A Celebration of Nature

The Vanderbilt campus is a place for insiders, for people who already know their way. As a stranger to Vanderbilt in 1985, I needed a map and explicit instructions to find my way through the campus. Once across 21st Avenue, however, I needed nothing but the words "continue straight ahead to the lawn, then turn right and it's at the top of the hill" to locate the Social Religious Building (now known as the Faye and Joe Wyatt Center for Education). As the insist 1897 map of Vanderbilt by Granberry Jackson illustrates, the plan determined that the campus would function in this way from the beginning. Architectural historians would describe the Vanderbilt campus as an example of the Romantic or organic ethos, with few right angles and lots of curves. And the architecture is primarily medieval in inspiration, with uneven roof lines and textured facades characterizing such early buildings as Kirkland Hall and the Old Gym.

The informal and Romantic plan appeared in America in the second half of the 19th century, first in cemeteries and slightly later in suburbs, with their curving tree-lined streets and cul-de-sacs. We call this plan "organic" because the intention was to celebrate the irregular shapes and textures of nature at a time when industrialism was replacing nature with roads and factories, right angles, and machines. The buildings of this vintage are medieval rather than classical in inspiration because the Victorians felt this style of architecture was more organic in outline.

A Celebration of Rationality

The Peabody campus operates from an entirely different perspective on what is the best human environment. Peabody is a place any outsider can quickly and easily comprehend. Its plan and its architecture celebrate the obviously manmade: a world of right angles and symmetrical facades, of straight allées of trees and smooth rectangular lawns.

This is the more ancient language of classicism, a language of calm and order designed to encourage people to think clear thoughts and believe in the perfectibility of human nature. It was the language of Thomas Jefferson, who believed that the architectural style of the Greeks and Romans could be used to tame the wilderness of his Virginia.

In the Peabody plan, the buildings grouped along the central axis define the central mission of the college—teaching and learning, library, and administration—with the space for communal gathering, where all were to come together in social and religious equality, holding pride of place at the crest. The

Architecture is an empty vessel into which we pour meaning. Buildings look the way they do because of what we expect them to contain. And buildings contain not mere functions, but aspirations as well.

The academic campus holds meanings beyond the architecture of its individual structures. Thomas Jefferson's belief in mind over matter—in the power of rationality to subdue chaos—is expressed on the grounds of his University of Virginia in Charlottesville no less than on the hilltop called Monticello. In the United States we have been front-loading the campus plan with ideological significance ever since.

In Nashville are two formerly unallied campuses resting side by side—Peabody College and Vanderbilt University—that convey two very different architectural messages while at the same time representing the same institution. And I know of no better way to explain the Peabody campus than by bizarbly crossing 21st Avenue to the Vanderbilt campus. For the wandering and sometimes confusing paths of Vanderbilt illuminate, by way of contrast, the clarity and order that is Peabody.

The Academic Campus holds meanings beyond the architecture of its individual structures. Thomas Jefferson's belief in mind over matter—in the power of rationality to subdue chaos—is expressed on the grounds of his University of Virginia in Charlottesville no less than on the hilltop called Monticello. In the United States we have been front-loading the campus plan with ideological significance ever since.

In Nashville are two formerly unallied campuses resting side by side—Peabody College and Vanderbilt University—that convey two very different architectural messages while at the same time representing the same institution. And I know of no better way to explain the Peabody campus than by bizarbly crossing 21st Avenue to the Vanderbilt campus. For the wandering and sometimes confusing paths of Vanderbilt illuminate, by way of contrast, the clarity and order that is Peabody.

Architecture is an empty vessel into which we pour meaning. Buildings look the way they do because of what we expect them to contain. And buildings contain not mere functions, but aspirations as well.

The academic campus holds meanings beyond the architecture of its individual structures. Thomas Jefferson's belief in mind over matter—in the power of rationality to subdue chaos—is expressed on the grounds of his University of Virginia in Charlottesville no less than on the hilltop called Monticello. In the United States we have been front-loading the campus plan with ideological significance ever since.

In Nashville are two formerly unallied campuses resting side by side—Peabody College and Vanderbilt University—that convey two very different architectural messages while at the same time representing the same institution. And I know of no better way to explain the Peabody campus than by bizarbly crossing 21st Avenue to the Vanderbilt campus. For the wandering and sometimes confusing paths of Vanderbilt illuminate, by way of contrast, the clarity and order that is Peabody.

The Academic Campus holds meanings beyond the architecture of its individual structures. Thomas Jefferson's belief in mind over matter—in the power of rationality to subdue chaos—is expressed on the grounds of his University of Virginia in Charlottesville no less than on the hilltop called Monticello. In the United States we have been front-loading the campus plan with ideological significance ever since.

