

Jane Silverstein
Grade 8 & 9. June 16, 1922
Age 13



Jane Silverstein Ries
Landscape Architect and Land Steward Advocate

Re: Nomination of Jane Silverstein Ries, FASLA for The ASLA Medal



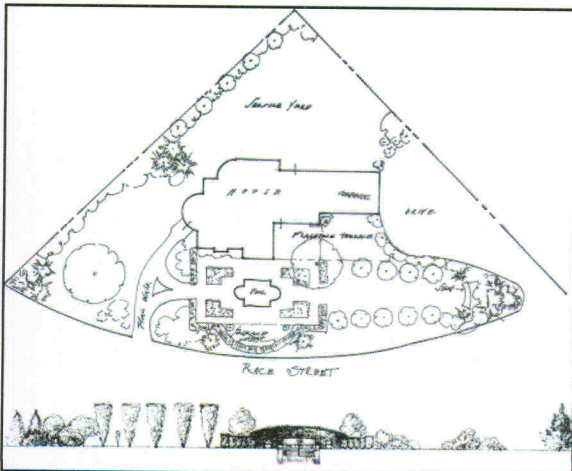
prelude

Jane Silverstein Ries was once quoted as saying, “there isn’t a day that goes by that a plant doesn’t give me a surprise.” In so many ways, she has been a constant delight and surprise to the City of Denver, Colorado and her chosen profession of landscape architecture. She is a woman who lives her life, much like she tends her garden, “well, and high-spirited.” Throughout her career that spanned some fifty-six years, Jane, the first female landscape architect in Colorado, demonstrated her own uncompromising, pioneering sense of awareness, understanding, and stewardship of land use values. Land use values that she believed in, fought for, and taught daily to others.



pursuit of a profession

Born in 1909, Jane grew up in a time when society’s expectations of young women focused solely on their domestic abilities. She was, by all accounts, a maverick and had the personality to match. Her mother understood this about her daughter and set out to find an appropriate women’s profession that would satisfy Jane’s love of nature and plants. Ironically, it was the recommendation of a family friend, Irvin McCrary (a prominent Denver landscape architect) that led Jane toward her professional pursuit.



In 1929, Jane enrolled in the Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture, Gardening and Horticulture for Women in Groton, Massachusetts. She graduated in 1933, and began her professional career working for Denver landscape architect Irvin J. McCrary, the very same person who recommended the profession to her mother. While there, Jane designed the landscape for the new women’s dormitory at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Six months later, she left the firm and started her own firm. Her business started by designing gardens for many of her mother’s friends; Jane’s big break came within her first year of private practice while working with architect Lester L. Jones on the landscape and courtyard design for the General Electric Show Home.



With the onslaught of World War II, Jane, like so many of her generation, supported the war effort by working as a consultant for several local architects and designed the grounds of war housing projects under the Federal Housing Authority in Wyoming and Nebraska. In 1943, she applied to Officer's Training School in the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Coast Guard and was later stationed in New York City to take surveys of all the Coast Guard property in the 3rd Naval District. Released from active duty in 1945, Jane stayed in New York to explore working at the well known firm of Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill. Unhappy with the politics of a big design firm, Jane returned to Denver in 1947 and resumed her practice. During her long professional career, Jane implemented well over 2,000 design plans in the State of Colorado for private estate and civic landscapes. At a mid-career peak, Jane was inducted as an ASLA Fellow in 1965. In the later part of her life, Jane's home, office and garden were officially designated as a Denver Landmark.

approach to Design

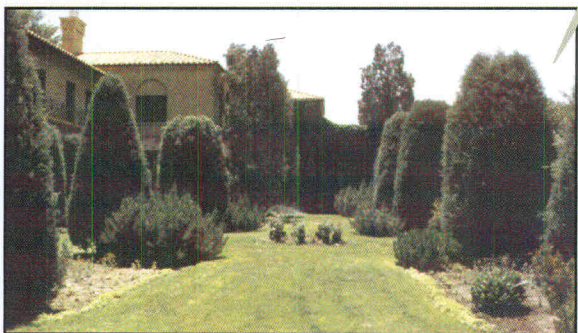


Jane's design approach was influenced by the beautification of the City of Denver and her experiences and study at Lowthorpe. During her childhood, the City of Denver went through some distinct changes under the leadership of Mayor Robert W. Speer. Speer's leadership was a crucial catalyst for Denver's transformation from a dusty mining service town to an urban oasis with city parks, tree-lined boulevards and parkway systems. Jane fondly recalls the effect the 110,000 seedling tree giveaway had on her and the city.

Throughout her career, Jane focused on the design of small estate and urban gardens, lifting her clients' awareness, well before it was in vogue that gardens were about livable environments, sustainable design, and stewardship of the land. Jane was also the creative force behind many civic improvement projects, including: Denver Botanic Gardens, Civic Center Park, renovation of the Governor's Mansion, Colorado Heritage Center, Larimer Square (Denver's first urban renewal project), and the Denver Art Museum.



