



A Week in the Life of a Landscape Architect

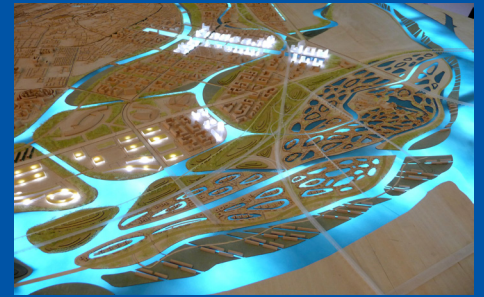
A principal in SWA's Laguna Beach office, Sean O'Malley looked out from his childhood home on the majestic San Bernardino Mountains continually obscured by smog, and was inspired to address large-scale environmental problems as a career. He studied landscape architecture at Cal Poly Pomona and urban design at Harvard's GSD. Among Sean's most significant projects is the plan for Shunde New City, in southern China, which reverses decades of industrial flood-control systems and restores natural waterways and drainage to support local ecology and the community's relationship with the land.

SUNDAY

Leave from Los Angeles for Hong Kong and, ultimately, Changsha, a city in south-central China where we are planning a major expansion, including waterfront development and retail and civic centers. Packed running shoes in case there's a chance to jog.

TUESDAY:

Land in Hong Kong in the morning and respond to emails before boarding flight to Changsha. Arrive in the afternoon. Our clients pick me up and head straight to a meeting where 30 people stare at me as I frantically set up my laptop for a presentation. Fortunately, I have time to think of my next sentence as the last one is being translated.



WEDNESDAY

Got in a morning run. Am surprised to arrive at the job site and find a field of boulders. The local design institute (LDI) has interpreted our wetlands park design as a rock garden. Negotiate solution so that some boulders are moved off the site and others hidden underwater. Repair relationship with LDI over dinner at restaurant specializing in eel.



THURSDAY

Present to Changsha's mayor the design for a new city axis, a mile-long series of plazas, river fountain, and forests built atop an underground parking garage. Visit job site for a 14-kilometer canal park cut through farmland and mountains. Return to California in the afternoon, and arrive home late that same day.

FRIDAY

Meeting with a large land developer who has hired us to do the planning for a series of new towns in Southern California's largest housing development. We propose a way to grade the hilltops sensitively so as to retain the natural contours of the land, connected to the arroyos below via an extensive trail network. Enjoy listening to my office colleagues' presentations over beers, a Friday tradition.

SATURDAY

Referee a 9 a.m. soccer match, where I'm heckled by passionate fellow parents about the rules of the game. A later date with the lawnmower and the smell of freshly cut grass. Nirvana. Great to get my hands dirty...

