

# TRANSFORMATION OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN – HIGH LINE OF THE AVANT-GARDE

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## ABSTRACT

The Avant-Garde period, spanning from the late 19th to early 20th centuries, marked a transformative era in landscape design, characterized by a profound departure from traditional aesthetics towards an embrace of modernist, industrial, and abstract approaches. This research explores the defining elements of Avant-Garde landscape design, analyzing its geometric abstraction, industrial material integration, functionality, color experimentation, deconstruction of natural landscapes, human-centered design, and nascent sustainable practices. Through a review of landmark designs and case studies, this paper investigates the movement's impact on the evolution of landscape architecture, focusing on its enduring influence on contemporary urban landscapes. The research concludes that Avant-Garde design principles catalyzed a reimagining of landscape spaces, establishing foundational concepts that continue to shape landscape architecture in the 21st century.

**KEYWORDS:** design, landscape, avan-garde, park

"High Line of the Avant-Garde" is a metaphorical concept denoting efforts to connect the past and the present with the future through the preservation, evolution and transmission of cultural values, traditions and expressions. It implies a deliberate and conscious effort to ensure that tradition and innovation serve as pathways for navigating and building the future.

## Introduction

The avant-garde movement, a broad cultural and artistic phenomenon, profoundly influenced various fields, including architecture, painting, and landscape design.

The avant-garde period, defined by its experimentation, disregard for tradition, and pursuit of new art forms, reshaped the disciplines of art, architecture, and design during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rooted in movements such as Futurism, Constructivism, Cubism, and De Stijl, avant-garde ideologies pushed boundaries by rejecting classical aesthetics and embracing abstraction, industrial materials, and modernist principles. In landscape design, these influences have led to the transformation of natural spaces from pastoral and decorative to places of dynamic, geometric and often functional expression. This change reflected broader social changes, including industrialization, urbanization, and new social ideologies that sought to democratize public spaces for social interaction and civic engagement. **(Rowe, C. 2000)**

Landscape design, traditionally focused on imitating natural beauty and enhancing the aesthetic qualities of the environment, underwent a profound reevaluation during this period. Designers began to see landscapes as an opportunity to engage with modern technology, explore the psychological effects of color and form, and address urban challenges. As cities grew rapidly in the industrial age, there was an urgent need for functional, multi-purpose public spaces. Avant-garde landscape designers responded by incorporating principles from modern art and architecture, such as clean lines, bold colors, and industrial materials, to create spaces that were not only visually stimulating, but also socially meaningful and accessible.

While many previous studies of the influences of the avant-garde have concentrated on architecture and the visual arts, fewer have explored the parallel transformation in landscape architecture.

This research aims to elucidate the fundamental transformations in landscape design during the avant-garde period and examines its legacy in contemporary landscape architecture. By contextualizing these transformations within broader sociocultural changes, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the period's contribution to modern landscape practices. **(Tschumi, B. (1994))**

By analyzing case studies such as Nikolai Milutin's Red Square garden, Gabriel Gevrekyan's Villa Noyce garden, and Gorky Park in Moscow, this paper identifies the primary characteristics of avant-garde landscape design and assesses their long-term impact on contemporary landscape architecture.

Through this lens, the study will demonstrate that avant-garde landscape design not only reflected the ideological and artistic goals of the time, but also laid the foundation for the discipline of modern landscape architecture, which continues to prioritize social engagement, sustainability, and spatial innovation. .

### **Literature Review**

Previous studies have often focused on Avant-Garde's influence on architectural and urban design; however, less attention has been given to its specific impact on landscape architecture. Scholars such as Rowe (2000) have discussed the geometric abstraction in landscape design during this period, while Tschumi (1994) highlighted the use of industrial materials. This paper builds upon these findings by integrating concepts from artistic theory, sociocultural studies, and environmental psychology to present a holistic perspective on Avant-Garde landscape design. **(Rowe, C. 2000)**

While much research has been dedicated to specific aspects of Avant-Garde influence in landscape design, few studies have integrated these findings into a comprehensive analysis of the movement's holistic impact on landscape architecture. The current literature predominantly addresses discrete elements—such as geometric abstraction, material use, or color—without fully examining how these innovations collectively contributed to a transformed approach to landscape design. Additionally, there is limited exploration of how Avant-Garde principles laid a foundation for modern sustainable, functional, and participatory landscape practices.

