

Get To Know Mark H. Hough



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Mark Hough has been the university landscape architect at [Duke University](#) since 2000. [Olmsted Brothers-designed](#) Duke is an 8,000-acre campus. The [Duke Forest](#) comprises 6,000 acres with the remaining 2,000 acres comprised of quads, open lawns, woodlands, hollows, gardens, athletic fields, a golf course and plazas.

Outside of Duke, Hough writes and lectures on topics, such as campuses, sustainability and cultural landscapes. He is a frequent contributor to *Landscape Architecture Magazine*, as well as [Places Journal](#), *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and [College Planning and Management](#). In 2011, he was awarded the [Bradford Williams Medal](#) for writing excellence by the [American Society of Landscape Architects](#), where he is a fellow. Hough is also an adjunct faculty member in the college of design at [North Carolina State University](#).

Prior to his post at Duke, Hough did a stint at the [Central Park Conservancy in New York City](#) that gave him a deeper understanding of the value of landscape stewardship and strengthened his resolve to work and live in a campus environment



PHOTOS: MARK HOUGH

“University campuses are complex and dynamic places – like microcosms of entire cities, only with a much higher percentage of green space,” he says. “In my role, I oversee everything outside of the buildings, including site design, master planning, sustainability, historic preservation, pedestrian and bicycle circulation, wayfinding, transportation systems, ecosystem conservation and stormwater management.”

Affiliations: [American Society of Landscape Architects \(ASLA\)](#) and [Society of College and University Planning \(SCUP\)](#)

Proudest moment in the business and why: When I became a fellow of ASLA,

which is one of the highest honors a landscape architect can get. It means a lot to be elected by a jury of my ASLA peers, who select people based on contributions made to both the society and the profession as a whole.

Biggest business challenge today: There is so much design and construction going on at Duke right now that keeping an eye on everything can be challenging. We are working very hard on balancing all of this growth with the desire to conserve the remaining natural areas we are so lucky to still have on campus. University growth is inevitable, but I want to make sure we do it in as responsible a manner as possible. Fortunately, this ties directly to a broader mission to be responsible stewards of the environment and supporting conservation efforts.



Best sources of landscape design/build inspiration: Whenever I travel anywhere, I visit as many campuses, cultural landscapes and urban public spaces as I can. There is nothing more valuable to a designer than seeing other places in person. It can be inspiring, but it also helps to see how other landscapes deal with the same issues of maintenance, overuse and general wear-and-tear. I'm also sort of obsessed with landscape detailing, so I have hundreds of photos from places I have been around the world showing examples of paving, walls, transitions, curbs and everything thing else that makes up a designed landscape. Succeeding at the detail level is what really makes certain places great.

Favorite plant or plant combination: This changes probably every year. Right now, I really love the oakleaf hydrangea. It's such a flexible plant, especially since the smaller cultivars have proven successful. Its structure and year-round appeal make it work well in both naturalistic and formal designs. I especially like its gnarled, sculptural branches in the winter, when set off against a darker background.

Monday morning motivation: What I love about my job is that every day brings something new. No two Mondays are ever alike. I very rarely take my work home with me, so I use the time walking my dog on Monday mornings to recalibrate from the weekend and get back into work mode. I can honestly say I have never dreaded starting a new workweek since I have been at Duke.

Business worry that keeps you up at night: I don't really worry about work too much once I leave for the day. I do, however, spend a lot of time outside of work writing. If I am fretting about something in the middle of the night, it's usually about a piece I am working on that is either stalled or behind schedule. I have a habit of overextending myself and sometimes that takes its toll on my sleep, too.



Landscape design mentor: Laurie Olin is at the top of the list, having collaborated with him on several projects at Duke over the past decade. I have learned so much from him about design. I really appreciate how he approaches it from both an intellectual and intuitive perspective. He has a great sense of humor and is refreshingly humble.

Favorite business or landscape design book: While I was working at the Central Park Conservancy in the 1990s, my brother gave me a set of "[The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted](#)." I have loved reading these as a landscape architect, a devotee of cultural landscapes and as a writer, especially the volume focused on the building of Central Park. There is an eloquence and immediacy to Olmsted's voice and words that has inspired me. I also enjoy well-done monographs if they back up the beautiful photography with quality and meaningful writing – those of Reed Hilderbrand and Nelson Byrd Woltz stand out for me.



Describe one landscape design project you've worked on that makes you smile every time you drive past it: The single landscape of [Duke University](#). The special thing about working on it for a long period of time is that you get to not only see it as you drive past, you get to become immersed in it and know it intimately. I not only see the evolution of the campus, I directly affect it and oversee its growth and maturity. My job is just beginning once construction ends and the contractor and consultants leave. This, to me, is what landscape stewardship is all about.

Describe your business in five years: I plan to still be at Duke in five years. I will still be pushing for improvements to the landscape that will make the campus more beautiful and efficient in its use of resources. I feel like I have accomplished a lot in my career so far, but there is still a lot I want to do.

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