Landscape Architecture: An Introduction
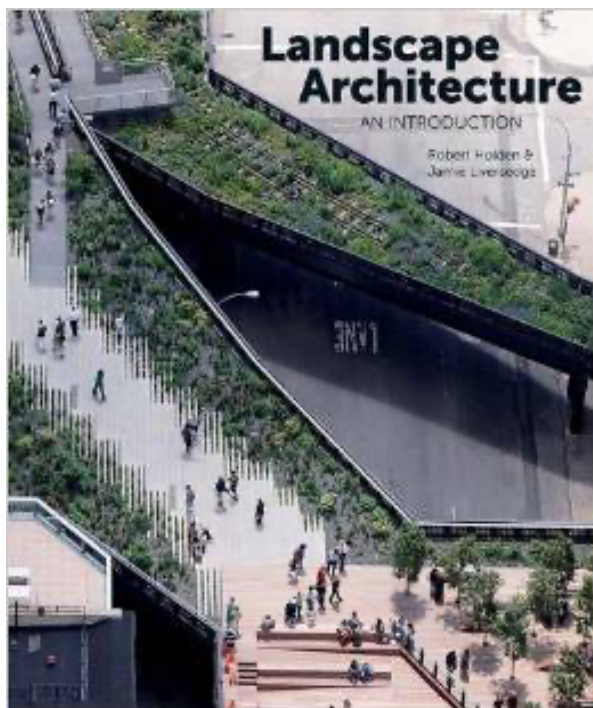
By Robert Holden & Jamie Liversedge. Laurence King, March 2014. 208 p. ill. ISBN 9781780672700 (pbk.), $35.00.

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Four years after the publication of their Construction for Landscape Architecture: Portfolio Skills, landscape architects and educators Robert Holden and Jamie Liversedge have produced an introduction to landscape architecture with a global perspective. In this case, the intended audience is not current practitioners or students, but prospective and new students. Holden has written extensively on landscape architecture. In his books, some of which have been translated into several languages, he has opted for a broad scope leaving narrower topics for his frequent contributions to journals such as Architects' Journal, Landscape Architecture, and Landscape Design.

The book is generously illustrated in color and it is clearly structured; after a brief introduction, seven chapters address first the history of the profession, and the steps normally involved in projects at various scales, including the design process, representation, and long-term landscape management. The two final chapters cover education, employment, and reflections on the future of the field. As in their previous work, this book is peppered with a healthy amount of references to philosophical and theoretical issues, which aid in illustrating the impact the profession can and should have in wider environmental, cultural, and political contexts. Interspersed with sections within each chapter, case studies serve to provide examples for the concepts explored. For the most part, these work well but, unfortunately, some of the case studies are only illustrated with photographs, which are not always sufficient or effective. For instance, the text for the Thames Barrier Park describes its design but lacks any drawings to assist the reader in understanding and visualizing this complex project. In contrast, most of the numerous diagrams fail to enhance the readings.

Many general works and introductions to landscape architecture already exist but few have attempted to reach out to those that might be considering the profession. One example is Kellean Foster's Becoming a Landscape Architect: A Guide to Careers in Design (2009). Foster's book is quite different in method and geographic scope: instead of using case studies from around the world, Foster uses interviews with designers and students focusing solely in the United States and Canada. The breadth of scope in Holden and Liversedge's work is sometimes problematic, especially in the chapter titled "Education and Employment." Their overview of programs around the world is too brief and incomplete to be useful, and the factual errors such as their claim that the typical "course" of study in the US is "a three-year Bachelor's degree followed by a two-year Master's" (page 158) are of special concern. This book may fall short in some ways but it might be a good fit for a general collection as it does offer a wide range of examples for those exploring the profession.