Hollywood's Backlot Urbanism: 
A Cinematographic Pattern Language for Landscape Architecture

Presenter: Chip Sullivan, ASLA

Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the fundamental concepts of production design
2. To define compositional principles from Hollywood’s ‘backlot urbanism’
3. To recognize film as a laboratory for landscape invention
4. To apply cinematographic techniques in the visualization of future environments
5. To identify a cinematic vocabulary as a new pattern language for landscape architecture

Outline:

I. Introduction and Overview of the History of Scenic Design
   A. Origins and development of film production design
   B. Pioneers of cinematography and production design
   C. Elements of the craft
   D. Magic of cinematic space
II. Analysis of Iconic Film Landscapes

A. *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)

B. *Metropolis* (1927)

C. *Deadend* (1937)

D. *Wizard of Oz* (1939)

E. *North by Northwest* (1959)

F. *Blade Runner* (1982)

G. *Batman* (1989)

III. Backlot Urbanism

A. The great backlot landscapes of Hollywood
   
   1. MGM
   
   2. Warner Brothers
   
   3. Paramount

B. Site design elements of the backlot

IV. Rick Carter, Contemporary Scenic Designer

A. Analysis of Carter’s set designs on Steven Spielberg’s films
   
   1. *Back to the Future, II & III*

   2. *Forrest Gump*

   3. *Artificial Intelligence*

   4. *Avatar*

B. Synthesis of Carter’s inventive film landscape designs
V. A Cinematic Pattern Languages for Landscape Design (Sullivan)

A. The Portal of Drama
B. The Romantic View
C. Mosaic of Facades
D. The Pinwheel Effect
E. The Dynamics of Optical Illusions
F. The Wonder of Distorted Perspective

VI. Summary

A. How do landscape architects envision the future?
B. Fostering a laboratory for visual invention
C. Negotiating the new visual realm

Sources:

Neuman, Dietrich. 1996. *Film Architecture*.


Holzman, Allan. 2010. *Behind the Scenes: Rick Carter, Production Designer*. DVD.