Border Town: Preserving a 'Living' Cultural Landscape in Harlingen, Texas

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BORDER TOWN:
PRESERVING A ‘LIVING’ CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN HARLINGEN, TEXAS

A Thesis Presented

by

SHELBY E. PARRISH

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Department of Art, Architecture and Art History
BORDER TOWN:
PRESERVING A ‘LIVING’ CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN HARLINGEN, TEXAS

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Department of Art, Architecture and Art History
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For everyone who encouraged me when I said I was going to architecture school 2100 miles away from home. For everyone who said that they were proud of me. For Harlingen, the town that raised me. This one is for you.
Abstract

BORDER TOWN:
PRESERVING A ‘LIVING’ CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN HARLINGEN, TEXAS

February 2021

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Directed by: Professor Eldra Dominque-Walker

The preservation of cultural landscapes takes an understanding of a region’s shared history, their sense of place, and the sensory and spatial behavior of their appropriated spaces. That being said, preserving cultural landscapes in urban areas can be especially challenging. They are constantly growing and evolving which requires special considerations to avoid suffocation of the space and the inhabitants’ spatial behavior. The practice of preserving cultural landscapes on an urban scale has been relatively lacking in the United States. The same preservation strategies are used for various types of cultural landscapes that have their own characteristics and stories. Different tactics and mentalities for varying cultural landscapes hasn’t been thoroughly investigated or acknowledged. That being said, the underdeveloped strategies provided a challenging and yet free interpretation of what preservation of cultural landscapes may look like. This paper discusses the key components that were used as a guide to prepare a plan and design a contemporary intervention for promoting a cultural landscape in a city located in the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Harlingen, Texas is a unique border town with its varying layers of settlement and inhabitancy has created a particular assemblage of people from a diverse set of backgrounds and heritages. It holds a distinctive location in the southern portion of Texas as it sits closely to the Mexican border as well as the coast of the Gulf of Mexico which has created a distinctive dynamic between nature and culture. If one were to observe Harlingen in all its qualities a question arises: How can we celebrate Harlingen as a unique culture and historic resource while allowing the small urban setting in South Texas to continue developing and growing. With the understanding of Harlingen’s unique character, history, and sense of place this paper works to implement the components of preserving a ‘living cultural landscape’ where consideration of preserving the physical aspects as well as Harlingen’s daily life are the main priority.
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Chapter One
The Case for Harlingen

Harlingen, Texas is a small city set in a very unique location of the United States. It sits nicely tucked in between the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and the Mexico-United States border. It is a decently sized town with a population of around sixty-five thousand people living there year-round. An interesting aspect of this population number, however, is that this town experiences fluctuations of temporary populations as well. Being so near the border many immigrants come from Mexico through the bus system and they are left in Harlingen to decide where they would like to go and what to do. These numbers can sometimes range into the few thousands all at once. Harlingen also sees a few thousand people from Canada and the Midwest that come in the winter to escape the cold (winter Texans). Lastly, Harlingen sees people who cross between Mexico and the United States more frequently and in few numbers to either travel for relaxation or do business.

Figure 1 - Proximity Map of Harlingen
(By Author)
This movement of people through Harlingen has always been a part of its identity, even before it was founded in 1910. Harlingen has seen indigenous people of America, Spanish colonizers, German immigrants, and many others. This was largely in part due to its location for this lower region of Texas saw many different ‘owners.’ The movement of people was only made easier when Lon Hill, the founder of Harlingen, brought with him the railroad. Here, is when the notion of Harlingen as the ‘crossroad’ came into being.\textsuperscript{1}

\begin{figure}[h!]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure2.jpg}
\caption{Historic Image of Downtown Harlingen (By myharlingen.us)}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h!]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure3.jpg}
\caption{Historic Image of Railroad (By myharlingen.us)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{1} Mattei 2009: 10
This collision of people still occurs today and has made Harlingen a unique place that is expressive through its cultural and vibrant mix of cultures. It’s diversity in stories and heritages have blended well together creating a gradient of sorts between the United States and Mexico. Truly, when you visit Harlingen it seems that it does not belong to one or the other but rather a mix of both.

Harlingen has a subtropic climate, so the city is hot and humid year-round. More than two-thirds are sunny days in Harlingen every year. Because of its warm temperate, people can enjoy being outside any time of the year. Harlingen has been used by boaters, swimmers and anglers for many years which is part of the reason it is popular for tourists to visit there. With its various types of palms, plants, and flowers that are water wise that can thrive during dry spells, it gives off a relaxing and calming scene even when Harlingen is going through a drought.

Harlingen expresses diversity even in its bird population, having one of the United States largest variety of birds. A convention is held every year in the region for bird watchers and enthusiasts who come from all over the United States. Historically speaking, the Rio Grande region’s Arroyo Colorado river (that runs through Harlingen) has been used for drainage for crop irrigation, wastewater return, and floodways during heavy precipitation (Harlingen is within the hurricane belt). The river is still utilized in the same ways today. Because of the Arroyo Colorado, Harlingen has rural land that consists of rich farmland and citrus land. All in all, even Harlingen’s location in terms of climate and ecosystem attract people to come here. The agriculture and activities that are possible within the region are a major component of Harlingen’s character.

While this multicultural region does not often have to experience issues with a lack of identity and a sense of place, it is a region within the United States that many do not understand. This largely in part because of its seamless blend of cultures. During the development of Harlingen and with the growing number of winter Texans and tourists, the city developed many new retail and entertainment opportunities. The problem with this was that instead of sticking
with elements that made Harlingen unique, the city decided to build generic places to eat and shop that can be found all over the United States. With the city’s expansion commercially and within the tourist industry, it began to lose some of its original charm. Standard buildings that do only what they need to and a considered ‘popular’ create spaces that evoke no emotion or sense of home/history telling. People have even begun to notice this as there is now a community in Harlingen who has put forth an effort to revitalize the historic downtown area. The Harlingen Downtown Improvement District aims to re-excite people about the culturally beautiful elements of Harlingen through events and public murals and mosaics.

Harlingen is a home for many types of people; many who have a story here that should be expressed, preserved and celebrated. That being said, I propose the intervention a ‘living’ cultural
landscape for Harlingen, Texas as a way to preserve historic structures, environmental qualities, and way of life.
Chapter Two
Defining Cultural Landscapes

The concept of a cultural landscape was introduced very early into my master’s program. Since then the subject has interested me and has driven a lot of my research and reading preferences for the past few years. It led me to many of the books and essays that are referenced in this thesis and has provided me with a new perspective on the concept of nature and a solution for Harlingen.

The National Park Service

It is vital to begin with the National Park Service (NPS) as it is the primary source for all basic knowledge on the subject of cultural landscapes in the United States. Cultural landscapes are part of a system of cultural resources within the NPS which aims to preserve the evident remains of history and culture. The NPS notes that cultural landscapes reveal our relationship with place and can strengthen our understanding of historic events, significant people, and patterns in American history. This is the main concept for what the purpose of a cultural landscape should achieve. The NPS helps better define this by breaking down certain considerations when determining if a space is a cultural landscape. The diagrams below express those five points.
As one might be able to tell with these diagrams, the National Park Service’s technical considerations are quite open to interpretation and allow for a variation of histories to be considered a cultural landscape. The different elements include the types different types of built environments or structures, location, the size and range of age. The most important aspect is that it must retain importance to American history and have historic character or integrity.

