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A woman walks her dog in Anderson Park, which connects the Aspen Meadows and Aspen Institute campuses, on Aug. 7.



Campus Life

How the Aspen Meadows campus came to be

by **Carolyn Sackariason** for **the Aspen Times Weekly**

As the Aspen Institute prepares to break ground on a building to house a museum and research center honoring Herbert Bayer, the architect of the storied Aspen Meadows campus, the new development will be the first one in 45 years to be designed with a nod to his Bauhaus style.

The building will pay homage to Bayer, whose vision for the campus was in lockstep with Aspen Institute founder Walter Paepcke, the father of Aspen's renaissance in the 1940s.

Their vision and the campus remain intact 70 years after they set eyes on this vast landscape on the west end of town that was once home to a horse track. A close look at the history of development on campus since Bayer and Paepcke's day, however, shows its preservation and relative purity were often threatened and never guaranteed.

"This has very well stood the test of time," said Jim Curtis, a land-use planner for the Aspen Institute.

A 'SPECIAL' AREA

Paepcke established his real estate firm, the Aspen Company, and bought the land for back taxes and began constructing with Bayer and local architect Fritz Benedict in the 1950s.

After Paepcke's death in 1960, several developers, including Donald Trump, unsuccessfully attempted to pave the sprawling property with a large hotel and private homes.

Robert O. Anderson, who was the president of the Institute at the time of Paepcke's passing, had first proposed a large-scale development with a hotel in the late 1970s but he couldn't get the city's approval.

Following his dispute with the city, Anderson planned to move the Institute to a new home near Crestone, Colorado.

The Institute eventually moved its headquarters on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland and later to Washington, D.C.

Anderson sold the land off to a local

character named Hans Cantrup, who went bankrupt, as did the next buyer.

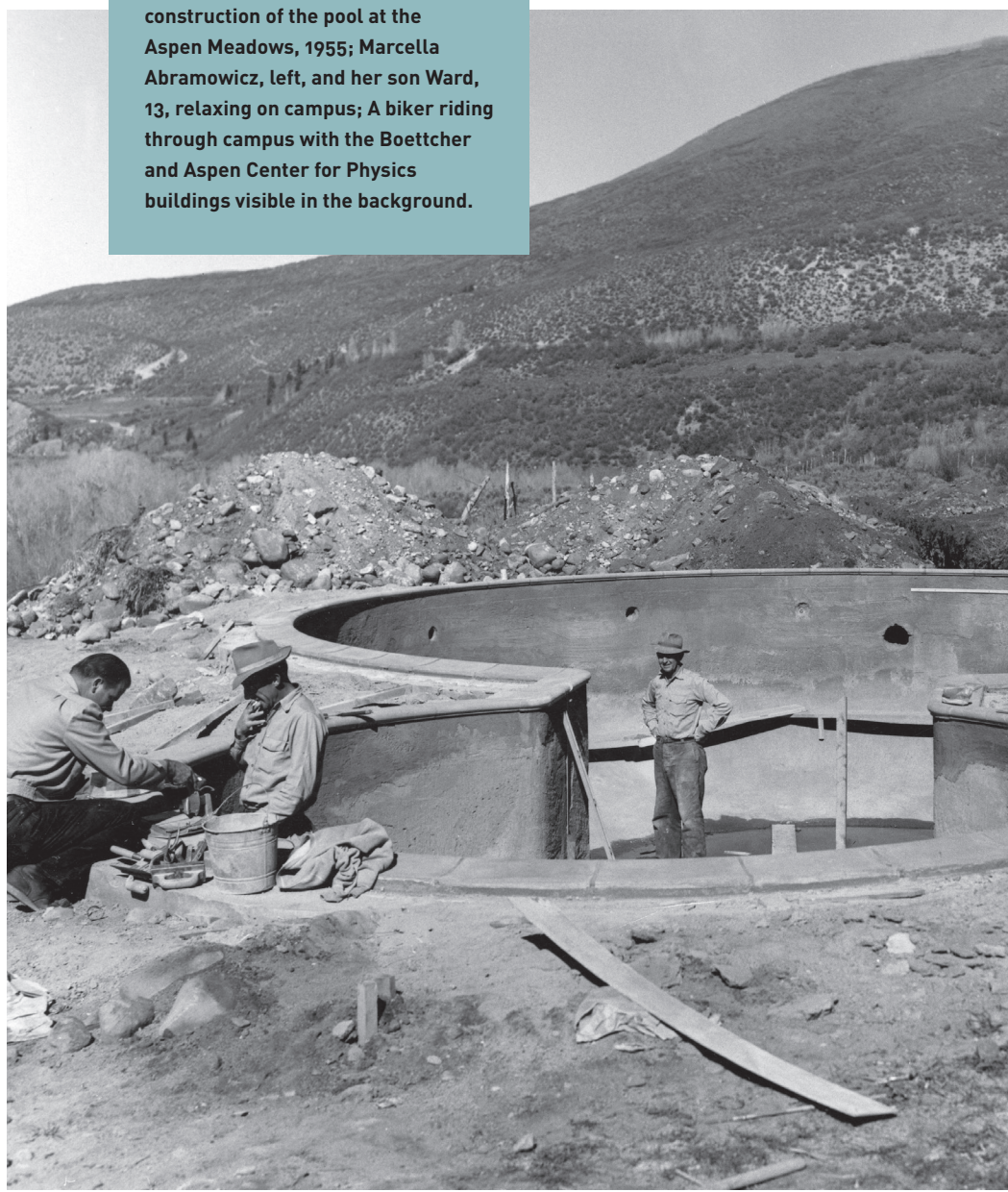
In 1984, Savannah Limited Partnership, run by developer Mohamed Hadid, had snagged a creditor's rights to several Aspen properties that were in foreclosure — beating Trump, who had a contract to buy the land from the bank that was repossessing it.

