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I inhabit a city that is reluctantly urban. My workplace and homeplace lie within the Austin city limits. Deep in the heart of Texas, Austin simultaneously stands as the state capital and as a state-of-mind. The city epitomizes Texan-ness while providing a contrast and a foil for the rest of the state.

Cities evolve through the cumulative impacts of many plans and designs as well as numerous unplanned and undesigned activities. Unintended consequences flow from both designed and unplanned actions. My neighborhood and my campus resulted in part because of two plans. The plans affecting my office and my home were completed several years apart.

The first of the two plans was prepared by Paul Philippe Cret (1876–1945) for the University of Texas campus in 1933. Cret was one of the most prominent architects in the United States from the first decade of the twentieth century through the 1930s. During the latter half of the twentieth century, his reputation plummeted with the rise of the International Style. The modernists opposed the Beaux-Arts tradition and Paul Cret bore the standard for the French school in America.

Paul Cret first entered the École des Beaux-Arts in his home city Lyon, France. In 1896, he won the Paris Prize, enabling him to study at the most important architectural school in the world then: the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He came to the United States in 1903 to teach at the University of Pennsylvania.[1] He stayed in Philadelphia until his death in 1945, except for his service in the French army during the First World War. While teaching and directing the architecture atelier at Penn, Cret maintained a robust practice in Philadelphia designing such buildings as the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C. (1907–1917), the Indianapolis Public Library (1917), and the Detroit Institute of the Arts (1920–1927).[2]

The second plan was prepared by Ian L. McHarg (1920–2001) in 1976 for the Lake Austin area. McHarg was the most prominent planner and landscape architect in the world during the 1970s. After apprenticing as a landscape architect in his native Scotland, he served in the British commandos during the Second World War. Afterwards, McHarg studied landscape architecture and city planning at Harvard University, a school then dominated by Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus.[3]

In 1954, McHarg went to the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught until his death in 2001. While teaching, writing, and chairing the landscape architecture and regional planning department at Penn, McHarg (like Cret) maintained a vigorous, Philadelphia-based practice. His firm, Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd (WMRT), was responsible for many plans including those for the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region of Minnesota (1969), the Denver metropolitan region (1971– 1972), and The Woodlands, Texas (1973–1974).