The National Park Service stresses the importance that the cultural landscape in question has significant ‘physical,’ historic integrity specifically within the site. This is referring to structures or environments, whether man-made or natural, that are recognizable as being from a historically significant time period. While I believe this is important to consider (and a necessary element), I believe there is more to incorporate than the physical elements of a site and a specific history. For example, the last chapter in “Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America”, *Integrity as a Value in Cultural Landscape Preservation*, Catherine Howett explains how cultural landscapes go through the process of being evaluated for the inclusion into the National Register of Historic Places and the National Park Service. This process deals with a specific criterion in
evaluating the significance in cultural landscapes which was called integrity. Integrity describes how much of the landscape still holds significance in modern times. Howett argues that this is not the best solution for analyzing these sites because nature is dynamic and ever-changing, meaning these evaluation processes can never truly give an accurate and good interpretation of a cultural landscape. Howett argues that “the quality and importance of any preservation project is not determined by the “integrity of the site;” but “by the quality of what is made of the site through the interpretation of its history”2.

With that in mind, it is helpful to have physical elements to preserve and express the historic or cultural significance. To aid those expressions the NPS provides a list of thirteen physical characteristics that can be a part of a cultural landscape. The image below depicts those thirteen elements and which ones can specifically apply to Harlingen and the area surrounding the site chosen for my thesis.

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2 Howett 2000: 207
A few that have been determined to be applicable are emphasized in pink on the map above. Of the thirteen, one would be cluster arrangement which specifically deals the arrangement of buildings and spaces developed around the “crossroads.” Buildings and structures make an obvious choice as there are historic buildings in Harlingen, especially in the downtown area. Circulation can also play a role because of how the railroads have played a vital role in the development and character of Harlingen.

*Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*

“Certainly, there are historical, aesthetic, scientific, and educational reasons for protecting these environments, but cultural landscape preservation can also assist us in understanding, appreciating, and valuing an even broader range of landscapes and landscape types, especially those we call ‘home’³. Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, landscape architecture professors and the editors of *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*, compiled a series of essays that centered around the topic of cultural landscapes in the United States. Their introduction provided a framework for rest the of the reading in which they claimed that cultural landscapes can be considered anywhere that human activity has affected the land. This ‘activity’ can be applied in a multitude of ways. For example, they can simply be the ‘ideal’ landscape (this includes parks, gardens, and rural pastoral scenes), but they can expand as far as townscapes and cityscapes so long as they can express a direct relationship between culture and the land. Traditionally cultural landscapes were pieces of land that were organized and imagined by professional designers, however recently, cultural landscapes now include regions that may not hold any value for the nation but serve, rather, local needs and histories. This can be most visibly expressed through a region’s agriculture, commercial and industrial areas; confirming that employing Harlingen to become a cultural landscape is a completely reasonable intervention. The

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³ Alanen, 2000: 21
introduction was concluded by explaining what would be addressed in the following essays. They stated that they hoped to discuss the current critical issues and topics for cultural landscape preservation through this collection of essays which would include; representation issues, lack of community interest, and the issue that the landscapes never stops changing. These topics with careful consideration, can contribute to a better understanding and background knowledge before embarking on any preservation project.

The first chapter, *Nature and Culture in Historic Preservation* is written by co-editor Robert Melnick, and he considers the delicate relationship between nature and culture. He uses the ideas of language and social behavior to explain why there is a gap between these two ideals. Nature is an unattainable concept, a Garden of Eden that is untouched and perfect. Culture, on the other hand, is created purposefully by people. To further his point, he uses the case of Yosemite Valley to explain why society is uncomfortable with the overlap of these two thoughts. He uses this essay to call for “nonlinear and cyclical modes of thinking about nature, culture, and landscape” and to consider “landscape as the integrating force for nature and culture”.

Chapter two, titled *Selling Heritage Landscapes*, focuses on the increasing interest in heritage landscapes. Because of this growth, the writer Richard Francaviglia, aims to truly understand their purpose and how they are ‘sold’. He argues that instead of classifying by use, there is a new and better system. It is based on the process of how the landscape came to be preserved and how their marketed. His classification system included passively preserved, actively preserved, restored heritage landscapes, assembled heritage landscapes, imagineered, and imagically preserved heritage landscapes. All six of these classifications have their own method of preservation, process of how the preservation began, and varying levels of ‘honesty’ in their reality. This chapter was particularly interesting because with these differing ranges of

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4 Melnick 2000: 43
preservation for heritage landscapes, came a series of questions. In his essay he questions if preservation is experiential or visual? Should the ‘viewer’ be distancing itself from it? How honest should this landscape be to what existed previously, if anything ever existed at all. These are crucial questions that preservationists, society, and I need to address before endeavoring in a preservation project or understanding what preservation really means. In particular, this chapter supported my belief that preservation work should not put a glass wall between the ‘landscape’ and the ‘viewer.’ Contrarily, in many cases, it should be experienced. Not all of culture can be celebrated with a physical element but a tradition or a lifestyle.

David Schuyler and Patricia O’Donnell uses the examples of parks and urban cemeteries in their essay, *History and Preservation of Urban Parks and Cemeteries*, to consider how these historic places were actually classified historically as well as provide methods in which to preserve them. These strategies are crucial in preservation projects, as the writers note, because it is a constant battle between preserving it historical significance but also still providing a functional and useful space today. Their solution is providing a consensus between all parties, especially in urban areas. This concept that the writers brought forth made an excellent point for urban spaces. There is a relationship between preservation and urban growth and development that must be acknowledged.

Continuing on the idea of the ordinary and the everyday, Arnold Alanen’s chapter explores the term ‘vernacular landscapes.’ He states that while these spaces can reside in large cities like the casitas in New York City, they are more commonly considered being small and rural spaces. He begins his essay by attempting to provide a definition of the ambiguous term that is ‘vernacular’ by considering its origin and evolution. He continues by describing the various methods that can be used to preserve vernacular landscapes. He uses specific case studies to explain different approaches such as: land trusts, the National Park Service, national reserves, local and community efforts, and heritage areas or corridors. Because this topic deals with smaller
regions and efforts, I believe that this particular chapter’s case studies was beneficial to look at for my own project in the small town of Harlingen.

“The mix of American cultures and ethnic groups coming at different times means that the same landscape may be simultaneously significant to people carrying quite different cultural traditions”5. Donald Hardesty’s essay, *Ethnographic Landscapes*, considers the role that ethnographic landscapes have in transforming a specific landscape into culture. He argues that one of the most specific aspects of an ethnographic landscape is that there must be cultural awareness for the space. This could mean that the land does not necessarily have to have human interventions or modifications on it, but rather, all it needs is a connection to sacred or secular meanings. It makes preserving these landscapes all the more interesting because there may not be any ‘material’ item to protect, but things like plants, animals, and the landforms themselves are what remain important. With this in mind, preserving ethnographic landscapes can be quite challenging. For one, ethnographic landscapes change as the people’s cultures, values, and way-of-life change meaning there is no set time period or culture to preserve, and one must protect this living landscape by also allowing it to grow. Secondly, because these landscapes can change, the protection of a particular identity can be difficult. Ethnographic landscapes can belong to more than one group of people with varying values. Because of these challenges, Hardesty attempts to provide a few methods for preserving these diverse landscapes at the end of his essay. Hardesty’s essay is the most applicable and related to the ideas of a living cultural landscape because he tries to address preservation through meaning and sense of place rather than a materialistic or physical object. In addition to this, he considers how people and culture evolves over time, and how that can affect the value of a cultural landscape. This specifically relates to Harlingen’s case, where there is a mix of culture that has morphed into a vibrant and interwoven relationship between all its users. Even in recent years because Harlingen and the Mexican border has gone through a

5 Hardesty 2000: 171
drastic change in relationship, along with recent environmental changes due to climate change, and the ever-evolving technological advances Harlingen has become a city that has both changed and remained the same. This is why Hardesty’s chapter is particularly helpful.

“Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America” provided many thought-provoking theories and concepts. I would say all of the writers wrote very accessible essays and provided concise arguments and case studies for their readers. While there are many take-aways from each individual writing, there are two points that I made after completing the entire book that I will carry forward in my work. First, these writings provided by various writers with differing backgrounds used many terms to describe similar spaces (heritage landscapes, vernacular landscapes, ethnographic landscapes, and cultural landscapes are just a few). It would be beneficial for my use to determine what is most appropriate for my work, and also provide my own definition and understanding as a way to more successfully describe my project. Many of these essays provided methods in which to go about preserving cultural landscapes, but for the most part they remained rather vague on the process and mostly explained the resource in which to get there. Further analysis of these techniques was necessary for the implementation of a process that is the most useful. Overall, I would say that this book provided an excellent base to begin my research on the preservation of a living cultural landscape in the American setting.

Urban Cultural Landscapes

Harlingen, while surrounded by rural setting is closer related to the preservation of an urban landscape. That being said studying examples and tactics for preservation of a cultural landscape on a scale of a city was more useful for this project. The primary steps for creating an inclusive history and a historic area that is non-disruptive to everyday life are the key components to an urban cultural landscape as well as a ‘living’ one. When addressing the dynamics of an
urban setting, one helpful example is looking at the example of roji preservation in Kagurazaka, Japan.

Benika Morokuma from the University of Tokyo wrote an article in 2016 that described the efforts put forth by the local community to preserve the roji of the area. Morokuma hopes to use this case study as a way to promote the need for a new approach to preserving urban cultural landscapes. A new approach that would both be able to recognize an environment as a historic and cultural resource, but also as a suitable living environment for the users of the place. This approach is exactly what a living cultural landscape calls for, and why it is an appropriate instance to study.

Morokuma begins their writing with an introduction to Japan’s policy dealing with cultural landscapes. In 2004, Japan passed a law called the Landscape Law. This would be the first time that cultural landscapes would be officially implemented into the list of cultural resources that Preservation Law of Cultural Properties considers significant. This law allowed the local governments to control and develop the areas in and around areas that the government’s found worth preserving. That being said, Japan took on a quite unique definition or understanding of what a cultural landscape actually was. It began with UNESCO’s definition which considered cultural landscapes as a space that focused on the act of creating a sense of place for the users which did not necessarily include any built forms, but Japan broadened it even more. This type of definition is unique in that it does not define cultural landscapes as being purely associated with vernacular architecture. That being said, after ten years of the law being passed not a single cultural landscape had been designated in Tokyo. Morokuma claims that her writing will examine
why after a fifteen-year effort, the community was able to help benefit the town’s planning but was unsuccessful in designating the roji as a cultural landscape for Tokyo.

Figure 8 - Night Image of Roji
(By tokyoroji.tokyo)

Roji are located in the central region of Tokyo in a neighborhood called Kagurazaka. It is an older part of the city that is known specifically for its network of neighborhood alleys (roji) that resides in the historic Geisha quarters. Specifically, roji is a term used to describe a slim street or walking path that is about three meters wide which was initially developed as a private street. Since the nineteenth century the neighborhood had become primarily a commercial and residential area and therefore the role of roji changed. It was most commonly used in the twentieth century, but quickly disappeared because they were not suitable to meet the post-war planning of the city which needed at least a width of four meters for fire trucks. Even roji itself were not the first thing to exist in their locations due to the city’s unending evolution. There were earlier structures in Kagurazaka that were created in the Edo period (early seventeenth century)
that pre-existed the roji. Originally the area was used to house high-class warriors because of its relative closeness to the castle. Most of modern Kagurazaka’s structure is based on this period, but once a ruler took hold of the government it evolved slightly. The area was converted to a residential and commercial district, the Geisha industry began to thrive, and rojis began to be developed through the subdivisions of the lots. This made roji just one layer of the fabric that defined the Kagurazaka neighborhood and would later have affects to its preservation.

At the turn of the century, Kagurazaka became an attractive area for residential development and began to see some significant growth in residential buildings. During this time the Geisha industry was also declining significantly which was a crucial aspect of the roji quarters. The loss of Geisha resulted in the loss of significance for roji in the eyes of the outsider. In response the local residents and business owners (along with experts in city planning, urban design, and law) went forward with a plan to protest the development of large-scale buildings. They argued that these buildings were too visually prominent and affected the general low-rise

Figure 9 - Image of Neighborhood View Blocked by New High Rise Building
(By Morokuma 2016: 65)
landscape of the neighborhood. With their efforts, they were only able to convince the developer to lower the thirty-one-story tower to twenty-six stories and that was it. With this failure, the community realized that they would need to use city planning to their advantage if they want to succeed in protecting roji. They created a series of organizations to help their cause. First was a group called Machizukuri Koryuukai which had the purpose of regulating the heights of new developments in the roji quarters. Another was the Ikimachi Club which consisted of stakeholders from the neighborhood who appreciated the character of Kagurazaka neighborhood. This club held roji symposiums and walking tours to promote interest to the neighborhood. The efforts made by the community led to heightened interest. Books and magazines featured Kagurazaka and TV programs mentioned the neighborhood as a very historic area. The interest in Kagurazaka reached to all of Japan and even the rest of the world. People began to see roji as the locus of the neighborhood. It served as a common open space that the community used to socialize with one another, it provided a safe and car-free area for children to play and benefited the commercial district as it made protected human traffic alleys. It’s considered a human-scale space as it only suits the human and human movement which was a very intriguing idea for twenty-first century people used to vehicular traffic defining spaces. This situation is very fascinating as it is a common occurrence in the urban setting. The movement and fast-paced nature of the city often allows itself to become unaware of the small elements and objects that have become an essential part of their day-to-day life. That idea along with historic significance to the neighborhood is what this a living cultural landscape. The idea is to celebrate the history but also preserve as a gear in a machine that is the Kagurazaka neighborhood. Because of that the neighborhood gained recognition as a place with old Japanese ambience, historic sense, and a crucial part of contemporary Japanese life. The community essentially was able to rebrand the neighborhood as a unique urban landscape that has evolved and accumulated different characteristics that would lead to its protection and appreciation.
While, this was essentially very helpful to the neighborhood, there were some issues that came forward. For example, the interest in roji had increased, however it is not held to the same value to all the stakeholders involved. The residential community and business owners of Kagurazaka who have had roots there for many years easily stood for its preservation, but new property owners in the area felt no connection to it leading to more high-rise development even after its great recognition. In 2010, the government of Japan attempted to organize a number the potential sites. Kagurazaka was chosen to be further studied for this designation, specifically the landscape of the roji quarters and Geisha industry.

Morokuma concluded her paper by proposing how to preserve the roji and its landscape. She stated that several actions need to take place for this preservation to be successful. First, the preservation of roji required the preservation of the general scale and patterns of roji that were created in the 1930s. This is based on the fact that there are no surviving pre-war buildings in that area anymore so roji is all that remains from that time. Second, the landscape around roji needs to be preserved by controlling new development of the surrounding area.

“The sudden threat to the everyday landscape of the old urban neighborhood in Tokyo...led the community to realize that the roji and its landscape are the significant asset of their neighborhood and they could be the basis for the future town planning that will enhance its unique characters of Kagurazaka.” 6

Because the protection of the area is primarily based on the interventions that the community had with the city planning (rather than preservation) the area is still not guaranteed protection. Morokuma’s argument is that the local community and preservation community need to come together if they wish for success. The preservation community recognizes the historical

6 Morokuma 2016: 73
significance of the region however the neighborhood still sees it only as an essential part of their way of life. To consider this neighborhood as both could potentially strengthen its protection.