Ultimately, the future preservation of the campus landed at the feet of the Aspen City Council in the early 1990s when it approved the Aspen Meadows Specially Planned Area.

"It went on for months," said former City Councilman Michael Gassman, who voted in favor of the master plan. "They were very contentious meetings."

The SPA secured a permanent home for three major educational and cultural nonprofits that began there in the 1950s and '60s — The Aspen Center for Physics, the Music Associates of Aspen and The Aspen Institute.

BELOW, CLOCKWISE: The construction of the pool at the Aspen Meadows, 1955; Marcella Abramowicz, left, and her son Ward, 13, relaxing on campus; A biker riding through campus with the Boettcher and Aspen Center for Physics buildings visible in the background.



The council voted 4-1 approving the SPA, with Frank Peters as the lone dissenter.

As the owner of the 80-acre property, Hadid was at the council table asking for development rights for single-family homes.

"When Hadid was trying to ransom the Aspen Meadows, we said, 'We are going to master plan it,'" Peters said. "I think it shocked Hadid and the nonprofits."

The consortium of nonprofits, Savannah Limited Partnership and council haggled back and forth for years, with a compromise finally reached that Hadid could build three single-family homes on the south end of the race track, now named "Amy's Meadow," along with other residential development.

The nonprofits got their land at a nominal price, which secured their future and created a campus that is world-renown as a cultural mecca.

When it was time to vote on the plan, Peters said he remembers looking around the council chambers from the dais and seeing the audience made up of residents, all of the nonprofits and their lawyers — the "real estate and cultural powerhouses," as he described them.

"I just could not blanking do it," he said of voting in favor of the plan. "Compromises were made that I didn't agree with."

In the end, though, the SPA locked in what is arguably the most significant piece of post-war Aspen history and the birthplace of Paepcke's Aspen Idea of nurturing the mind, body and spirit.

"I'm glad the council halted that ransom play and protected the public's interest," Peters said. "There was enough on the table that everyone got something."

John Sarpa, who represented Hadid, recalled that the nonprofits on the campus, which also included the International Design Conference, were looking for places to move, and had been at odds in trying to save the languishing property.

Anderson summoned him from his Washington, D.C., office to the Meadows shortly after Hadid's group assumed ownership of the land.

Anderson had all the players from those nonprofits in the room when Sarpa arrived.

