc.

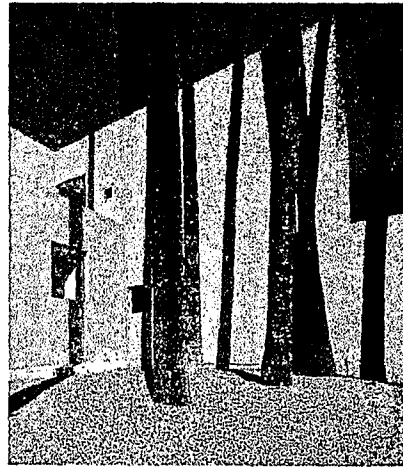


Figure 1.1: A fine example of just how a simple house and a garden can be.

This research is a study on the new form of landscape design that is contemporary and expresses the mood of the present times (refer to Figure 1.1). It is the minimalist landscape. The aim of this study is to investigate and find a clear understanding on the conceptual of minimalism in landscape. In order to discover the fundamental understanding of minimalist landscape, this study will start with a research of historical aspects of minimalism that emerged between 1960's to 1970's as well as to trace the root of minimalism.

Minimalist derived from the word minimal; the smallest amount, degree or size. It is the style that stressing the idea of reducing a work of art to the minimum number of colors, values, shapes, lines and texture. No attempt

is made to represent or symbolized any other object or experience (refer to Figure 1.2). It is sometimes called ABC art, minimal art, reductivism and rejective art. (Delahunt,1996)

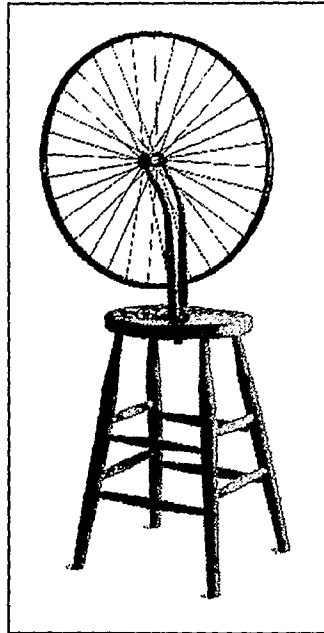


Figure 1.2: Bicycle Wheel, a ready-made sculpture created by Marcel Duchamp in 1913.

Minimalism is the first art movement to have emerged in the United States. Donald Judd, Sol Le Witt, Agnes Martins, Robert Morris, Richard Serra and David Smith were some of its pioneer. Cooper, G. and Taylor, G (2000) identified that their ground zero minimalist forms, lines and group of the some abstract geometric shapes set in seriality, cross-fertilized with the work of late twentieth-century garden and landscape architects and designers, particularly in the work of Peter Walker.

Thus, this research will discuss on the work of the minimalist practitioner particularly in the works of Peter Walker. It will feature some of his finest works and other landscape architects to study on the approaches and

elements used by them to create minimalist garden. Apart from that, this research also will include the historical review of minimalist art and movement to understand the roots of minimalist landscape.

1.2 Research Issues

Cooper G. and Taylor G. (2000) stated that over the past 20 years, the landscape architecture and design profession has had to struggle to find acceptance for design, which relate to the realities of contemporary. The traditionally perceived as a go-ahead and innovative society, attitudes towards contemporary designs in the garden and landscape have been slow to change. Modernism had been labeled and associated with cheapness and poor quality due to the lack of understanding and quality in design and materials.

The minimalist style is one of the approaches that emerging in the modernism that has a modern image but still has its calmness and modesty in its root that suitable for different types of ages and cultures. Thus, the author, believe this trend that is minimalist design/approach will be broadly used in the future. However, lacking of knowledge and awareness by public of specific concept is highlighted by the ignorance of public in the new approach of landscape design such as minimalist landscape and still with the traditional picturesque style.

