



## Ivor Cunningham - Eric Lyons & Partners

Pioneer landscape architect.

Ivor Cunningham's name will always be linked to that of Eric Lyons, whom he joined in 1955, and whose practice he continued after Lyons' death in 1980.

After Dartford Grammar School and Medway School of Art, Cunningham studied at the AA, and gained experience in landscape architecture in The Netherlands and Sweden. He worked with Sylvia Crowe and Brenda Colvin, bringing to the Lyons practice the knowledge and talent for layouts and planting that helped to set the Span housing developments on which they worked in a league of

their own. 'An important aspect of landscape design is to satisfy the functions of space; to express or underline certain aspects and even on occasion to obscure some of these functions,' a promotional brochure for the Eric Lyons Cunningham Partnership explained. 'The spaces in between the buildings are not left to chance, and this integrated design process leads to a cohesive outcome where the buildings help create the settings and the settings enhance the buildings? Our aspiration is to create places that people will enjoy.' Preben Jakobsen, who joined the practice in 1961, contributed detailed planting plans to Cunningham's layouts.

Span went into eclipse with the withdrawal of GLC funding for New Ash Green in 1969, but returned in 1976. Lyons took time out to act as RIBA president 1975-77, while Cunningham carried on the practice, which formed a temporary alliance with HT Cadbury-Brown and John Metcalfe as executants for the World's End scheme.

Cunningham was largely responsible for the final Span commissions in Blackheath; the large housing estates in Westbourne Road and Delhi Street, Islington; and for Mallard Place, Teddington, completed in 1984 - all with pitched roofs and more traditional elevations. This late work demonstrated what Cunningham called his 'Damascene moment' shared with Lyons, when they worked on a holiday town at Vilamora in the Algarve (1971). 'They thought [it] such fun they wanted to repeat the vibrant designs in Britain,' a Historic Housing Design Award in 2005 stated, adding: 'Anyone seeking an irresistible higher density model need look no further.'

Cunningham also designed a training complex at Warren House, Kingston Hill for ICI and many other projects before closing the practice in 2003.

Ebullience and theatricality with a social mission were qualities that Lyons and Cunningham shared, and which enlivened the office at East Molesey, with its close connection to family, garden and river. Ivor Cunningham died on 15 March, aged 78.

Obituary credit: [www.architectsjournal.co.uk](http://www.architectsjournal.co.uk)