

James Rose Center honored for restoring Ridgewood landscape architect's EarthCam garden

By [Marsha A Stoltz](#), April 22, 2022



RIDGEWOOD — Thirty-one years after his death, the meandering, stream-like designs of renegade landscape architect James Rose are still receiving awards, as well as new challenges to their survival.

The latest accolade for helping with the restoration of the architect's landscape around the EarthCam corporate headquarters in Upper Saddle River — the 2022 Historic Preservation Project Award — will be presented to the [James Rose Center](#) by the Bergen County Board of County Commissioners on May 5.

Three years in the making, the restoration has also garnered awards for EarthCam from the New Jersey chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects and [Docomomo](#), a nonprofit dedicated to the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the modern movement.

But four years after completion, EarthCam officials say they face an ongoing challenge to preserve what they restored, because part of the landscaping is in a 100-foot-wide Rockland Electric easement. As such, workers are allowed under New Jersey Board of Public Utilities regulations to enter the right of way at will and conduct whatever trimming or removal they determine is needed to preserve power transmission.

Nine trees from the 1986 project have been removed and six more topped to discourage further growth. Other plantings have been damaged or destroyed in the process.

“We’ve offered to do our own trimming under their direction, but so far, they have refused,” said Senior Vice President William Sharp.

Board of Public Utilities spokesman Peter Peretzman said the matter may come before the board at a future date, and they therefore “have no comment at this time.”

Rockland Electric did not respond to requests for information.

JAMES ROSE CENTER: [Take a look inside the secluded James Rose Center](#)

‘Civil disobedience’

In fairness, Rose knowingly placed the plantings and structures in the right of way as part of his signature shoot-from-the-hip on-site spontaneous design process, said James Rose Center Director Dean Cardasis.

“For Rose, this was an act of civil disobedience illustrating how land upon which it was illegal to build could still be used to inspire a ‘heavenly’ experience without interfering with the utility/maintenance function for which it had been reserved,” Cardasis said.

It was far from Rose’s first act of rebellion. He was a high school dropout who was still accepted at Cornell University as an architect major, then as a landscape architect major at Harvard University, where he was expelled for failing to follow the Beaux-Arts style of the period.

Rejecting large-scale projects, Rose moved to garden design after World War II. Among his residential clients were Florence and Edward Paley, for whom he also landscaped the nearby 10-acre industrial property at 650 E. Crescent Road, occupied at the time by Texwipe.

‘Spontaneous improviser’

“Rose was the James Dean of architects,” Cardasis said. “He was a spontaneous improviser.”

Rose relied on inspiration as he walked the property for placement of his obtuse-angle railroad-tie retaining walls, winding paths, and stone “ikebana” layers created from rocks dug up during construction

“Rumor has it Rose would stay behind at night and remove the rocks to new positions,” Sharp said. “We can’t figure out how. The rocks are too big to move alone, and there are no scrape marks suggesting he pushed them around.”

Texwipe left the property in 2001, and by 2004 the building had been abandoned. It wasn’t until EarthCam founder Brian Cury began looking for new headquarters in 2013 that he came across the disintegrating property.

“The building architect wanted nothing to do with the landscaping,” Sharp said. “He pointed out the difficulties of the ponds, the winding paths. And there were no plans.”

The James Rose Center was called in to generate whatever documentation it had on the project.

“Our role was being experts on James Rose,” Cardasis said. “They didn’t understand fully what they had. We provided them with historical documentation and on-site consultation.”

EarthCam applied its aerial drone photography expertise to filming the site from overhead, where Rose’s design was more visible. Bluestone walk slabs were laboriously photographed, numbered and placed on pallets while grading and new entrance construction took place.

The timber-edge rubber-lined pools that had collapsed were recast in cement for durability. EarthCam declined to speculate on the project’s final cost.

“We’ve made a cool high-tech headquarters for our 150 employees,” Sharp said.

Mayor Joanne Minichetti said the borough was “very pleased to welcome EarthCam to town.”

“They not only restored it but updated the property with features like a waterscape,” Minichetti said. “They are high-tech, innovative and great community partners.”