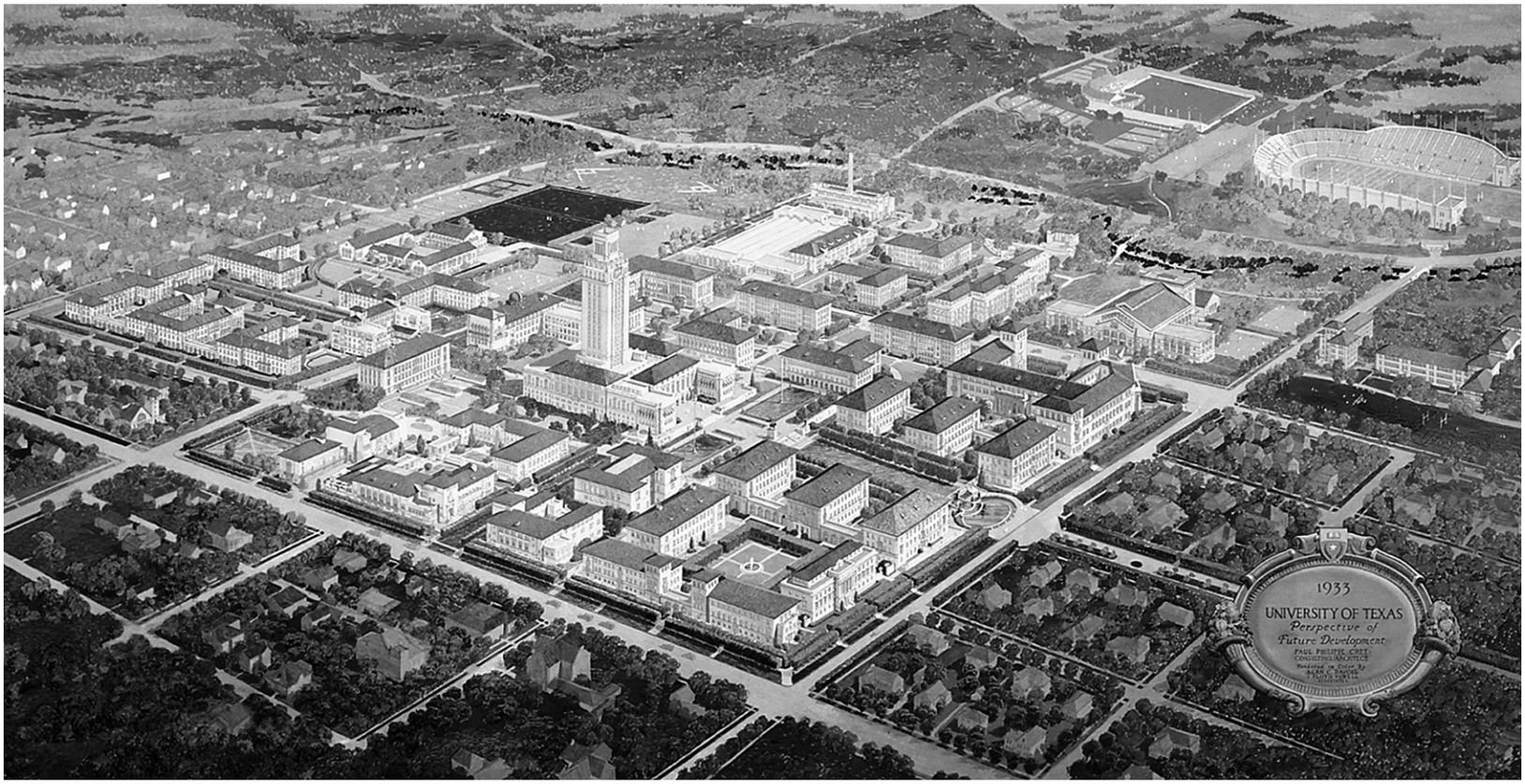
What can the plans for Austin, Texas put forth by these two Philadelphia-based immigrants teach us about the nature of city making? We will look at each plan in some detail, and then reflect on their larger significance for the present state of the city.

The Eyes of Texas

Texans aim high, and, early on, they set their sights on a great state university. Bolstered with oil revenue from state trust lands, a permanent university endowment fueled the construction of a physical plant worthy of these aspirations. Paul Cret's plan and subsequent buildings for the Texas campus were preceded by the noteworthy work of others, including that of the inventive architect Cass Gilbert. But it was with Cret that the university found an architect who matched its confident enterprise.

The Texas Board of Regents retained Cret as consulting architect in March 1930, a post he retained until his death fifteen years later. In addition to his 1933 comprehensive development plan, Cret participated in the design of nineteen campus buildings as well as many terraces, retaining walls, and inner-campus roads.[4]

Cret's "Report Accompanying the General Plan of Development" contains careful analyses of the existing buildings, previous plans (most notably those by Gilbert), and the site.[5] The plan also presents a clear vision



Paul Phillippe Cret Drawings. The Alexander Architectural Archive, The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

for the future. His scheme respects precedent and context while charting a bold, new course for action. Cret's work is deeply rooted in Beaux-Arts design principles.

Carol McMichael characterizes Beaux-Arts buildings as "axially and symmetrically disposed particulate plans …[with]… historicist elevations derived from a careful study of the architectural monuments of antiquity and the Renaissance."[6] Furthermore, she describes the oppositions between Cret's "traditional Beaux-Arts" and "modern purist concepts" as: "(a) symmetrical, compartmentalized plans vs. asymmetrical, open plans, (b) mass-dominant buildings vs. volume-dominant buildings, (c) particulate masses vs. unified masses; and (d) ornamented surfaces vs. unornamented surfaces."[7]

