

The emergence of Women Landscape Architects in France since 1945

La aparición de las arquitectas paisajistas en Francia desde 1945
Bernadette Blanchon

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Bernadette Blanchon

ENSP-Versailles

b.blanchon@versailles.ecole-paysage.fr

Associate Professor at Ecole Nationale

Supérieure de Paysage-Versailles,

research fellow at LAREP (Laboratoire

de Recherche en projet de Paysage),

after a collaboration at A. Chemetoff's

«Bureau des Paysages». She has

contributed to several publications

and lectured at international

conferences and various universities.

She is a founding editor of the

academic Journal JoLA, Journal of

Landscape Architecture, in charge of

Under the Sky (2006-2014), a section

for projects criticism.

Abstract

In France, as in other European countries, landscape architecture is a relatively feminized field both at the educational and professional level. This article summarizes the evolution of women in the field of French landscape architecture and how their presence and contributions have been key in the consolidation of the profession. The text includes the main female names that contributed to the recognition of this field as an independent profession, to the establishment of teaching curricula or to the management of landscaping from the powerful French administration.

Names such as Ingrid Bourne-Cloppenburg, Isabelle Auricoste, Marguerite Mercier, Caroline Baudelot, Caroline Mollie or Claire Corajoud allow us to understand not only the pioneering role of women in the different spatial planning fields, but the very history of these disciplines, their construction and evolution and how they have come to be constituted and understood as such today.

Key words: *Women Landscape Architects; Landscape designers in France; Isabelle Auricoste; Marguerite Mercier; Caroline Mollie.*

Resumen

En Francia, como en otros países europeos, el paisajismo constituye un campo relativamente feminizado tanto a nivel de estudios como en el ámbito profesional. Este artículo resume la evolución de las mujeres en el campo del paisajismo francés y cómo su presencia y aportaciones han sido clave en la consolidación de la profesión. El texto recoge los principales nombres que contribuyeron al reconocimiento de este ámbito como una profesión independiente, al establecimiento de los currículos docentes o a la gestión del paisajismo desde la potente administración francesa.

Nombres como el Ingrid Bourne-Cloppenburg, Isabelle Auricoste, Marguerite Mercier, Caroline Baudelot, Caroline Mollie o Claire Corajoud permiten entender no sólo el papel precursor de las mujeres en los campos de diseño y planificación espacial, sino la propia historia de estas disciplinas, su construcción y evolución y cómo han llegado a constituirse y entenderse como tales en la actualidad.

Palabras clave: *Mujeres arquitectas paisajistas; Paisajistas francesas; Isabelle Auricoste; Marguerite Mercier; Caroline Mollie.*

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Today, more than 60% of future landscape designers in France are female students. There are many female landscape designers in practice and more than half of the *Paysagistes-Conseils de l'État* (State Council Landscape Architects) are women. This has not always been the case, although women landscapers have played a significant role in the emergence of the profession in France. The singular role of women landscape architects in the the French context can be understood firstly by the background of landscape architects' training. The historical context of training will form the main framework of this article.¹

How can we describe and situate the commitments of the female pioneers of the profession, whether in terms of teaching, designing, project management or promotion of the profession?

From the establishment of a new curriculum to the recognition of the landscape designer (1945-2016)

In December 1945, the *Section du Paysage et de l'Art des Jardins* (SPAJ) (Landscape and Garden Art department) was created at the *Ecole Nationale d'Horticulture de Versailles*. As with the architects earlier, the aim was to separate the roles of contractor and designer and to obtain recognition for a specific diploma in landscape architecture. This was also reacting to the prohibition of using the title of landscape architect since the creation of the Professional Order of Architects in 1940.

This new curriculum was explicitly intended to train professionals capable of joining the teams in charge of the reconstruction of the devastated France. But it was only recently, in 2016, that landscape architects obtained recognition of the title of "*Paysagiste concepteur*" instead of *Paysagiste DPLG* (Government Certified Landscape Architect). In previous research, we have exposed the parallels between the programs of large housing estates and the construction of the contemporary landscape profession.² We shall see here that women have largely taken part in these developments.

The first female students of the SPAJ were sometimes nicknamed "cuscutes" (alfalfa parasite), "grannies", or "knitters", depending on the class and the shortcuts in vogue. Although they were initially considered to be looking for a husband, the reality bears witness to their determination to build new social interactions through their work. The contribution of women landscape architects to the development of the profession, but also to the adaptation of teaching curricula to the changing socio-economic context, can be described in three stages.

