

part two

The Approach and Arrival Sequence



In Atlanta, GA, the former parking area was a large free-form asphalt pad. The existing gazebo became the focal point for the new parking area and bluestone pierced by an ophiopogon running strip provide welcome green relief.

Dignity and Expectation

THE COMPONENTS OF A FULLY EXPRESSED LANDSCAPE

The Approach and Arrival sequence is first of the four components of a fully expressed landscape. It begins at the street and ends at the front door and includes three parts: the drive portal and drive corridor, the parking court and the entry node. This part of the master plan sets the stage for an unforgettable property. Your property has a unique personality, and you can design it to create a lasting impression.

Whether located in the city, suburbs or countryside, the approach and arrival sequence is the welcome mat for visitors. This series of linked spaces takes visitors from the street to the front entrance of the house. The distance may vary from a few feet in urban settings to a few miles in the country.

This important entry corridor is often the most neglected part of a contemporary residential property. Many homeowners concentrate their efforts where they spend most of their time relaxing, entertaining or gardening. As a result, the driveway and parking area are anonymously paved and left to their own devices.

The portal involves the public interface between street and private drive. The parking court offers convenient and succinct parking. The entry node embraces and directs visitors to the front door.

Our forefathers knew how to layer the approach and arrival in a number of ways. For centuries, a long axial driveway leading up to the front of a building underscored the property's significance and impressed visitors with a sense of dignity and grandeur. Walls and gates were used to protect the house and make the transition onto the private realm of a property. Long, winding driveways allowed glimpses of the house through trees and built anticipation. Awe-struck heroines in nineteenth-century English novels eagerly glimpsed the great manor house where they might one day live (provided the romance at hand went well) as the carriage wheels lurched and leather seats creaked.

For new residential sites, the approach and arrival sequence is the historic province of the landscape architect,

builder, owner and architect working in collaboration. How a new home is sited on a piece of land, how the land is graded and contoured and how the ribbon of the driveway will find its ultimate shape are solutions to complex creative problems. It is a luxury to work with a blank canvas, but many other residential projects reflect transformations of existing situations.

Keeping these visual and literary images in mind explains many of the features of the approach and arrival sequence designed for large rural estates and mansions today. The basic, physical ingredients are the same, and they play on the same human emotions of anticipation, expectation and the sheer pleasure of seeing a great house for the first time. Scaled down to smaller properties, a skillfully designed approach and arrival sequence has equally intriguing and unforgettable results.





First Impressions

Each property is as individual as a fingerprint and can easily vacillate between model citizen and fugitive. When designing your approach and arrival sequence, three axioms will improve the process.

The first axiom is **Harmony in Materials**, which allows home grounds to read like a well-designed wardrobe, or “of a piece,” as interior designers describe coordinated rooms. The second axiom is **Seamless Flow**, whereby all portions of the approach and arrival sequence work in concert. The third axiom is **Modulate Space**—by using plant materials to accent nodes or to solve visual problems.



FACING: Walkway spaces are modulated by creating a gateway of plantings leading into the entry garden.

LEFT: A trip up this brown exposed aggregate driveway provides a seamless flow for the house and its grounds.

ABOVE: This driveway expresses harmony in materials by combining tumbled limestone edging with Craborchard cobblestone. The house is a pale buff color.

Axiom #1: Harmony in Materials. Whether the approach and arrival sequence is designed for a starter home or a connoisseur's mansion, the subtle qualities of genius loci express themselves and take shape through the introduction of a materials-and-color palette. Echoes of these choices occur throughout the entire master plan.

Choosing the predominant types of stone, paving materials and other construction materials is an exciting part of any design process. A vast range of options is available for every site: the house architecture, the color and texture of its building materials and architectural details and the neighborhood's personality. Personal preferences guide selections. The approach and arrival sequence

needs to say that you are encountering something special. Build the personality of the site with care and consistency.

Axiom #2: Seamless Flow. A well-designed approach and arrival sequence is perceived as one gracious and coherent whole, with one design element transitioning into the next. The portal, parking court,

front walk, entry node and landing work in concert so there are no gaps in the flow.

