

# landscape

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# architecture

## **Design Merit**

# *Native Ingenuity*

**DARREL G. MORRISON, FASLA**

THE NATIONAL WILDFLOWER RESEARCH CENTER  
*Austin, Texas*

In the words of designer Darrel Morrison, FASLA, the purpose of the design of the National Wildflower Research Cen-

ter was “to educate the public to the value of environmentally sensitive planning and design and to demonstrate that the rich regional aesthetic quality can be retained or revealed through the artistic use of native vegetation and building materials of the region.” The design of the center thus extended the mission of the center itself.

The goal of maximum conservation of natural resources—water, soil, seeds, and

rocks—provided a raison d'être for many of the most striking design features, including the one that most impressed the judges: a rainwater-harvesting system that collects water from the building roofs in cisterns with a combined storage capacity of 70,000 gallons. The designer used site-collected boulders and rocks in gardens and such water features as the main courtyard pool, which emulates a typical aquifer-fed natural spring. An entrance water feature (consisting of water splashing down a stone cascade into the pond), a sandstone colonnade, the ponds, and the cisterns, all remind one of both natural outcroppings and ancient ruins, a melding of the human into the vegetative cycle of growth and decay.

In addition to the central courtyard—a native flagstone area enclosed by limestone and sandstone buildings—designed areas include a seed court with banks of native grasses and wildflower species; demonstration gardens; and a wildflower meadow, which was constructed over a construction scar. The design process went hand in hand with such environmentally sensitive practices as stockpiling native soil with its seed bank for redistribution in disturbed

areas of the site; propagating and planting 70,000 grass and forb seedlings by both staff and volunteers; transplanting more than 250 small trees and shrubs on-site; and protecting 882 trees and large shrubs during construction. And behind the visible project lies site planning by the designer in close collaboration with the building architects, from initial on-site analysis of the site through construction and planting. The landscape design team also set the design standards for the civil engineers in the construction of five storm-water ponds. With an annual visitation of more than 100,000 the complex of buildings and gardens on the forty-two-acre site offers a concrete demonstration of how environmental and regional concerns can be integrated with design excellence.

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ECOLOGICAL DESIGN, DESIGN, AND RESTORATION: *Darrel G. Morrison, FASLA, Watkinsville, Georgia.* LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS: *J. Robert Anderson, ASLA, and Eleanor McKinney, project associate, Austin, Texas.* ARCHITECTS: *Overland Partners, San Antonio, Texas (Rick Archer and Robert Shemwell).* ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY CONSULTING: *David Mabler, Boulder Terracing, Austin, Texas.* LANDSCAPE MA-

SONRY: *Joe B. Lopez, Austin, Texas.* LANDSCAPE PLANTING: *Texascapes, Inc., Austin, Texas.* IRRIGATION CONTRACTOR: *Phoenix Irrigation, Austin, Texas.* SITE LIGHTING: *Nightsapes, Austin, Texas.* GENERAL CONTRACTORS: *Bartlett Cocke, San Antonio, Texas; Austin Commercial, Austin, Texas.* IRRIGATION CONSULTANT: *Dan Pope, Houston, Texas.* CLIENT: *The National Wildflower Research Center, Austin, Texas; David Northington, executive director.*