

Recycling the City: The Use and Reuse of Urban Land, edited by Rosalind Greenstein and Yesim Sungu-Eryilmaz; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2004; 260 pages, \$66.50.

Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America, by Alan Berger; New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006; 254 pages, \$34.95.

Reviewed by Gale Fulton

TWO NEW BOOKS on the subject of vacant urban land, brownfields, and waste landscapes add compelling insights into the workings of the contemporary metropolis. *Recycling the City* and *Drosscape* take the long view from a historical perspective and the wide view from the standpoint of considering urbanization beyond the formal or spatial to include the complex global economic, cultural, and ecological forces shaping the city today. But while there is some overlap in the raw subject matter of the two projects, there is a radical difference in how this information has been researched and represented, and, perhaps ultimately, in the changes to the built environment that will come about as a result of their publication.

Recycling the City is a compilation of essays based on research funded by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based institution that holds as its primary mission the study and teaching of land policy. Editors Rosalind Greenstein and Yesim Sungu-Eryilmaz describe the focus of their book as an investigation into the phenomenon of vacant urban land, not only the difficulties it presents for redevelopment, but also for the largely overlooked opportunities that may still lie fallow in its suspect soils. They argue that the future of such sites, and especially the potential of these sites to be reintegrated into some beneficial future use, hinges on how the problem of vacancy is framed. Quite simply, do we (developers, designers, legislators, the public) look at urban vacancies and see insurmountable problems and difficulties, or do we learn to see untapped potentials—a new landscape type that is waiting for yet-to-be-considered programs or tactics for its reclamation?

The book successfully describes what could best be termed an 'ecology of vacancy,' referring to the complex web of relationships that surround vacant sites, which can include everything from physical characteristics to economic and physical design strategies for their redevelopment to legislation aimed at facilitating their reuse. And, even though the primary focus of this collection is the "relatively small-scale and overlooked parcels... located in urban neighborhoods and districts that have been disregarded by in-

vestors," the editors believe that urban vacancy must be considered in the context of "global economic forces," as the history and future of these sites are intimately connected with the vagaries of global capitalism. Brownfields, one type of urban vacancy, are a major concern of the book, appearing in nearly half of the chapter titles and discussed in some form in all but one of the individual texts.

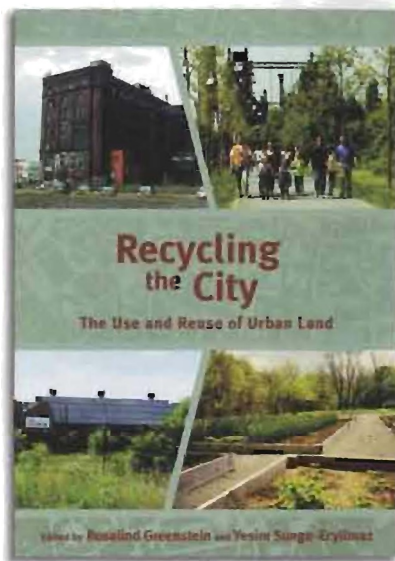
The book is divided into three parts containing eleven essays. Part 1 describes the physical, economic, political, and legislative context of urban vacancy. Part 2 focuses primarily on a broad and critical survey of the various mechanisms and conditions—physical and nonphysical, public and private, federal, state, and local—that play a role in the success and speed of vacancy redevelopment. Part 3 describes several instances in which urban vacancies and

brownfields have been returned to productive use in innovative or unusual ways. For those unfamiliar with the language of land policy, parts of the book may be a bit of a struggle as the reader is quickly introduced to such concepts as split-rate taxation, tax increment financing, locally undesirable land uses, and no further requirements letters/documents, but in general the extra effort pays off, and the simple fact is that we as landscape architects will have to become more adept with the mechanisms and vocabulary of policy if we are to become instrumental in dealing with these landscapes.

Drosscape is Alan Berger's second book and is offered as a "companion" to his earlier *Reclaiming the American West*. As in *Reclaiming*, Berger, an associate professor of landscape architecture at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, describes another vast

landscape project awaiting our sustained attention while simultaneously prodding the landscape architecture profession to claim a more prominent role in shaping the landscapes of urbanization. He characterizes dross as "landscape leftovers, or waste landscapes... undervalued for many reasons (pollution, vacancy, natural conditions unsuitable for building, unprofitability, etc.)," and he suggests drosscape's inevitability in his provocative coda: "Urban landscape is a natural thing to waste." Here Berger suggests that the processes of urbanization are less *analogous* to the processes of other life forms than they are *homologous* to them, and, as all natural growth necessarily produces some waste as a by-product, to attempt to achieve urbanization free from any form of waste is a naive waste of resources. "The challenge for designers is thus not to achieve drossless urbanization, but to integrate inevitable dross into more flexible aesthetic and design strategies."

