

CIMAM ARTICLE

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“How can I be a better servant of what’s here?”

"Culture is a human response to a place"

3 July 2024



Interview with Zita Cobb, CEO and co-founder of [Shorefast](#), Ottawa / Joe Batt's Arm, Canada, keynote speaker at the 56th CIMAM Annual Conference in Los Angeles, and new CIMAM Supporter.

Can you tell us about the origins of Shorefast and the initial vision behind its creation? What inspired you and your siblings to establish Shorefast in 2004?

In a way, a small island is a good proxy for a small planet. And so Fogo Island, this particular small island—which is not so small as it’s four times the size of Manhattan—has endured and flourished and struggled for centuries. And you can see that, apart from war that we fortunately haven’t had to live through, most things that happened in the world have manifested in one way or another in that little place.



That's the magic of small islands: they are a complete entity onto themselves yet undeniably interconnected with the larger whole. The fundamental question that we are trying to resolve at this point in our human history is how the parts belong to the whole. How does a person relate to their local environment? How does that local place relate to the region? And so on.

I am an eighth-generation Fogo Islander. My ancestors emigrated from England and Ireland in the early 19th century to fish in Newfoundland on this little island.

As fishing families, we didn't control access to the market; we traded with a merchant, and we were a very entrepreneurial community. People had a deep social logic, a deep ecological logic for making a living in the North Atlantic, and practically no economic logic. To survive in these centuries, the economic logic was actually less important than the ecological and social logic.

I am 65 years old, and I have lived in three centuries. For the first 10 years of my life, I lived on this island in what was a lot like the 19th century. We didn't have running water, access to healthcare, or much connection to the mainland, and my parents couldn't read. When I was 10, the negative impact of the 20th century started to affect us with the industrialization of the fishery and the arrival of large shipping fleets.

Europeans had always come to fish, and that's how we ended up there, but small-scale fishing turned into industrial-scale fishing. It didn't take long for almost all the fish to be taken out of the ocean. This led to an economic and near-cultural collapse for us.

Art, in a way, acted like an electric eel in the pond – it activated local energies and brought Fogo Islanders together in what has become known as the Fogo Process. I experienced this when I was 10 years old. It helped the community unite during a difficult time to resist forced resettlement of the island. The community adapted by making slightly larger boats, enabling them to go further out to sea and fish for different species.

When I was 10 years old, my father told me that when I grew up, I had to learn, stay in school, and then leave the island and figure out how the money system works. He emphasized that if I didn't understand the money system, it would 'eat everything we love'. I followed his advice. I studied business, pursued a career in business, and made money from it. Being a relatively sane person, I took the money and came home to figure out how to use it to support the things we love.

Regarding the question of what inspired us to create Shorefast, my perspective is that everything a person needs can be found in place. We are physical and social creatures, meaning-seeking creatures – everything we need exists in place(s). There was a time when people believed that we all lived in a global village. This caused a place blindness. Our human and business systems have evolved as if place didn't matter, leading to the failure of economies, communities, and cultures.

Upon returning home, we wanted to take a stand for this place that we love and has given us everything. Everything you need to know about me can be found in Fogo. It all began with the simple idea of boosting the economy in a way that supports the cultural and social development of the area. In a poem by Glenn Colquhoun, a New Zealand poet, it is said that walking upright is the art of using both feet—one for holding on and the other for stretching. This way, place can belong to the world, at least to some extent, on its own terms.

Shorefast's mission emphasizes the importance of community as the unit of change. Why do you believe community-based approaches are crucial for sustainable economic development?

Going back to the idea of humans as embodied beings, everything lands in a place, good or bad. Every government policy, every dream, everything lands in the places we live. I'm a big fan of the economist Raghuram Rajan who wrote a book called *The Third Pillar*, where he says that human societies rest on three pillars: markets, governments, and communities. Through neglect, by not understanding what we were doing, we humans have taken so many moves in the last 60 years that have hollowed out communities and left them as bundles of loose ends. Dysfunction at the community level equals dysfunction at all levels. We can have the best ideas in the world and the best leaders, but we humans don't function if communities don't function.

So, the community is the basic unit of design. In North America, we have built too many cities without considering that where we live is a kind of community, a social system.