Jane's signature style is immediately recognizable as it differed from the popular Beaux-Arts tradition of the time. Her style is more aligned with the latter cubist influenced work of the infamous three — Garrett Eckbo, Dan Kiley and James Rose. Her designs have the charm and romance of an English cottage garden mixed with very modern, organic, and geometric symmetry. Jane was able to blend the architecture of the



home with the outdoor rooms of the garden utilizing pathways, walls, pool, fountains, raised beds, sculpture, trellises and plant materials as defining elements in the landscape. She established a demanding ethic for the development of suburban, prairie, and mountain sites. Jane would slip a home into the natural topography “without disturbing the existing land,” thus making vistas and native vegetation into a natural extension of the garden.

impact on the profession

Woven throughout the fabric of her career and life were two of Jane's principle beliefs: the importance of a collegial, professional network that encouraged individual excellence and collective impact and the responsibility of every citizen to take part in civic debate. She put these beliefs into practice and made an example of herself for profession.

Jane collaborated with Andrew Larson, and authored Colorado's first landscape architecture licensing exam. She was Colorado's first female landscape architect and the third person to receive a professional license from the State. Jane founded and was president of the Colorado Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (CCASLA) — at the time it was the Rocky Mountain Chapter and included Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Wyoming — in 1959. She was on the task force to establish a graduate program of Landscape Architecture at the University of Colorado at Denver.

Jane made many volunteer contributions of time and consulting services to the improvement of Denver's public places. She served as the CCASLA's Historic Preservation Liaison to ASLA, leading the way in defining the importance of preserving historic landscapes and spearheaded the effort to rehabilitate the grounds of Colorado's Governor's Mansion. Jane volunteered her services to the restoration of the Molly Brown House Museum garden and creation of the Ninth Street Historic Park.

For over half a century, few significant land use issues arose within Denver or the State of Colorado, without Jane's wisdom or wit placed on their merits. She involved herself in the importance of prairie and mountain lands, the need for mass transit, control of rampant growth and good planning, the onslaught of drought, and the replacement of street trees. Governors and Mayors sought her advice; Jane always had the ear of the City's policy makers. Throughout her career, Jane enjoyed great collaborative partnerships with many of Denver's leading





architects. Jane contributed many articles to “The Green Thumb” — a quarterly publication of the Denver Botanic Gardens — and generously gave interviews to gain publicity for the causes she was championing.

In 1983, Jane partnered with CCASLA to initiate the Jane Silverstein Ries (JSR) Award, which annually recognizes a person, group, or organization that has demonstrated a pioneering sense of awareness and stewardship to land-use values. In 1997, the JSR Foundation was formally established in her name. This program seeks to recognize those who value and seek to protect what Jane cares about most, the land. At a time when open space is often sacrificed for the sake of growth, land use is an issue that greatly impacts Colorado. Past honorable award winners have been the Platte River Greenway Foundation and the Colorado Division for the Public Land Trust.

Too numerous to list, Jane served on multiple boards, committees, and commissions of local civic organizations. Some of these include the Advisory Committee to the Denver Partnership, The Urban Design Forum, Colorado Nature Conservancy, Denver Botanic Gardens Horticulture Advisory Committee, The Park People, the Denver Planning Board, and the Denver Urban Forest.

a woman of consequence

Jane Silverstein Ries is a mentor and role model for women within the profession of Landscape Architecture. She has been a tireless cheerleader, volunteer, and sage for fellow women in design. Jane, like many of her contemporaries, led the way for women all over the country to begin dreaming about a life beyond traditional values.

Jane became a uniquely influential advocate for understanding land uses and the intelligent stewardship of the environment, for sustainable design and good planning, and for the importance of aesthetic green space for higher standards of urban life. She also understood the importance of civic responsibility and responsibilities that landscape architects owe to their profession.

“Above all, Jane was a catalyst — as a mentor to community leaders and opinion makers; as a popular designer of small urban gardens; and as a tireless advocate for urban greenspace and untouched open space, for adequate park funding, for conservation of the urban forest and historic landscapes, in short for ‘quality of place’.” - Carolyn and Don Etter, Honary Members of ASLA, Historians, and Former Managers of Denver’s Parks & Recreation Department.

the asla medal

The ASLA Medal is an honor that seeks to recognize individuals whose lifetime achievements and contributions to Landscape Architecture have a unique and lasting impact on the welfare of the public and the environment.

Jane Silverstein Ries has a devoted civic conscience, an unorthodox approach to design, and decades of service that have made a great impact on the City of Denver and the State of Colorado. She displays a contagious exhilaration for life and landscape architecture. Her work in Denver has become legendary; designers in the region respect her and are grateful for her contributions to the profession and the beautification of our city.

With that in mind, we are pleased and proud to nominate Jane Silverstein Ries for the ASLA Medal; becoming the third woman to receive this great honor and the 33rd Landscape Architect.

Respectfully,
Colorado Chapter of ASLA & the JSR Foundation



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