"I noticed there was a fair amount of animosity among them, and an hour or two into the meeting someone pulled up the Aspen Idea book. 'Do you even know what this is?' I said, 'No sir, I do not,'" Sarpa told the Times in 2019. "He threw it across the table and said, 'you read that damn book and come back tomorrow and we'll talk' and we ended the meeting right there."

"I took my little book home and I read it and I went, 'Oh my God,' because what they had obviously was already there and it was in jeopardy," Sarpa said. "But overnight I sure got it. It was like the lights went on and this was a whole lot more than a piece of real estate."

He said he convinced Hadid and his investors, who planned on building high-density homes there, to give the land back to the nonprofits for \$10.

However the SPA came to be, Peters said it was a politically charged time as Benedict was threatening to move the music tent to Snowmass and developers were asking for too much, in his opinion.

"What was on the table was the 10 years I aged when I heard Fritz said we'll move to Snowmass. ... I was crushed by that and angry," he said, adding the developers' attire also bothered him as it reminded

him of the rich he was exposed to growing up in D.C. "I really, really hate tasseled loafers."

Regardless, under the SPA, each nonprofit identified their expected needs, and approval to develop new facilities was granted.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE FROM THE PAST

Curtis, the land-use planner representing the Institute for the new Bayer building, said the SPA allowed 60 acres to be subdivided into three pods so each organization had its own distinctive area.

But it was already, in a sense, planned that way by Bayer and Benedict.

"What's impressive is that the basic concept is still here: you've got three nodes and Bayer and Fritz set the template in the '50s," he said. "You've got the lodging, you've got the academics and the conference area with the tent and a node with Boettcher and physics (buildings)."

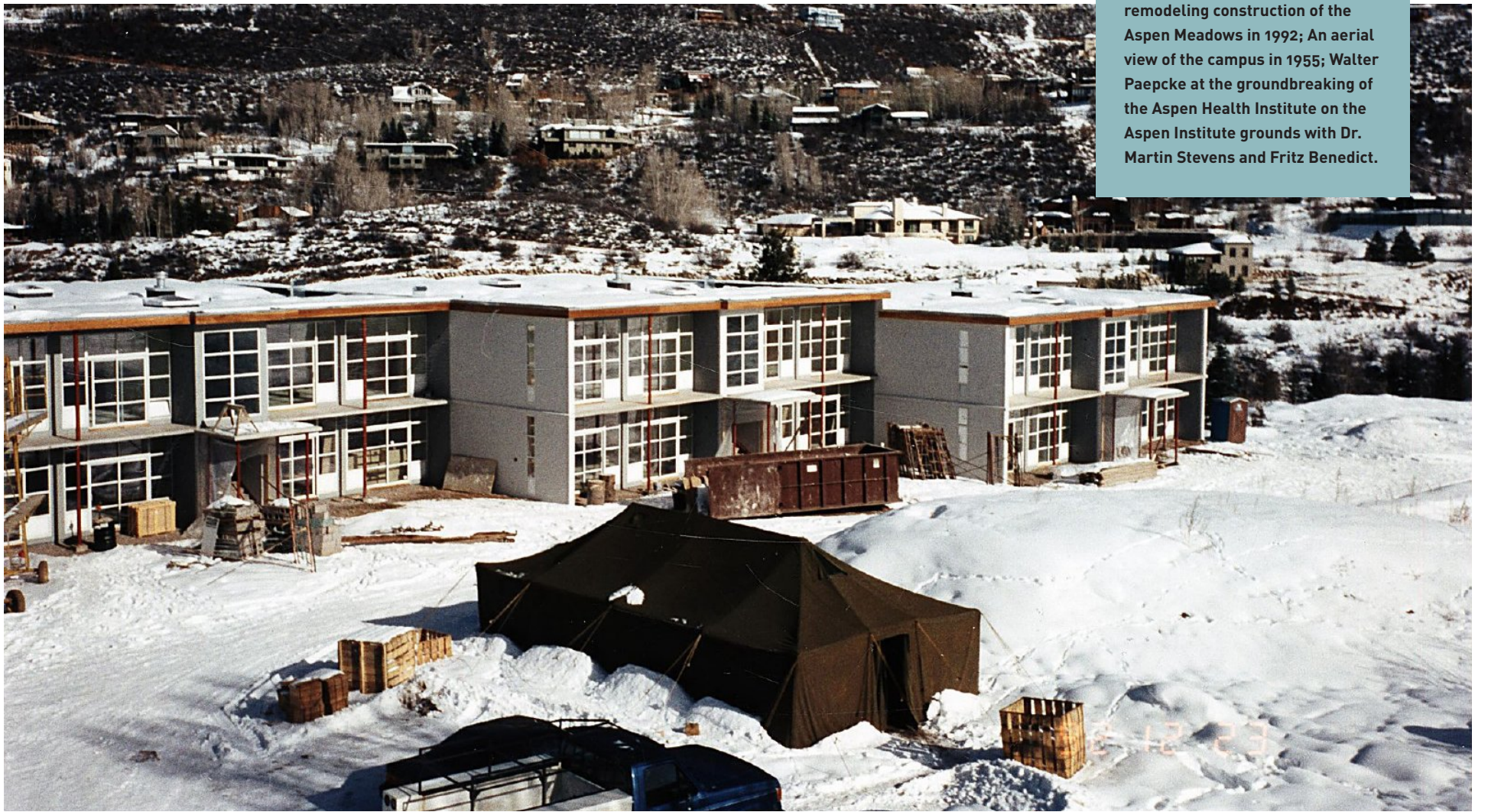
The SPA also allowed the nonprofits a certain amount of development rights that they could act on immediately.

