

Cornelia Hahn Oberlander Honoured for Landscape Architecture Practice, Scholarship

[April 22, 2019](#). At 98, a pioneering Canadian landscape architect is getting her place on the Mount Rushmore of her profession.

Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, an acclaimed practitioner and an innovator in playgrounds, green design and rooftop landscapes, has become the first Canadian to be named as a Distinguished Member of the International Honor Society of Landscape Architecture, Sigma Lambda Alpha.

The society consists of chapters at universities offering landscape architecture programs and is based in the U.S.A.

Cornelia was co-nominated this year by Robert Corry, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Guelph, which hosts the group's sole Canadian chapter, and by Robert Brown, University Professor Emeritus at the University of Guelph and a professor of landscape architecture at Texas A&M University.

Corry was thrilled to learn that the Vancouver-based practitioner had been chosen, saying that the recognition puts her in the company of celebrated landscape architects like Garrett Eckbo, Roberto Burle-Marx, and Bill Johnson.

“It’s like getting your face on the Mount Rushmore of landscape architecture. Cornelia has her place among other legends,” said the U of G professor, explaining that Hahn Oberlander has influenced numerous landscape architects and students across Canada. “This honour recognizes her as one of the best landscape architects in the world.”

Cornelia Hahn Oberlander will be recognized for her 70-year record of landscape projects in North America as well as her scholarly activities, including writing national playground guidelines that helped shape the design of dozens of naturalistic children’s play spaces across Canada.

Cornelia will receive the award during a Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA) Congress in Vancouver on May 7. She’s among only a handful of women to gain Distinguished Member status since the award was established in 1979.

After immigrating to the United States from Germany, she attended Smith College. In 1947, she became one of the first women to graduate from the landscape architecture program at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design.

Since moving to Vancouver in the early 1950s, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander has worked with numerous noted architects on projects in Canada and the United States.

She collaborated with acclaimed Canadian architect Arthur Erickson on Vancouver's Robson Square, the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia and the Canadian Chancery in Washington, D.C.

Along with Renzo Piano, she incorporated birch trees, sedges, and ferns into the iconic interior courtyard of the New York Times Building in 2007.

In the late 1980s, Cornelia worked with Moshe Safdie to design the gardens of Ottawa's National Gallery of Canada based on the museum's collection of Group of Seven paintings and the taiga landscape of Northern Canada.

That project reconnected her with Safdie, who designed the Habitat model community for Expo 67 in Montreal. Cornelia designed the Children's Creative Centre for Expo that year.

That natural playground was a personal favourite for Virginia Burt, who was a tot when she visited Expo.

Now head of Virginia Burt Designs in Burlington, Ont., and a 1985 BLA alumna of U of G, Burt said, "Cornelia's influence on the profession has been immense as her work is environmentally responsive, poetic, charged with meaning, ecological and, most importantly, modernist – reflecting her humanistic view of our natural environment.

"Cornelia exemplifies the kind of landscape architect that I aspire to be – passionate, persistent and polite."

Known for considering humanity and ecology and for integrating landscape and architecture in her work, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander has received numerous international accolades and Canadian honorary degrees, including one from the University of Guelph in 2015.

A Companion of the Order of Canada, she was the inaugural recipient of the Governor General's Medal in Landscape Architecture in 2016.

The International Honor Society is sponsored by the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture.

Additional information:

Photographs of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander and her work are available from The Cultural Landscape Foundation. <https://www.tclf.org/pioneer/cornelia-hahn-oberlander>

To learn more about the CSLA Congress in Vancouver where Cornelia Hahn Oberlander will be recognized at the CSLA College of Fellows Investiture Ceremony, contact the CSLA in Ottawa. Tel.: 1 (866) 781-9799 <https://www.csla-aapc.ca/events/2019-csla-congress-and-csla-bcsla-showcase>

To learn more about Sigma Lambda Alpha, the Honor Society of Landscape Architecture, contact the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA). Tel.: (919) 674-4185 www.thecela.org

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