

8-8-08

Conuors Pond, Peter Shum
 Early morning 8:30 AM - overcast -
 heavy rain last night - distant
 hills lost & found in the mist.

Lake

by Holly Guran

come toward me
 bring me your waters

leave me to the loons
 who call out in the night
 for one another

needing only
 an occasional breath,
coo-cakoo, a little hitch, an echo

waters come toward me
 when I enter
 loosen all of me

let the years that cling
 on land swim to the far shore—

The Right Place

by *Edward O. Wilson*

First, the savanna itself, with nothing more added, offered an abundance of animal and plant food to which the omnivorous hominids were well adapted, as well as the clear view needed to detect animals and rival bands at long distances. Second, some topographic relief was desirable. Cliffs, hillocks, and ridges were the vantage points from which to make a still more distant surveillance, while their overhangs and caves served as natural shelters at night. During longer marches, the scattered clumps of trees provided auxiliary retreats sheltering bodies of drinking water. Finally, lakes and rivers offered fish, mollusks, and new kinds of edible plants. Because few natural enemies of man can cross deep water, the shorelines became natural perimeters of defense.

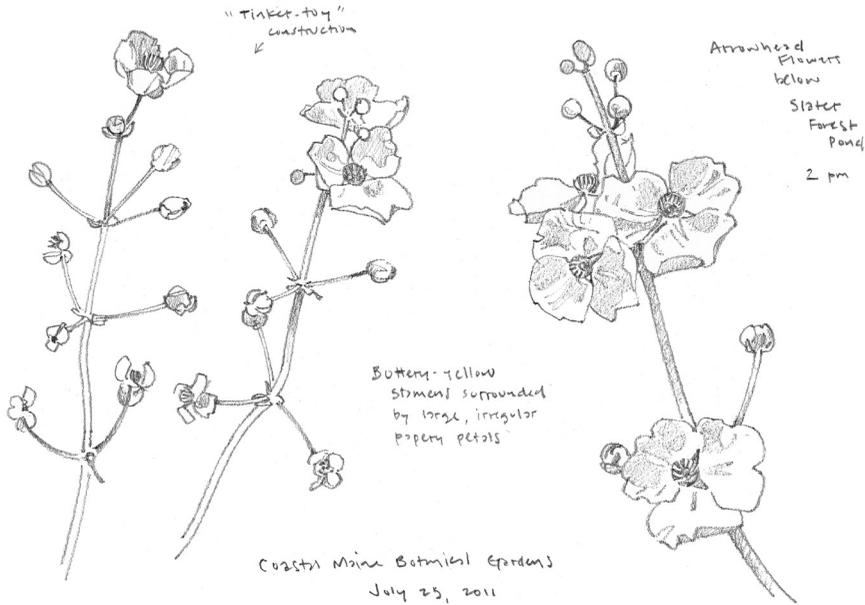
Put these three elements together: it seems that whenever people are given a free choice, they move to open tree-studded land on prominences overlooking water. This worldwide tendency is no longer dictated by the hard necessities of hunter-gatherer life. It has become largely aesthetic, a spur to art and landscaping. Those who exercise the greatest degree of free choice, the rich and powerful, congregate on high land above lakes and rivers and along ocean bluffs. On such sites they build palaces, villas, temples, and corporate retreats. Psychologists have noticed that people entering unfamiliar places tend to move toward towers and other large objects breaking the skyline. Given leisure time, they stroll along shores and riverbanks. They look along the water and up, to the hills beyond or to high buildings, expecting to see the sacred and beautiful places, the sites of historic events, now the seats of government, museums, or the homes of important personages. And they often do, in such landmarks as the Zähringen-Kyburg fortress of Thun, the Belvedere palace of Vienna, the cathedral in Saint Étienne, the Chateau of Angers, and the Potala, and among the more imposing sites from past eras,

Thingvellir, location of the ancient parliament of Iceland, the Parthenon, and the great plaza at Tenochtitlán.

The most revealing manifestation of triple criterion occurs in the principle of landscape design. When people are confined to crowded cities or featureless land, they go to considerable lengths to recreate an intermediate terrain, something that can tentatively be called the savanna gestalt. At Pompeii the Romans built gardens next to almost every inn, restaurant, and private residence, most possessing the same basic elements: artfully spaced trees and shrubs, beds of herbs and flowers, pools and fountains, and domestic statuary. When the courtyards were too small to hold much of a garden, their owners painted attractive pictures and plants and animals on the enclosure walls—in open geometric assemblages. Japanese gardens, dating from the Heian period of the ninth to twelfth centuries (and hence ultimately Chinese in origin), similarly emphasize the orderly arrangement of trees and shrubs, open space, and streams and ponds. The trees have been continuously bred and pruned to resemble those of the tropical savanna in height and crown shape. The



Steve Yarnum - View toward Mt. Mansfield
July 11, 1972



dimensions are so close as to make it seem that some unconscious force has been at work to turn Asiatic pines and other northern species into African acacias.

I will grant at once the strangeness of the comparison and the possibility that the convergence is merely a large coincidence. It is also true the individuals often yearn to retain the dominant and sometimes peculiar qualities of the environment in which they were raised. But entertain for a while longer the idea that the landscape architects and gardeners, and we who enjoy their creations without special instruction or persuasion, are responding to a deep genetic memory of mankind's optimal environment. That given a completely free choice, people gravitate statistically toward a savanna-like environment. The theory accommodates a great many seemingly disconnected facts from other parts of the world. 🌿

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