Taking the First Step: The Labyrinth and the World of Landscape Architecture

Abstract
Having historical, cultural, and religious roots, humans have been walking the path of the labyrinth for centuries. From seashores to cathedral floors, the labyrinth is seen as a symbolic search for one’s center. The labyrinth has experienced a revival in modern life, showing up everywhere from rehabilitation centers and hospitals, to prisons and backyard landscapes across this country. The labyrinth has emerged as a form that can help humans find their internal center and place of emotional stability.

Having walked the labyrinth and believing in its healing properties, I became interested in the symbol itself. I was intrigued by the way the symbol was actually an architectural element that told the narrative of the culture that built it. While the labyrinth was on church floors in medieval times, its revival in modern times seems to be located in the outdoor environment. Since Landscape Architecture is a field based on the creation of safe and pleasing outdoor environments for humans, I chose the labyrinth as a way of looking at experience and contemplation in the landscape, and how the design (the creation of form) of this object contributes to the analysis.

Wanting to complete this analysis by actually building a labyrinth, I was approached by the Sanctuaries Unique Garden Center in Richmond, Virginia, and asked to design and build a labyrinth. Providing Sanctuaries with conceptual designs of one way paths, a final design was settled on and the project was built. The thesis will highlight the theory, design, and construction surrounding the object called a labyrinth.
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