1945-1962. The beginning: from horticultural engineering to urban planning

The first period highlights the teaching figures of André Rioussé (1895-1952) and Théodore Leveau (1896-1971), architect-urban planners from the *École des Beaux-Arts*, who led the project workshops (studios) and passed on the heritage of the "Great French Century" taught at the ENSBA —*École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts*—; and also those of the experienced landscape practitioners, such as Edouard André, Ferdinand Duprat and Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier (1861-1930).

1 Blanchon, Bernadette, Donadieu, Pierre and Santini, Chiara. "The training of landscape architects in France. From the horticultural engineer to the landscape architect, 1876-2016", in *The Routledge Landscape architecture education Handbook*, edited by Diedrich Bruns and Stefanie Hennecke (New York: Routledge, to be published in 2022).

2 Bernadette Blanchon, "*Pratiques et compétences paysagistes dans les grands ensembles d'habitations, 1945-1975*", *Strates* 13 (2007).

It was not until the 6th graduating class of the SPAJ that a female name—Michèle de Crety, whose professional practice is not known—emerged. The following year, the name of Lucienne Tailhade appears, a landscape architect and renowned teacher who marked generations of students at the École du Breuil in Paris and at the ENSP in Versailles until the 1990s.

The DPLG (certified landscape architect) *Paysagiste Diplômé par le gouvernement* (such was his title from 1960 until 2015) gradually dissociated these professionals from the garden contractor and asserted an intermediate position between the architect and the horticultural engineer. Free auditors, particularly from abroad, completed the enrollment without claiming a diploma, as in the case of a young German woman, Ingrid Bourne. She joined the Section (SPAJ) as a free auditor in 1954, after practical training in a School of Agriculture in England. Her multinational references stimulated debates within the “Theory of Garden Art and Composition” class (known as *Atelier*) and questioned the classical teaching transmitted by the urban architect Théodore Leveau (1896-1971), who had worked with J.C.N. Forestier.

In particular, she reports on the experiences of her summer courses in Germany: the plant associations, made up of “indigenous” species, learned from Karl Plömin, author of the very popular *Planten un Blumen* exhibition park in Hamburg; the motorways designed by Alwin Seifert (1890-1972), under the Third Reich, in order to

Reconstruct the landscape after the motorway has passed.

More than a material, the plant is considered as a living being to be respected, the organic qualities of the site as the material of the project, whereas in France the roadside verges and parks were covered with ornamental plants. Drawing on these references, she and her husband Michel Bourne developed the premises of another vision of landscape practice, as geographical as it is ecological. (Fig.1)



Figure 1. Ingrid Bourne-Cloppenburg visiting *Planten un Blumen* in Hambourg, 1956.
© Ingrid & Michel Bourne

First practices of the female landscape gardener's profession

Based in the region of Lyon, the Bourne couple ran two companies: Michel ran a garden company and was in charge of monitoring the worksites, while Ingrid ran the design office. The experimental project of the *Unité de Voisinage de Bron-Parilly*,¹ a new type of order, without budget or surveyor's reports, was quickly led by Ingrid alone, given the leave of her husband for military service. The planting of local, hardy species, adapted to the sterile, compacted soil, was carried out using forestry planting techniques —as it was done in Germany—.³

The recognition acquired with the many large housing projects that followed allowing them to devote themselves from 1967 onwards to the "*Atelier de Paysage*" in Saint Marcellin, and to widen their field of activity to include campuses, new towns and public spaces. From then on, based on the sharing of orders, Ingrid Bourne could devote herself to her own projects,⁴ from design to execution, drawing on her international heritage and asserting her taste for plants and listening to the client. (Fig.2)

3 Ibidem

- 4 Such as: Paul Mistral Park (1966-71), Grenoble (38) -Winter Olympic Games, 1968; New town of Echirolles, Grenoble-Ouest, new districts and park 9 ha.



Figure 2. Parc Paul Mistral, Grenoble, 1968 © Ingrid & Michel Bourne. Created for the winter Olympic games, the park links neighborhoods, institutions and leisure areas. The project build upon Ingrid Bourne's international experience.

The profile of the Bourne couple is characteristic of the historical transition from entrepreneur to landscape designer through the takeover of a family business in a region where the profession of landscape designer was unknown. They were involved in defending the profession, but not much in teaching —except in the local School of Architecture—.