*A Living Cultural Landscape*

The National Park Service define a cultural landscape as a historic place that shows evidence of human interaction with the physical environment. Their authenticity is measured by historical integrity, or the presence and condition of physical characteristics that remain from the historic period. I believe that this definition is just the beginning of what can define a cultural landscape, and it is also crucial to consider the instances that made the site historically significant to begin with. A downfall with just considering what still remains of a space can lead to an inaccurate and untrue representation. This was well expressed in a book written by Laura Alice Watt. Her book is called the “Paradox of Preservation: Wilderness and Working Landscapes at Point Reyes National Seashore.” This book uses the case study of Point Reyes National Seashore which has been a working landscape for a long time. With the shore being protected as a National Seashore, there are consequences to the seashores current state because of a predetermined idea of what a park should “look like.” Watt considers the evolution of this idea, and why it may not accurately display that lands history. Specifically, in this case, the Secretary of the Interior decided to close an eight-decade-old oyster farm that is located within the national seashore. Leading up to this decision, there was a significant amount of argument (all the way to a national scale) about whether the farm was harmful to the seashore or not.
“The oyster controversy at Point Reyes represents an ongoing collision of an older, wilderness-based conception of resource preservation with a new view that aims to rethink resource management in the era of Anthropocene, with increasing recognition that all environments around the globe are now being deeply influenced by human activity in one form or another- that no natural landscape are truly ‘pristine’”\(^7\)

As Watt stated, there is a new debate that pushes back on the traditional idea of what wilderness, landscapes, or nature truly means and what that could look like. She states that there is no truly “natural” landscape, and the views and parks created by the park management are an idealistic and imagined space. This is reiterated by a number of people, but one text that expands well on this idea is “Uncommon Ground” which is edited by William Cronon.

The book is set up as a series of essays that had its origins in an interdisciplinary seminar which focused on the theme “reinventing nature.” William Cronon, a professor of history, geography, and environmental studies and the president of the American Society for Environmental History, edited together these essays from a multitude of disciplines that dealt with trying to change what nature really means. This book argues that aiming to rid humans out of wilderness is not a solution to the current environmental issues, rather, society should try to redefine what nature truly is. Cronon’s essay “The Trouble with Wilderness: or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” notes that in the past, wilderness was a place separated from humans. It became a sacred place and celebrates

\(^7\) Watt 2017: 4
the most inhuman beauty. Cronon argues that the land has never been “untouched” and to claim otherwise is not only false, but also insulting to the past users of the landscape.

“The myth of the wilderness as ‘virgin,’ uninhabited land had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home. Now they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they are seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God’s own creation.”

The idea that a space must be preserved to a pristine and perfectly historic image will not accurately depict what that cultural landscape means to the users of the space. The people who decide this method of preservation do not know the life, work, blessings and hardships faced there, and therefore, do not understand the meaningful connections that the space should have. While the two past examples deal directly with parks and wilderness. The same concept can be translated into the urban or city scale. Creating the perfectly preserved space to match the exact point in history that has been decided as the best depiction of historic integrity can lead to an inaccurate representation of its significance, specifically in a constantly changing setting like Harlingen. With that in mind, a living cultural landscape for Harlingen will require two different approaches to succeed. It will need to celebrate Harlingen’s historic integrity through preservation strategies as well as provided a newly designed element to promote the evolving and developing city that is Harlingen today. These two approaches will be studied and developed in the following two chapters.

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8 Cronon 1995: 79
Chapter Three
Preservation Strategies

When considering how to address a living cultural landscape, I realized that there are many considerations and questions that must be implemented into the project. The diagram below expresses those thoughts specifically thinking about how contemporary interventions could work, how to blend this intervention with day-to-day lives of the people of Harlingen, creating a sense of place and the considerations regarding representation. The following two sections and its corresponding research addresses these ideas below.

Power of Place

“Urban landscapes are storehouses for…social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbors, as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of
many people and often outlast many lifetimes.” In *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, Dolores Hayden proposes new ideas and interventions for the practice of public history and art, urban preservation, and cultural landscape preservation. Hayden’s background as a professor of architecture, urbanism, and American studies has formed a particular interest in urban landscapes and public history, specifically relating to the representation of all races, genders, and classes. The first half of the book outlines the various elements of social history in urban spaces and how those urban landscapes change as the lives of the user change. She concludes with a few approaches to how communities and professionals can promote public memory and a sense of place. The second part of the book documents the nonprofit organization that Hayden founded. She uses this portion of the book as a case study that she has directly been involved in to preserve and honor urban landscapes of African American, Latin, and Asian American families in Los Angeles.

As stated previously, the first part of the book covers ideas dealing with urban landscapes and social histories. When it comes to studying these topics, especially in the case of the United States, there is a problem of inclusivity. This first chapter specifically deals with this topic. Hayden notes that there is a representational problem that is common in preservation in the United States. Hayden proposes that instead of merely including some more diverse projects, what really needs to occur is a reworking of the conceptual framework that demands for an inclusive “cultural citizenship”. Not by a legal membership but of a sense of cultural belonging. Because she notes, there is always a chance that the emotion is being pulled from a place may be a feeling of bitterness, she argues that goal should be to reach a subtle evocation of American diversity in projects. It allows for a feeling of common membership, where a variety of groups may see the space and relate to it in some sort of way.

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9 Hayden 1997: 9
“The sense of civic identity that shared history can convey is missing. And even bitter experiences and fights communities have lost need to be remembered—so as to not diminish their importance.”

Hayden proposes three points to preservation of urban landscapes that can serve as steps to address a society’s history in the most appropriate and inclusive way. The first point is claiming the entire urban cultural landscape as an important part of American history, not just architectural monuments. This helps the space be a cultural landscape in its entirety and expands the characteristics of the National Park Service to include so much more. The second step is to find creative ways to interpret modest buildings as part of the flow of contemporary city life. Finally, she says that the project must emphasize public processes and public memory which would include considering strategies for the representation of women’s history and ethnic history, as these are the areas that Hayden feels are currently under-represented.

The second chapter of Hayden’s book discusses the essence of how social histories are developed over time. She starts off this chapter, ‘Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space,’ by mentioning the significance of a ‘sense of place’ in urban context. She mentions John Brinkerhoff Jackson’s argument that vernacular or ordinary landscapes are “the image of our common humanity,” and therefore can take the shape of various sizes and scales. Urban landscapes are not exempt from this idea. He combines cultural geography, architecture, and social history to find the overlap that is cultural landscape.

10 Hayden 1997: 9
“It is the story of how places are planned, designed, built, inhabited, appropriated, celebrated, despoiled, and discarded. Cultural identity, social history, and urban design are here intertwined.”

Hayden argues that many writers of architecture, photography, cultural geography, and others strive to define a ‘sense of place’ but remains surface level with their attempts, only looking at the ‘personality of the location’. She continues by discussing the work presented by French sociologist, Henri Lefebvre. He provides a framework called the ‘production of space.’ He explains that every society has created a specific social space that was based on the requirements of social reproduction and economic production. With this understanding of growth, one would be able to determine a social history of an urban space. Hayden continues to explain Lefebvre’s outline of the development of a working landscape. First the production of the space will begin as soon as the indigenous residents begin to search for subsistence. This space may eventually grow into a town, and maybe later, a city. She says that the shape of the urban landscape of these spaces begins with the economic production. This would most often include barns, mine shafts, piers, or factories. Then social reproduction would come next which would include housing, stores, a school, and religious meeting places. Infrastructure follows these elements. By these means, the writer makes the point that these elements are a huge part of how certain groups of people (different race, gender, or class) may lose economic and political rights. This is achieved by limiting these groups’ access to space that would help achieve social reproduction. Accounts of these limitations help begin to map spatial segregation for these groups. Hayden continues by mentioning the significance of analyzing the power struggles dealing with planning, design, construction, use and demolition of typical buildings. She mentions that like cultural landscapes, vernacular buildings are focused primarily in rural or small towns. She argues that there is a huge amount of potential to look at urban areas just like these rural areas so as to understand a broad

11 Hayden 1997: 15
social interpretation of construction and inhabitation for the region. It’s much more than just looking at the material. Hayden mentions it is just as important to look at the records of ownership, taxation, and regulations rather than only looking at building plans. She ends this chapter by arguing that there is a serious problem with past studies of great urban spaces. The lack of true representation of the users and influencers of the development of the space is still a problem. These large areas are dynamic and complicated, but with careful consideration and study (similar to studies of rural vernacular buildings) urban spaces can be understood similarly.