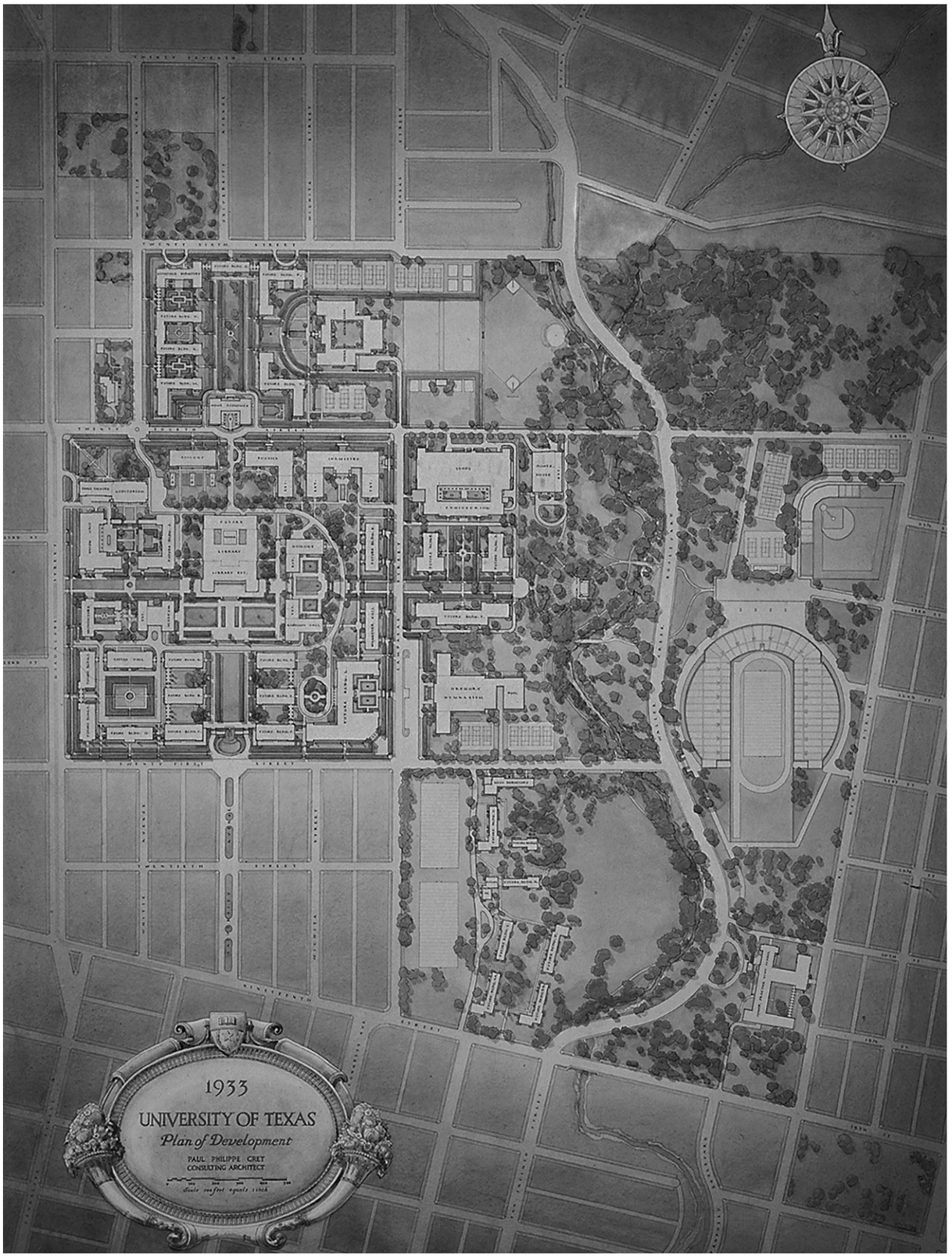
Beyond the historicist facades, Beaux-Arts architects like Cret gave careful attention to the relationships among buildings. They organized these relationships to build physical communities. Although (to my knowledge) they never used the word explicitly, this approach is "ecological"—that is, concerned about the relationship between organisms (in this case "academic organisms") with each other and with their environments.