1963-1970: The renewal of the Landscape and garden Art Department ("la Section"): urbanism and environment

After the 1950s, young graduate landscape architects —Jacques Sgard (born in 1929) and Jean-Claude Saint-Maurice (1924-1989)— renewed the teaching by shifting the studio subjects from the design of private gardens to the landscaping of urban public spaces. From 1962-1963, they renewed the pedagogical approaches of the project workshops (*les ateliers*) and integrated the sensitive approach to places developed by the visual artist Bernard Lassus (born in 1929). They obtained the creation of a memorable course in plant ecology by the botanist Jacques Montégut (1925-2007), a professor at the ENSH.

The teaching staff remained very masculine, except in the History of Art and Gardens, where Madeleine Hugueney succeeded Marguerite Charageat. Female students became more numerous and their number sometimes exceeded half of the class. Three profiles bear witness to the specific contributions of women.

Caroline Mollie, Isabelle Auricoste and Marguerite Mercier accompanied the renewal of a curriculum that the new academic programmes attempt to remove from the strong horticultural influence. Isabelle Auricoste and Marguerite Mercier have both followed other academic paths (EHESS, IUP, etc.) which have brought them closer to sociologists such as Henri Lefebvre and Antoine Haumont. These paths led them to tackle the issues of the city and urban development, and marked their commitment to professional practice. As for Caroline Mollie, it was after graduating that she deepened her training in plant ecology and plastic arts. For all three, this openness to interdisciplinarity goes hand in hand with a political commitment. In this period of societal changes, the rise of environmental issues is part of a critique of the prevailing consumerism. (Fig.3)



Figure 3. *Les Ateliers* in 1966, *Section du Paysage et de l'Art des Jardins*. The class had six women out of 11 students. Marguerite Mercier is sitting on the right.
© Marguerite Mercier

From political commitment to regional public action

Isabelle Auricoste was particularly close to the world of architecture and militant action. Together with Hubert Tonka, her husband, and the sociologist Jean Baudrillard, she took part in the creation of the Marxist *counsellor* group of the *Utopie* journal. While her fellow architects refused to “compromise themselves” by building, the landscape architect saw in this new profession the possibility of transforming society.

French landscape architects then aspired to create new spaces for living within large social housing complexes, but their role was often reduced to providing vegetation to counterbalance the rigidity of the buildings. For Isabelle Auricoste, as for the Bournes, these green spaces (*les espaces verts*) represented a necessary step beyond the scale of the garden.

For these professionals, they would later become symbols of the alienation of landscape design and the domination of the construction industry. (Fig.4 & 5)



For her part, Caroline Mollie⁵ joined forces with colleagues to develop new ideas on landscape within the *Groupe d'Études et de Recherches en Paysage* (GERP) and participated in the collective work *Le paysage rural et régional*.⁶

This work opened up the field of convergence between scientific knowledge of environments and landscape approaches, which the new Ministry of the Environment (1971) was soon to take up. (Fig.6)

