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VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF
ECOLOGICAL DESIGN
AT THE
CROSBY
ARBORETUM,
PICAYUNE, MISSISSIPPI

Robert F Brzuszek and James Clark

ABSTRACT

This article highlights a case study and visitors' perceptions of an ecologically designed arboretum in the southern US. Our results from a survey of visitors find that natural appearing designed landscapes 1) should blend into their surrounding landscape context; 2) should appear cared for; 3) do not need to be highly structured in appearance; 4) that contain art and human expression are of moderate interest; and 5) should convey meaning or importance of the facility.

While noting the importance of landscape ecology to the design profession, landscape architects have criticized certain aspects of ecological design in public gardens. Regarded as the first arboretum to comprehensively embody a bioregional concept, Crosby Arboretum in Picayune, Mississippi, has been described as "the first fully realized ecological garden in the country." Project designers merged a symbiotic interplay between the vegetation patterns and physical processes of the arboretum site with the patterns and processes found in local plant communities.

The survey determined the degree to which visitors understood and derived meaning from the original design intent by asking about their learning and perceptions from the experience of individual landscape exhibits and an overall site comprehension of regional understanding. Results were entered into a purpose-built database, which provided statistical analyses on collected information.

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KEY WORDS

ecological design, public gardens, visitor perceptions, landscape

Photos by Robert F Brzuszek unless otherwise noted.