

Donald Joseph Molnar '60

was a highly distinguished American landscape architect, campus planner, and university educator. Best known for his extensive work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Purdue University, he made lasting contributions to campus design, student mentorship, and professional recruitment in the field. He passed away at his home in Champaign, Illinois, on December 4, 2025, at the age of 86.



He earned both his Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Landscape Architecture in 1960 and his Master of Landscape Architecture (MLA) in 1964 from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He later received the FAA Legacy Award from the College of Fine and Applied Arts.

After graduating from Illinois, Donald J. Molnar practiced at Simonds and Simonds, one of the foremost landscape architecture firms in the 20th century, working on designs that balance environmental and community concerns.

In 1964 he left private practice to return to the University of Illinois for nearly two decades as a campus planner. As campus planner he was responsible for project planning and design, coordination of site and landscape development, administration of consulting professionals, and application of planning guidelines and standards for the Urbana, Chicago Circle, and medical campuses plus the Rockford and Peoria medical centers.

In 1971 Molnar coauthored *Anatomy of a Park*, a groundbreaking text in the discipline that has been continuously in print for 48 years. Later he served as chair of the Landscape Architecture program at Purdue, making an equally deep impact on its campus and programming by developing a cooperative internship program that has successfully placed over 600 graduates in careers all over the country.

As principal of the Drumlin Group, he searched for all levels of professional landscape architects for offices across the United States and abroad and worked in identification and negotiations for acquisitions, mergers, and consulting services. Molnar was also a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

One of the lasting contributions made during his time as campus planner at Illinois was his *Peace Memorial*, a popular memorial dedicated to University of Illinois students who served the US military during wartime, which can still be seen in the south courtyard of Lincoln Hall.

The memorial, a monolithic concrete bas-relief, was commissioned in 1968 to mark the 50th anniversary of World War I. It was the first and only sculpture Don ever made.

He chose different typography to represent the class years from students who served in World Wars I and II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. He also embedded several metal pieces, including a plowshare, bayonets, and military helmets, into the sculpture. Since it was built during the Vietnam War, Don's intent was not to create a memorial to those who served but rather to create a "time machine" to facilitate reflection on these wars. "You can't run away from [war]. It happened. It will happen again," Molnar said about the memorial's message.

His contributions to the field are perhaps best summed up by Shawn Kelly, American Society of Landscape Architects president: "Don is the example of professional and personal integrity to which we should all aspire. . . . Don is a mentor, teacher, artist, creative genius, therapist, listener, builder of dreams, optimist, steward of the environment, friend. Don has provided such a positive impact on not only my personal and professional life but the lives of so many others that is immeasurable and cannot be overstated."