

DUMBARTON OAKS
GARDEN AND LANDSCAPE STUDIES

PUBLIC LECTURE

Professor Kongjian Yu, Peking University

The New Vernacular: Redefining Urbanity in Contemporary China

Wednesday, October 1, 2008 at 5:30 p.m.
at Dumbarton Oaks in the Music Room at the Main House
(Registration begins at 5:00 p.m.)



Abstract

For more than a thousand years, young Chinese girls were forced to bind their feet in order to be able to marry into the urban elites. This movement from *Rusticus* to *Urbanitas* continues today. Each year one percent of China's 1.3 billion population moves to the city, changing not just the city itself, but the whole landscape of China. The rough and wild rivers are channelized and lined with marble; the rustic wetlands are replaced by shining furnished ponds and fountains; the "messy" native shrubs are uprooted and replaced by ornamentals while the harsh native grasses are replaced by ever-green exotic lawns which consume a huge amount of water.

In the prevailing "City Beautiful Movement" in China today, urban design and landscape architecture have lost their way in searching for a suitable style, resulting in meaningless forms and exotic grandeur. Examples in contemporary China include the new Olympic park and the steel-wasting "bird's nest," the dangerously flamboyant CCTV tower, and the energy-wasting National Opera House. All these facilities express the outmoded values of the urban elite and do nothing more than accelerate degradation of our environment. The question has to be asked: Is this sustainable? Dr. Yu will argue that landscape and urban design should be recovered as an art of survival and as a tool to redefine urbanity: "the new vernacular". He will present several of his award-winning projects—including Zhongshan Shipyard Park, the Rice Campus of Shenyang Architecture University, the Floating Gardens of Yongning River Park, the Red Ribbon Tanghe River Park, and the "Negative Approach to Urban Development" for Taizhou City—in the context of ideas about sustainability, tradition, cultural identity and modernization in the Chinese context.

Kongjian Yu is the founder and dean of the Graduate School of Landscape Architecture at Peking University, a Professor of Urban and Regional Planning, and founder and president of Turenscape, one of the first and largest private landscape architecture and urban design firms in China. He received his doctor of design award from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 1995. Dr. Yu has lectured internationally and has written more than 200 papers and 15 books; he is also chief editor of *Landscape Architecture China*. Among numerous other honors, Dr. Yu has received five Honor Awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects; he was the recipient of the Chinese Cultural Ministry's National Gold Medal of Fine Arts in 2004; and he was awarded the Oversea Chinese Pioneer Achievement Medal by the Chinese central government in 2004 for his overall contribution to the nation. *Time Magazine* celebrated his ecologically and culturally sensitive design as "A Force of Nature" in their issue of 17 April 2006, and in the April 2008 issue of *Conde Nast Traveler*, his design of Red Ribbon Tanghe River Park was hailed as one of the "new seven wonders of the architecture world."

*Reservations are required. Please **RSVP** by **September 30th***
to: Landscape@doaks.org 202-339-6460.

*The lecture will be held in the **Music Room** at Dumbarton Oaks's Main House located at 1703 32nd Street, NW, Washington DC. The lecture is open to the public without charge. A light reception to follow; Parking not provided.*