These ideas are also addressed in two other readings that are titled “Memory Without Monuments: Vernacular Architecture” by Stanford Anderson and “Public History and the Study of Memory” by David Glassberg. These two papers are concerned about memory, and its role in architecture and society.

In Stanford Anderson’s “Memory Without Monuments,” he explored questions that came up after an essay that had been published previously. One question that he addressed was whether or not there was an example of architecture where societal and disciplinary memory were not separated. He used the example of vernacular architecture and how they inherently carry both types of memory. This, in effect, carries the idea that the act of building itself can carry memory. He argues that this is true regardless of preliterate or literate societies as even literate societies can have an ahistorical attitude. Anderson goes on to explore the idea of vernacular architecture as a document and considerations that need to be made. He makes two points: while, a building can be a document, one must consider that it may not be considered by other later, so it is important that the historical sense is assertive, and the other is that there needs to be a level of autonomy to other building ‘documents’ like it.

The second writing, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” considers public history projects researching memory, and why it is important that more research be done. David Glassberg discusses the evolving phenomenon, where in the beginning a group’s memory was
just based on its beliefs of the past, but now it also considers tradition. This is because of a shift in who the researchers are studying. They moved from institutions that write the history to the individual who learns and interprets all of these histories. Glassberg goes on to consider so of the challenges that public history faces; there is a problem of how to collect all these individual ideas and combine to create a public history, a problem of politics deciding whose version of the history gets institutionalized, having to consider a way to re-spark the ‘interest’ of people without turning history into a theme park, and considering the significance a place can hold for public history. Glassberg finishes by explaining that historians have a lot of new things to consider when they go on to do their history-making, but also finishes by saying that there is a growing interest in memory by the historical profession which is a great start.

The third chapter of *Power of Place*, ‘Place Memory and Urban Preservation’, of the first part of Hayden’s book notes a few interventions that are possible to these ideas into a reality.

“There needs to be, and there can be, a more coherent way of conceptualizing and planning the work each group is able to contribute to the presence of the past in the city.”12

The first method could be through the means of architectural preservation. To preserve a series of vernacular buildings that are in good condition and help to tell the story that is meant to be told is not always available for every city. This is also generally the case for Harlingen as well. When this is a possibility, a series a structure can be presented to the public that can spark the visitors’ imagination and public memory by visually seeing the story take place. The second approach considers environmental protection and landscape preservation. Over the past twenty years, there has been much debate regarding the extent in which nature and culture are overlapped. Harlingen has had many natural elements that take part in its cultural identity such as; agriculture, the Gulf of Mexico,

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12 Hayden 1997: 45
and the diverse types of birds and butterflies that live in the area. All of these elements are currently being threatened with environmental issues, specifically flooding, and it is critical to implement protection for these things. This strategy calls for landscape to act as visual and physical ‘storehouse’ of culture and history rather than the landscape being only a scientific issue. When considering these concepts as one big picture, it provides a method in which the community is directly involved in the protection of natural landscapes as well as a sense of place and meaning. The final strategy would be through the use of public art and memory. It has become more of a common occurrence to see artists interested in working with urban societies to provide a public work. While this public art can be interpreted and achieved in a multitude of ways, the goal would be to allow for citizens to engage the urban history through it. Harlingen has also attempted to begin this idea with its historic and cultural mural walk.

![Welcome Mural for Downtown Image](By myharlingen.us)

Hayden ends this chapter by noting how important it is to have collaboration with the community.
“For the public art curator, environmental planner, or urban designer, it means being willing to work for the community, in incremental ways, rather than trying to control grand plans and strategies from the top down.”

She claims that the most important part is community involvement. Rather than these projects being a huge expense and task, it is a ‘labor of love’ from everyone involved.

Dolores Hayden’s book was incredibly insightful for the caring and preservation of urban spaces’ history. Her references and examples clearly helped express how these ideas and interventions she is proposing can successfully be obtained. This book most accurately depicts what I believe to be the most critical parts of cultural landscapes, and consequently how to preserve and protect them. It is a place that may or may not have elements of natural geographical features, architectural structures, streets, patterns of growth, potential varieties of histories and cultures. It is a working landscape that has evolved and will continue to evolve but will carry with it a story and identity that can belong to the residents of the land, the generations previous, a region, an entire state, and possibly an entire country. Regardless, if it is to claim to have historical significance or cultural heritage elements it needs to speak true for everyone’s past to whom it relates and affects.

Hayden’s work was the most influential texts I read during my research. Her framework set forth a three-part list of strategies for creating a sense of place in a diverse city. Generally speaking, these are the basic practices of protecting cultural landscapes. It involves the inclusion of public art and preservation of the built and natural environment. When combined with my belief that cultural landscape preservation requires the inclusion of a contemporary intervention that promotes daily life, we finally reach my four major strategies for creating a ‘living’ cultural

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13 Hayden 1997, 77
They include architectural preservation, environmental protection, public art and memory, and the implementation of a cultural district.

![A New 4 Part Strategy for Creating a Living Cultural Landscape](image)

**Strategies for Creating a Sense of Place**

1. **Architectural Preservation**
   - Preserve a series of vernacular buildings that are in good condition and help tell a story, sparking user/visitor’s imagination and public memory.

2. **Environmental Protection and Landscape Preservation**
   - Calls for landscape to act as visual and physical ‘storehouse’ of culture and history rather than the landscape being only a scientific issue.

3. **Public Art and Memory**
   - Artists interested in working with urban societies would provide a public work that would allow for citizens to engage the urban history through it.

**Memory Through Practice**

4. **Cultural District**
   - Designate an area that will become a cultural district. This will portray the location’s specific history and culture through building types, materials, environment. This allows citizens and visitors to celebrate stories and culture through day-to-day living.

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This cultural district should be home to historic structures and/or areas of landscape that are actively being preserved or restored. It should include public art to spark a sense of memory to the place. Lastly, it should have a series of contemporary buildings that contain places to exhibit or perform the culture of that area. Some of these buildings could include art studios, performance areas, restaurants, and public gathering spaces.
“Old Buildings New Forms” by Francois Bollack was an exciting and inciteful book because it is a beautiful resource for showing how innovative and creative one can be with restoration or preservation work. The writer used different architectural terms to describe various interventions that can be performed on old buildings. In this case I am only showing one building from three of the five types of interventions because this were the most compelling and applicable to the renovation of Casa del Sol.

The reality is that no two tasks of restoration can ever lead to the exact same result, and this book exhibits how to celebrate that idea. Bollack “…shows how the addition of one building to another, involving juxtaposition of old and new fabric, can be the occasion for quite different cultural approaches”\textsuperscript{14}

Bollack’s book began a stimulated thought and inspired many ideas going into the design process of Harlingen.

\textsuperscript{14} Bollack 2013: 6
Chapter Four
Design Strategies

Architecture and Art for Happiness

This portion of the paper expresses the significance that art and architecture can have on a human being. Using the Architecture of Happiness by Alan de Botton provides a simple research example that clearly explains the influence architecture, art, and sense of place can affect people’s lives.