This paper seeks to address these gaps by synthesizing insights from art theory, sociocultural studies, and environmental psychology to provide a cohesive understanding of Avant-Garde landscape design. By connecting the various principles and practices, this research aims to illustrate how the Avant-Garde movement's landscape architecture created new paradigms that continue to influence the field today. Through this integrated approach, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of Avant-Garde landscape design's enduring relevance and its foundational role in shaping contemporary landscape architecture principles.

### **Methods**

This research employs a qualitative methodology, analyzing historical designs, primary sources (including landscape plans and designer sketches), and contemporary interpretations of Avant-Garde landscape spaces. Case studies were selected based on their influence, innovative use of materials, and adherence to Avant-Garde principles. Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles and critical essays, were analyzed to contextualize each case within its sociopolitical and aesthetic milieu.

### **Geometric Abstraction and Formal Composition**

Geometric abstraction emerged as a defining characteristic of Avant-Garde landscape design, representing a clear departure from the organic, pastoral aesthetics that had dominated previous landscape traditions. This approach drew heavily on artistic movements such as Cubism, with its fragmented perspectives, and De Stijl, which emphasized simplicity and balance through intersecting lines, primary colors, and rectangular forms. Rather than replicating the soft curves and irregular forms of natural landscapes, Avant-Garde designers embraced structured, highly ordered compositions characterized by sharp angles, distinct

lines, and bold geometric shapes. These designs emphasized clarity and structure, aligning with the modernist impulse toward rationality, order, and functionality in the rapidly industrializing world. (Rowe, C. 2000)

Geometric abstraction in Avant-Garde landscape design was not merely an aesthetic choice but a statement of modernity. The use of intersecting lines, repetitive patterns, and angular shapes created a sense of controlled dynamism within public spaces, lending a sense of energy and movement to landscapes that had traditionally been associated with calm and repose. This structured approach to composition introduced a new relationship between human-made environments and the natural world, as designers manipulated space to encourage exploration and interaction rather than passive observation. This shift underscored the Avant-Garde movement's ambition to redefine not just landscape aesthetics but also how people experienced and engaged with their environments.

Example: Nikolai Milyutin's "Red Square" Garden Design

Nikolai Milyutin's "Red Square" garden design is a quintessential example of geometric abstraction within Avant-Garde landscape design, demonstrating how abstraction could be used to evoke both visual impact and ideological resonance. In "Red Square," Milyutin employed vibrant colors—particularly reds and primary tones—that reflected both modernist aesthetics and the revolutionary ethos of the time. The garden's layout incorporated intersecting lines, angular paths, and bold geometric shapes, drawing visitors into a landscape that was both visually stimulating and spatially engaging. These abstract shapes, together with striking color contrasts, gave the garden a sense of immediacy and energy, making it more than a mere garden but a statement of social and political ideals. Milyutin's design also embodied Constructivist principles, focusing on functionality and social interaction within the garden space. Rather than being purely decorative, "Red Square" was meant to be an accessible, interactive environment where people could move freely and engage directly with the landscape. In this way, geometric abstraction in Milyutin's work extended beyond aesthetics to serve practical and ideological purposes. The design invited visitors to experience the garden actively, to walk through structured paths, and to appreciate the juxtaposition of shapes and colors that conveyed a sense of industrial progress and collective purpose.



Fig.1 Nikolai Milyutin's "Red Square Moscow garden [https://mos-tour.moscow/en/location/moscow/excursions/red\\_square\\_alexander\\_garden1/](https://mos-tour.moscow/en/location/moscow/excursions/red_square_alexander_garden1/)

### **Integration of Industrial Materials and Technological Aesthetics**

Avant-Garde landscape design was marked by its groundbreaking use of industrial materials, a clear departure from the natural and organic materials traditionally used in garden and park design. Embracing materials such as concrete, steel, and glass, Avant-Garde landscape architects reflected the era's fascination with technological progress and industrial efficiency. These materials aligned with the modernist ethos of functionality, durability, and minimalism, qualities that were well-suited to the fast-evolving urban environments of the early 20th century. By incorporating industrial materials, Avant-Garde designers introduced a new aesthetic language that celebrated the machine age, allowing landscapes to become symbols of technological advancement and resilience in urban life. **(Giedion, S. 1967)**