Berger synthesizes information from a diverse array of theoretical and statistical resources to equip the reader with a new set of languages through which to comprehend the workings of the contemporary metropolis. With section headings such as "The



Obsolescence of Sprawl” and “From In-Between to Freedom and Waste,” the message of the author is clear—no matter which disciplinary silo we call home, it is impossible for us to fully engage in the process of urbanization if we rely on outdated, obsolete, and/or reductive language to understand it.

Berger goes on to look at 10 metropolitan regions, each of which he analyzes through four representational devices: aerial photography, entropic indicator maps, dispersal graphs, and spindle charts. Each of the accompanying maps, charts, and graphs displays a complex visual analysis of a quantifiable aspect of American urbanism such as rapid horizontal expansion, movements of industry from center to periphery, and the spatial and temporal redistribution of population. After exploring the graphics, our vision of the photograph is altered. The reader realizes that this is less a scene than it is an urban prototype that is replicated again and again throughout the country. If not clear before, the massiveness of drosscapes is crystallized in the mind.

Berger puts forward definitions of six types of waste landscapes, each one linked to some process of urbanization. The six types, waste landscapes of dwelling, transition, infrastructure, obsolescence, exchange, and contamination, are accompanied by a series of short texts, aerial photographs, and descriptive captions that further clarify for the reader the implications of each type as a potential landscape resource.

Drosscape concludes with The Drosscape Manifesto, a call to action for designers of the built environment. Here, Berger discusses the “inefficacy” of the “big four” design disciplines—landscape architecture, urban design, planning, and architecture. He also summarizes drosscape as “a new condition in which vast, wasted, or wasteful land surfaces are modeled in accordance with new programs or new sets of values that remove or replace real or perceived wasteful aspects of geographical space,” and drosscapping as “the placement upon the landscape of new social programs that transform waste (real or perceived) into more productive urbanized landscapes to some degree.” Last,

Berger profiles the “advocacy designer who engenders inventiveness, entrepreneurialism, and visioning.” Such a designer is not content to simply wait for a project delivered as a discrete site with a prescribed program awaiting placement of a “design.” Instead, the scapist whom Berger outlines is as important to the future of urbanism and landscape for identifying future projects and communicating them to others as he or she is for helping to define that landscape’s final form.

Taken together, *Recycling the City* and *Drosscape* complement each other well, but alone, *Drosscape* is the more compelling project in its potential to alter future practices. While both books are rigorously researched and well written, *Recycling*, not by fault of the editors or authors as much as the conventions dictating how different disciplines convey their messages, may well be added to the stack of solid but fairly ordinary books on the subject. It is significant that Berger is a landscape architect who is also an author as opposed to being an author who writes about landscape. *Drosscape* exhibits the expanded range of capacities that a designer brings to such projects as well as a particular way of seeing the world unique to the landscape architect.

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NOTEWORTHY

➤ **MONTROSE: LIFE IN A GARDEN**, by Nancy Goodwin with Illustrations by Ippy Patterson; Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005; 296 pages, \$34.95.

WHAT STRIKES ONE FIRST about this book are the gorgeous and meticulously detailed color drawings—mostly close-up studies of plants—by garden illustrator Ippy Patterson. The book’s actual subject is gardening, specifically at the author’s nineteenth-century property in Hillsborough, North Carolina. The text is a detailed month-by-month chronicle of a specific year told from the owner’s point of view.



➤ **THIS LAND: THE BATTLE OVER SPRAWL AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICA**, by Anthony Flint; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006; 298 pages, \$28.95.

DESPITE A MODEST REVIVAL in city living, most Americans are still moving outward, and this highly readable book is packed with information about that movement in all its manifestations. A much better book than Dolores Hayden’s much heralded *Field Guide to Sprawl*, it provides a good overview of the powerful economic, social, and regulatory forces that encourage sprawl. It tracks the burgeoning anti-sprawl movement (smart growth, new urbanism, et al.) and ends with a practical proposal of Six Healthy Habits for Sensible Growth.



➤ **GREEN BUILDING MATERIALS: A GUIDE TO PRODUCT SELECTION AND SPECIFICATION (SECOND EDITION)**, by Ross Spiegel and Dru Meadows; New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2006; 368 pages, \$80.00.



THIS UPDATED MANUAL, although written by architects, has a lot to offer landscape architects. The text does not focus on specific building materials but rather provides a framework for thinking about and specifying greener materials: where to find them, how to use them effectively, and how they fit into LEED requirements. A summary of environmental issues is an important feature, as is a chapter on state programs that can aid the designer moving toward greener design.