

Security Design: Plus ca change? = Land-Art Opportunities

Neil Hobbs FAILA

A growing speciality in landscape architectural practice is security design. The United States of course is full of it, generating its own special sessions at conferences. A recent issue of Landscape Architecture (late last year) showed images of security barriers in and around Wall Street Manhattan. I was in Manhattan in 2002, the new works are a vast improvement on the haphazard arrangement of concrete barriers, plastic covered awnings and on-street 'muscle' that proliferated at US public buildings at the time.

We don't escape in Canberra: for several years post September 2001 our national parliament had what I liked to call 'John Howard's Ring of Confidence', a nice, even set of (plastic) pearly whites strung around the perimeter of the building. The pearly whites have gone, and a quite acceptable landscaped solution has been designed and constructed. The automatic bollards have had their well-publicised problems, but the concrete berms and barriers could almost have been the original design intent. For many reasons, most buildings in Canberra have not had that level of funding lavished on them, the more prosaic response is to dot large boulders along the perimeter. Most security barriers don't quite reach the potential for a Miesian quality of horizontal planes arranged around and connecting with the building. But there is another designer of a few centuries prior to Mies who is worth another look.

Sébastien Le Prestre Marquis de Vauban (1633–1707) was a Marshal of France and the foremost military engineer of his age, famed for his skill in both designing fortifications and in breaking through them.¹



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Postcard



1 www.vaubanllc.com/images/vauban1_sr2k.jpg

I had the pleasure of a tour of France for a week in early 07, and, while in Strasbourg, noticed some interesting buildings and landforms, on the upstream side of the River Ill. What I learned was that Vauban's barrage and earthen mound allowed for the areas upstream of Strasbourg to be flooded, preventing access by an invader from the southwest. Defensive towers are behind the barrage, gun ports still evident. The barrage dates from 1681.

The barrage — Modern Art Museum to the mid right

Vauban was directly involved in the upgrade of fortifications of 300 cites in France, over a 40 year period. Typically, Vauban fortified cites using the 'Star Fort' design first employed by Italian engineers of the 1500s.

"The late seventeenth-century architect Menno van Coehoorn and Vauban, Louis XIV's military engineer, are considered to have taken the form to its logical extreme. "Fortresses... acquired ravelins and redoubts, bonnettes and lunettes, tenailles and tenaillons, counterguards and crownworks and hornworks and curvettes and fausse brayes and scarps and cordons and banquettes and counterscarps... that baroque profusion."²



View of 'Le Petit France' district of Strasbourg from the barrage

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_fort



Public space east of the barrage



Looks like a site for Shaun Gladwell



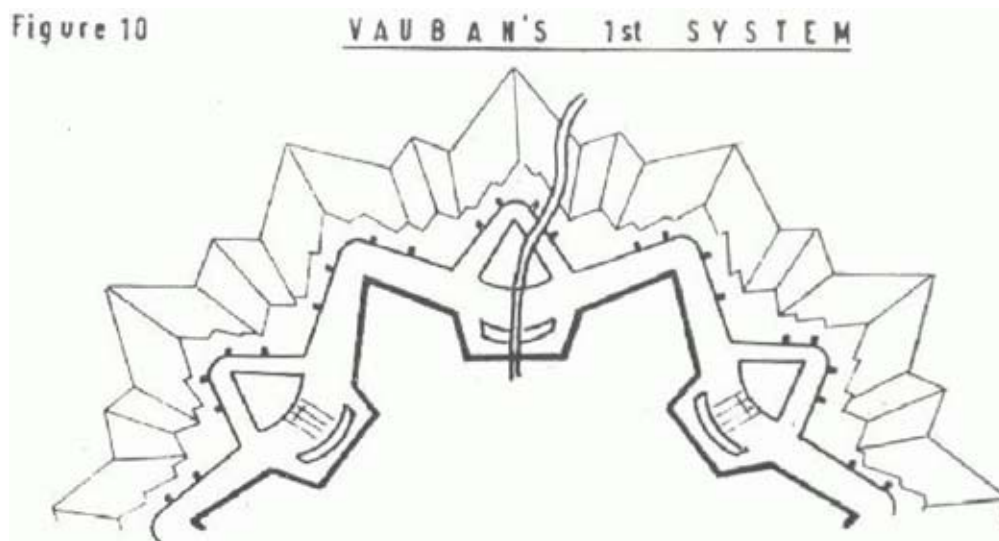
The interior of the barrage includes a stockpile of treasures