Another issue to be highlighted here is the statement by Levy L. (1997) through her book, Peter Walker Minimalist Garden, who said that Zen garden

has a strong influence in Walker's work (minimalist landscape) that an underlying philosophical distillation of the complex to achieve simplicity with both separate component and the unifying wholeness of many his garden. Bradley-Hole C.(2000) also has the same opinion when he cited that, "... 15th century garden of Ryoan-ji in Kyoto, and it is outstanding for its disciplined, minimalist depiction of a dry landscape". The author consider that research on Zen Garden is indeed important as both statements have the same point that minimalist landscape approach has a relationship and inspired by the concept of Zen.

The issues that were discussed earlier inspire this research and the main hope that to broaden the knowledge on minimalist landscape design. The concept of minimalism in the landscape, problem statement and general thought of relationship of art with landscape elements has guide a set of research questions as follows:

- i. What are the influences that emerge the minimalist concept in landscape design?
- ii. Does minimalist landscape associated with minimal and simplicity of design?
- iii. What is the relationship between Zen Garden and minimalist landscape?
- iv. What are the elements and approaches taken by minimalist landscape architect/designer to differentiate minimalist garden with other design?

1.3 Operational Definition

Minimalist: Minimalist landscape is an approach of pure abstraction and deeply symbolic that executes simplicity in design with purity, smooth, uncluttered lines, geometric shapes and muted color to achieve serenity and tranquility surrounding. (Bradley-Hole C., 2000)

Minimalism: A non-representational style, usually severely restricted in the use of visual elements and often consisting of simple geometric shapes or masses. The style came to prominence in the late 1960s. (Stangos N., 1994)

Abstract Expressionism: An art movement, primarily in painting, that originated in the United States in the 1940s and remained strong through 1950s. Artist working in many different styles emphasized spontaneous personal expression in large painting that are abstract or non-representational. (Honour H. and Fleming J., 1999)

Landscape: An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors.

According to land becomes landscape when it is described or seen in term of its physiographic and environmental characteristics. Landscape varies according to these characteristics and according tot the historical impact of man on it. (Laurie M., 1986),

Landscape Design: It is the process through which specific quality is given to the diagrammatic spaces and areas of the site plan. It involves the selection of components, materials, plant and their combination in three dimensions as solutions to limited and well-defined problems. (Booth N.K., 1999)

1.4 Research Goal

In order to generate the minimalist concept as one of the alternatives approach in contemporary landscape design, this study is aimed by:

“Aspiration of minimalist concept in contemporary landscape for future”

In achieving the above-mentioned goal, the author has listed 3 research objectives:

- i. To generate explicit understanding on the meaning of minimalist landscape design; thus to create an awareness.
- ii. To understand the theories, perspective and approach of minimalist landscape.
- iii. To study on the design characteristic and elements of minimalist landscape.

1.5 Research Methodology

Identifications of research goals and objectives will lead to a certain end result that needs to achieve in order to have a successful research. Apart from having suitable methodology in gathering data and information, a set of operational of the research process is crucial in managing the collected data. It is important that to have planned and executed the study to know how exactly the whole process of the research. The research process of this paper had been structured into 4 stages:

- i. Preliminary and Theoretical Study
- ii. Descriptive Research and Master at Work
- iii. Content Analysis
- iv. Design Suggestion and Recommendation

1.5.1 Preliminary and Theoretical Study

At this stage, the author has to study related theories and perspective pertaining minimalist landscape. To broaden the author knowledge, a set of books and literature by famous landscape architect, discussion about minimalist, historical overview of minimalism and philosophical study of minimalist had been collected. The collection of reading provide background for research issues and based from the information, it allow the author to connect the problems and later to link the findings of the study. The important of this stage is to expose the author to related literature that allow the author to establish the starting point selected for the study and also to build a plan to study the problems. Most of the literature review was collected from International Islamic University of Malaysia's (IIUM) library and lecturers of Department of Landscape Architecture, IIUM.

