



## IN MEMORIAM

Michael M. Laurie  
Professor of Landscape Architecture, Emeritus  
Berkeley  
1932 — 2002

Michael M. Laurie, professor emeritus of landscape architecture, passed away at his San Francisco home on March 19, 2002. He was deprived too soon of the pleasures and accomplishments that retirement could have given him.

Born December 19, 1932 to Ian and Nan Laurie in Dundee, Scotland, he was the youngest of three sons and is survived by his brothers Hamish and Alasdair. Michael was a grandson of James Laurie, who founded a well-respected family firm of nurserymen and landscape designers in 1860. He was nurtured with a sense of landscape by his father, who maintained the family firm.

Graduating from Dundee High School in 1951, Michael then served two years with the Queen's Blackwatch Guard in Malaya. After national service, he went to the University of Reading to study landscape architecture under the distinguished Professor H. Frank Clark, receiving his diploma in 1956. Clark encouraged him to go to London for professional experience with Sylvia Crowe, renowned for large-scale planning and as a long-term consultant to the Forestry Commission. As research and design assistant to her, Michael worked on military housing and landscape integration of nuclear power installations. In 1958 and 1959, he was Leverhulme Research Fellow in the Department of Civic Design, University of Liverpool, doing a thesis on the planning organization of the National Parks. He ended his professional experience in England as design assistant with the Parks Department of the London County Council in 1960.

Michael went to the University of Pennsylvania on a Thouron Anglo-American scholarship to study under Ian McHarg, well known for his pioneering the relationships between broad scale planning and ecology. Michael graduated with a master's degree in landscape architecture in 1962.

The same year, Professor H. Leland Vaughan, chairman of the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, recruited Michael Laurie as lecturer. Michael started his first year teaching elementary design and theory, junior design and design history. In 1963 he was appointed assistant professor and promoted to associate professor in 1969. In 1979 he was promoted to professor. Michael was the chairman of Landscape Architecture for three periods: 1976-78; 1981-82; and 1991-98. He was a good shepherd for the faculty and staff and sensitive to the demeanor of our students. Michael retired in 1998.

For generations of students, Michael is remembered for the course "Introduction to Landscape Architecture" taught to a broad cross section of Berkeley undergraduates. His erudite lectures, delivered with verve and an obvious commitment to the field, became the basis for his book of the same title. The core of teaching in landscape architecture, however, is the design studio, and Michael was a renowned studio professor. He stressed clarity of design intent and a simplicity of form that was both elegant and resilient to change over time. For Michael, design was a comprehensive enterprise, and his studio projects extended from the design of a dinner party to the design of a regional park. In studio critiques, he sometimes took the unsettling stance of the devil's advocate, questioning a student's presumptions and solutions. But in this, Michael was advancing the dictum of his senior colleague Professor H. Leland Vaughan, a dictum that he often quoted—"good design is clear thinking." With a constructive skepticism all his own, he impelled students to hone

their ideas and to present them with precision and conviction. Michael received the Outstanding Educator Award from the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA) in 1988.

Professor Laurie was a very private person despite his legion of good friends and happy times spent with them. He was so modest in recognizing his own accomplishments that he gave them no notice. In his well-known, well-used book, *Introduction to Landscape Architecture*, he did not appreciate that he had put together a new classic, internationally used for teaching, which superseded Hubbard and Kimball's 1919 *Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design*. Michael brought his account up to the present to convey the breadth and change of the present-day profession. The book immediately became the standard introductory text in landscape architecture in the United States and Great Britain. It was subsequently translated into Japanese and Spanish.

Michael's interest in the work of Thomas Church led to his editing, with Grace Hall, a revision of Church's book, *Gardens Are for People* in 1983. He contributed chapters to several books on such topics as "The Modern Garden," "Housing Environments," "Modern Landscape Architecture," and "Nature and City Planning in the 19th Century." His contributions to the leading journals in landscape architecture included papers on the modern garden, ecology, aesthetics, historic preservation, and profiles of landscape architects. His writing was insightful and often provocative. As in his lectures, his writing always challenged us to examine the basis for our ideas and the consequences of those ideas for landscape design and the stewardship of nature. For his writing, Michael was honored with the Bradford Williams Medal, presented to him by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) in 1966. In 1986 Michael was elected a Fellow of the ASLA.

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the department, he wrote with David Streatfield, *75 Years of Landscape Architecture at Berkeley*. Michael took pains to acknowledge all of the chairmen and notable faculty and their service for that period but said nothing about his own three stints as departmental chair, nothing of his leadership in curriculum development, nothing of his instrumentality in bringing such luminaries as Sylvia Crowe, Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe, and Ian McHarg for college lectures and their enrichment of classes.

One of Michael's great passions was the study of landscapes through careful observation, confirming particular scenes in watercolor or black and white sketches. He particularly enjoyed outings with friends for watercolor sketching. Michael's watercolor style was efficient, but not minimal. He thought the watercolor sketch was a record of the landscape to be done quickly. Over the years he shared his techniques with his students. In 1993, Michael put together an exhibit of 28 watercolor sketches taken for the many paintings he had done while teaching the California landscape regions course. The exhibit, *Regions of California*, was displayed in Wurster Hall on the Berkeley campus and was enthusiastically received by faculty and students.

Laurie put great faith in the principle of good form. With his interpretation, good form was as applicable to design criticism as it was to conduct of a humane, constructive and beneficent style of life. In his web of good form, he could catch the smallest or largest things. It was bad form to have to borrow watercolor water from a classmate — or a professor — while doing a plein air landscape sketch. Good form could mean that a student's project demonstrated integration of well-proportioned spaces and areas scaled as suitable to the functions served. Or good form might mean praise for a student's honor in receipt of a fellowship or congratulations to a colleague for work well done. In all of this, Michael was the essence of a gentleman.

A memorial service was held for Michael in Berkeley at the University of California Blake Garden in May 2002. Later, there was a memorial gathering at St. Mados Church of Scotland, Glencarse. His earthly remains are there in the churchyard cemetery along with others of his family. He is at last home. Michael's presence enriched our lives and that of so many others; he stays a happy memory with us.

R. Burton Litton Jr.  
Joe R. McBride  
Louise A. Mozingo