“The theorists of the idealizing tradition were refreshingly frank in their insistence that art should try to make things happen – and, more importantly, that it should try to make us good”. Alain de Botton possesses an advanced degree in philosophy, but rather than considering him a professional philosopher, it would be more appropriate to consider him an essayist or author. Since 1993 when de Botton published his first novel, Essays on Love, he has quickly become a bestselling author and has written many other books and essays ranging in topics. With his descriptive and expressive writing, he is known for discussing topics of literature, philosophy, and art in a more accessible manner that can touch a much wider audience in a rather successful way. This is also true for The Architecture of Happiness where he concerns himself with the practical experience that we, as users, have with architecture and how it may help us achieve (what he calls) happiness. Alain de Botton does not have an education-based background in architecture or design, but his great interest and knowledge on these subjects is apparent with his extensive familiarity about the history, strategies, and topics in architecture and design. De Botton noticeably has an interest in architecture as he has launched a project in 2009 called “Living Architecture” that builds holiday rental houses in the UK using well known architects (which included Peter Zumthor, MVRDV, NORD). His goal was to increase the appreciation and

15 de Botton, 2006: 146
interest in ‘good’ contemporary architecture which was, in fact, a continuation of The Architecture of Happiness. Once reading the book and learning of this project that de Botton formed, it is apparent that his intention for this book was less for the academic aesthetics or philosophers in architecture and more for the general occupants of architecture.

“Youth embedded in its charming prose and its useful reflections on the psychological and moral meanings of architecture is a progression of ideas that amount to an argument”\(^{16}\)

Although de Botton’s argument in his book is not a formal philosophical argument, it is clear that he has a goal that he wants his reader to take away. That argument being that architecture, more specifically “beautiful architecture”, has a direct relationship to our happiness and well-being. De Botton makes useful arguments that are helpful to the ideas of finding a sense of happiness or place in a space.

De Botton organized the book into six chapters that each have their own assorted topics and attractive images that explain how architecture speaks to its user, and how that may apply to their emotional and mental state. His first chapter, “The Significance of Architecture” de Botton makes two points that sets up his argument. His first being that the quality of our lives are significantly dependent on our physical surroundings. This is especially true for the spaces that we occupy in our daily lives – such as work and home. His second point argues that if we find that a building brings us joy or is directly related to our well-being, that we more-often-than-not consider these buildings beautiful. De Botton makes clear, however, that these arguments are not claiming that architecture is so powerful as to have a physical power that can deal with our tangible needs like a vaccine or a bowl of rice may, but rather is there to inspire and influence. In other words, expressing the beauty of the mundane, day-to-day life objects.

\(^{16}\) Shiner, 2008: 105
“Architecture may well possess moral messages; it simply has no power to enforce them. It offers suggestions instead of making laws. It invites, rather than orders, us to emulate its spirit and cannot prevent its own abuse.”

This point is extremely powerful because he sets up a great defense for any arguments that claim his writing is putting architecture on an unrealistic pedestal in which architecture can solve all our problems. He realistically sets up an argument that he will further delve into in the proceeding chapters.

De Botton continues by considering what defines a beautiful building. He briefly describes an historical evolution of styles that dominated the western hemisphere from the middle ages to the rise of modernism to communicate the problem of “choosing a style.” Each style that has emerged and taken precedence in the world has at one point been (or still is) considered beautiful. Regarding this argument, de Botton is pointing that no one person has the right to claim that they know what is considered attractive. Instead, it is imperative that we consider architecture has having an expressive function that can be used to portray a particular concept and meaning that we consider important. He references John Ruskin’s proposal that buildings should not only provide us shelter but should also “speak” to us about whatever us as the user finds important or needs to be reminded of.

This point led to de Botton’s next point regarding how buildings may talk to its occupants. He uses many references of art, design, architecture, and even visual thinking drawings. For example, he mentions the German psychologist, Rudolf Arnheim, and his study he had with his students. He asked them to describe a good and bad marriage using only a line drawing. One student drew smooth curves to represent a peaceful marriage while they drew

17 de Botton, 2006: 20
gagged and random points for struggling marriage.

He uses this chapter, “Talking Buildings,” and all its references to appeal that even the everyday object, like a hot water kettle can express a meaning that may attribute to our happiness or our idea of beauty.

“To call a work of architecture or design beautiful is to recognize that it as rendition of values critical to our flourishing, a transubstantiation of our individual ideals in a material medium”.  

This argument, however still valid, does not provide as much explanation and reasoning so much as a lot of examples. In that way it falls a little flat, making it seem a little less credible. Jonathan Neufeld from the department of philosophy at Vanderbilt University, also found this true as he claimed that the “lack of discussion of...how we are to justify them” would make any reader a little skeptical about de Botton’s claim.

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18 de Botton, 2006: 100
Through these set of arguments that de Botton has arranged for us, he is shifting the importance of architecture away from the visual attributes of it and rather the potential values and meanings that architecture can portray. The idea is that the essence of architecture should reflect, in a built structure, the life we aspire to have or love. Pierre Nora also considers this idea in his paper *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*. This paper focuses on the difference between memory and history. Nora claims that history and preserving the stories by means of items and documents has taken over what used to be done by memory. Memory is a way of life and because of that, it preserves culture and the past by living it every day. Architecture can play a role with memory and representation of a particular way of life. Nora makes this claim:

“Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects...Memory is absolute while history can only conceive the relative.”

I believe that this is one of the ideas that de Botton is aiming for in *The Architecture of Happiness* that is specifically orientated towards architects and designers. He is suggesting that architecture is so much more than just designing a space that is trendy or ‘fashionable’ for the time or is designed to a specific style. To design architecture that is beautiful and remain beautiful in the perspective of the upcoming generations, one must design with value and meaning in mind. Surface level design will not last.

Overall, de Botton organizes a very convincing argument. He manages to delve into the mind of any reader with any background and lay the foundation for understanding the true importance of architecture. While his arguments are weak in areas where he does not provide enough explanation, what he claims is still strong enough with the references and images that he provides. De Botton takes a very naturalistic approach. His argument is based on an understanding that while he studies from an outside perspective of others, he also does not claim

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19 Nora, 1989: 9
objectivity. In fact, his argument itself centers around the idea that there cannot be only one standard for architectural beauty as the value changes based on the values of the user. The “multiple, socially constructed realities”\(^{20}\) that make up a naturalistic stance is evident throughout the entire book. This book could have easily taken on an emancipatory role, but de Botton shows little concern for the social class and political aspects of architecture. This is most likely due to the psychological focus based on his background.

As I have stated throughout this essay, de Botton’s main audience is for the reader with no background in architecture. If his intention was for the architect, his efforts put forth for his argument would deem useless as he would be “preaching to the choir.” He does however subtly implement deeper threads of arguments that an architect can take away. For one, style is not what is important to design a building that is considered beautiful. You must consider these virtues of architecture: order, balance, elegance, and coherence. Also, experience is what is most important to make a building last. The everyday life is deeply affected by our physical surroundings so creating a space that sparks a feeling of inspiration of for our lives or reminds us of something is what is important. Take for example Pompeii. The old city does not receive the number of tourists it does every year because of its architectural beauty even though there is plenty of built form to look at, rather people go because they are interested in seeing how people lived around 80 AD. They are interested in their steppingstones along the streets, they reflective stones built into the streets that reflect the moon’s light for safe traveling, their plumbing system, and much more. Learning about the lives lived is generally far more interesting and important to the visitors than the architectural form and style.

“They can thus outlive their temporal or geographical origins and communicate their intentions long after their initial audiences have disappeared.”\(^{21}\)

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\(^{20}\) Groat, 2013: 33

\(^{21}\) de Botton, 2006: 97
These two key elements are considerations that I will be making in my future design work. I personally appreciated the variety of resources he used to make explain his points as well as his powerful and beautiful images. It reminds me that I should expand my research from just architectural writings and study other forms of design, history, social sciences, and many other topics. With a diverse list of references and concise writing de Botton’s *The Architecture of Happiness* truly is a successful book about the true value of architecture that anyone could read.

*How Buildings Learn*

*How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They’re Built*, written by Stewart Brand, proposes that buildings are adapted best when they are being constantly refined and reformed by their users. He aims with this book to explain how designers, once they consider buildings in terms of time and space, a building can successful be improved and adapted over time. With Brand’s diverse background in biology, the military, and design, he provides a unique perspective to the idea of building adaptation.