Vauban's methods were exported widely – later in the year I happened to be passing Fort George, north of Inverness, where the fort built to secure the north of Scotland following the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 was based on a plan of one of Vauban's works. Perhaps not what the putative Franco/L'Ecosse alliance would have preferred, however, that was clearly not the last time that military intelligence and strategies developed by one power was employed against the interests of the same power.

The British were not backward in employing the new technology — in Canada, overlooking Halifax Harbour, massive fortifications were commenced in the late 1740s, to counter the growing French presence on the Gaspé peninsula.

"The current star-shaped fortress, or citadel, is formally known as Fort George (yet another one) and was completed in 1856, following 28 years of construction. This massive masonry-construction fort was designed to repel a land-based attack by United States forces and was inspired by the designs of Louis XIV's commissary of fortifications Sébastien Le Prestre, Seigneur de Vauban — a star-shaped hillock fortress with internal courtyard and clear harbour view from armoured ramparts. The British constructed a similar citadel in Quebec City known as the Citadel of Quebec"³

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citadel_Hill



Vauban formalised this system and built numerous fortresses in France and Flanders, all on a massive scale, many of which gave a good account of themselves even as late as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870⁴

The defensive systems reached all the way to the Caribbean, ebbing and flowing with the rise and fall of English and French influence.

The star formed fortifications were taken by English plantation emigrants to Ireland: Birr Castle, Co Offaly, had been a stronghold of the Eile Ui Chearbhaill (the O'Carrolls) since c 950. The O'Carroll's held a stronghold of about 40 Castles through to the mid 1500s, resisting Anglo and Norman invaders, but finally losing out to the Cromwellian plantations of the early 1600s. The new English owner (Sir Laurence Parsons) took on the development of the castle, and would seem to have constructed the star-shaped fortifications, as below:



Birr Castle, County Offaly, Ireland.

4 http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaverall/Hangar/3337/Jock_Ham.html



The castle saw a series of sieges and conflict until the mid 1700's Later Parsons became staunch opposers of the Act of Union: Sir Lawrence, fifth baronet, (1791–1841) became well-known as a patriot statesman, whose friend and colleague, Wolfe Tone, referred to him as *'one of the very, very few honest men in the Irish House of Commons'*⁵

Vauban's legacy is a northern hemisphere landscape littered with traces of earthen forms and battlements, and the value for landscape architects is that the remnants are often in publicly accessible areas. Often these landscapes link to open space systems along waterways and other park systems.

Jumping forward to the 20th Century, The landscape architect Eelco Hoftman, based in Scotland, spoke of his favourite landscape at 'Die besten Garten 2007 in Langenlois, Austria: *'Arguably the best landscapes are not composed but found....The contrast of the cubes Cartesian geometry to the voluptuous dunes is striking..... The symbiosis between brutalist artefacts of warfare and fragile nature in miniature is most appealing..... Gardens are seldom innocent. Ian Hamilton Finlay reminded us: some gardens are for retreat while others are for attack.'*⁶



Photographs: Eelco Hoftman — 'Concrete Garden' — coastal defences against German invasion, 1940's Scottish Coast⁷

5 <http://www.birrcastle.com/historyOfBirr.asp>

6 Eelco Hoftman 'Concrete Garden' Die besten Garten 2007 c2007 Team Private Plots

7 ibid.



Strasbourg⁸
Vauban Barrage and the four towers of Le Petit France.

Quebec⁹

Just one of hundreds of 'walkable' landscape artworks for lucky landscape architects.

All photographs by Neil Hobbs unless noted otherwise.

8 Google Earth

9 Google Earth