The use of concrete, steel, and glass in landscape architecture not only enhanced the durability and longevity of public spaces but also allowed for the creation of new forms and structures that were previously unachievable with natural materials. Concrete, for instance, enabled designers to craft large, seamless surfaces and bold, geometric forms that contributed to a stark, minimalistic aesthetic. Steel allowed for open, lightweight structures that provided support without obstructing views, while glass introduced a sense of transparency and modernity that complemented the open, inviting quality of Avant-Garde public spaces. Together, these materials transformed landscapes into industrial works of art, embodying the technological optimism of the period and aligning with the vision of landscapes as functional and adaptable urban spaces. Example: The Constructivist park designs in Moscow, such as Gorky Park, utilized metal and concrete extensively, reflecting both aesthetic minimalism and the Constructivist focus on functionalism. **(Tschumi, B. (1994)**



Fig. 2 The Constructivist park designs in Gorky Park <https://moscowplaces.com/moscow-sightseeing/top-moscow-parks/>

### **Functionalism and the Social Role of Public Landscapes**

Avant-Garde designers recognized the importance of creating public landscapes that served urban populations. Reflecting a utilitarian approach, landscape designs of the period prioritized functionality, providing spaces for recreation, community gatherings, and public events. This shift underscored the role of landscape design in promoting social cohesion and urban welfare.

This focus on functionality was closely tied to the broader modernist and political ideals of the time, where the emphasis on rational design, efficiency, and progress was seen as a way to foster social cohesion and improve public welfare. In contrast to the ornamental, aristocratic gardens of the past, Avant-Garde landscapes were designed with the working class in mind, aimed at providing accessible spaces that catered to the needs of all urban dwellers, regardless of social or economic status. These public landscapes became venues for communal activities, recreation, and civic events, reflecting the ideal of collective social engagement.

Example: Gorky Park in Moscow stands as a pioneering example of a multifunctional landscape space, with elements designed for various forms of public interaction and engagement, influenced by Constructivist principles. **(Sitte, C. (1986)**



Fig.3 Gorky Park in Moskow <https://www.bignewsnetwork.com/news/274099628/why-do-so-many-russian-cities-have-gorky-parks>

### Experimentation with Color and Spatial Dynamics

Color became a prominent element in Avant-Garde landscape design, used to create striking contrasts, highlight focal points, and shape the viewer's experience. This application of color, inspired by Fauvist and De Stijl theories, added psychological and perceptual depth to landscapes, encouraging viewers to engage with spaces in new ways **(Pallasmaa, 1986)**.

Example: Gabriel Guevrekian's work on the Villa Noailles garden in France exemplifies color experimentation, with geometric flower beds in contrasting colors that demonstrate principles of Cubism and Surrealism in landscape form.

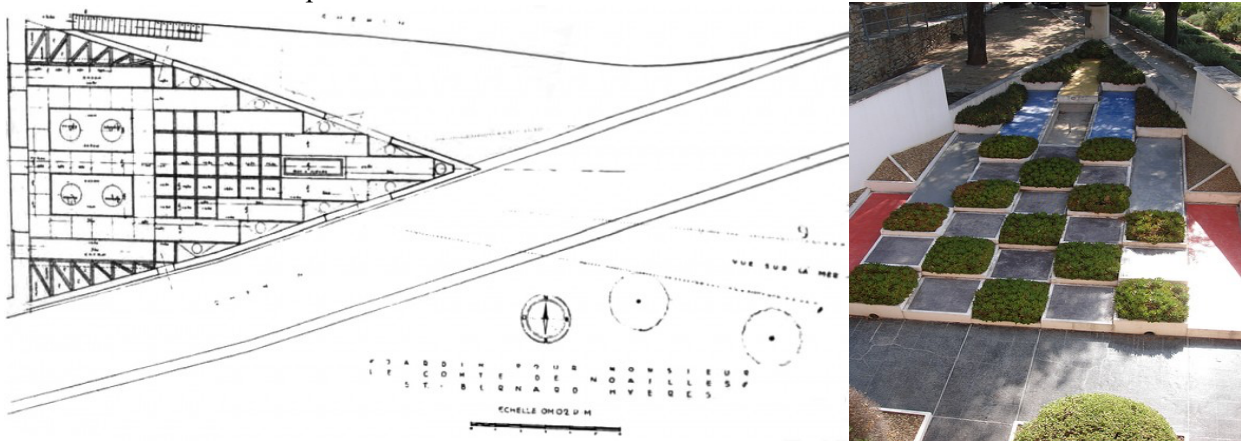


Fig.4 Vila Noailles France <https://www.caoi.ir/en/projects/item/31-the-cubist-garden-of-villa-noailles-by-gabriel-guevrekian.html>