Thirdly, it created a check and balance system as all of the nonprofits have to agree to any new development on the campus.

"The '92 plan created the rebirth that you see today," Curtis said. "I think the property looks better physically today than it ever did."

The Institute had used all of its development rights under the SPA when it recently built the Albright Pavilion, according to Amy Simon, the city's historic preservation officer.

New development has occurred over the years, like the Doerr-Hosier building.



BELOW, CLOCKWISE: The remodeling construction of the Aspen Meadows in 1992; An aerial view of the campus in 1955; Walter Paepcke at the groundbreaking of the Aspen Health Institute on the Aspen Institute grounds with Dr. Martin Stevens and Fritz Benedict.



City Council this past February approved the 7,536-square-foot Resnick Center for Herbert Bayer Studies, along with a renovation of the adjacent Boettcher Seminar Building.

The center will display, collect, archive, preserve and educate on Bayer's works and influence in the Bauhaus movement, as well as the development of the Aspen Meadows campus.

As part of the Bayer Center approval, the Boettcher building will be historically designated.

Situated on the southeastern side of the campus, Boettcher was built in 1975 by Bayer and Benedict.

BUILDING THE BAYER WAY

Land-use approval was a bit simpler when Paepcke and Bayer began developing the campus in the 1950s. The first Bayer-designed Aspen Institute building is known today as the Koch Building.

Most of the buildings and works of art that define the campus were constructed from 1953

to 1960, the year when the Paepcke Auditorium was built as a memorial following his death. Bayer's architecture of simple rectilinear and geometric shapes, flat roofs, cinder blocks and the use of primary colors, white and grays, still dominate the landscape throughout the campus.

Bayer's landscape architecture and earthwork is just as notable, with Anderson Park connecting the Aspen Meadows campus to the music tent.

The use of streams, which serve as irrigation ditches and meander throughout the property, along with earth mounds with panoramic views of the surrounding mountains provide a place for contemplation, reflection and serenity.

"The campus is a total work of art," said Aspen Institute President and CEO Dan Porterfield at the Feb. 25 meeting, referring to the Bauhaus concept.

Paepcke founded the Institute in 1949 with the goal of creating a forum where business leaders could reflect on the intellectual, ethical

and spiritual values, which might benefit their companies, and ideally society, according to Simon.

It's where the Aspen Ideas Festival is held and a place where world leaders and dignitaries gather.

But for the majority of the year, it's a campus open to the public with Bauhaus architecture dotting the landscape with Bayer's influence.

"He felt strongly about having these spaces that would encourage interaction and the exchange of ideas whether they be inside or outside and that was such an important aspect of his earthworks and outdoor sculptures," said Lissa Ballinger, art curator at the Aspen Institute. "This would have been more than he could have ever imagined, however he was specific in everything that he said and wrote about maintaining things on a human scale."

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