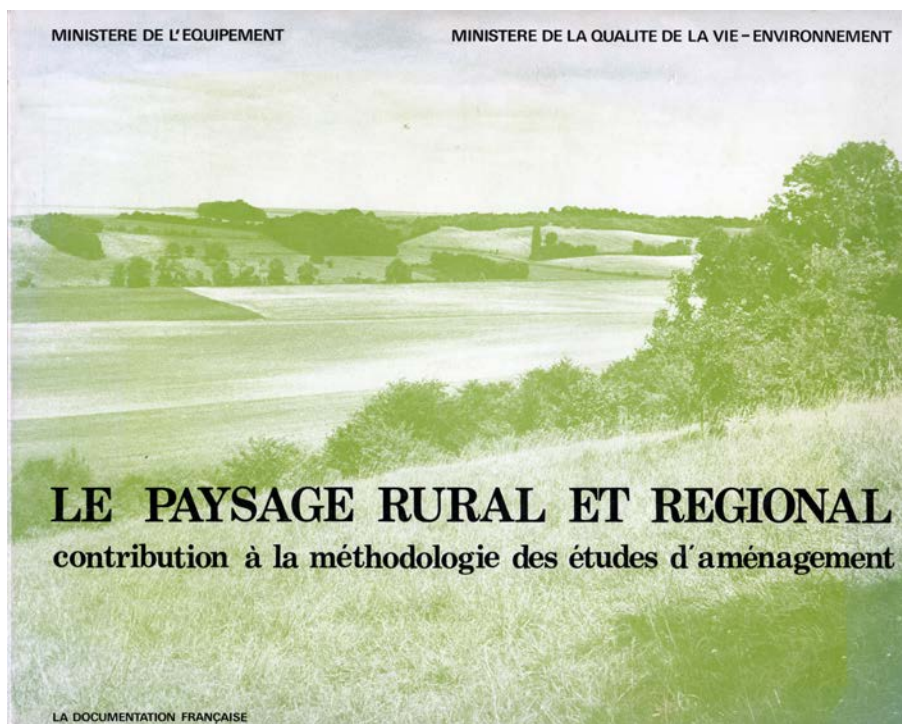
utopie

Sociologie de l'urbain
Numéro un, mai 1967

utopie

Figure 4 (Left). Bobigny, town center, 1975. Landforms “taming” the space between roads and buildings. Photo 1988 © Isabelle Auricoste.

Figure 5 (Right). Revue Utopie n° 1, cover, May 1967 © Hubert Tonka. The cover and its typographical design is by Auricoste, the idea being to abolish the boundaries between different modes of expression.



5 Caroline Mollie changed her name to Baudelot in 1965, then to Stefulesco in 1982 and back to Mollie in 1995.

6 Caroline Baudelot, Paul Clerc et Pierre Dauvergne, *Le paysage rural et régional*, Paris, La Documentation Française, 1975.

Figure 6. *Le paysage rural et régional*. © ENSP (Mollie-Baudelot)

At the same time, Marguerite Mercier drew from militant sociology a commitment to the political role of landscape in regional planning. Initially employed by an architectural firm, she then worked on public commissions, notably in the *Ville Nouvelle* (New Town) de Saint Quentin en Yvelines (1972-1976) and then within MIACA (1976-1989), *Mission Interministérielle pour l'aménagement touristique de la Côte Aquitaine* (Interministerial Mission for the Tourist Development of the Aquitaine Coast). She learnt to “bow to the strength and fragility of nature”, and “discovered the importance of giving time for natural environments to recover and also the priority to be given to the management of both the natural environment and the planted areas”.

She concluded this career with seventeen years of involvement in the DDE —*Direction Départementale de l'Équipement*—, (Public Works county service) of the Gironde. There she shared her culture of the landscape project with internal and external partners, the State services and local authorities. (Fig.7)

Figura 7. Marguerite Mercier on the Aquitaine coastal dune, explaining to local residents the coastal protection scheme, after the heavy storms of the beginning of the year, february 2014.
© Marguerite Mercier



Nourished by their reading of the journals *Anthos*, *Landskab* and *Urbanisme*, these three female practitioners are united by a remarkable commitment within a predominantly male environment; their paths will cross on various occasions and they will take common positions on the promotion, training and opening up of the profession.

1970-1979: Two key moments, the end of the SPAJ and the short-lived life of the CNERP

The Ministry of Agriculture gave few means to the reforms initiated by the young teaching team which, after an unfulfilled project of a Landscape Institute, turned to another training that emerged under the authority of the new Ministry of the Environment created in 1971: the *Centre national d'étude et de recherche du paysage*, CNERP, (National Centre for Landscape Study and Research).⁷

7 Pierre Donadieu. *Histoire de l'ENSP*, Source: <https://topia.fr/2018/11/30/les-debuts-de-lenseignement-a-lensp-2/> (Accessed November 12, 2021)

Caroline Mollie took part in its foundation in 1972 with some of the young teachers of the Section. It benefited from its own resources (studies and research) and interministerial resources. The teaching was devoted to the management of urban and rural landscapes, and was aimed at engineers, landscape architects and architects.

8 Bernadette Blanchon, "Jacques Simon et Michel Corajoud à l'AUA, ou la fondation du paysagisme urbain", in Cohen Jean-Louis and Vanessa Grossman (eds.), *Une architecture de l'engagement: l'AUA 1960-1985*, (Paris: Carré, Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, 2015), 214-225.

At the heart of the Section in crisis, the teachers Pierre Dauvergne (born in 1943) and Jacques Simon (1929-2015) asked the young landscape architect Michel Corajoud (1937-2014) to "save this training in perdition" and to come and share the knowledge he had acquired at the AUA (*Atelier d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme* in Paris).⁸

Some of the students of these last classes of the SPAJ later became major figures in French landscape design and urban public space projects from the 1980s onwards. These protagonists, teachers and students, were often made up of private and professional pairs, of which the male part is the best known.

There is not enough space here to do proper justice to these female partners, who certainly did not remain in the shadow of a more expansive companion, but for whom fame was, in their own words, of only relative interest—an interest they reserved for the exercise itself—.

