



NICK GOTTHARDT '12

GRADUATE DEGREE: Master of Landscape Architecture

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE: Bachelors in Urban Planning - University of Cincinnati, Bachelors in Geography - Universiteit van Amsterdam

CURRENT JOB: Designer at SURFACEDESIGN, inc

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO PURSUE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE?

I first became aware of landscape architecture while living in the Netherlands. Afterwards I moved to California and worked for Metro, the transit agency for LA County. At that time we were working on rail expansion through sites adjacent to the Los Angeles River and I took a personal interest in the river – both its history and the many design proposals which were flying around the design community. This is what really sparked a curiosity for thinking about contemporary landscapes and the practice of landscape architecture.

WHICH SUBJECTS DO YOU FEEL MOST PREPARED YOU FOR AN MLA DEGREE?

My undergraduate studies were all over the map - literally. I entered undergrad as an Architecture major, but switched to Planning in order to zoom out. I took a lot of art history, geography and urban studies courses. In my final year of undergrad I received a scholarship to complete my Planning degree at the University of Amsterdam, while working on a second degree in Geography.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE OSU FOR YOUR MLA DEGREE?

I decided to attend OSU after a visit with Jane Amidon, who was head of the landscape architecture section at the time. She invited me to a Wednesday night lecture that evening by Kate Orff and I wanted to get started the next day. The Knowlton building was better than any other facility I had seen and I left with the impression that the Knowlton School's curriculum was a better blend; rooted in design, history and theory on one end and open ended for personalized research on the other. Even now I'm still trying to figure out how I want to situate myself in practice and I think that's a product of my time at Knowlton. I always felt encouraged to continually redefine what it means to study, think, draw, build and write about landscape architecture.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB AFTER GRADUATING FROM THE MLA PROGRAM?

I have been at SURFACEDESIGN, INC. in San Francisco, California since graduation. I also currently adjunct at the Academy of Art in San Francisco, teaching undergraduate studios and mixed media graphics courses.

HOW DID YOUR TIME IN THE PROGRAM PREPARE YOU FOR A CAREER IN YOUR FIELD?

The MLA program provided what I consider to be a great foundation for design thinking; using drawing as a tool, working through iteration after iteration...after iteration, and the need to be self-critical of my work and precedents. I consider myself more of a thoughtful designer than a natural, and all of those habits came out of the studios and workshop classes which pushed a variety of mediums: drawing, modeling, writing, and verbal presentation. In addition to these critical skills, time spent teaching as a GTA really primed me for professional practice both as an instructor and designer. Having the opportunity to help undergraduate students guide their design concepts did a lot to prepare me for the aesthetic versatility that's needed in an office. It's also important to recognize the connections made with a lot of wonderful practitioners, artists and academics that were facilitated through reviews, collaborations and faculty introductions. These connections still play a big part of my professional development.

DESCRIBE A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE YOU HAD IN GRADUATE SCHOOL.

I remember having a wow moment during my second quarter when I realized that I actually could make compelling hand drawings that did not look like a child's...I was just a little slow to develop. Winning the Thesis prize in my final year is another nice memory. There's also a story from Sarah Cowles' Land Arts seminar that involved Michael Mercil in a Monkey suit, trudging through the then drained Goodale Park Pond. It was an evening seminar and I think a Halloween prank? It happened, I swear - ask my studio pals and other distinguished alums Kirk Hiatt, Abby Downs, or Jesse Hartman.

WHY WOULD YOU EMPLOY A GRADUATE FROM THE MLA PROGRAM AT OSU?

I have employed Knowlton students! Several of my former undergraduate students that I taught as a TA have interned with our studio in San Francisco. When I first moved here I was the kid from Ohio State in a field of Berkeley, GSD, RISD and Penn Grads. Now, there's an impressive Knowlton contingency which I hope continues to grow.