Coker Arbor & Koch Memorial Forest Theatre

CONCEPT DESIGN - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
• Dr. William Chambers Coker, Professor of Botany, begins the collection in 5.5 acres, formerly a livestock-grazing meadow

• Dr. Henry Roland Totten, creates a garden of medicinal plants

• Arbor reconstructed

• Arbor succumbed to rot and to damage from Hurricane Fran

1903

1911

1914

1953

1974

1992

1996

• Arbor first constructed of black locust for the display of flowering vines

• Dr. William Chambers Coker dies

• Walter’s pine named State Champion tree
LEGACY – COKER ARBORETUM / ARBOR

The legacy of the Arbor is most powerfully understood by its position within the Arboretum and the fabric of the Campus itself. While its specific design and material character are important and its role as part of the Arboretum’s plant collection is invaluable, the history shows that the Arbor has undergone periodic renewal and reconstruction. It is, however, the memories that have been built here by countless generations of students, community members, and visitors that stand as the Arbor’s greatest legacy.

Timeline images courtesy NC Botanical Garden and UNC Herbarium
TOPOGRAPHY

- Separated
- Depressed

VEGETATION

- Vine collections
- Light
- Ebullience
- Seasonality
- Enclosure

CIRCULATION

- Linear connections
- Edges

WATER FEATURES

- N/A
STRUCTURES, ETC

- Rustic wood
- Low / intimate
- Alumni circle
- End pergolas

COKER ARBOR - CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES

Character defining features are the elements, qualities, or characteristics of a landscape that shape how we experience it. These are defined broadly here to look beyond the physical fabric, recognizing that alternative materials and componentry may be able to provide the same character, spatial quality, or physical or mental association. This opens opportunities to balance continuity and necessary change.
Character defining features rich with integrity should be protected (blue). Those with less integrity are ripe for adaptation or re-imagination (grey).
A. COKER ARBOR - GOALS

- The arbor is both a part of campus circulation and a place unto itself
- The arbor provides a sense of welcome and orientation for the arboretum
- The arbor supports education and the interpretation of native vines
- The arbor is iconic as experience and as place
- The character and scale of the landscape around the arbor enhances the experience of walking through the arbor
- The interplay of structure and vegetation create a powerful experience of light and shadow, texture and color
- The arbor provides moments of surprise and wonderment
- The arbor is welcoming and safe
Existing Conditions - Coker Arbor

DRIVE LANE IS DANGEROUS FOR PEDESTRIANS

ARBOR IS NOT ACCESSIBLE AT ENDS (STEPS/CURB RAMP)
ADJACENT PLANTING HAS SUBSUMED THE ARBOR/VINE COLLECTION

POOR VISIBILITY INTO/OUT OF ARBOR
FULLY ACCESSIBLE / BARRIER FREE

TABLED PLAZA FOR PEDESTRIAN SAFETY
COKER ARBORETUM

LARGER ENTRY GATEWAYS AT CENTER AND ENDS

FURTHER REMOVED FROM TRAFFIC

E CAMERON AVE
The ends and middle of the renewed arbor are expanded as entry gateways connecting to the Arboretum.
ARBOR IS SET BACK SLIGHTLY FROM ROADWAY

VISIBILITY WITHIN AND THROUGH IS IMPROVED

SCALE IS SLIGHTLY INCREASED, STILL INTIMATE
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Maintain campus circulation patterns; improve access

• Establish the arbor as gateway and threshold to the Arboretum; accentuate the ends and center

• Improve longevity with contemporary materials, but maintain rustic character

• Clarify and distinguish vegetation patterns between the arbor and the Arboretum to improve legibility

• Incorporate the arbor into the larger planting gestures of the Arboretum

• Augment the play of light, shadow, sound, and touch

• Improve safety by maintaining discrete sight lines into and through the arbor and Arboretum edges

• Vary the horticultural experience along the length and across the width

ENABLE FULL ACCESSIBILITY/PEDESTRIAN SAFETY
RE-ESTABLISH LEGIBILITY OF VINE COLLECTION
MAINTAIN VIEWS INTO/OUT OF ARBOR, MAINTAIN MYSTIQUE
DISTINGUISH ARBOR AS THRESHOLD/GATEWAY TO COKER; INCORPORATE IT INTO THE ARBORETUM THRU PLANTING

MAINTAIN SIGHTLINES TO OPEN SPACES W/IN COKER

REIMAGINE THE ARBOR FOR CONTEMPORARY USE W/ FAMILIAR CHARACTER, BUT DURABLE DETAILING; PROTECT THE MAGICAL QUALITIES!

VARY POROSITY & DENSITY OF EDGES

RE-ESTABLISH LEGIBILITY OF VINE COLLECTION

MAINTAIN VIEWS INTO/OUT OF ARBOR, MAINTAIN MYSTIQUE

VARY POROSITY & DENSITY OF EDGES
COKER ARBOR - CHARACTER

The character of the new Coker Arbor should be familiar and authentic to the inherent qualities of the original design. Contemporary materials should be discrete and used to increase durability and function.