Brand references the unchanging size of the ground-floor ladies’ room of the Opera House in San Francisco. It has been too small since it was built in 1932 and will most likely remain that way. The writer claims that buildings are not intended to ever be adapted, in fact, we do everything in our power to make sure it doesn’t. Regardless of our desire to keep buildings in the way we meant for them to be, they will always change because the world is always changing. He writes, “…a building is always building and rebuilding.” (Brand, 1994: 2) Brand claims that his intent for this book is to examine buildings in terms of space and time, and how we can prepare for buildings to change with ease.

Brand begins his argument in chapter 1, by explaining why time should be considered when designing and studying buildings. To explain how buildings can change over time, Brand uses varying examples: social changes like women entering the work force, introduction of heating and cooling systems, codes, and deterioration. Building renovations are growing rapidly.
There was around $200 billion spent on renovation and rehabilitation in 1989, in fact it is almost becoming a trend. He uses the example of Levi’s jeans. People love these when they buy them, but they also age beautifully, showing its age but remaining strong. Brand articulates that this is also what people respect about old buildings. Brand explains that age is extremely valued in America. His point in this chapter was to really portray how the changing and evolving of buildings is unavoidable. The next step is to understand how the process works or how it might go better. Brand uses the example of the evolution of Architectural Digest magazine because even though it started as an architecture magazine, it became more focused on interior design. This is because the magazine noticed that many of the readers rebuilt interiors rather than houses. Going off this example, Brand uses chapter 2 to explain the life cycle of different elements of the building. He expands on an idea started by Frank Duffy, calling it the “six S’s.” Here he breaks down the six parts of a building and how they perform/work/change during the building’s lifetime. He claimed this idea (time-layered perspective) is fundamental to understanding how buildings actually behave. Brand claims that there is a balance with change in buildings however. The quick processes provide originality and challenge. The slow provide continuity and constraint.

“A design imperative emerges: An adaptive building has to allow slippage between the differently-paced systems of Site, Structure, Skin, Services, Space plan, and Stuff. Otherwise the slow systems block the flow of the quick ones, and the quick ones tear up the slow ones with their constant change.”

He argues that even though all buildings change, not all improve. He claims that growth is often the driver, but when is it considered an improvement? In chapter 11 Brand suggests the use of a tool called scenario planning. This is meant to determine strategy because it considers

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22 Brand, 1994: 20
unforeseeable changes unlike a plan. This will ensure that you always have “maneuvering room.” Designing with a vagueness of too little program as well as a precise program with no plans of changing can be problematic to the building’s future. There would be no space for change/growth/etc.

“The great virtue of programming is that it deeply involves the users of a building and makes it really their building. The great vice of programming is that is over-responds to the immediate needs of the immediate users, leaving future users out of the picture, making the building all too optimal to the present and maladaptive for the future.” 23

How do we solve this then? The answer is scenario exercise. You explore the “driving forces” that could shape the future environment. Consider the unthinkable. Then come together to try to make decisions on a strategy that will accommodate all the scenarios. These scenarios can help shine light on design flaws or mistakes in the building. Brand’s tactics for explaining his concepts were incredibly simple to follow. This is most likely due to his varying knowledge. He explains using diagrams and photographs as well as examples that readers even with very little design background can understand. For example, his references to Levi’s denim and the rock musician Brian Eno. All of these elements assist Brand in providing a very successful argument about why time should be considered in architecture and how to prepare for them. With that in mind, applying Brand’s arguments to the new construction element of my project could be very helpful in my goal of creating a living cultural landscape. This is because the concept of a living cultural landscape is to allow the current users of the region to be able to still live and grow. By allowing the new building to evolve easily with the users, it creates a nice technique that was applied during the design process.

On Performative Regionalism and Belonging

23 Brand, 1994: 181
When I began to research documents that could help drive my design for new construction, I read two different essays that focused less on the style as the driver and more the use of the space. These two writings, “On Performative Regionalism” and “Belonging” discuss design in relation to spatial behavior. While “On Performative Regionalism” is more architectural and “Belonging” is more scientific they both argued that well thought out architecture and design can successfully create a sense of belonging. This is related to how the user use the space repetitively rather than the form or style. This is concept I carried into my design. If a specific style for the new construction building had been chosen, there is a significant chance that the building would feel exclusive to certain members of the city. A study of how and what the people of Harlingen value and use their space revealed what kind of spaces I should design and along that, how those spaces should make the user feel. Therefore, a careful consideration of the user’s repetitive nature and needs for what they regularly do was a study that occurred before the design process of the cultural district. First, I performed a pattern study which can be seen in the image below. This consisted of a series of abstract, ink drawings of varying topics within Harlingen. They differed in scale and story, but all helped me orient myself to important elements the city. The topics were Public Art, City Movement, Site Movement, Activity Clusters, Downtown, Nature, Casa Del Sol, and the Border Gradient.
Figure 15 - Pattern Study Sketches
(By Author)
A program study came second. This would help me determine what would be needed and used in a cultural landscape for this border town. It was broken down by two general users, the citizens of Harlingen and the visitors. Then breaking down the activities that each group would perform on a daily basis. Once these activities were determined such as celebrate, create, observe, and teach, it was possible to decide on a set of building types that could house these activities. Overall, they landed within a set of six different types that will be implemented into Harlingen’s cultural district. They include performance spaces, class/workspaces, stores/restaurants, galleries, park-like spaces, and event spaces.

![Program Study Diagram](image)

Figure 16 - Program Study (By Author)
Chapter Five
Site: Historic Downtown and Casa del Sol

The Site

Downtown Harlingen is very central within the city, and it is where Harlingen all comes together (quite literally). The main streets and trains cross through here. It is also the where the city began to develop, giving it its title, historic downtown Harlingen. It holds some of the most historic buildings in Harlingen, the most local artwork that, and hosts many community gatherings like the monthly market days and holiday parades. The problem is that it is only used for these ‘special events’ and has been relatively abandoned during the rest of the year. Why is it not used for the rest of the time when it should be the core for Harlingen? Because of this reason, I knew that my site for the cultural district needed to be located within this area.

The site is located at 221 E Madison Avenue, but actually spreads east to west over a few blocks. This site sits on the northern edge of historic downtown. It’s within the commercial zone but is very near two large residential zones. This is great placement because that means people will regularly be traveling through this area to get to and from work. It also is located close to the city lake which contains paths used regularly by the town as well as the public library and cultural arts center which, unfortunately, is not currently being utilized. The northern edge of the site faces one of the railroads that runs through Harlingen which will evoke the history of how Harlingen was founded and how it has grown since its founding. Lastly, the main bus station is two blocks south of this site, making it very easy for visitors to come here to orient themselves to the city, get food, and get an introduction to the city’s culture.
Figure 17 - Site Proximity Map and Existing Conditions
(By Author and googlemaps.com)
Casa del Sol

As one might recall, one of the strategies for creating a cultural district and a sense of place was the preservation and restoration of historic buildings. Within the site is Casa del Sol or the House of the Sun. This building was designed by Taniguchi and Croft Architects in the early sixties. This was a popular firm within the region at the time, and they often designed in the modern style with the inclusion of thin shell concrete roofs to reflect Mexican architecture.

Figure 18 - Historic Plan and Elevation of Casa del Sol
(By Charles B. Croft Architect, shared by City of Harlingen, City Secretary’s Office)
This completely circular building’s original program was designed to be a new tourist center for the growing number of winter Texans and visitors coming to Harlingen every year. It included a stage and catering style kitchen. To create revenue for the city, it was later transformed into a community/recreation space. The major change during its renovation was that the original storefront glazing and adobe brick façade was removed and replaced with a stucco wall assembly. This is rather unfortunate as you lose clear views to the outside, natural daylight, and views of the structure from the outside.