In Nashville are two formerly unallied campuses resting side by side—Peabody College and Vanderbilt University—that convey two very different architectural messages while at the same time representing the same institution. And I know of no better way to explain the Peabody campus than by bizarbly crossing 21st Avenue to the Vanderbilt campus. For the wandering and sometimes confusing paths of Vanderbilt illuminate, by way of contrast, the clarity and order that is Peabody.

The Academic Campus holds meanings beyond the architecture of its individual structures. Thomas Jefferson's belief in mind over matter—in the power of rationality to subdue chaos—is expressed on the grounds of his University of Virginia in Charlottesville no less than on the hilltop called Monticello. In the United States we have been front-loading the campus plan with ideological significance ever since.

In Nashville are two formerly unallied campuses resting side by side—Peabody College and Vanderbilt University—that convey two very different architectural messages while at the same time representing the same institution. And I know of no better way to explain the Peabody campus than by bizarbly crossing 21st Avenue to the Vanderbilt campus. For the wandering and sometimes confusing paths of Vanderbilt illuminate, by way of contrast, the clarity and order that is Peabody.

The Academic Campus holds meanings beyond the architecture of its individual structures. Thomas Jefferson's belief in mind over matter—in the power of rationality to subdue chaos—is expressed on the grounds of his University of Virginia in Charlottesville no less than on the hilltop called Monticello. In the United States we have been front-loading the campus plan with ideological significance ever since.

In Nashville are two formerly unallied campuses resting side by side—Peabody College and Vanderbilt University—that convey two very different architectural messages while at the same time representing the same institution. And I know of no better way to explain the Peabody campus than by bizarbly crossing 21st Avenue to the Vanderbilt campus. For the wandering and sometimes confusing paths of Vanderbilt illuminate, by way of contrast, the clarity and order that is Peabody.
buildings for residence and eating are grouped around the secondary axes because, while necessary, they do not define the primary purpose of Peabody. The Peabody plan celebrates rationality as the highest of human virtues. Both Vanderbilt University and Peabody College were the result of northern philanthropy in the post-Civil War South—Yankee gentlemen on the part of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt of New York and George Peabody of Massachusetts to help heal a devastated land by means of education. In 1873 the Com- modore gave $1 million to realize Bishop Mc- Coy’s vision of a central southern university to rival such northern institutions as Harvard and Yale. In 1867 George Peabody established the Peabody Education Fund with an eventual endowment of $2 million to grant funds to teaching by Edward Tilton, no southern state had free public schools, and as the states moved to establish them, they needed teachers to teach in them. The Peabody Fund was to provide the help necessary to train those teachers.

The Kirkland and Payne Philosophies

The money might have come from similar impulses, but the Vanderbilt and Peabody campus plans and their architectural styles reflect the distinct educational philosophies and missions of their institutions. Vanderbilt evolved into a place for insiders because James H. Kirkland, the Vanderbilt chancellor who really shaped the character of the University, was an educational conservative, a man who believed in a certain degree of intellectual and social elitism. Bruce Payne, the president who oversaw the planning of the Peabody campus, was an educational egalitarian. Payne believed strongly in education for the masses, for so- cial outsiders as well as insiders, and wanted to use the latest in progressive techniques to provide that education.

Payne came to Peabody from the Uni- versity of Virginia in 1912 and wanted to create in Nashville the same kind of college environment Jefferson had established in Charlottesville. To do so Payne hired the New York firm of Lucien and Peabody and the eminent landscape architect Warren Man- nering to design an “academical village” like Jefferson’s. The University of Virginia plan is simpler than Peabody’s. Jefferson’s grouped his build- ings along a single axis and assigned primacy to the library’s rotunda. The two-story struc- tures contained a series of departments, with professors living in the pavilions marked by columned facades and the students living below in rooms that flanked the central green. Each pavilion reflected a different classical order—Doric and Ionic, Corinthian and Tus- can—so students could study the classical styles, the only styles Jefferson thought worth studying, in three dimensions.

The Campus as a City

By the turn of the 20th century, when the Peabody campus was planned, the “academ- ical village” had evolved into the ideal of the campus as a city unto itself. But these aca- demical cities would not be the morally, eth- nically, and physically disorderly spaces of the Industrial Revolution metropolis. These aca- demical cities would be disciplined by the theory of urban planning derived from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and known in this coun- try as the “City Beautiful” movement. The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago—with its hierarchy of primary and secondary axes, its strong sightlines, and mon- umental buildings—had demonstrated to America these principles of city planning. Fragments of the City Beautiful survive today in such cities as San Francisco, but we find the most complete manifestations at colleges and universities, where a controlling disci- pline is more easily achieved because there is a single property owner.