Practitioners working in pairs

Many of the best-known pairings are from the generation formed in those atypical years at the end of the SPAJ. Most of them became teachers, such as Elisabeth Mortamais and Jean Magerand, Linda Leblanc and Jacques Coulon, Claire and Michel Corajoud. The latter structured their agency from the winning project of the *Parc du Sausset in Villepinte (93)* in 1980, where she followed the development of the bocage, right up to the last phases still underway today. Laurence Vacherot joined forces with Gilles Vexlard to create the “Latitude Nord” agency in 1981.

More than 400 projects followed, on all scales: studies, rehabilitation of large housing estates, open-air and leisure centers, national and international competitions, parks, master plans, etc., in which she applied the thoroughness of her laboratory culture, a family heritage, acquired at the biology laboratory of the University of Orsay.

The recognition of this generation came after the success of the *Parc du Sausset* (1980) with the numerous competitions organized in the 1980s and 1990s. By that time, women landscape designers were already numerous and active. (Fig.8 & 9)



Figure 8 (Left). Claire and Michel Corajoud, around 1980.

© Archives Corajoud-ENSP

Figure 9 (Right). *Le parc du Sausset* (The Sausset park), the bocage. Opening onto a clearing, 2005.

© M. Corajoud

The CNERP, a training as original as ephemeral, closed in 1979 and inspired the creation of the *Mission du paysage* (a service dedicated to landscape matters) at the *Ministère de l'Équipement* (Ministry of Public works), and some of the studio programs (*ateliers pédagogiques régionaux*) of the ENSP. The new school was finally created in 1976 next to the ENSH at the *Potager du Roi* (King's kitchen garden) in Versailles.

1976-1991. Female teachers of the École Nationale Supérieure du Paysage (ENSP)

Created without permanent teachers and dependent on the administration of the ENSH, the ENSP made a large place for project design, which Michel Corajoud and Bernard Lassus shared. Women were given a modest place.

In the 1980s, Isabelle Auricoste taught at the *Atelier Le Nôtre* (Le Nôtre workshop) led by Michel Corajoud, but struggled to find her rightful place in the prevailing culture of conflict, where the visions of the workshop leaders clashed.

9 He worked with International architects such as Rem Koolhaas or Jean Nouvel.

10 George Sand garden in Nohant, for instance.

During her time at the ENSP in Versailles, she supported young talents such as Yves Brunier⁹ (1962-1991), with whom she later became associated. She took part in the renewal of the history of garden design teaching, partly in common with the neighbouring School of Architecture, a discipline which also nourished her professional practice.¹⁰ (Fig.10)

Figura 10. La place de la Gare TGV, Tours, Isabelle Auricoste et Yves Brunier © Isabelle Auricoste. The public square at the high-speed train station in Tours. Stool shoots of *Lagerstroemia Indica*, and fountain providing light in the parking place underneath. Isabelle Auricoste and Yves Brunier, Landscape architects, 1991.



Over the years, the proportion of women in the classes has varied - more than half in 1975 but barely a third in 1978, to finally see from the 1980s onwards a regular mixed influx, sometimes balanced and sometimes with a majority of women.

The emerging part of the history of landscape design in France is that of the practitioner-designers from this period; for its more discreet female side, we will simply mention here a few names of former ENSP students: pairs again, Christine Dalnoky and Michel Desvignes or Christine Schnitzler and Michel Pena; but also resolute entrepreneurs such as Jacqueline Osty, awarded the *Grand Prix de l'Urbanisme* in 2020, a teacher in Blois and Pascale Hannetel, a long-time ENSP teacher in the wake of Gilles Vexlard, recognised for her approach to water-related issues, for her work on large-scale housing estates and her involvement in the Ministry of Culture and the UNESCO.

Catherine Mosbach,¹¹ taught in the United States and she was involved in the creation of the professional and theoretical ephemeral magazine *Pages Paysage*.

11 *Le Louvre Lens*, 2012. Mosbach, Catherine. *Traversées, Crossings*. Paris: ICI Consultants, Green vision, 2010.

Diversification of practices and training

If there are many female designers, some are also ready to join the project management team, such as Jacqueline Varier Gandois, who joined the *Service des Espaces verts* (Green Spaces Department) of the Val de Marne County Council in 1990, notably for the *Parc des Lilas* project.

