PLANTING:
UNLOCKING CREATIVITY THROUGH NEW AVENUES
OF DESIGNER/GROWER COLLABORATION

DESCRIPTION
As landscape architecture has become more professionalized over recent decades, its practice has drifted apart from the kinds of fruitful relationships with nurseries that characterized the profession in the early 20th Century. Michael Van Valkenburgh and Edmund Hollander, landscape architects, and Chet Halka and Ted Kiefer, nurserymen, will describe their collaboration over the years and illustrate the benefits of sharing growers’ and designers’ knowledge bases.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
• Recognize the inherent limitations of the formal landscape architecture education with respect to understanding plant care and growth
• Understand the advantages of a collaborative relationship between architects and growers
• Explore opportunities that arise when a rapport is developed between landscape architect and nursery
• See specific examples of architect/nursery collaboration that creates a more resilient and effective design

OUTLINE
• Introduction: Michael Van Valkenburgh and Edmund Hollander
  • Personal histories and approaches to design
  • Past landscape architects who influenced their perspectives
• Design education and its lack of practical knowledge of planting and growing
• The importance of a relationship with local nurseries
• Exchange of ideas between landscape architect and nursery and the opportunities this exchange creates
• Examples of those opportunities (large plant transport, tree clumping, microclimate experimentation, etc.)
MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH
President and CEO - Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc.

Michael Van Valkenburgh has always had a green thumb, and he was the kid on the family farm that tended the vegetable garden. He visited his first tree farm when he was sixteen and selected a pair of pin oaks that are still in front of his parents’ house in upstate New York. For Michael, that first nursery trip was the beginning of discovering he wanted to be a landscape architect. He graduated with a B.S. with a concentration in landscape architecture from the College of Agriculture at Cornell, where he studied with the remarkable plants teacher Robert Mower. He joined the faculty at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design in 1982, where he has taught planting and design every year since.

Michael’s personal and educational background creates a foundation for his integrative approach to design, which finds inspiration in the pragmatics of science while aspiring to the highest levels of artistic expression and social purpose. He oversees a wide range of MVVA projects in both the Cambridge and New York offices, and part of the unique genius of the firm is the constellation of other plant geeks and lovers who now work with him. He is a registered landscape architect in New York and in more than 23 other states and Canada. He is also a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome and the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA).

Michael received the National Design Award in Environmental Design from the Smithsonian Institution’s Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in 2003. MVVA’s design for Brooklyn Bridge Park was awarded the prestigious Brendan Gill Prize from the Municipal Art Society of New York, having been selected as the work of art in 2010 that best exemplifies and contributes to the vibrant life of New York City. Michael was named the 2010 recipient of the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for contributions to the practice of architecture as an art, making him, after Dan Kiley, only the second landscape architect to be honored in the award’s 45-year history. In 2011, Michael was elected as a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In addition, he was the recipient of the ASLA Design Medal, which recognizes “an individual landscape architect who has produced a body of exceptional design work at a sustained level for a period of at least ten years.”

EDMUND HOLLANDER
Principal - Edmund D. Hollander Design

Edmund Hollander is the President of Edmund Hollander Design, a firm with offices in New York and Sag Harbor which includes landscape architects, environmental planners, and horticulturists. He graduated from Vassar College in 1976 with a BA in History and later studied at the New York Botanical Garden School of Horticulture. Hollander received his Masters Degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1983. After graduating from Penn he worked for the Delta Group in Philadelphia and Clarke and Rapuano in New York City before founding Hollander Design with his partner Maryanne Connelly in 1991. He has taught at the City College of the University of New York and at the Graduate School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania, and he has lectured widely. He is the Past President of the New York Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects and was recently elected as a Fellow in the American Society of Landscape Architects.


Hollander Design received the 2006 American Society of Landscape Architects Honor Award for residential design, as well as the New York Chapter American Society of Landscape Architecture awards in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2011. The firm won four awards in both 2012 and 2013. In addition, the firm was awarded the prestigious Stanford White Award in Landscape Architecture from the Institute for Classical Architecture. The firm has also won awards from the New York and Connecticut Chapters of the American Institute of Architects. Most recently the firm has been nominated for the Cooper Hewitt National Design Award in Landscape Architecture.
CHET HALKA
Owner - Halka Nurseries

Chet Halka, of Halka Nurseries, is a second-generation nurseryman from Monmouth County, New Jersey, who has been in the nursery business for forty years. He has offered his time and knowledge serving on the following political committees: Township Committee, Township Open Space Committee, Township and County Agricultural Advisory Committees, and the Search Committee to provide Rutgers University with a Specialist in Nursery Management and Production. Chet and Halka Nurseries have often been acknowledged for their magnificent trees by the media, including the Washington Post, the New York Times, People Magazine, and CNBC. It has been said that if you are looking for large trees, Chet Halka is the man to see.

Halka Nurseries, one of the largest and most successful nurseries in the country, was founded by Chet’s father, Chet Halka, Sr., in 1954. A third generation, Chet’s daughters Kate and Jaime, are currently working with him to learn the business, and together they oversee the nursery’s daily operations. Halka Nurseries grows over 200 varieties of plant material on approximately 2600 acres of farmland in central and southern New Jersey. It is known for its large trees, but it also sells trees as small as 3” caliper. Halka Nurseries has provided trees for the White House, the Capitol building, many of the national memorials in Washington, D.C., The Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, Four Freedoms Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Ground Zero, Battery Park, Princeton and Harvard Universities, and many estates on the East Coast.

TED KIEFER
Owner - Rivendell Nursery

Ted Kiefer is owner and operator of Rivendell Nursery, located in Greenwich, New Jersey. Ted grew up in Franklin Township, New Jersey, where his parents own a garden center and a landscaping company. Growing up working with plants inspired Ted to study plant science at the University of Delaware. After college, Ted started Rivendell Nursery in 1988. Rivendell is a 500 acre ball-and-burlap wholesale nursery dedicated to growing a range of exciting and useful plants for the landscape profession. Along with buying in high quality lining-out stock, Rivendell also propagates many rare and unusual plants by seed, cutting, and grafting. Rivendell has grown plants for many fine gardens including The Barnes Museum, Brooklyn Bridge Park, and the High Line.

Ted has served as Mayor of Greenwich from 2006 to 2012 and served on its Planning Board. He is a long time member of the International Plant Propagators Society. Ted competes in open water swimming and in 2013 completed the Hellespont, swimming from Europe to Asia. In addition to swimming, Ted enjoys cooking, wine, yoga, music, biking, kite surfing, gardening, and spending time with his five children.