

Landscape

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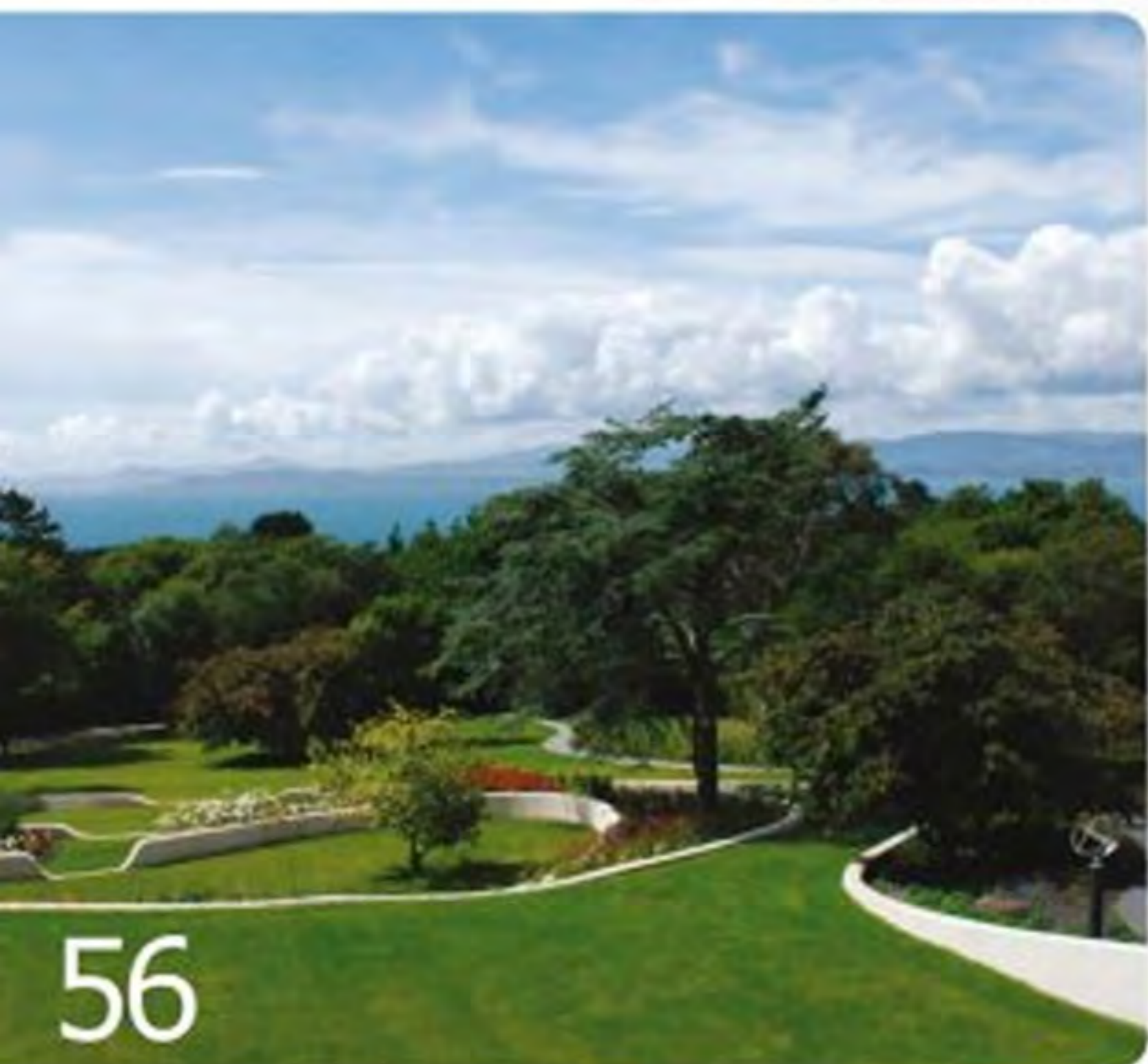
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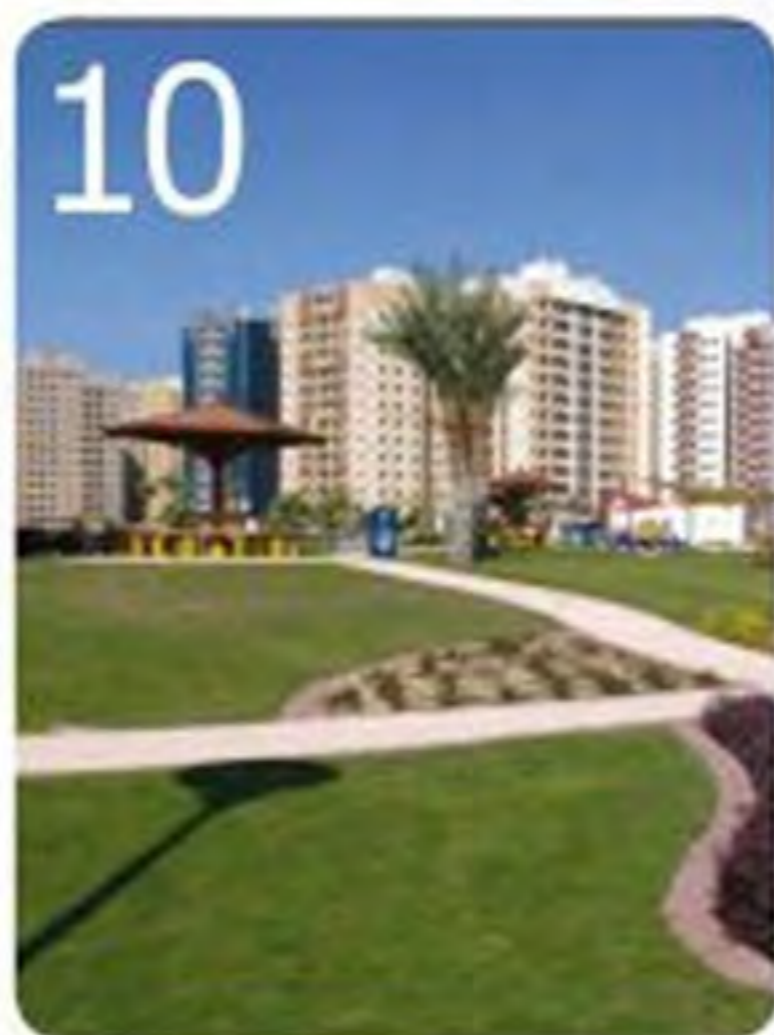
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The broad sweep of Dublin Bay begins on its south side where the ancient fishing harbour of Coliemore is snugly tucked into the area of rocky coastline that is Dalkey Sound. Just off shore it is the craggy outcrop of Dalkey Island that creates this natural place of shelter, and this island with its very own Martello Tower can be seen from anywhere in the bay area. The shoreline of the bay runs from here, past Dun Laoghaire Harbour and on to Dublin Port itself, before carrying on to form the northern shoreline that culminates in the Hill of Howth. It is on the warm, gentle, south-facing slope of this restful hillside that you will find this project that I call "Landfall", and from here you can gaze back across the water to Dalkey Island and imagine that you are looking down on the Vikings as they made their landfall in Dyflin over 1000 years ago.