In 1993, she created with Pierre Dauvergne the Landscape Delegation service, within the *Direction de l'Aménagement* (Urban Development Department), where, for the first time, the question of a landscape policy was raised on a departmental (County) scale.¹²

With the experience of the CNERP and her additional training, Caroline Mollie seized the opportunity to join the new *Mission du Paysage* (Landscape Department) at the Ministry of Public Works in 1979, under the leadership of Anne Kriegel, former teacher of CNERP. There, she produced the reference work *L'urbanisme végétal* (1993),¹³ which emphasises the structuring role of plants in urban projects. During the 1990s, she set up the Observatoire photographique national des Paysages to establish a collection of images to monitor the evolution of “ordinary” landscapes. From 1986 to 1991, she became president of the FF —*Fédération Française du Paysage*— (French Landscape professional organization).

During her term of office, Caroline Mollie defended the development and diversification of teaching by creating a landscape architect training course at the Bordeaux School of Architecture, with the support of landscape architect Alexandre Chemetoff. She seized the opportunities offered by Simone Weill's presidency of the European Year of the Environment and the presence of Vincent Auzanneau, a GREF engineer, (*Génie rural, eaux et forêts*) at the head of Bordeaux School of Architecture since 1987. (Fig.11)

Isabelle Auricoste joined the team in charge of building this new training curriculum for landscape architects under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, and for 17 years she was involved in a pedagogical approach combining practice and theory, teaching and research. At the same time, she settled down in Charente where she has been a local politician since 1989. She is the only woman, to have been awarded the *Grand Prix National du Paysage* (2000). As mentioned above, Jacqueline Osty has been awarded the *Grand prix National de l'Urbanisme* in 2020.

12 Blanchon, Bernadette and Keravel, Sonia. “France: paysagistes actuelles (nées après 1945)”, in *Dictionnaire des Femmes Créatrices*, edited by Béatrice Didier et al. Paris: Editions des femmes-Belin, 2013.

13 Reprint 2009: *Des arbres dans la ville* (Trees in the city), Arles, Actes Sud.



Figure 11. Caroline Mollie-Stefulesco, 1995, Opening of the exhibition “L’observatoire photographique du Paysage”, with Michel Barnier, Minister of the Environment.
© Caroline Mollie

Four other schools were then created at the same time as a branch of the Versailles ENSP in Marseille. Many landscape architects, in parallel with their agencies, will also find positions as practicing teachers or as full research teachers.

Conclusions and perspectives

During the recent history of French education, the training of landscape architects has been adapted to the expectations of the commission and to the demand of landscape professionals. In this context, the female profiles exposed in this text have been at the same time witnesses, origin and drivers of this dynamic of constant renewal. The four outstanding figures highlighted here have all enlarged the profession at an early stage by opening it to cultures and disciplines outside the Versailles school where they were trained. Along with their male counterparts, they have shown that landscape designers have the capacity to anticipate project responses in order to invent alternative responses to the different spatial and temporal scales of territorial development.

Capturing the words and testimonies of these pioneers through interviews and the collection of archives is key to record the history of this spatial planning field in France. For it is striking to note the convergence of the foundations of their contributions: listening to the client, the partner, in the team, and the interest in living worlds (particularly the care of the soil and the plant), which determines the landscape project; to note how the renewal of the 1960s extends the early contributions of Ingrid Bourne in the reference to the cultures of Northern Europe. This interest was amply shared by Jacques Simon, a tutelary figure and hinge if ever there was one, between these different generations.

The female figures of this period testify of a designer's commitment in the service of public landscape policies, constantly nourished by the back and forth between practice and critical reflection. They have sought to flesh out the profile of the landscape designer by inscribing her/his action in broader geographical and historical dynamics, while maintaining the link with the history of garden design. Be it the understanding of a rural space whose economy and agricultural or forestry models must be rethought, for Isabelle Auricoste; be it the tireless involvement of Marguerite Mercier for the coherence of the built space through the different scales of development and the continuity of implementation between public and private spaces; or Caroline Mollie's determination in her different institutional responsibilities in favor of the conscious evolution of the landscape and the opening up of training.

Together with other female practitioners mentioned earlier and their male colleagues, they have contributed to define a singular French thinking of landscape. Pragmatic, mobilized by the relevance of the form more than by the style, by the specific dynamics of the places more than by the speeches, and by the daily enjoyment of the well-being in the inhabited spaces, they have at heart to invent the conditions of a multidisciplinary work between experts, designers and planners. They rely on the transmission of a skill, of a profession that can change society, through teaching or through integration into the project management.



“Fagus Hug”, Isabelle Auricoste hugging a beech tree during a study trip in Petworth (England) in 2007. Source: Serge Briffaud, with permission.

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