

Alan Hoops

Alan Hoops graduated with Bachelor of Landscape Architecture in 1985. He started out as an architecture major at the University of Cincinnati and transferred to MSU to pursue engineering. While neither of those majors proved a fit, he learned about landscape architecture, with elements that combined the two and felt right at home.

DESCRIBE AN MSU MEMORY. A 1984 trip with three other students to the LABash Conference at Iowa State University stands out. Garrett Eckbo, a talented landscape architect and professor, was speaking and I actually got to meet him. I asked him what I thought was a simple question and he gave me a philosophical response. He had just critiqued a design in a Landscape Architecture magazine article, saying that the design was harsh and in conflict with the natural environment. I asked him for an example of a design in harmony with the natural

environment. He said two words: a farm. I thought about that for a long time and it changed how I viewed landscape architecture.

DISCUSS YOUR CAREER JOURNEY. I was a co-op student for four semesters in the early 1980s with Kevin Tucker and Associates in Nashville, Tennessee. After graduation, I went to work for Hartley P. Fairchild & Associates in Jackson, Mississippi. In 1996, I went out on my own, did fairly well, but had a child in 1997 and wanted something more secure. I took a position at JBHM Architects in 1997 as the staff landscape architect and spent six years there before being enticed to come to the city of Madison as the director of community development in 2003. I have been there ever since.

HOW DID YOUR DEGREE PREPARE YOU?

It gave me the knowledge, experience, and tools I needed to not only understand

the basics of design but to be able to communicate my ideas in a form that can be understood by others and potentially constructed.

DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU TURNED A CHALLENGE INTO AN OPPORTUNITY. All projects are opportunities and some are more of a challenge than others. Maybe the best challenge I faced was being asked to take a job with the city of Madison that was previously held by a planning professional. When I was asked by the mayor to take the job I was reluctant but felt like it would be a great way for the landscape architecture profession to expand itself, at least in Mississippi. I embraced it after a lot of thought and advice from Professor Ed Martin, who I have kept in touch with, and I am actually now a certified planner as well as a professional landscape architect.

HOW HAS THE INDUSTRY SHIFTED?

Technology has changed the way we do some things, but landscape architecture is still landscape architecture: the business of placing manmade structures in a natural environment in a sustainable manner. What is great is that the world has changed. Everybody wants to be green and sustainable. We have been green since the beginning. I think we need to be proud of that.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

Attending the landscape architecture program at MSU was one of the best things I have ever done. I was excited about learning, loved to do the work, and the professors were great. I am deeply indebted to them all and especially to Professor Martin, who encouraged me with positive words and actions when I needed them.



A cell tower in Madison, MS designed by Alan Hoops. (Photo by MSU alumnae Kim Crothers)