In the book "In an Irish Garden" by Sybil Connolly and Helen Dillon, Olive Gladys Stanley-Clarke described Earlscliffe as a "large ugly house" with a neglected garden overrun with Aubrieta and "a hideous mauve Gladiolus". However, although the Stanley-Clarke's originally had two maids and a gardener, a scarcity of money led them to eventually sell Earlscliffe.

Even though she had a dislike for the Earlscliffe house, Olive still loved the Baily area. So they cut off a one and a half acre corner of the Earlscliffe land to build themselves a cottage which they named Shiel. She used stones from Earlscliffe to build steps down from the cottage to the lawns of Shiel and planted flowering cherries (dug up from Earlscliffe before they sold the place). Kit died in 1983, aged 96. Olive continued to live in Shiel until she sadly passed away on January 26 1996 at the age of 100.

LANDFALL

Historical and Geographical Context

By Hugh Ryan

Formulating the Brief

When I was first invited to view the garden at Shiel back in 2005 the new owners explained to me that when they bought the house some years previously they had inherited a well-established garden, but one that in many respects had seen better days. They set about making some improvements, notably the restyling and replanting of the herbaceous borders, and all in all they were happy with what they had achieved. The house itself was a traditional dormer style bungalow, commonly found in suburban areas during the mid 20th century, and the garden was very much in keeping with this style.

The owners of this delightful, but by now jaded property had been granted planning permission to demolish the existing dwelling and to build a new home more suited to their taste and requirements. Initially my brief was to make the new house work with the old garden, and to do so with the minimum number of changes.

At first I was unsure about this project as I thought it might be very difficult to merge the new house with the old garden both from a spatial planning point of view, but also from a style point of view. That is not to say that merging old with new is a bad idea, indeed it can often be achieved with dramatic success, take for example the Louvre Pyramid designed by Chinese-born American architect I. M. Pei. Once I saw



what the architect was planning for the new house I immediately started to think along more radical lines than my client brief was suggesting. So I took the bull by the horns and went away to think, and after a while I came up with a design that was proposing major rather than minor changes. To be honest my design called for the sweeping away of almost all of what remained of the original garden, and I can well remember the day I went to meet up with my clients to lay my plans before them. I was prepared for them to be perhaps unenthusiastic, and maybe even potentially offended, but their reaction could not have been more positive and so began our journey to create a new garden for Shiel.

Developing the Concept

It goes without saying that the sun has always been at the centre of the life and the lives on this planet, and whether or not we acknowledge its importance on a daily basis, it is nevertheless forever present.



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Our relationship with history and with the cycles of the sun is of interest to me, and concepts around megalithic monuments, standing stones etc, although not fully explained, hold a particular fascination. Back in 2007 I designed a garden for an international festival in Ireland at a place called Emo House, and in that installation I endeavoured to explore, and to express, some of my ideas around this subject. For me the challenge of landscape design is to firstly deal with the practical issues, then to quickly go beyond that to create a sense of emotional tension. Inevitably when I am working on a project I am looking for the “hook” on which to hang my concept and here it was the front façade of the new house. This two story façade is smoothly curved so as to take full advantage of both the spectacular views of Dublin Bay, with its backdrop of comfortable mountains, and of the daily aching passage of the bountiful sun. Therefore it seemed natural to me that curves would be my “hook”, curves which flow across the space, connecting the house with its garden and in turn the garden with the landscape beyond, a

landscape of sea, earth and sky. I like to feel that the walls to the front of the house flow in both directions, on the one hand away from the house to the land, and then from the land to the house. The main and longest wall rises from its point in the land and travels up across the lawn, around the cedar, kisses its way past the Hamamelis and on by the upper lawn towards the house where it embraces the lower sun patio before finally making its landfall as it slides into the circular deck. Then without hesitation it turns around to continue its journey back into the landscape from whence it first emerged. The sense of place is important to me, but a sense of place must embrace not only geographic location, but also a place in time. As I mentioned in my introduction, this property overlooks the physically beautiful Dublin Bay, but like every other place on earth, Dublin Bay has its own unique history, and a large part of this history is its maritime history. So this is what these curves have come to represent to me - not just “roots that anchor”, but also “waves which can carry us, and which know no bounds.” Giving expression to the dreams of my clients is the best part of my work but, at the same time, indulging in some of my own dreams is nice too.