Vanderbilt administrators, inspired by City Beautiful theory, hired a series of na- tionally known planners and design profes- sionals to make rational order from their organic campus. But plans for the Vanderbilt campus by Richard Morris Hunt (1902), the Vanderbilt family architect, and George Kessler (1905), the designer of the City Beautiful plan for the St. Louis World’s Fair, as well as the 1920s Day and Klauder plan, faced physical challenges that hindered implementation. Unlike the rectangular Peabody cam- pus, the Vanderbilt site itself is irregular, bounded on the north by West End Avenue and then by 21st Avenue as it heads south and curves west. And at the heart of the old Van- derbilt campus, the buildings known as Old Central and Old Science (now Benson Hall) are not aligned with any street axis but are located at the intersection of these curving coordinates. This is why any attempt to add new buildings for residence and eating are grouped around the secondary axes because, while necessary, they do not define the primary purpose of Peabody. The Peabody plan celebrates rationality as the highest of human virtues. Both Vanderbilt University and Peabody College were the result of northern philanthropy in the post-Civil War South—Yankee gentlemen on the part of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt of New York and George Peabody of Massachusetts to help heal a devastated land by means of education. In 1873 the Com- modore gave $1 million to realize Bishop Mc- Coy’s vision of a central southern university to rival such northern institutions as Harvard and Yale. In 1867 George Peabody established the Peabody Education Fund with an eventual endowment of $2 million to grant funds to teaching by Edward Tilton, no southern state had free public schools, and as the states moved to establish them, they needed teachers to teach in them. The Peabody Fund was to provide the help necessary to train those teachers.

The Kirkland and Payne Philosophies

The money might have come from similar impulses, but the Vanderbilt and Peabody campus plans and their architectural styles reflect the distinct educational philosophies and missions of their institutions. Vanderbilt evolved into a place for insiders because James H. Kirkland, the Vanderbilt chancellor who really shaped the character of the University, was an educational conservative, a man who believed in a certain degree of intellectual and social elitism. Bruce Payne, the president who oversaw the planning of the Peabody campus, was an educational egalitarian. Payne believed strongly in education for the masses, for so- cial outsiders as well as insiders, and wanted to use the latest in progressive techniques to provide that education.

Payne came to Peabody from the Uni- versity of Virginia in 1912 and wanted to create in Nashville the same kind of college environment Jefferson had established in Charlottesville. To do so Payne hired the New York firm of Lucien and Peabody and the eminent landscape architect Warren Man- nering to design an “academical village” like Jefferson’s. The University of Virginia plan is simpler than Peabody’s. Jefferson’s grouped his build- ings along a single axis and assigned primacy to the library’s rotunda. The two-story struc- tures contained a series of departments, with professors living in the pavilions marked by columned facades and the students living below in rooms that flanked the central green. Each pavilion reflected a different classical order—Doric and Ionic, Corinthian and Tus- can—so students could study the classical styles, the only styles Jefferson thought worth studying, in three dimensions.

The Campus as a City

By the turn of the 20th century, when the Peabody campus was planned, the “academ- ical village” had evolved into the ideal of the campus as a city unto itself. But these aca- demical cities would not be the morally, eth- nically, and physically disorderly spaces of the Industrial Revolution metropolis. These aca- demical cities would be disciplined by the theory of urban planning derived from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and known in this coun- try as the “City Beautiful” movement. The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago—with its hierarchy of primary and secondary axes, its strong sightlines, and mon- umental buildings—had demonstrated to America these principles of city planning. Fragments of the City Beautiful survive today in such cities as San Francisco, but we find the most complete manifestations at colleges and universities, where a controlling disci- pline is more easily achieved because there is a single property owner.

Vanderbilt administrators, inspired by City Beautiful theory, hired a series of na- tionally known planners and design profes- sionals to make rational order from their organic campus. But plans for the Vanderbilt campus by Richard Morris Hunt (1902), the Vanderbilt family architect, and George Kessler (1905), the designer of the City Beautiful plan for the St. Louis World’s Fair, as well as the 1920s Day and Klauder plan, faced physical challenges that hindered implementation. Unlike the rectangular Peabody cam- pus, the Vanderbilt site itself is irregular, bounded on the north by West End Avenue and then by 21st Avenue as it heads south and curves west. And at the heart of the old Van- derbilt campus, the buildings known as Old Central and Old Science (now Benson Hall) are not aligned with any street axis but are located at the intersection of these curving coordinates. This is why any attempt to add

Erected in 1926 as a gift from Nashville art col- lector George Etta Brinkley Cohen, the Cohen Build- ing represents the purest example of classical styling on the Peabody campus. The building’s elegant interior features marble columns, balconades, wainscoting, and marble mosaic flooring.

The majestic Wyatt Center, completed in 1915, crowns the Peabody campus mall with its ten Corinthi- an columns. The building was a personal gift from philanthropist John D. Rockefeller.

The 1912 original plan of George Peabody College for Teachers celebrates classicism—a world of right angles, symmetrical facades, and rectangular lawns.