

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Design Revealed for Renewal of the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum at the U.S. National Arboretum

*U.S. Commission of Fine Arts Approves Concept Design
by Reed Hilderbrand and Trahan Architects*



Rendering courtesy of Design Distill for Reed Hilderbrand/Trahan Architects

WASHINGTON, D.C. Reed Hilderbrand and Trahan Architects are pleased to announce that the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts has approved a new Concept Design for the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum at the U.S. National Arboretum.

The design recognizes the extensive collection of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, which includes some of the finest trees and viewing stones from across the globe, and has been voted “Best Place to Take an Out-of-Towner” in *Washington City Paper’s* Best of D.C. poll for three consecutive years. Located within the U.S. National Arboretum’s Core, the museum is conceived as an immersive and cohesive garden experience, intended to evoke awe and wonder while also drawing connections to the larger Arboretum landscape. Funded through a gift to the National Bonsai Foundation (NBF), which provides financial support to the Museum, this Concept Design organizes the Museum’s program around a central court which orients the visitor to a network of paths that lead to the four exhibitions, expanded classroom, and administrative services. The exhibitions, conceived as gardens rather than buildings, blur their

boundaries with the larger, surrounding garden to offer continuing revelation of surprise and discovery.

The design of the Bonsai and Penjing Museum establishes a pervasive grove of understory trees as the principal image and identity of the Museum. Mixed species surround and frame the various exhibitions and the central court. The architecture is restrained and practical, deferring to the power of the bonsai. Garden walls organize a meandering path through the display and make available multiple orientations for the bonsai — an elegant, neutral backdrop that allows generous air circulation to mitigate heat. Charred wood posts and trellises rise above the exhibitions to filter light and shape a sense of enclosure. Built of durable, simple materials, the pavilions read as a unified family of structures while framing subtle cultural differences of the bonsai and penjing within.

“The stunning design that Reed Hilderbrand and Trahan Architects have presented, made possible by a generous gift to the National Bonsai Foundation, are a stimulating first step in the development of a master plan for the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum,” said NBF Board Chair James Hughes. “NBF is proud and pleased to be assisting in the revitalization of the world’s first public bonsai museum and looks forward to working with the U.S. National Arboretum on the next steps of this project.”



Rendering courtesy of Design Distill for Reed Hilderbrand/Trahan Architects

The National Bonsai and Penjing Museum is the first project within Reed Hilderbrand’s Master Plan Update for the U.S. National Arboretum’s core, which the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts also approved during Summer 2020. The core landscape is a 109-acre site that includes the memorable Ellipse Meadow and stretches from the former M Street Gate to Hickey Lane. Reed Hilderbrand’s work also addresses the larger landscape of the U.S. National Arboretum, namely by identifying those

landscape systems and character-defining features that descend from its history as a farm in the nineteenth century and earlier, to decades of development as a renowned scientific research facility focused on agriculture after its founding in 1927. The Update also evaluates sustainability, accessibility, and safety within the site while also seeking to reduce impervious surfaces across the National Arboretum.

Douglas Reed, FASLA, RAAR, founding principal of Reed Hilderbrand, said of the project: “The legacy of global cultural exchange through horticulture takes on an important meaning today in Washington. We have sought to elevate a world-class collection, making it more accessible, where visitors can make a powerful connection between a bonsai beech tree in the Museum and its full grown expression in the National Arboretum woods.”

Trey Trahan, FAIA, architect for the Bonsai and Penjing Museum and founding principal of Trahan Architects, said: “It’s about deferring to the power of the Bonsai & Penjing. The architectural expression is subtle — composed of elemental components that respond to the unique environmental conditions of the site. We wanted the visitor to embark upon a journey that created a sense of mystery, where the boundaries between the landscape and the architecture are blurred, inviting people to reflect upon these unique cultural artifacts within a lush garden setting.”

Elizabeth K. Meyer, FASLA, Vice Chairman of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, said in the hearing: “I want to underscore what I really appreciate about the new site plan. One is the clarity of the spatial sequence, the degree to which courtyards and gardens build rooms and thresholds as a coherent sequence. The second is that it’s really rare that we get a design team that isn’t thinking about the building on one drawing and the landscape on another drawing. We just don’t get this kind of collaboration.”