Cret's plan consisted of large, carefully rendered watercolor plan and perspective drawings as well as a written report. His scheme sought to achieve an "elastic formal plan" derived from the writings about architecture as a "civic art" by Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peets.[8] According to McMichael, "Formality was achieved by grouping buildings around courts and arranging those groups about axes. Elasticity was achieved by 'organic extensions' of existing and projected buildings and by the creation of secondary courts around the primary one at the center of the campus. The whole composition was guided by goals of 'interrelation, balance, and symmetry.' Interrelation was directed toward realizing elasticity; balance and symmetry, toward formality."[9]

Cret viewed the plan as flexible and adaptable, writing, "a general plan prepared today will have to be modified from time to time, to take account of changing conditions."[10] He recognized "to make an elastic formal plan is by no means an easy matter."[11]

The plan plays careful attention to site conditions and the relationship of the campus to the City of Austin. Vistas, open space, the east–west orientation of the central campus, sun angle and weather conditions, breezes, and topography contribute to the arrangement of buildings and circulation systems. Traffic flow between the university and the city of Austin is an important, recognized challenge. Because the Jeffersonian north–south, east–west grid of the campus is shifted from the original southwest to north–east grid of the city, the tenuousness of the connections is exacerbated.

Cret envisioned the stream, Waller Creek, running along the east side of the campus as an important opportunity to link the campus to the city. "This element of the campus," he wrote about the Waller Creek corridor, "can be developed into a most attractive feature, without entailing large expenditures."[12]



Paul Phillippe Cret Drawings. The Alexander Architectural Archive, The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Cret's plan is its acknowledgment that change is inevitable. He presented careful provisions for growth. In particular, Cret recognized sports would be an important driver of campus change. He observed, "the future of intercollegiate athletics, and especially of the exhibition games requiring very large accommodations for the public, is a subject of great controversy."[13]

Design with Nature

Plans to expand the football stadium in 1970 generated "great controversy" indeed. The expansion plans encroached on the Waller Creek corridor. Student activists, including many from the university's School of Architecture, chained themselves to trees and bulldozers and the Austin environmental movement was born. As the city expanded in the early 1970s, its leaders initiated the "Austin Tomorrow" planning process. A centerpiece of that process became Ian McHarg's *Lake Austin Growth Management Plan*.[14]

In 1974, the Austin city council authorized the preparation of a plan for the ninety-two-square-mile area encompassing Lake Austin and the watersheds of its tributaries. Located to the west of the then-limits of the city, the planning area covered an oak-dominated undulating terrain situated over the Edwards Aquifer.



Barton Springs, Austin, Texas. Photos by Frederick Steiner.

The area was clearly fated for new growth but also possessed significant environmental amenities. According to McHarg and his colleagues, how and where growth "occurs will have a profound effect upon life and property and the Area's irreplaceable natural resources. The consequences of unplanned and uncontrolled growth will be felt not only by those persons living in the Lake Austin Area, but by a much larger population residing in the City of Austin and Travis County who will bear the costs of degraded environments and those actions required to deal with such conditions."[15]

Whereas Cret's plan for the campus may be interpreted as an implicitly applied human ecology, McHarg and his compatriots applied ecology to their management plan explicitly. Whereas Cret proposed an "elastic formal plan" with "organic extensions," McHarg advocated more of an "elastic organic plan" with "formal extensions." Cret's extensions were primarily buildings and green spaces; McHarg's were infrastructure and green spaces.

The Lake Austin plan consisted of a careful analysis of development trends, the determination of facilities and services necessary to accommodate that development, a detailed inventory of the natural environment with particular attention to the suitabilities for future growth, conservation and development principles, and suggested public policies to manage growth. Water quality received considerable attention in the WMRT plan, especially as it related to the sensitivity of the vast Edwards Aquifer.

