

22 April 2023  
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I first saw Jens Jensen's Clearing on a day in mid-May of 1970, fifty-three years ago. It was near the end of my first year as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I had read Jensen's 1939 book, "Siftings" as a UW graduate student myself, and I assigned readings from it to my students in the undergraduate Planting Design class, for example, the chapter entitled "Our Native Landscape". I also had read Leonard Eaton's insightful biography of Jensen, "Landscape Artist in America", published in 1964. In my lectures in the Planting Design class, I remember projecting images of Jensen's landscape plans from Eaton's book so my students could learn from his masterful spatial manipulation as well as his use of native plants in designed landscapes.

Having read Jensen's "Siftings" and Eaton's book with its chapter on The Clearing, I was eager to see The Clearing in person. And what better way to do that than to take my class there on a two-day field trip near the end of the 1969-70 school year, just as trees would be leafing out in Door County? So I wrote to Clair and Dorothy Johnson, resident managers at The Clearing, to ask about the possibility of such a trip. I will be forever grateful for their generous response to the inquiry from me, an unknown fledgling Assistant Professor down in Madison, planning for our lodgings, meals and a program to familiarize ourselves with the "School of the Soil" that Jens Jensen established in 1935 at age seventy-five.

And so, on a Friday morning in May, my Planting Design students, along with three faculty colleagues, William Tishler, P. E. "Gene" DeTurk, George Ziegler (UW Extension Landscape Architect) and myself, loaded into three white University of Wisconsin vans for the five-hour trip to Ellison Bay and The Clearing. Jensen had begun acquiring the property overlooking Green Bay near the tip of the Door County peninsula, the "thumb" that projects northeasterly into Lake Michigan, in 1919. He and his family traveled there from the Chicago area for summer vacations from 1920 until 1934, the year that Jensen's wife Anne Marie died. In 1935, Jensen became a full-time resident of the Clearing property, which by then was 128 acres. He lived at The Clearing until his death on October 1, 1951, seventeen days after his ninety-first birthday.

At the time of my first visit to The Clearing I had never traveled northward beyond the city of Green Bay. So on that Friday in May, from Green Bay onward, everything was new to me. As we traveled in the University vans toward Sturgeon Bay, we saw periodic glimpses of the bay to our left. Then, after Sturgeon Bay, we passed through the picturesque bayside villages of Egg Harbor, Fish Creek, Ephraim, Sister Bay, and finally Ellison Bay. I still remember coming down the hill into Ellison Bay, and seeing the limestone cliffs rising up from the bay in the distance. In Ellison Bay, we passed by the Pioneer General Store, then the Viking Restaurant, and then Klinker's Garage at the intersection with Garrett Bay Road. We turned left onto Garrett Bay Road

and in about a quarter of a mile up a gentle slope, we saw the unassuming entrance gate to The Clearing on our left.

It is not an exaggeration to say that as we turned onto The Clearing entrance drive, we entered another world. Designed by Jensen, the narrow driveway winds gracefully through a second-growth forest, with the view changing with every curve. Then the driveway opens up to reveal a broad meadow on the left, in stark contrast with the forest. The driveway then runs nearly straight through the meadow, again contrasting with the series of curves in the woods. To the right there are shrubs like buffaloberry and roundleaf dogwood as well as paper birch and trembling aspen trees emerging from the woods to the right of the driveway, and occasional oldfield common junipers in the meadow.

Then, we are briefly in a canopied landscape again in a continuing shade-sunlight-shade sequence, and finally turn into a roughly-defined gravel parking lot on our left. Here we disembark and begin walking up a gentle incline on a gravel path, with a modest one-story stone building on our left and a rich forest on our right. As we reach the corner of the stone building, we look down a long vista to the left toward the Main Lodge, past a collection of log and stone buildings, rectilinear retaining walls and a narrow flagstone path that curves ever-so-slightly as it moves through the central courtyard.

While I first saw this iconic view of The Clearing central courtyard, on that day in May of 1970, with the filigree of fresh yellow-green leaves on the surrounding trees, it is as if it was only yesterday. This scene was the first of many that my students and I experienced on our first visit to The Clearing that I think we will all remember as long as we remember anything.

For example, we walked on sawdust paths through the woods to the Schoolhouse, built of native limestone quarried on the site. The depression that resulted from quarrying that stone became a many-layered garden, just outside the windows of the Schoolhouse. When I think of this garden, I immediately conjure up visions of maidenhair ferns, bulblet ferns, harebells, coral-colored wild columbines, meadow rue, Solomon's seal and multitudes of other native species growing in this garden.

We gathered in the small council ring just down the rocky slope from the Schoolhouse, overlooking Green Bay, for the sunset, the first of many times I have been there with students, friends and colleagues over the last half-century to watch the sun go down over Green Bay.

We walked northward from the council ring along the rocky pathway among ancient gnarled white cedars (*arborvitae*) to the tiny Cliff House, a tiny cabin that Jensen had built into the limestone cliff near the north property line of the Clearing.

We walked the many curves of the exit driveway, through the old forest of sugar maples, American beeches and hemlock trees. And we explored the Inner Meadow, one-time fields,

orchards or pasture, where dense groves of trembling aspen, paper birch, white pines, staghorn sumac and oldfield common junipers were invading the space.

And we had meals, thanks to The Clearing staff, in the dining room in the Main Lodge. Perhaps the highlight of the whole trip was the meal that Clair and Dorothy Johnson planned for us on Friday night. In addition to my students, three faculty colleagues and myself, the Johnsons had assembled an amazing group of people who had personally known Jensen before and/or during the years he was at The Clearing.

