

# Observation for Design Online Seminar

8 Weeks Starting Monday, April 5, 2021

If you think back over all your experiences in school, anywhere from kindergarten all the way up to graduate school, you probably won't remember every having a lesson on how to be a good observer or how to use your physical senses effectively. This is a bit funny since observation is a critical part of both the scientific method and all professional design practices. Whether training scientists, architects, engineers, or Permaculture designers, part of the standard set of instructions is to always remember that good observation is critical. But then no training in how to do that is ever provided. The assumption seems to be that people are just naturally able to be good observers and that they can simply learn to use their senses optimally without any extra training.

As modern research has begun to discover, however, this assumption is not even remotely true. Observation is a skill that has to be actively cultivated in order to become powerful and effective. If you want to build your observational muscles they have to be exercised. Observation is one of those skills, just like playing sports or playing the piano, that only comes through consistent and focused exercise.



And just like playing the piano, observation isn't something that you can learn only through study, reading, or listening to lectures. It requires daily practice over time to develop, and an experienced teacher to help build good habits.

Join Alan Booker as he walks you through his new book *Observation for Design*, which he is currently in the final stages of developing. Over the course of this 8-week online seminar, you will learn how to be a powerful observer and work through a series of daily field exercises that will take your design skills to the next level.

## *Class Description*

As Alan trained numerous professional designers over the past two decades, he began to increasingly realize that very few of them were naturally very skilled at observation. The ones who were typically had one thing in common: they were either trained naturalists or personally spent a great deal of time in nature. It turns out that the complex and dynamic patterns of natural ecosystems provide both the sensory inputs and the real-time feedback that create the possibility of becoming a powerful observer.

The other thing that Alan kept on finding was that the best designers were invariably also some of the best observers. Through his training as a tracker and naturalist, Alan was aware of the techniques and exercises that helped people become better observers, so he started to incorporate them into his design classes where possible. This certainly helped, but most design classes don't have the time or space to put enough emphasis on observation skills.

As a result, Alan decided to create this 8-week program of daily guided practice to help professional designers who wanted to dramatically deepen their skills. The result is the forthcoming book *Observation for Design*, which walks you through the process step by step.

As he is completing development of the book, Alan has decided to offer this class to a limited number of interested students. The class will meet via video conference once a week for 8 sessions. Between sessions, students will work through 5 daily field exercises that are designed to systematically improve their observation skills. Alan will take the feedback and comments from this pilot group and use them to help refine and improve the materials before the final book is released.

Topics we will cover include:

- Why observation doesn't turn out to be as simple as it seems and why observation is so important to a good designer
- How to do a number of simple exercises that greatly increase your sensory perceptions
- How to develop powerful pattern recognition skills and search images that enable you to see things you missed before
- Why mapping and drawing are such powerful tools when learning to observe
- How to identify and correct your own blind-spots and perceptual ruts
- How to keep a daily observation journal that will begin to teach you how to see the subtle interactions between elements of the landscape that almost everyone else misses
- Why learning to observe how patterns change over time is so critical to good design
- How to keep your mind from falling so far into analysis mode that you can no longer function as an effective observer
- Why the skills of observation learned through nature are applicable to any kind of design, even design of abstract systems like community structures or business processes

This will be a great class to get you outside and actively engaging your senses, learning to see patterns that you have completely missed before.

### *Who is this Course For?*

This course is ideal for:

- Permaculture Designers
- Architects
- Landscape Architects
- Engineers and Scientists
- Any Design Professional who would benefit from better observational skills



### *Time Commitment*

In addition to the online class time, this course requires about 30 minutes of field work 5 times each week for the entire 8 weeks. Without the daily practice, you won't get the intended benefits from this course. Please consider joining the class only if you are currently able to put in the time and effort required to complete the daily assignments and feel that it will not present any undue stress.

## *Location*

This class will be hosted online via Zoom Meeting. Recordings of each class will be made available for students who are unable to join the class live.

## *Instructor*

All sessions will be taught by Alan Booker, the author of the *Observation for Design* workbook that will be the text for this course.

## *Dates & Time*

The class will have 8 weekly meetings running 8:00pm - 9:30 pm Central Time on Monday nights. The introductory session will be on Monday, April 5, 2021 and the course will wrap up on May 24, 2021.

## *Cost and Registration*

The course fee is \$350.00 and includes a printed copy of the workbook materials mailed to you before the first online session.



Registration for the course is open through Sunday, March 21, 2021. Since this is a pilot class, enrollment is limited. Members of Permies.com interested in registering should send a “Purple Mooseage” to Alan Booker for more details.