McHarg's premise was that by studying the natural environment, one could identify certain opportunities for development as well as constraints. The constraints could limit some land uses while restricting others. This range of development opportunities and constraints corresponded to three proposed zones for the planning area: conservation, limited development, and development. The rules for each zone were "based upon a philosophy that land use and development controls should be as few in number and as uncomplicated as possible so that they may be effectively administered by a public agency and understood by the private sector."[16] Like Cret, WMRT advocated elasticity, a flexibility guided by clear principles.

McHarg contended that "natural regions" could be translated into "planning regions." As a result, he defined four physiographic regions for the Lake Austin area, tailoring the three zones (conservation, limited development, and development) for each. That is, the guidelines for the development zone in one region (for example, the Lake Austin Corridor Region) differed from the other three physiographic regions (e.g., the Lower Terrace Region, the Hill Region, and the Terrace Region). Six elements then directed the maintenance of the information database for the planning area as well as public policies for future land use, open space, water supply, sewage collection and treatment, and highway construction and improvements.

The plan had varying and continuing influence in the Austin metropolitan region. Parts of the area covered by the plan incorporated as separate jurisdictions (called West Lake Hills and Rollingwood). These towns pursued several development and conservation standards and suburban neighborhoods reflect many of McHarg's proposals. In other places, his ideas were pursued less vigorously. Throughout the Austin metropolitan region, the plan is still used as a basis for ongoing discussions and debates about environmental planning, growth management, and smart growth policies.

The Bookends of American Modernism

Paul Cret was a Beaux-Arts architect. Nevertheless, he was a modern, literate man with broad, international experiences and connections. His later buildings clearly exhibited the influences of the CIAM movement. Ian McHarg entered Harvard with academic modernism in full bloom. He retained a modernist belief in the wisdom of science as a basis to guide decision-making until his death. Still, he shared his mentor Lewis Mumford's skepticism about the International Style. Cret continued to use the Beaux-Arts method to design while dabbling with modern visual motifs, such as spare surfaces. McHarg grounded his method in modern processes while abandoning the notion that a single style was appropriate across the globe.

Louis Kahn connected Cret with McHarg. Kahn was Cret's most famous student and he worked in Cret's firm. Kahn was McHarg's colleague, collaborator, and friend. Although Kahn marinated in modernism after Cret's death, Kahn does not fit neatly in the modern camp.

Cret worked with the University of Texas campus for a decade and a half. While McHarg was directly involved in Austin for two years, two of his students (Austan Librach and Pliny Fisk) have been involved with design and planning initiatives in Austin for almost thirty years. Kahn influenced a generation of architects, including many who continue to teach and practice in Austin. What influence do the ideas, designs, and plans of

Cret, McHarg, and Kahn exert on the nature of the city?

A lot, but too little.

