The most humbling thing about Ron Williams’s achievement in his book Landscape Architecture in Canada (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014) isn’t that he managed to tell the design story of an entire country clearly and elegantly. Nor is it that he was able to articulate the underlying cultural landscape characteristics of this vast, diverse nation and braid them together with ideas from Europe, Asia, and the United States into a narrative of a distinctly Canadian design history. The most humbling thing is that he did all that while writing simultaneously in French and English for the two editions of the book. The effort nods to Canada’s multiple identities and cultures, embedded in its singular landscape and brought to the forefront.

Nearly 15 years in the works, and many more in the planning, the book reflects the formidable research and commitment of Williams, a former director of the school of landscape architecture at the University of Montreal, and a wide circle of contributing historians and practitioners. Illustrated profusely with photographs as well as site plans and maps, Landscape Architecture in Canada is the story of Canada situated in the wider world of ideas. Williams estimates that he visited between 600 and 700 sites in and outside Canada and that roughly 500 sites are covered in the text. Synthesizing scholarship from Canadian geography, architecture, art, and environmental history, among others, Williams demonstrates how Canadian landscape architecture evolved as a field and as an idea.