1.5.2 Descriptive Research and Master at Work

The term descriptive research is generally used to classify procedures used to generate knowledge by studying condition as they currently exist. Well-designed studies for descriptive research follow the point of the general scientific approach to inquiry. The author has come up with research question which is the major component in making the descriptive research process function satisfactory.

Firstly, the author give the attention to those questions that can be best answered by careful description of characteristic of subjects and the theoretical framework that allows studies that existing variation to the descriptive research study. A clearly defined problem about relationship is basic to the descriptive research study. Secondly, the author proceeds with the thorough study on the knowledge of the background of the minimalist landscape for that allow the author to place the conclusion of the study within the context. After that, the data will be gathered and it involves selecting or constructing the data-gathering instruments to provide the needed data and choosing the elements to supply the data. Finally, when the data are in and the results organized, the author interprets the meaning of the data by forming conclusion. Conclusions are the output of this study, and their validity determines the worth of the study.

1.5.3 Content Analysis

Analysis of the content of records, document and other printed matter comprise the second use of a survey to collect facts for a research study. After documents have withstood criticism for authenticity and credibility, examination of the contents can reveal facts to be used in a study. Classifying the content of documents, frequency of appearance in documents or amount of space devoted to something can be the basis for the analysis. Content analysis can be used to examine the literally style or belief of a writer to measure difficulty level or reading

level or textbooks; to determine interest levels in certain topics (Hopkins C.D. and Antes R.L., 1990)

1.5.4 Design Suggestion and Recommendation

Conclusions from research studies often carry some implications for practical application. The review of literature and in-depth understanding of the problem question should generate other possible questions. Familiarity with the question under study allows demands a good understanding of a wider scope about closely related questions. As an authority in this general idea, the author projected into the future by giving personal ideas for recommended research. Design suggestion and recommendation complete the task that commenced when the indeterminate situation was made and a study was developed to overcome the obstacles.

1.6 Limitation of Research

In doing this research, there are some difficulties and circumstances that the author faced. Since there are no specific recognized minimalist landscape designs in analysis, therefore this study only limited to literature research by using descriptive research approach.

The duration of the research for one semester also considered as one of the limitation of the research, which only consists of fourteen weeks, and the research must be submitted on the 10th week.

Another limitation in doing this research is that the limitation of books and reference that relate in the field study of minimalist landscape proved to be a real challenge in doing the research.

1.7 Thesis Structure

This research comprises six chapters described in the following paragraphs:

Chapter 1: It is the first stage and an introduction to this research that called 'A Study of Minimalist Landscape'. The introduction of this research begin with general overview on minimalist and minimalism that followed by research issues. Identifying research issues will lead to several research questions that important to establish the research's goals and objectives. At this stage also it will be discussing on research methodology used by the author in gathering and analyzing information.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2 is the Literature Review part, will be focusing on the historical overview of minimalism and factor that caused the emergence of it. At this chapter, the author will be reviewing on the minimalist gardens to have more information on

elements and approaches of minimalist landscape taken by several chosen landscape architect. The author also will be gathering information on the Japanese Zen Garden to study on its philosophy and elements in the garden design.

Chapter 3: This is the Research Methodology chapter that discussing on the methodology used by the author in doing this research. The methodology used is the descriptive research and master at work approach. Then, the content analysis approach used by the author is to classify and analyze the content and literally style of the documents. Content analysis is important in gathering information for research findings in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4 is the chapter of the Research Findings. The purpose of the result findings is to make a conclusion from the analysis regarding the minimalist landscape. Research findings shall be described in terms of the general understanding on what is all about minimalist landscape according to the author views from the information and data collected in previous chapters. In this chapter also will be discussing on the principles and characteristics of minimalist landscape.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5, the Design Recommendations and Suggestions is a stage where certain design guidelines and criteria from content analysis and result findings suggested. This stage is important