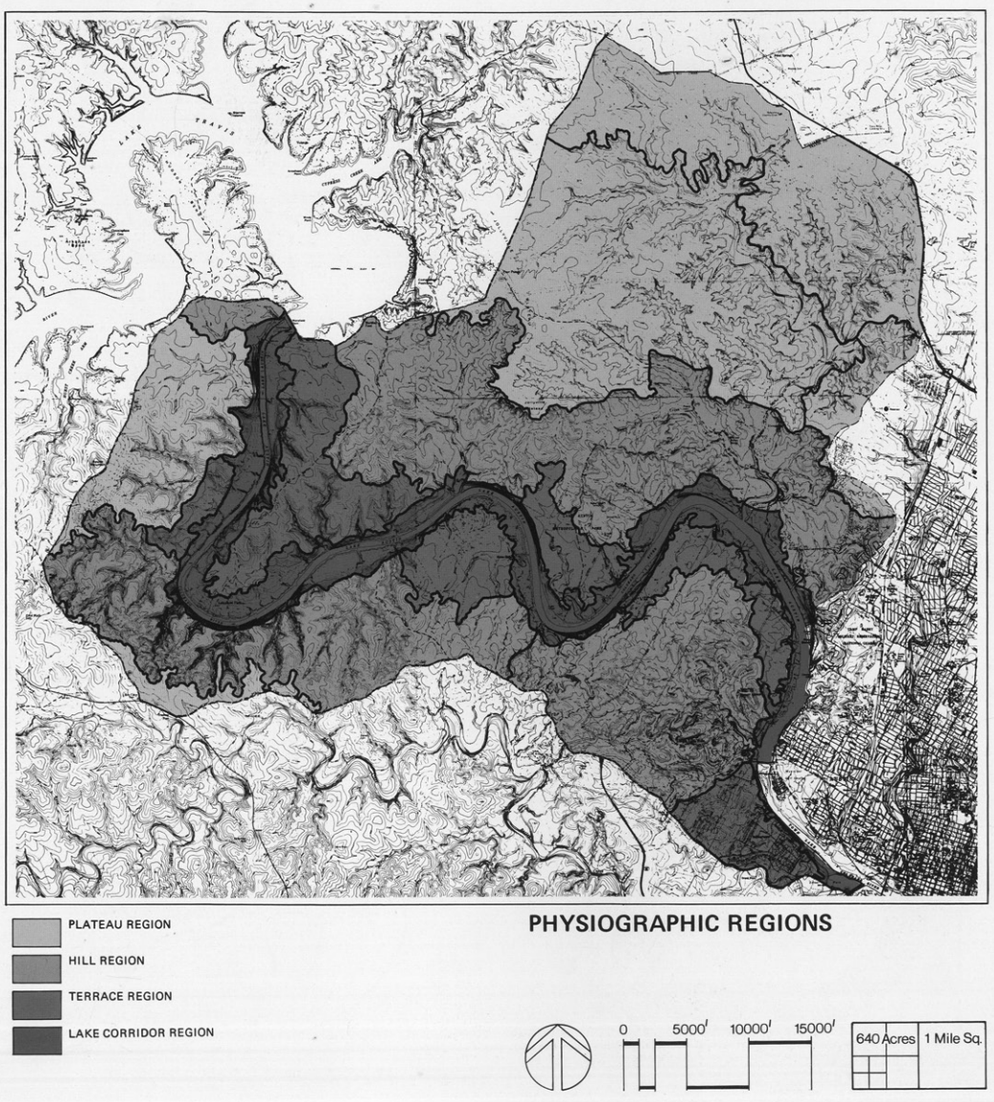
Between the poetic core of the campus and the woody hills around Lake Austin lies a bumpy mess of a city. In his plan for the campus, Cret pinpointed the ugliness near the state's capitol as a significant urban design issue. He wrote: "The whole problem of the capitol grounds and its approach has never been the object of an adequate study, although of great importance to the City of Austin. As this problem is of interest to the state, the City, and the University, it is to be hoped that it will be placed some day in competent hands."[17]

Some almost seventy years later, one still hopes.

Even though Austin regularly ranks high on "most livable" city polls, its urban fabric generally reveals many of the woes facing other American cities. An interstate highway divides the African-American and Latino populations from the whites. These divisions reflect economic and ethnic segregation. Blacks and Hispanics are further separated spatially from each other.

The city lacks affordable housing and traffic clogs highways and streets. Neighborhoods are under siege by transportation engineers who want to expand highways. Cars and trucks bump along city streets pockmarked with potholes. Giant billboards and utility lines loom above and business signs blaze in competition for the senses. Large, vacant lots dot the city center, while suburbanity sprawls out at the periphery.

Still, each day, I leave my office in a building designed by Paul Cret on the campus he planned. On my way home, I pass a sign welcoming me to the "Edwards Aquifer Environmentally Sensitive Area." My limestone house just inside the Austin city limits was



Physiographic Regions
The spatial arrangement of physiographic features in the Planning Area reveals the presence of larger geographic areas, each having similar landforms, which may be considered as physiographic regions. As shown on the accompanying map and described below, four regions are recognized in the Planning Area.

Lake Austin Corridor Region. Defined by the former channel and valley escarpments carved by the Colorado River, the major feature of the Corridor is Lake Austin. Adjacent to the Lake are the valley floor and small isolated terraces. Moderate to steep general slope features rise behind the valley floor.