Who are the stewards of nature? We are: the people who inhabit a particular place. When I say "community", I am referring to a community that is rooted in a specific place, as place is where nature resides. Culture is a human response to a place. To me, "community" encapsulates both nature and culture. What more is there?



JEREMY HARNUM, 2023 @JEREMYHARNUM

Can you share some key lessons from Fogo Island that other communities could learn from?

I believe the first and most important thing is to understand yourself as a community and know your assets. Sometimes, we use the wrong terms, and this leads us down the wrong path. For example, in business, we often refer to people and nature as resources. However, human beings and nature are

assets, while money is a resource.

Resources must be deployed to support assets. We've all gotten caught up in this reductionist business way of understanding the world. I'm a business person, so I can say this from my own experience. In the business world, we look for ways to turn everything into money—that's the essence of business skills. The problem with all of this is that we've lost the ability to understand our real assets, which is why we're in this climate mess.

For any community, the first question is: what are our assets? Something called asset-based community development, a well-known methodology, has some very beautiful questions: What do we know? What do we have? What do we like? What do we miss? And what can we do about it? These questions lead us to understand that, if these are our assets, we have to come together in this place to interact with the world in a way so that these assets are properly developed. And proper development means bringing out the potential of something in the way that the people who have that potential want to bring it out.

This is the opposite of extraction. When it's done correctly and at the right scale, it's regenerative. And I think a regenerative economy is possible. That's the main thing for communities to understand. If these are our assets and this is the way we want to move forward and develop, then you look at the world, and figure out how to harness those assets properly so that your community belongs to the greater whole on your own terms...

The entire world is made up of institutions, whether they are corporations, government departments, or museums. It's like a whole system that optimizes for itself, and they are all kind of siloed. The question is how to reconcile the management of places and communities with the management of institutions. This can be seen in many ways, such as in museums, where there is a need to be more relevant and connected to the place where they are located. However, it's not just museums; all of us human beings

have tricked ourselves into thinking that the solutions lie within the institutions. We have overlooked the importance of the actual places.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY T.A. LOEFFLER



Shorefast aims to build new models of place-based economic development. How do you envision these models contributing to a more equitable and regenerative global economy?

Whatever we do, every morning, we must wake up and ask ourselves: Who is this for? Maybe not everything is for everyone.

If it's not for all the people then it at least needs to be open, it needs to serve directly or indirectly all the people, whoever they are, in a place

That's what happens with an institution. It exists in a place. Most institutions have a greater reach through digital platforms and maybe multiple locations. But we all need to leave our offices and go out on the street and spend much time lying down on the road to understand the place from the ground up, and remake our work to absolutely serve and be useful in some way to all people in the place. What changes would we make to better meet people's needs? I believe that 90% of us would discover numerous improvements that need to be made.

We always face tensions around the rigor of professional disciplines that sometimes work for very few people because if you're not educated in that discipline, you cannot enter.

You have to start over, start from this place, start by believing and seeing, because if you believe it, you see it—I'm not sure which way it goes, maybe it goes both ways—everything we need to live dignified lives is here.

And our job is to ask ourselves, “How can I be a better servant of what’s here?” and to believe that what’s here are the assets. These are the assets; I am a servant. An institution is a tool. It is a resource that can serve these assets.



So equitable means it’s simply for everybody here. At the root of ‘regenerative’ is understanding the externalities. What are the externalities of my work? The fact that we exist means we take up space and contribute in some way to carbon just by existing. And so, let’s make all of our work and existence count for other people.

RED SHED WEATHER STATION

Photo credit: Joshua Jensen, 2022 @jo.shua

When you founded Shorefast, your first project was the creation of the international residency program Fogo Island Arts. What was the impetus for this?

I believe that art serves as a precious asset for understanding the world. I also think there are various logic systems, and humans can make mistakes when we adhere narrowly to one logic system, such as an economic logic system.

Fogo Island was saved in the late 1960s due to the collective efforts of the National Film Board of Canada, the Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the people of the local community. This process was generative because different questions were asked.

The reductionist logic approach in the late 1960s, from a public policy perspective, would have been to relocate these people who lacked access to running water, education and healthcare and were now facing a shortage of fish.

When filmmakers with unique approaches and perspectives arrived, they were able to help uncover the true potential of the place by asking different questions. According to John McKnight, a pioneer in asset-based community development, artists are like reverse magicians because they make things appear that didn’t look like that before. And that made all the difference in that place that I love and work in, in 1968. And it’s the same thing now. It’s just a different way of seeing possibilities. A miracle is nothing more than a small change in the way you see something.