The impressive guest list included:

- Mertha Fulkerson, who had been his secretary in his landscape design studio in Ravinia, Illinois, and then accompanied him to Ellison Bay to help him establish and administer his school beginning in 1935. When Jensen died sixteen years later, it was Mertha who kept the school running, and was the central force in The Clearing's survival at that critical time. She continued to be the director of the school until 1969, a year before my students and I arrived for our introduction to it.

- Grace Richardson, Mertha's sister who lived in Green Bay and had been a frequent visitor at The Clearing during Mertha's years there.

- Elizabeth Gimmler, landscape architect who worked with Jensen in his office in Ravinia, and an occasional teacher at The Clearing after the school was founded in 1935.

- Inez and Sid Telfer, orchardists who lived across Garrett Bay Road, and friends of Jensen from 1925 until he died in 1951.

- Emma Toft ("Miss Emma"), an ardent conservationist who had been a teacher in the Bailey's Harbor public school during the school year, and then rented out cabins and served meals to summer boarders at Toft Point, on the Lake Michigan shoreline, across the Door Peninsula from Ellison Bay.

After supper (the evening meal at The Clearing) in the dining room in the Main Lodge, we all assembled in the cathedral-ceilinged living room where Jensen himself was said to have held forth with students who gathered around him in his chair next to the fireplace. Stories abounded throughout the memorable evening.

The Telfers related their first meeting with Jensen in 1925, and talked about their close friendship with him and Mertha, and meals at each others' places, as well as picnics they packed for trips they took together to natural areas in Door County. They also related the fact that Jensen had made the Clearing Schoolhouse available for their daughter's wedding on December 28, 1946, and how he himself had decorated it with evergreen trees and candles for the event.

Elizabeth Gimmler talked about her experiences while working in his Ravinia, Illinois design studio. It was hardly a conventional office. In addition to drafting tables, there was a grand piano in the studio, symbolizing in its way Jensen's belief that music and landscape design are closely related. She also remembered Jensen's encouraging his employees to get up from their drafting tables in the studio on occasion and go outside where they could find inspiration in the natural surroundings there.

"Miss Emma" Toft recalled her close friendship with Jensen and their joint efforts to protect and preserve some remarkable Door County natural areas, the most notable being The Ridges Sanctuary at Bailey's Harbor. When a portion of it was threatened in 1937 by a plan to be developed as a campground, they joined other conservationists in having it set aside as a protected area. Miss Emma also took great pleasure in telling a story about one of her last visits with Jensen, during his final illness. He was bedridden in his room at The Clearing. She brought with her a small bundle in which she had wrapped a baby skunk. Jensen unwrapped the surprise gift at which point she said it had definitely gotten his attention and that "Jensen's eyes bugged out like saucers".

Mertha Fulkerson, sitting next to the fireplace in the Main Lodge after supper, told stories about Jensen as well, and one could sense the deep admiration she still felt for him, nineteen years after his death. I think her favorite story related to his final falling out with renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright and Jensen had collaborated on some residential projects. Despite some professional differences, Jensen generally respected Wright for his architectural skill. However, at the end of World War II, Wright wrote to Jensen asking him to write a letter recommending him as the architect to review and approve the designs for all U.S. State Department buildings. Jensen didn't think anyone should have that much power and ignored Wright's request. Wright wrote a second letter asking for Jensen's recommendation, which he again ignored. Finally, when Wright's third request arrived, he asked Mertha to type an unusually succinct response, "Go to Hell".

A recurring theme during the evening's thoroughly engaging conversation was that Jensen loved to have a good time. This facet of his personality has sometimes been obscured, I think, with some admirers' tendency to deify him, treating him as "Saint Jens". But that evening, it became apparent that he had always enjoyed his nightly drink of akavit, his favorite drink; that he loved music, and was inspired by it; that he liked circle dancing on the beach; and that he got a kick out of playing pranks on family and friends, and that he enjoyed it when they reciprocated.

The next morning, we crossed the Door Peninsula to Bailey's Harbor for a final field trip before heading southward to Madison. This included a stop at The Ridges Sanctuary which Jensen and Miss Emma had played a role in saving back in 1937. Roy Lukes, long-time steward and manager of the Ridges led us on a walk along several of the sandy ridges with linear swales between them. Miss Emma joined us on the walk. The day we were there, there were multitudes

of dwarf lake iris in bloom, as well as gay-wings with their bright magenta “wings”, and low-growing trailing arbutus, among the array of plants we saw.

At one point, Miss Emma was following my colleague Gene DeTurk on the narrow sandy trail, and I was following her. Gene bent down to take a close-up photo of a flowering trailing arbutus plant. To get a good picture of the flower, he had to move one of the leaves on the plant. He snapped his picture and continued on the trail. When Miss Emma reached the place he had taken the photo, she silently bent down, and gently placed the leaf back where it had been before the photo shoot. Her silence spoke volumes.

We boarded the white vans in Bailey’s Harbor to begin the trip back to Madison, with a trove of many happy memories and visions of The Clearing.

## EPILOGUE

After this first trip to The Clearing, 53 years ago, I knew I wanted to go back. So, the next year, I signed up to take the Clearing’s week-long class on the vegetation of Door County taught by Floyd Swink, taxonomist at the Morton Arboretum, with lots of field time. And that led me to propose to teach a course there myself the year after that, with an emphasis on Jensen’s design work at The Clearing and beyond, and again, a big dose of field work. That led to my teaching week-long classes at The Clearing over a span of fifty years, with yet another class scheduled for the week of June 25, 2023.

It has reached the point that every time I come up the walkway from the student parking area, and come around the stone building and see the vista to the Main Lodge, I feel like I am coming home. And, in a way, I am.

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