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Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams

EDAW

Landscape Architects | Regional | Urban | Site | Environmental Planning & Design

Firm History

Since its founding 70 years ago, EDAW's enthusiastic embrace of complexity has had a powerful impact on the role of landscape architecture in the wider society. In consistently promoting a sustainable outlook and in taking on ambitious, long-term projects and initiatives, the firm has elevated the position, scope and profile of landscape architecture.

"The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." - F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald's words resonate with the EDAW story. It is a story of contradictions. On the one hand, EDAW is a large firm. It is 1,800 staff spread around the world across 25 studios driven by smaller Principal-led design teams. On the other, it has an authentic, process-driven culture that is genuinely committed to advancing an agenda of economic equity and ecological restoration. There is a long record of excellence in design, and consistent financial performance. There is planning and design, science and art. EDAW is a dialogue of opposites, a condition that has fostered creativity, intellectual rigor and innovation. The sparks of this energy have fashioned a global consultancy where the landscape architect plays the leading role in a dynamic practice that shapes meaningful environments at multiple scales.

1939-1992 – Origins – Eckbo, Dean, Austin & Williams: Modernism and Activism

This dichotomy within EDAW traces its origins back to its original partners. Garrett Eckbo FASLA and Edward Williams FASLA set up an office in San Francisco to practice landscape architecture, urban design and planning. Eckbo, a Modernist who had diverged from the Beaux-Arts aesthetic, was a populist with an evangelical zeal for social justice achieved through landscape. Williams, a growth management and open space enthusiast, provided organizational and management savvy, and inserted himself into many of the contemporary arguments of the day regarding land use. They were later joined by Francis Dean FASLA, and Don Austin FASLA; hence the moniker we know today – EDAW.

The partnership's early years had established a compelling portfolio of modernist landscapes, but the partners began to take on ever-larger planning projects. Combined planning and design work in Pasadena, England, Fresno, Riverside and Burbank in the 1960s provided a logical jumping point for EDAW's future. Early recruit Howard Altman FASLA worked on the California Urban Metropolitan Open Space Study – the first state-wide **open space and environmental study** – that was a deeply **progressive** document for its time, and became an award-winning platform for sustainable planning from that point forward. EDAW soon realized a similar plan for the State of Hawai'i. These first forays into major land design and regional planning elevated EDAW's visibility beyond traditional landscape design and planning, and presaged a larger move into the field of environmental planning.

During the 60s the firm also designed its first resort (Laurence Rockefeller's Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, Hawai'i) and its early **international** projects: Lodi Park and the Ford Foundation Headquarters, New Delhi, India; Osaka, Japan's Civic Center; and projects in Micronesia and Guam represented the firm's first steps abroad. With Colorado's Denver Botanic Garden Master Plan, the firm gained the distinction of laying out the world's very first modernist botanic garden. The idea of a firm in which ideas and resources would flow from office to office was taking hold. By 1969, the firm had grown to about 45 people.

In the early 1970s, EDAW won a major environmental planning contract with PG&E for the Davenport transmission line study at Half Moon Bay in California. Herb Schaal FASLA, who was to play a major role in this and many future EDAW undertakings, was hired to direct transmission line siting for the Davenport project. An ASLA award-winner that was one of the first large-area land use and siting studies in the U.S., Davenport established a new service for the firm which would go on to become one of its most prominent: that of balancing new energy facility development with environmental and social concerns. Additionally, it was the first EDAW project to make extensive use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to achieve its goals. During the 70s, David Blau FASLA, would begin to build the firm's now long-standing reputation as a leader in environmental resource planning and management and visual analysis. By 1975, Joe Brown FASLA, had joined the firm, and the practice in the Washington area was expanding sufficiently to warrant the opening of a full-fledged EDAW office in Alexandria. The Atlanta office was opened in 1979 as a project office under the direction of Barbara Faga FASLA, with a number of park and public sector projects, as well as several major environmental projects with southeastern utility companies. Meanwhile, the reputation of EDAW as a whole was being enhanced by a variety of publications, including an award-winning manual for the ASLA titled "Creating Land for Tomorrow," written by Herb Schaal. Additionally, in 1976 EDAW completed its first **Olympic Games** project, the Olympic Water Park Conversion in Montreal, Canada.

In 1980, EDAW inaugurated its **Summer Student Program** designed to provide students in EDAW's core disciplines with a real-world project on which to build their skills, the SSP has become a key part of the firm's outreach and recruiting in universities, as well as an opportunity for EDAW employees to mentor the up-and-coming generation in a freer atmosphere. Notable additions at the time included Russ Butler FASLA, Richard Dorrier and Dennis Carmichael FASLA. Significant mid-80s projects, led by Faga and Brown, include the award-winning Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, GA, and the Alexandria, VA Waterfront Design Plan. Major