### Deconstruction of Natural Landscapes and Artificiality

The Avant-Garde period witnessed an intentional deconstruction of the natural landscape, with designers reinterpreting traditional forms and incorporating artificial elements into natural spaces. This approach aligned with Surrealist ideas, creating landscapes that blurred the line between nature and artifice, often evoking curiosity and encouraging reflection on humanity's relationship with the natural world. (Meuser, P., & Zadorin, D. (2015))

*Example:* Surrealist-inspired designs often included sculptural elements or manipulated natural forms, exemplified in André Breton's and Salvador Dalí's conceptual gardens, which incorporated visual distortions and elements of surprise.



Fig.5 Salvador Dalí's conceptual gardens <https://www.sarasotamagazine.com/arts-and-entertainment/2020/02/em-salvador-dali-gardens-of-the-mind-em-to-open-at-selby-gardens>

### Human Experience and Interaction as Central Design Goals

Avant-Garde landscape design increasingly focused on human interaction, seeking to create environments that engaged visitors on multiple sensory levels. Spaces were designed to be immersive, encouraging

movement, exploration, and interaction. This concept of user experience in landscape architecture laid the foundation for the participatory design principles seen in contemporary landscape architecture.

*Example:* El Lissitzky's Lenin Tribune, though an architectural structure, inspired similar interactive elements in landscapes, encouraging designers to consider movement and active viewer engagement in their designs.



Fig.6 El Lissitzky's Lenin Tribune <https://www.meisterdrucke.ie/fine-art-prints/Eliezer-Markowich-Lissitzky/1322085/Lenin%27s-tribune,-architectural-design-by-El-Lissitzky.html>

### **Discussion**

The Avant-Garde transformations in landscape design, driven by geometric abstraction, industrial aesthetics, and functionality, highlight the movement's complex relationship with modernity. This design ethos, marked by a rejection of classical forms and an embrace of abstract expression, reflects the sociopolitical turbulence of the period. Furthermore, the emphasis on communal and utilitarian landscapes reflects a democratization of public space, situating landscape design within broader efforts toward social welfare and inclusivity.

One of the defining aspects of Avant-Garde landscape design was its emphasis on communal spaces designed to facilitate public engagement and interaction. Unlike the secluded and decorative gardens of earlier eras, these new spaces were accessible and multipurpose, intended to accommodate a wide range of social activities, from public gatherings and festivals to recreational sports and community meetings. By creating parks and open areas that were open to all citizens, Avant-Garde designers actively democratized public space, transforming it from exclusive and often private domains into areas that fostered inclusivity and community. This shift was influenced by broader sociopolitical movements that sought to elevate public welfare and promote egalitarian values, especially in urban settings where the majority of the population lived and worked.

### **Conclusion**

This research concludes that the Avant-Garde period catalyzed a foundational transformation in landscape design, shifting the focus from aesthetic ornamentation to modernist abstraction, functionalism, and public utility. These innovations laid the groundwork for contemporary landscape architecture, where industrial materials, public interaction, and abstract forms remain integral. The Avant-Garde's legacy endures as landscape architecture continues to evolve, drawing from the movement's pioneering ideas to create sustainable, inclusive, and visually compelling urban environments.

The transformations in landscape design during the Avant-Garde period reflect a complex and multifaceted relationship with modernity. By challenging traditional forms, embracing industrial aesthetics, and prioritizing functionality and accessibility, Avant-Garde landscape architects developed spaces that were not only visually revolutionary but also socially and ideologically aligned with the period's broader calls for inclusivity, resilience, and progress. These foundational principles established a new paradigm for public spaces that continues to influence contemporary landscape design, where the balance of beauty, utility, and social relevance remains central. Through this transformative approach, Avant-Garde designers expanded the role of landscape architecture beyond mere decoration, establishing it as a vital component of urban life and collective identity.

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