

BOOK REVIEW

ROBERT JENSEN, ed. 2023. **FROM THE GROUND UP, conversations with Wes Jackson.** (ISBN-13: 978-1-5179-1390-4, pbk; 978-1-73541-365-5, pbk). New Perennials Publishing, Editor, Bill Vitek, Director, the New Perennials Project; Scholar in Residence, Middlebury College, Professor Emeritus, Clarkson University. (**Orders:** <https://www.newperennialspublishing.org/>). free download, 72 pp , 6" × 9".

Foreword by Linda Ronstadt. The book narrative is a series of five conversations with Wes Jackson. Questions are posed and Jackson answers. The First Conversations is about *Intellectual Grounding* that focuses on his schooling beginning with a two-room rural school house to his doctorate in genetics. He tries to dispel the notion he is a genius but his thinking about the importance of soil and conservation issues has always been “outside the box.” There is an appreciation of growing up on a farm in rural Topeka, Kansas, and the importance of a work ethic. This topical section is worth reading to appreciate the beauty of the tallgrass prairie landscape in the Flint Hills of Kansas.

The Second Conversation is *Respecting Your Tools*. Educational experiences mostly at Kansas Wesleyan University, University of Kansas, Sacramento State University in California and establishing The Land Institute highlight this phase of Wes Jackson’s life story. Wes had always been a builder with his hands, tools, and a sense of place that resulted in building his home and outbuildings that eventually resulted in The Land Institute.

Conversation Three, *Mad About Science*. Here one learns science does not have all the answers to complex social problems. Science fails to ask hard questions about technological fixes in our modern world. The four pages of color plates show former activities and building and grounds since The Land Institute was established in the early 1970s. This section includes an explanation of crop diversity and species diversity and the importance of perennial polycultures versus monocultures of wheat, corn, and soybeans found on modern farms of today. This harkens back to the 1930s and his parents truck farm that produced 25 different vegetables that were grown for consumption and sale.

Conversation Four, *Methodism to My Madness*, or why is Wes a 5/8s Christian. This section of the book will test your belief system. Wes grew up in the Methodist church, taught Sunday school, asked the tough questions about religion and church doctrine and teachings in the Bible. His short section on the Nicene Creed is worth reading to get his assessment of the contents.

Conversation Five, *The Portrait of an Artist as an Old Man*. Here Wes discusses the importance of scrapyards, junkyards, and creativity. It will make you think about how to build things without much money. The last sentence of the book is something to ponder, “We can’t avoid being participants in creating the Creation.”

About the authors:

Quoted from the book. “**Wes Jackson**, is cofounder and president of The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. He is the author and editor of numerous books, including *Hogs Are Up Stories of the Land with Digressions* and *New Roots for Agriculture*. **Robert Jensen** is professor emeritus in the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of many books, including *The Restless and Relentless Mind of Wes Jackson: Searching for Sustainability and Plain Radicals: Living, Loving, and Learning to Leave the Plant Gracefully*. Jackson and Jensen.”

—Harold W. Keller, Professor Emeritus, Botanist and Mycologist,
Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.