The Lower Terrace Region. This Region is represented in five areas, all of which are adjacent to the Lake Austin Corridor. Their features are predominantly lobate terraces (levels 3 and 4) dissected by shallow headwaters valleys and variable type lower tributary valleys. Also occurring but to a much lessor extent are isolated terraces and other small valleys.

The Hill Region. This Region is represented in four areas, occupying locations generally higher than but adjacent to the Lower Terrace Region. It is familiar as the rugged stairstepped landscape descending from the Jollyville Plateau to Lake Austin. It is comprised of complex yet reoccurring arrangements of generally steep lands of knolls, narrow ridges and saddles, bordered by small headwaters valleys.

Plateau Region. This Region occupies topographic positions in five areas above the Hill Region. It is distinguished by extensive continuous broad and lobate terraces, dissected in many areas by headwaters and lower tributary valleys.

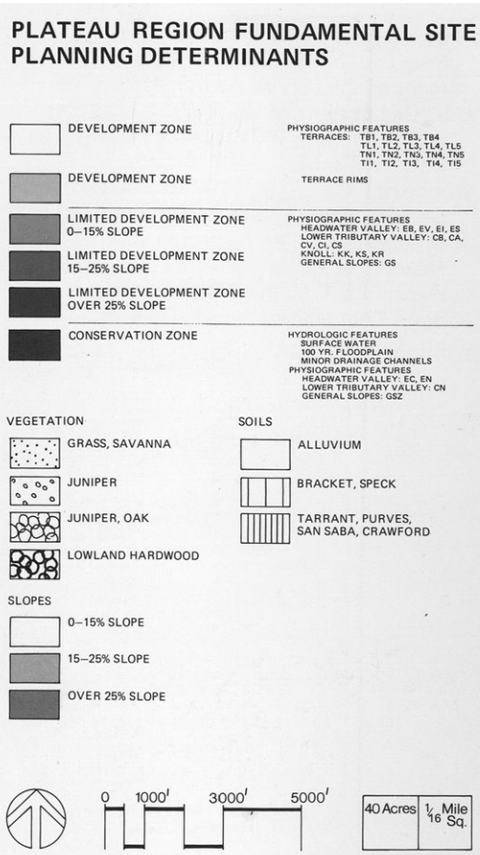
From Lake Austin Growth Management Plan. *Wallace, McHarg, Roberts & Todd.*

built among the live oaks in 1980, four years after the Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd plan for this area. Each evening, an opossum visits our backyard. As I jog in the morning along a stream that is connected to a larger greenway system, I often spot fox and deer.

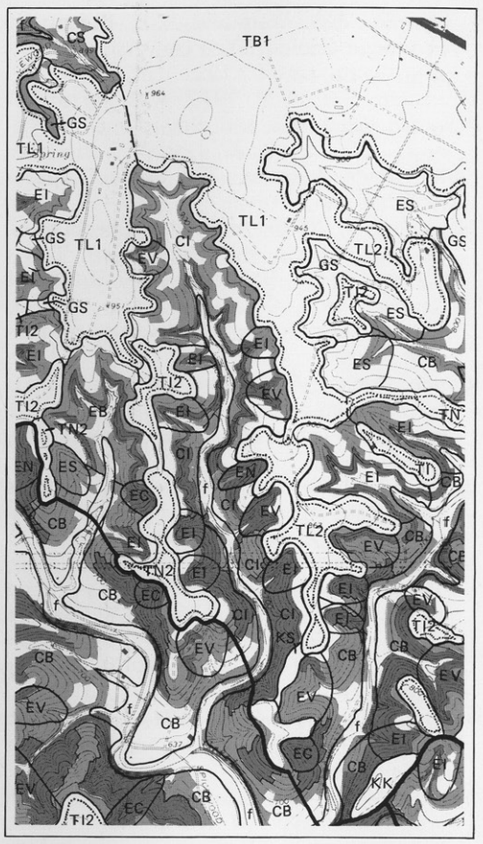
We—my colleagues at the university, the fauna at home—live in Cret's legacy, in McHarg's legacy. All people should be as fortunate.