Figure 19 - Images of Existing Casa del Sol
(By Author and googlemaps.com)
Its most unique feature is its round domed, thin-shelled concrete roof (has a cantenary shape), and it was designed to evoke the shape of a sombrero. With only 2 inches of concrete and additional inch of insulation, it gives a weightless and almost tarp-like appearance. The beams are an early example of a post-tensioned concrete system in a building. These beams move up the circle in the center of the roof which distribute a back force all the way around. With a roof span of one hundred and twenty feet, many people believed the structure would fail when the formwork was removed. When the day came to remove the formwork and Casa del Sol remained standing it became a celebrated piece of architecture in the region as it was never done before there. It was even featured in the Texas Architect magazine in 1964.24

Since it was built, Casa del Sol has been a part of all the lives who live in Harlingen. It has seen dozens of quincenaeras, school celebrations, dances and parties, exams, and other local events. Because of its historic significance to the citizens of Harlingen for the daily lives as well as the significance it held as being a new building construction type in the region, it is the perfect building for putting in restoration and preservation efforts. By protecting Casa del Sol, the celebration of a major building for Harlingen in a cultural and architectural sense became a reality for this cultural district.

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After completing the pattern and program studies as well as deciding on the location of the site, developing the design for the district and specifically the new community center was the next step. In the image below, you will see a parti diagram which explains how the form and general layout of the site was decided. Essentially, everything is radiating off of Casa del Sol, so the layout of the site is organized by a series of rays and rings. The parti diagram is specifically showing the community center rings and rays off of Casa del Sol. Originally the rays only radiated off of the columns of Casa del Sol, but because the community center was going to include the support spaces for Casa del Sol (bathrooms, mechanical space, storage space, and a link to the kitchen) it needed one ray to be split into two parts. These rays determine program and the activities that will be done there. Another layer of this is the rings that radiate off the Casa del Sol. These rings determine the levels of privacy or openness that those parts of the program have towards Casa del Sol. For example, the private ring will be enclosed spaces and you would not be
able to see Casa del Sol while the viewing ring has a clear and unobstructed view of the historic building.

With this parti and program came the site plan (refer to the figure below) of the cultural district of Harlingen. As stated previously, Casa del Sol has become that center of the site in which everything else responds to. Casa del Sol now has been restored to have storefront glazing once again. Creating a unobstructed view into and outside the space. Directly connected to Casa del Sol is the new community center which be explored more in detail. The site includes an arts building which would have opportunities for people walking along the site to view the artists doing their craft. This would promote the buying to local and handmade goods in the area rather than shopping at generic stores. There are retail and dining areas for buying, selling and eating
local goods. Near these areas are designated spaces where people can perform or lounge outside.

Another key point to the district is that major circulation on the site is generally more centralized rather than along the outside. This was to create a space, that once within, would be a distraction free environment where visitors of the district can focus on the experience. Lastly, the east of the site, I proposed a pathway that connects the district to the public library and city lake. Along this pathway is a wildflower, sculpture garden where people would experience local flowers and art that would be promoting the history and environment of Harlingen.
Moving on to the community center which was designed to join Casa del Sol so as to give the historic building the supporting program it needs to continue functioning as it had before the reimplementation of storefront. My goal for the community center was to provide a place where people could gather and share stories and experiences. The other buildings on the site provide a lot of the tangible and physical elements such as food, art, and goods. But as stated throughout this paper, the preservation of culture requires activity and storytelling. The rest of the site promotes preservation through repetitive activity so the community center will hold program for reading stories, sharing ideas, sharing special events and more.

The first floor of the building includes an exhibition space which can be used as a flexible space for large gatherings. This floor also has the major support ray for Casa del Sol. It includes bathrooms and a mechanical space that will be shared among the two buildings. As a reminder that support space is in the support ray, and therefore, the administration space is also within this ray. In the activity ray of the building, there is a daycare, a retail/fitness space, and a café lounge which has the best view into Casa del Sol.
Figure 24 - Level 01 Community Center Floor Plan
(By Author)
Figure 25 - Level 02 Community Center Floor Plan (By Author)
On the second level, the activity ray includes classrooms, collaboration spaces, meeting rooms, and reading/computer areas. To the left in the support ray, there are more bathrooms as well as a collection and archive space. This program was included because of the loss of the Cultural Arts Center that was stripped for renovation and never finished. All the documents and pieces have been left in storage with no way to utilize them. The space along the edge of Casa del Sol has been pulled back creating a double height, atrium space. This gives the reading and collaboration spaces a great view of Casa del Sol’s iconic roof.

As the cultural district is intended to evoke a sense of place and storytelling, it was important that the district use local building materials and promoted local art and colors. The use of local stone and wood for the façade of the buildings would be implemented into the site. Roof gardens are balconies will also be a key part for these buildings. As stated previously the weather is nice all year-round, and many people in Harlingen spend their evening eating and conversing.
outside. Lastly, the implementation of colorful paintings and tile work on the buildings was a key factor for the façade. In the sketch above, one can see that long windows are accentuated with strips of colorful tile and large expansive walls will include painted murals done by local artists.

In conclusion, the overall goal for this thesis was to celebrate the history and culture of Harlingen through the implementation of a living cultural landscape that would include contemporary structures to promote the continuous use of the space. My solution for a living cultural landscape was the creation of the Harlingen Cultural District which includes my four strategies for creating a sense of place (architectural preservation, environmental protection, public art, and contemporary architecture for continuation of cultural activities). With the new buildings, the community center, and the restoration work on Casa del Sol I believe this idea has become something attainable. While this thesis does not intend to change the world or a global mindset, it aims to change and enhance to livelihood of small South Texas town. And with that, I believe these strategies used to celebrate a culturally important town in United States could (and should) be used in other places among the world. Not necessarily for the betterment of the world, but rather, the betterment of that city and their local history.

Figure 27 - Level Two Perspective
(By Author)
Figure 28 - Level 1 Perspectives
(By Author)
Chapter Seven
Final Design Documentation – Oral Presentation

Shelby E Parrish
BORDER TOWN
Preserving a “Living” Cultural Landscape in Harlingen, Texas

Figure 30 - Introductory Slide

Figure 29 - Harlingen Proximity Map
Figure 31 - Descriptive Images of Harlingen

Figure 32 - Thesis Question and Intent
Figure 34 - Research Diagram

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

A place that contains cultural characteristics representing the combined works of nature and of man. These characteristics were created through the continuous life styles and vocation of humans and natural changes in the environment.

Figure 33 - Cultural Landscape Description 01
Dolores Hayden
Strategies for Creating a Sense of Place

1. Architectural Preservation
   Preserve a series of vernacular buildings that are in good condition and help tell a story, sparking user/visitor’s imagination and public memory.

2. Environmental Protection and Landscape Preservation
   Calls for landscape to act as visual and physical ‘storehouse’ of culture and history rather than the landscape being only a scientific issue.

3. Public Art and Memory
   Artists interested in working with urban societies would provide a public work that would allow for citizens to engage the urban history through it.

My Intervention
Memory Through Practice

Cultural District

4. Designate an area that will become a cultural district. This will portray the location’s specific history and culture through building types, materials, environment. This allows citizens and visitors to celebrate stories and culture through day-to-day living.
Figure 37 - Casa del Sol Existing Drawings

Figure 38 - Site Context
Figure 40 - Casa del Sol Existing Photos

Figure 39 - Harlingen Vignette Exercise
Figure 42 - Program Diagram

Figure 41 - Cultural District Site Plan
Figure 44 - Perspective Images

CASA DEL SOL

WILDFLOWER GARDEN

Figure 43 - Aerial Perspective of Community Building
Figure 48 - Level 02 Floor Plan

Figure 47 - Facade Exploration
Figure 50 - Building Sections

Figure 49 - Interior Perspective 01
Figure 53 - Ending Graphic Image
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