Dr. Richard T. Olsen, Director of the U.S. National Arboretum, said: “The new concept embraces the art and horticulture of bonsai and penjing. It also creates an experience for the visitor and an environment that ensures a long life for these living artworks in the heart of DC. The design elevates the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum to the world class experience befitting the collection, which includes priceless State gifts of trees and viewing stones.”

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ABOUT UNITED STATES NATIONAL ARBORETUM

Established in 1927 by an Act of Congress, the National Arboretum is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. The Agency is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief scientific in-house research agency and works daily to deliver scientific solutions to national and global agricultural challenges.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL BONSAI FOUNDATION

Founded in 1982, the National Bonsai Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that works in cooperation with the U.S. National Arboretum to supply financial, programmatic and curatorial support for the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum. The Foundation offices and Museum are located on the grounds of the Arboretum in Washington, D.C. This private/public collaboration between the Foundation and the Arboretum enables the Museum to promote the art of bonsai and penjing to visitors through masterpiece displays and educational programs while also fostering intercultural friendship and understanding.

ABOUT REED HILDERBRAND

Reed Hilderbrand the Cambridge-based practice founded by Douglas Reed and Gary Hilderbrand to pursue landscape architecture driven by investigative reason and speculative invention. Now in its third decade, recognized with more than 80 design awards, Reed Hilderbrand's work connects daily life to the visible phenomena of nature and the invisible patterns of culture, in pursuit of beauty and clarity as well as ecological health and resilience. Transforming the land shapes lives and influences communities, projecting values of our era into the future—an act of cultural expression. By designing the land, we seek to extend and enrich human experience toward an optimistic future. The Society of College and University Planners (SCUP) has honored their work with three Design Awards for Campus Landscapes. The monograph *Visible|Invisible: The Landscape Works of Reed Hilderbrand* (Metropolis Books, 2012) received an ASLA Honor Award for Design Communications. Douglas Reed and Gary Hilderbrand are each recipients of the ASLA Design Medal, awarded in 2019 and 2017, respectively. The ASLA named Reed Hilderbrand Firm of the Year in 2013.

Reed Hilderbrand's landscape works are recognized by a coherent, expressive modernism able to evoke the phenomena of nature as well as the underlying patterns of culture. Notable current projects include the Franklin Park Action Plan in Boston, Massachusetts; the Alamo Plaza and Museum in San Antonio, Texas; a new Conservatory for Longwood Gardens outside of Philadelphia; and new greenhouses and courtyard for Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC.

ABOUT TRAHAN ARCHITECTS

Trahan Architects is a global architecture firm with offices in New Orleans and New York. Our work spans the realms of culture, education, athletics, residences, ecology,

and beyond. Notable projects include The Coca-Cola Stage at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia; The Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana; and important conservation and preservation undertakings in St Francisville, Louisiana and in Corcovado National Park in Patagonia, Chile.

Our firm is founded on the belief that the mindful design of everyday spaces can elevate human experience. With our roots in New Orleans and our global perspective in New York, we approach each project as part of a unique ecosystem. This careful consideration of context runs alongside a process where technical innovation and aesthetic possibilities merge, enabling us to shape our communal environments in new and meaningful ways.

Trahan Architects is ranked the number one design firm in Architect 50, the annual ranking by Architect magazine, the official publication of American Institute of Architects which topped the list by building “dramatic, sumptuous and well-detailed projects.” The firm, founded by Victor F. “Trey” Trahan, III, FAIA, is commended for its innovative use of sustainable materials, stemming from a collective belief in the value of environmental conservancy. The firm has designed a series of domestic and international projects that have received global recognition for work that is historically grounded and aesthetically sublime. Trahan Architects has won over 100 national awards, including four National AIA Awards, as well as several international design competitions.

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For more information about the work of Trahan Architects, please visit www.trahanarchitects.com. Trahan Architects is @trahanarchitects on social media.