CRISSY FIELD ARTICLE

TOPICS//DESIGN AND PLANNING

Crissy Field at 25: The Waterfront That Predicted Climate Resilience

Long before sea level rise adaptation became standard practice, a former San Francisco military site demonstrated how restored shorelines could protect cities, expand public access, and create lasting civic value.

By [Charmaine Curtis](#)
July 30, 2026



The transformation of Crissy Field from a derelict military air strip took an approach that sought to make the site's layered history visible while enhancing public access along the waterfront.

(Kirke Wrench/NPS)

As Bay Area communities ponder a vulnerable waterfront and prepare for rising seas, many people here are embracing ideas that were embedded in Crissy Field a quarter century ago. Before its transformation, Crissy Field was an eyesore on San Francisco's waterfront: 100 acres (40 ha) of cracked concrete from an old airstrip, plus a scattering of

old and long-unused military structures in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It also had one of the most spectacular views in urban America, an arms-wide-open panorama of the fog rolling through the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge.

This year is the 25th anniversary of Crissy Field's transformation, marked with a simple invitation: "Meet me at Crissy Field." It's become a place to gather, fly kites, and reconnect with nature. Looking back now, Crissy Field feels strikingly ahead of its time.

"What makes Crissy Field especially remarkable today is how relevant it still feels," said Mary Margaret Jones, president and CEO of Hargreaves Jones, the landscape architecture and urban design firm behind the transformation of the former military airfield into the beloved waterfront park and marshland we know today. "As communities across the Bay Area rethink vulnerable shorelines, many are embracing ideas that were embedded in Crissy Field from the beginning."

Natural Collaboration

When Crissy Field reopened in 2001, it offered an early example of what's possible when cities work with nature instead of against it. Long before climate resilience and sea level rise adaptation became central to planning discussions, Crissy Field demonstrated how restored marshes, dunes, and open shoreline could help protect the waterfront while creating spaces that are both resilient and welcoming.

"You can see that influence across the region," Jones said. In Berkeley and Albany, California, plans for the former Golden Gate Fields site focus on public access, habitat restoration, and shoreline resilience. At San Francisco's Pier 70, a major waterfront redevelopment incorporates a retreating shoreline strategy conceived to adapt to rising seas over time.

Crissy Field helped show that resilience doesn't have to mean walls and barriers. It can also mean living systems that absorb water, adapt over time, and remain deeply connected to the people who use them every day.

"Crissy Field is an enduring blueprint for how urban waterfronts can reflect cultural history, restore ecological function, and create meaningful public places," said Claire Mooney, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy's vice president for Park Projects & Conservation. The Parks Conservancy is the park's philanthropic partner that led the project with the National Park Service (NPS). "The project shows how design can honor what came before while creating a place that continues to serve people and the landscape over time."

The transformation of Crissy Field took an approach that sought to make the site's layered history visible while enhancing public access along the waterfront. Planning for the project included engagement with Ohlone representatives to acknowledge the site's

deep Indigenous history. The design evokes the military airfield era here through subtle references, including the alignment of paths and open spaces, while preserving and adaptively reusing historic hangars and structures around the field for educational and community purposes. Together, these elements allow visitors to experience Crissy Field as a place shaped by its history, natural processes, and contemporary civic life.

The project restored ecological connections that were severed for decades. Teams of project specialists reconnected 18 acres (7 ha) of tidal marsh to the bay for the first time in a century, restored beaches and dunes, and constructed a curving promenade along the shoreline.

Volunteers played a key role in planting native vegetation and supporting habitat restoration efforts, thus helping to create conditions that welcomed the return of more than 135 bird species. As the landscape recovered, people returned, as well. Today, Crissy Field is a destination for more than a million visitors each year.



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(Brittany Hosea-Small / Parks Conservancy)

Ripple Effects

As sea level rise, storm surge, and coastal flooding increasingly threaten urban waterfronts, Crissy Field has become more than a beloved public space. It is now a working model for climate adaptation. What began as a \$34 million restoration project in 2001 anticipated many of the challenges cities are now racing to address, decades later.