Notes

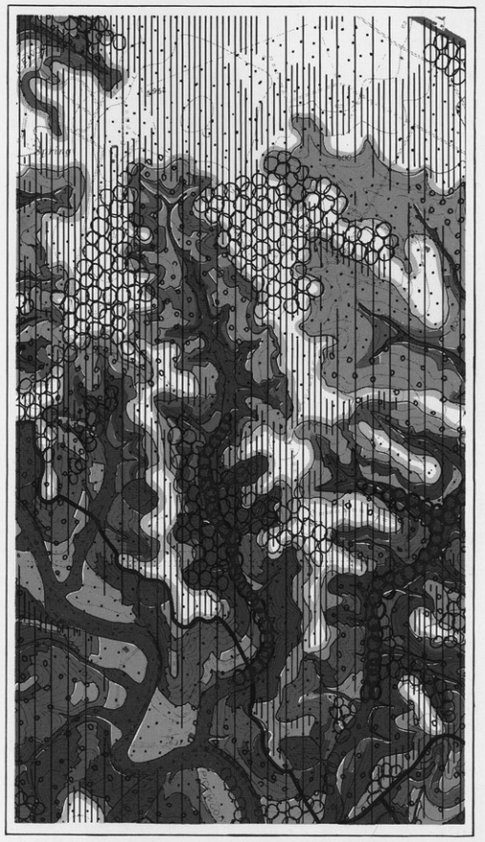
1. Carol McMichael, *Paul Cret at Texas* (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 1983).
2. Ibid. See, also, "Paul Philippe Cret" in Ann L. Strong and George E. Thomas, eds. *The Book of the School: 100 Years* (Philadelphia: Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania, 1990), p. 72.
3. Ian McHarg, *A Quest for Life: An Autobiography* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1996). See, also, Ian L. McHarg and Frederick R. Steiner, eds. *To Heal the Earth* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998).
4. McMichael, *Paul Cret at Texas*.
5. Paul P. Cret. "Report Accompanying the General Plan of Development" (Austin: University of Texas, January 1933).
6. McMichael, Paul Cret at Texas.
7. Ibid., p. 43.
8. Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peets. *The American Vitruvius: An Architect's Handbook of Civic Art* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1922).
9. McMichael, *Paul Cret at Texas*, p. 84.
10. Cret, "Report," p. 3.
11. Ibid., p. 4.
12. Ibid., p. 32.
13. Ibid., p. 17.
14. Wallace, McHarg, Roberts and Todd. *Lake Austin Growth Management Plan* (Austin: City of Austin, July 1976). Although several members of WMRT were involved in the plan and William Roberts was the partner-in-charge, it is still identified locally as "the McHarg Plan." Local leaders report the firm was retained because of McHarg and the plan reflects the principles put forth in his *Design with Nature* (Garden City, New York: Natural History Press, 1969).
15. WMRT, *Lake Austin Growth Management Plan*, p. 2.
16. Ibid., p. 49.
17. Cret, "Report," p. 14.



The extent to which urban growth will be permitted in the Plateau Region will be determined by the effort and expertise devoted to site planning and design of individual projects. An understanding of a property's intrinsic suitabilities and those conservation and development principles applicable to the property will be fundamental to the preparation of acceptable development proposals. A section of the Plateau Region, as shown on the accompanying sketches, illustrates the minimum information required to review development proposals for a particular property.



The above sketch identifies a sample location in the Plateau Region to illustrate the presence and configuration of physiographic and hydrographic features and different slope conditions. Those data are required to identify conservation and development zones on a particular property. The Plateau Region is comprised primarily of upper broad and lobate terraces dissected by headwaters and lower tributary valleys.



The above sketch shows the designation of physiographic and hydrographic features as conservation and development zones. Slope, soil and vegetation characteristics of a property are also required for review of development plans. Future urban land uses in the development zones of the Plateau Region may include residential, office, commercial, industrial and institutional uses.

From Lake Austin Growth Management Plan. *Wallace, McHarg, Roberts & Todd.*