

Olivia Erlanger What is a system?

Sean Hogan, Cistus, Landscape Architect

Both natural and human environment by default are an evolved system. **It seems when we fail to realize we are just part of the bigger picture and when things don't work on an immediate level that the system will move on with or without us.**

OE What does disaster in your field mean?

**SH Disaster ultimately comes from apathy, or I suppose the loss of life qualities that force efforts and energy to excess corporate profit or religious fighting rather than common good (no, I do not have a coexist sticker on my car).** With that, my field, at least as I practice it is based on community and common good. With gathering places essentially seen as sacred, and direct connections to the wonders of the natural world, maybe we can create nodes of **Gesellschaft**, or company where discussion and maybe some critical thinking are born. **All this with a few plants and a bench? Maybe! Disaster comes when we are too busy to want these things, or worse don't know we should expect them!**

OE Is it possible to design a natural world?

**SH** No. Personal opinion of course, but the best we can do is take our hands off, try undo past human damage, and let nature try her best. We try, of course, by collection and planting of endangered and other native species and their cohorts.

OE Do you believe we can restore the earth back to a state of equilibrium?

**SH** I actually am an optimist here. **I think with an emerging middle class, possible population plateau and the ability to use fewer resources, we will have the time to contemplate the world around us and foster nature, art and community.**

OE What are your biggest influences for how you design?

**SH** Really, much of my design work comes from exposure to relatively unspoiled natural communities. Our western woods, oak savannah, chaparral and grasslands are of a beauty we can only hope to emulate! To me, the softening and the battle (hopefully stylized in design) of and between the built and natural can create a comfort in our collective spaces. A green-shrouded nook to sit in out of the fray, or a single Daphne with fragrant flower to induce the desire to pause, or even contemplate. **Maybe our primal selves see a meadow as a safe place to be.** Maybe the simple act of cultivation says activity and nurture.

OE What is nature?

**SH** I am not of the camp that whatever we do is part of such, since we are just part of what came from the primordial ocean stew back in the day. **We have this weird brain thing—a lobe that allows us to connect past actions with future events and with that, empathy. We should probably use it more often. Allowing the natural systems to function more as they did before we**

**became so dominant might allow us to be part of that again as we become custodians.**

**OE** What is biomimicry? Does this influence your designs?

**SH** I have always thought life imitates art. Yes, in the greater sense we imitate the spaces and the colors, and the fragrances that delight our psyche, but pushing the edges (thinking outside the boxwood as it were), questioning and not going with the obvious flow is what nature does to succeed, and heeding that will hopefully do the same for us. **Seeing a living plant indistinguishable from the stone in which it is growing, or from prey it is trying to attract—or even looking exactly like a counterpart from another continent and having no relation, except via the physical environment in which they evolved—is a much more literal take, but it leads me directly to the above.**