At a time when most waterfront projects still relied heavily on hard infrastructure and shoreline armoring, Crissy Field embraced a different approach: restoring tidal marshes,

rebuilding dunes, letting ecological systems function naturally, and designing for flexibility over time.

That strategy reset expectations in the Bay Area for what resilient waterfront development could look like. Early on, designers resisted the idea of sealing off fragile habitats from people. At Crissy Field, public access was carefully threaded through the restored marsh. A pedestrian bridge crossed one edge of the tidal habitat, allowing visitors to move through the landscape without overwhelming it.

“Successful nature-based projects often allow people to interact with the spaces around them,” said Amy Hutzal, executive officer, California State Coastal Conservancy. “People need to move through these types of spaces to understand and appreciate them.”

Today, Crissy Field serves as a palpable demonstration of how nature-based systems can help urban shorelines absorb rising tides, manage flooding, and adapt over time—lessons increasingly relevant to cities that face mounting climate pressures. “The design shows how restoration is not a one-time project, but an ongoing response to changing conditions,” said Kevin Conger, a founding partner at CMG Landscape Architecture. “This shoreline is able to move and adapt, which is exactly what coastal cities are trying to figure out right now.”

Conger worked on Crissy Field, and his firm also leads landscape designs on [San Francisco's Treasure Island](#), where a new neighborhood is being built on an artificial isle in the middle of San Francisco Bay. There, new parks have stormwater gardens that filter water before it enters the bay. Future phases will have tidal marshes to let floodwaters enter and be absorbed.

The ripple effects of Crissy Field can now be seen across the Bay Area, where planners, landscape architects, and public agencies increasingly view resilient shorelines as essential civic infrastructure.

Projects including Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline, the Baylands Nature Preserve, Treasure Island, and the proposed new waterfront park at the former Golden Gate Fields horse track in the East Bay all reflect principles that Crissy Field helped bring into the mainstream, Hutzal said. Among those principles are designing with natural systems, restoring tidal landscapes, expanding public access, and planning for long-term sea level rise adaptation rather than relying solely on hard shoreline defenses.

Jones agreed with Hutzal's assessment. “Twenty-five years ago, sea level rise was still treated as a future possibility rather than an immediate planning reality,” Jones said. “At Crissy Field, resilience was treated as central to the project from the beginning. That mindset is now becoming essential for waterfront cities everywhere.”

The project's foresight is even more striking when one considers that California had not yet formally integrated climate adaptation into statewide land-use and infrastructure

planning. Not until 2008 did then governor Arnold Schwarzenegger direct state agencies to study the effects of global warming and develop adaptation strategies. By then, Crissy Field was already demonstrating what climate-responsive waterfront planning could look like in practice.



The transformation of Crissy Field took an approach that sought to make the site's layered history visible while enhancing public access along the waterfront. Planning for the project included engagement with Ohlone representatives to acknowledge the site's deep Indigenous history.

(Will Elder/NPS)

Long-term Stewardship

Today, Crissy Field is still adapting and leading. Its resilience comes in many forms, thanks to strong partnerships between the Parks Conservancy, NPS, Presidio Trust, and the community. Quartermaster Reach Marsh, a newly restored 7 acre (3 ha) tidal marsh, connects freshwater from the Presidio's largest watershed to the saltwater Crissy Marsh and, ultimately, to San Francisco Bay.

As the capstone to the Presidio's "post-to-park" transformation, the Presidio Tunnel Tops project created a world-class public space that connects Crissy Field and the Main Post. Long-term resilience investments continue across the site. Presidio Tunnel Tops was made possible by seismic work on the Doyle Drive Tunnels. The historic Crissy Field hangars, once used to house early aircraft, and the Crissy Field Center for youth education also underwent significant seismic upgrades.

Furthermore, Crissy Field demonstrates that resilient infrastructure requires long-term stewardship, public investment, and community engagement. After 25 years of the Crissy Field Center and nearly 800,000 participants, youth programs continue to connect climate science, stewardship, and belonging, helping to prepare the next generation of climate leaders. On top of that, ongoing volunteer programs care for its beaches, dunes, and plant life.

“Crissy Field reminds us that, when we work together, we can create something lasting and meaningful,” Mooney said. “It’s a place for everyone to share and respect this stunning shoreline.” She added that “the transformation reimagined what urban waterfronts can be—not just public amenities, but [also] resilient civic infrastructure designed to serve and inspire communities for generations.”