works of the early 80s would provide access alternatives to work and recreational areas for millions of people, through projects such as the Port of Los Angeles Master Plan, CA; the Fort Collins Downtown Redevelopment, CO; the Guadalupe River Park Master Plan, San Jose, CA; and the Fairfax Center Area Comprehensive Plan, VA. EDAW's portfolio started to internationalize then with projects in Korea, China, Japan, Thailand and Singapore. It was with this early work where EDAW opened the door for Western design and planning firms' work abroad, particularly in Asia. Roger Courtenay FASLA, who had been with the San Francisco office since 1981, relocated to the Alexandria office in 1986. By 1989, EDAW was a firm of 200, with 130 major industry awards under its belt and no intention of resting on these laurels. In 1989, Brown took on a unique role to help guide the firm's marketing efforts both in the US and internationally. While EDAW was rapidly becoming a "big" firm, Joe recognized that bureaucracy and regionalism would cause stagnation. The best people for a particular project should staff it, he argued, no matter where their office is located. The concept of a EDAW as a "**firm without walls**" was born. By 1992, EDAW had an office in Sydney with a professional staff of 12 under the direction of Jacinta McCann FAILA and a London office that had a staff of 20.

1992-1995 – EDAW: Global, yet local

Joe Brown took the helm of EDAW in 1992, and the firm quickly became internationalized. The 1990s heralded unprecedented expansion in both expertise and location. By 1994, EDAW was a 16-office, 400-person firm. 1996 occasioned EDAW's move into Asia with the establishment of a studio in Hong Kong, and in 1997, principal Sean Chiao AIA joined the firm. In 1999, Jason Prior – who had done exemplary work on the Manchester City Centre Redevelopment project after EDAW's proposal won an international competition – took over EDAW's European practice. By 2000, EDAW was, by many measures, the world's premier land and community design consultancy, a first-tier firm equal to any of its engineering or architectural counterparts in terms of scope and visibility.

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A review of the decade's big projects is studded with **award-winners** – far too many to list here in their entirety. A few outstanding examples include Centennial Olympic Park, Atlanta, GA; Disney's Celebration New Town, FL; Fort Ord Reuse Plan, Monterey, CA; Cleveland Botanic Gardens, OH; St. Joe West Florida Lands Business Plan Strategy, FL; Canal City Hakata, Fukuoka, Japan; Washington DC's Monumental Core; the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, Arlington, VA; Edinburgh New Town, Scotland; and the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, DC. EDAW's work with Disney was of particular note, with more than 40 projects completed to date.

The 00's provided a number of opportunities for EDAW to participate in urban regeneration and redevelopment across the globe. Projects such as the Central Milton Keynes Development Framework and Manchester City Center Redevelopment in England are standouts that have raised the bar for such work the world over because of their focus on socio-economic **sustainability**. The Washington DC Downtown Action Plan; Stapleton Airport Site Redevelopment, Denver, Co; and the St. Louis Downtown Core and Riverfront District Master Plan, MO are US regeneration projects that provided important improvements to urban areas to better enable interaction, business and trade. 2001 saw the inclusion of cultural resources and environmental field compliance added to the firm's repertoire. In China, new offices were opened in Shanghai, Shenzhen and Beijing. Shortly thereafter, an office in Suzhou grew out of a summer student workshop that ultimately resulted in the acclaimed Jinji Lake project. In 2004, EDAW had grown to over 1,000 people, and had become the most holistic firm responding to land- and community-based challenges.

Since 2005 – EDAW | AECOM: Landscape architect, leader

EDAW's current mode is about pushing the boundaries of landscape architecture, and putting the landscape architect in a position to lead significant projects that will influence and shape not just human life, but that of the planet. In this vein, the firm joined the AECOM group of companies in 2005. The group brings together a wide spectrum of practices related to built, natural and social environments. As the front-end of the organization, EDAW has a wide platform to assert its sustainable philosophy.

In 2006, Joe Brown stepped aside as president of the firm, remaining CEO; Jason Prior became the firm's president, responsible for EDAW's practice and day-to-day operation. Based in London, Prior's selection affirmed the internationalization of an American practice with origins in the Modernist traditions of California, which now stretched worldwide. Notable recent projects include the Tokyo Midtown mixed-use development, the ongoing redesign of Los Angeles' San Pedro waterfront, the Singapore Sports Hub, Li Lake Parklands in Wuxi, China, Mission Creek Park in San Francisco, CA, Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi, Boston's Wharf District Park, and the development of sustainable design tools that aim for carbon neutrality. In recent years EDAW's work has been noted for its audacity, cross-disciplinary innovation and influence beyond the landscape. The master plan that won London its bid for the 2012 Olympic Games speaks excellently to this combination; in South London, EDAW today is leading a large multi-consultant team on a multi-year project that will revitalize one of the UK's poorest areas and create the largest new park in Europe in 150 years. From Boston, to Macau to Abu Dhabi, EDAW is now playing this kind of **leadership** role – driving the design of large areas of land, where the principles of landscape are instructing planning, architecture and engineering.

The result? Increasingly, **land comes first**, and everything else – from infrastructure to social planning – follows after. In an age of ecological fragility, it is a promising development. This is EDAW's **legacy**.