Axiom #3: Modulate Space. Plantings add beauty and interest and are useful to shape spaces and solve visual problems. Crafted to reinforce the flow of movement throughout the sequence, plantings offer line, color, form and texture to a landscape

canvas. Furnishings and accessories used sparingly give the arrival sequence additional grooming and personalization.

Harmony of materials, modulation of spaces and the seamless flow between the drive portal and corridor, parking court, front walk and landing in the approach and arrival sequence bind a property together into a coherent whole.

The Anatomy of an Approach and Arrival Sequence: Checklist

All properties are not created equal. Whatever its size, now is the opportunity to study, photograph and note how your approach and arrival sequence works. The following checklist for defining your portal, the parking court and entry node is useful. As in all design, the success lies in the details.

Drive Portal and Corridor

Do you park on the street? If so, is there a pedestrian gate and fencing for property definition?

How is this node treated to enhance the personality of your approach with regard to color, mail collection, pots, paving and plant materials? If the driveway pierces your property, is there a change of material at the apron? Do gates or piers define

the entry at least 20 feet back to allow for temporary car parking on the street? What are the running surface and color of the drive? Can plantings be improved to express the unique personality of your property and set off the entry node at the street?

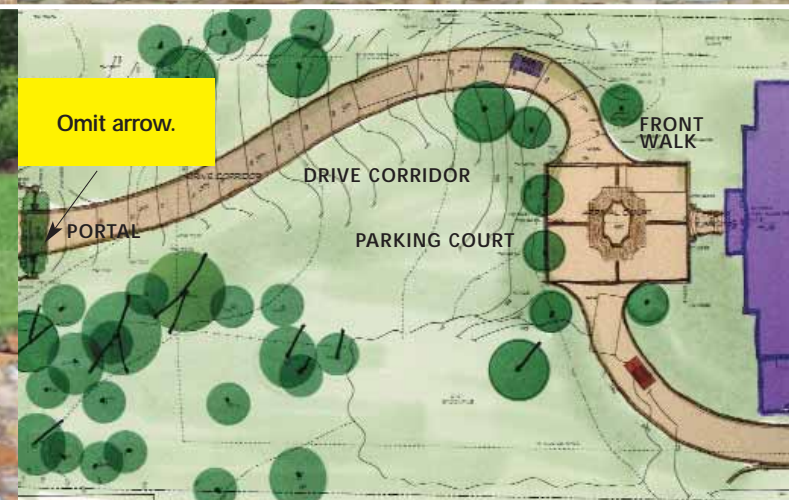
Parking Court

On which side of the house is the drive? Is it straight or winding? Is parking large enough for guests and your family? (A simple mapping tool to ensure if each car parks neatly is to provide a space 10' x 20' in size. Use survey flags available from a hardware store and a tape measure to outline the perfect arrangement. (Curved parking courts are difficult to arrange because a car is a rectangular shoe-

box.) Does your parking court have trees to shade the paving? If the paving is all one piece and monotonous, could it be made more interesting with banding or a medallion?

The Front Walk, Entry Node and Landing

Does the walk direct visitors to the front door? Is it gently winding or a straight shot? Is it slammed against the house or part of the landscape? Are pots or a color node placed at the driveway to reinforce its importance? What is the paving type and color? If there are steps, do you have landings approximately every five to six steps to break up a feeling of steepness? How can you improve the impression of this being a very special place?



ABOVE: Careful selection of rectangular slabs of gray craborchard paving made the approach to this gem of a house less formal.

LEFT: A graphic of an approach and arrival.

RIGHT: Wide steps lead to this front porch, offering room for pots to add seasonal color to the entrance and millstones for historic interest.



BELOW RIGHT: Why not let the entry landing at your home be a star? Play up large paved areas with a field of contrasting design.

ABOVE: Pierced worn-brick walls offer privacy and ventilation for this Charleston courtyard.

ABOVE RIGHT: A Normandy-style house with full story windows requires a low planting accented with boxwoods landing "walks" out into the parking court.