Charmaine Curtis

Charmaine Curtis is principal of Curtis Development, with more than 25 years of experience successfully developing market rate and affordable housing, and serves as vice chair of the Board of Trustees of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

THE EDGE: ON PARK LEADERSHIP, THE CRAZY ONES, AND
WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND ARTICLE



Beauty in design, principles and seeing the landscape differently

The Edge: On Park Leadership, the Crazy Ones, and What We Leave Behind

[Neil McCarthy](#)

Executive Director at Mosaic Insights

(I was recently asked about this question of how hard do you push an innovative concept - so [Fort Monroe Authority](#) you have a challenge in front of you. To [Gil Penalosa](#) [Daniel Raven-Ellison](#) [Scott Martin](#) keep on the EDGE, I can't thank you enough For [john senior](#) understanding a legacy of an organisation like [Parks and Leisure Australia](#) might need to chat with the quite individuals who changed parks in Australia and to [Brett Cheatley](#) who believes anything is possible... many thanks)

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Landscape and park leadership is a peculiar kind of hard. It rarely comes with the visible drama of a corporate collapse or a political scandal — no share price crashing on a screen, no press pack at the door. It comes slower and quieter than that, and it comes from something much harder to defend in a boardroom: an idea. An idea about what a place could be, decades before anyone else can see it.

Over forty years working in parks and natural resource organisations — in Victoria and with global bodies — I have come to believe the hardest part of this work isn't managing the landscape. It's managing the distance between what you believe is possible and what the people around you are ready to accept. That distance has a name. I call it the edge. And the question that has followed me through every organisation I have led or advised is this: how do you tell when you are pushing on the edge — which is where all the good work happens — versus when you have gone over it?

Principle Before Boldness

Before we get to the edge, it's worth being honest about the foundation underneath it, because risk without discipline isn't leadership — it's just noise. The landscapes we now call legacy — Central Park, the great English estates shaped by “Capability” Brown, the parks and boulevards Olmsted scattered across a still-young America — didn't become legacy because someone was bold. They became legacy because the boldness was built on top of principle.

Olmsted, more than anyone, gave landscape design a set of foundational principles that still hold up today: Natural Form, the full utilisation of what a space naturally offers; Blend, the subordination of every individual detail to the whole; Concealment, design that never calls attention to itself; Sense, design built to enhance the feeling of a space rather than just its function; Utility, above all else; and System, the understanding that a space is never really “a park” in isolation, but part of a network. Six quiet disciplines, and everyone is about restraint before it is about vision.

That's the part we lose when we romanticise “thinking differently.” Olmsted and Brown weren't reckless — they were disciplined designers who then, on top of that discipline, took the risk of seeing land as it would become across a hundred years and several generations who would never know their names. That is the leap good design actually requires: the principles give you the foundation to stand on, and vision is what you do once you're standing on it and you look further than the brief ever asked you to.

It's no accident that in the fuller set of Design Legacy Principles I have tried to capture from this sector, you cannot get to Principle 14 — Leadership without Fear — without first having earned the six that come before it. The leaders who go over the edge are, more often than not, the ones who skipped the discipline and jumped straight to the boldness. The ones who become legacy mastered the discipline first, then had the courage to see past it.

The Edge Is Where the Work Is

I have written before about Design Legacy Principle 14 — Leadership without Fear. It is about considering ideas and innovations that don't just challenge existing concepts, but change the concept altogether. It sounds simple written down. It is not simple to live.

Central Park is the example I keep returning to. It captures Olmsted's foundational principles beautifully — but it doesn't thrive because of the drawings. It thrives because of an innovative and passionate community leadership that understands its community, keeps learning, and is willing to fail. That last part is the one we conveniently forget. We treat design as a static set of plans on a wall, when design is actually about bringing something to life — and nothing alive stays safely inside the lines.

Brian O'Neill understood this better than almost anyone I have met. When he started at what would become Golden Gate National Parks back in the 1960s, his fundamental idea was to connect with people and empower them — to stop treating parks as islands with fences around them. The National Park Service didn't see a visionary. They saw an aberration. He was, by the standards of the time, over the edge. Decades later, they wish they'd had many more like him. His three Design Legacy Principles — Belief, Community Fabric, Connections — now sit quietly underneath some of the most admired urban landscapes in the world: Crissy Field, the Presidio, Alcatraz. He used to say that every time an agency does it themselves, they miss out on an opportunity for community engagement. That line has never left me.

So here is the uncomfortable truth about the edge: from where you're standing at the time, you cannot always tell the difference between visionary and reckless. Brian couldn't prove it in 1965. Neither could the individuals who, in 1999, decided parks had a central role in human health and built Healthy Parks Healthy People out of nothing but an observation and a conviction — a concept dismissed as soft, then

adopted worldwide, then treated as if it had always been obvious. Ahead-of-its-time ideas rarely announce themselves as such. They just look wrong, right up until they don't.

When It Tips Over

But it does tip. I have watched ideas — some of them mine — go over that edge, and it is worth being honest about what that actually looks like, because it isn't simply “big” or “bold.” It's something more specific: it's when the idea stops connecting to the community it's meant to serve and starts serving the ambition of the person carrying it.

I wrote a paper in 1992 warning that Victoria's push to corporatise and sell off state timber plantations would hollow out research, strip regional employment and leave government exposed to the next biological disaster with none of the expertise left to respond to it. I said plainly that timber production would shift from native forests to plantation timber within twenty years. It did. But the paper landed nowhere near the decision, because by then the momentum belonged to a financial logic that had already stopped listening — to foresters, to regional communities, to the people who would carry the cost. That is what over the edge looks like from the other side: not an idea too bold, but a process that has stopped bringing anyone with it.

Compare that to the Suburban Rail Loop proposing to consume thirty-five hectares of Melbourne's open space, in a city whose 1929 plan already had the vision for underground rail a hundred years before Melbourne finally built twelve kilometres of it — a fraction of what London had laid in the 1860s. That isn't leadership pushing an edge. That's the opposite failure: a “normal” solution, the government-owned-land answer because it's the one that doesn't apparently cost anything, dressed up in the language of “putting people first” while quietly taking space away from the people it claims to serve. Going over the edge and staying safely short of it can produce the same result — a community that loses out — for entirely opposite reasons.

So the signals I now watch for aren't about how radical an idea sounds. They're about connection. Are you still listening to the quiet person in the room, or have you started explaining to them why they're wrong? Is the community still part of the fabric of the idea, or has the idea become bigger than the fabric? Are you willing to fail in public, the way Central Park's stewards always have been — or are you simply unwilling to be told no? Pushing the edge keeps the rope attached to the people you serve. Going over it means you've let go of the rope and convinced yourself the view is worth it anyway.

The Crazy Ones

It is one of my favourite things about Steve Jobs — not the products, but that he wished us to buy something that would change our lives, rather than trying to sell us something to simply make money. He wrote, in words that have outlived every device he ever built:

“Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as

the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

I think about that quote constantly in the context of parks and landscapes, because our sector produces exactly this kind of person and then, more often than not, pushes them aside. A New Scientist article a few years back explored how humankind's progress has always leant on the one or two percent of the population who don't fit the mould — the ones the rest of us find exhausting to have around, right up until we're using the fruits of what they saw first. We gladly inherit their insight. We're far less generous about supporting them while they're still the ones being ignored in the room.

The crazy ones and the ones who've gone over the edge can look identical from a distance. The difference, I have come to believe, is not in how loudly they disagree with the status quo — it's in whether they are trying to bring the world with them, or simply trying to be right without it.

What Legacy Actually Asks of You

Legacy is a word we throw around too easily in this sector, usually attached to a plaque or a naming ceremony. Real legacy is not comfort. It is the discomfort someone was willing to sit with, on your behalf, before you were ready to understand why. Olmsted, Muir, the Board of Works planners who put parks into a 1929 Melbourne plan a full century ahead of use, O'Neill at Golden Gate — none of them got to see their idea vindicated in their own tenure. They took the risk. They stayed connected to the people the risk was for. And they let time do the rest of the arguing.

That, in the end, is the only test I trust. Not “was this idea big enough,” but “did I stay tethered to the people this was meant to serve while I pushed it.” If the answer is yes, you're on the edge, and the edge is exactly where park and landscape leadership is supposed to live. If the answer drifts to no — if you find yourself explaining the idea more than listening to the room — you have already gone over it, no matter how right you turn out to be twenty years from now.

Back the crazy ones. Just make sure you're still one of them, and not simply alone.

Neil McCarthy

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