

It would be hard to overestimate the changes that public spaces have undergone

in New York City in the four decades since Thomas Balsley, FASLA, founded his landscape architecture firm. The once-gritty urban realm is now marbled with city-sponsored green streets and bike lanes, and the era of modernist plazas has blown by like the wind that swept them free of activity. With the development of new parks in almost every borough as well as the revival of existing urban parks, Gotham is in the midst of a landscape renaissance, and Thomas Balsley Associates (TBA) is behind the design of great swaths of acreage.

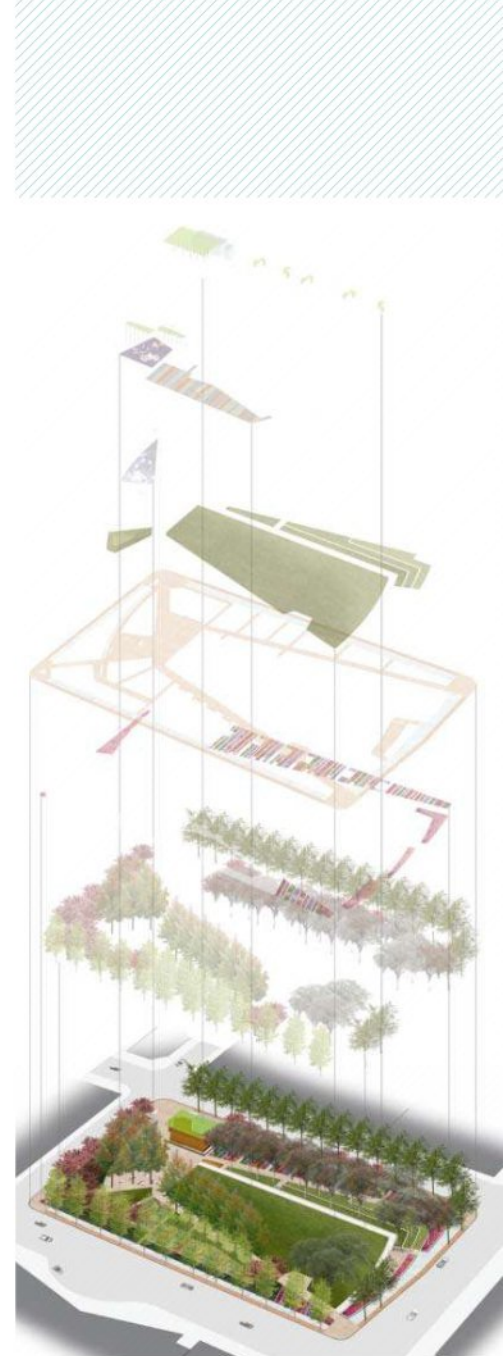
Early in his career, Balsley would weigh the importance of many small, local parks in the urban fabric against Frederick Law Olmsted's iconic Greensward Plan with its grand meadows and forestlike rambles. These days, when his office tallies up the amount of parkland it has shaped in New York City since Balsley hung out his shingle in 1970—waterfronts, pocket parks, public plazas—it nearly equals the size of Central Park.

However, TBA's work isn't limited to the five boroughs. The firm has created plans for places as far afield as Doha, Qatar, and Seoul, South Korea. And stateside, cities such as Baltimore, Dallas, Cleveland,

Tampa, and Denver have turned to Balsley for help in fashioning green space and reviving urban cores. Over the past few years, the office has been building a robust civic portfolio—and it's reaching a critical mass.

Balsley is an expert at creating intimate moments within the city grid. His practice was built on advocating for and designing (or rather redesigning) bonus plazas—those parcels of land required to be set aside by developers as public space. More often than not, they exist as bleak, underused wastelands in the shadows of high-rises, but when optimized by designs like his, they provide a green respite and an outdoor seat.

"A little piazza is where someone can go to on the weekend or after work or during work or for breakfast or coffee," Balsley says, passionately listing off uses. "It's a place to get off the street, like in Italy or France. And people remember those little piazzas. They don't know the name. It doesn't really matter. The point is, they got off the beaten path, they sat down, and they watched the world go by. So I make the case sometimes that these little spaces could even be more important than Central Park in touching our daily lives and defining our urban experience."



TBA's projects in New York City, such as Gantry Plaza State Park in Long Island City and Riverside Park South along the Hudson River side of Manhattan, deploy the lessons learned from small parks across a larger canvas. Balsley takes design cues from existing bits of the built environment—a crumbling pier, railroad tracks, a skyline. But his thinking about how people act in public space is indebted to the sociologist William Whyte's studies of New York City's parks and plazas. It was Whyte who famously stated the now seemingly obvious aphorism, "People tend to sit most where there are places to sit." As such, TBA creates places for people to gather, play, walk, and take in a view. Terraces, lawns, and footpaths combine with extensive seating areas and shade structures.

Perhaps as an outgrowth of working within the constraints of Manhattan's bonus plazas and trying to make as much as possible in a tight space, Balsley's work is filled with design moments and activities. And, at times, his schemes teeter on the brink of overprogramming. For example, Main Street Garden Park, which opened in downtown Dallas in late 2009, fits, among other things, a café pavilion, a dog park, a stage, a burbling fountain, a

ABOVE LEFT

TBA's Main Street Garden Park restores a previously ragged edge of downtown Dallas.

ABOVE RIGHT

Multiple programs—a café, dog park, art installations—ring the park's main lawn.

IMAGE CREDITS

Craig D. Blackmon, left; Courtesy Thomas Balsley Associates, right



LEFT

Junior landscape architect Chris Barnes (standing) and project manager Marc Delouvrier pore over new designs in the firm's New York City office.

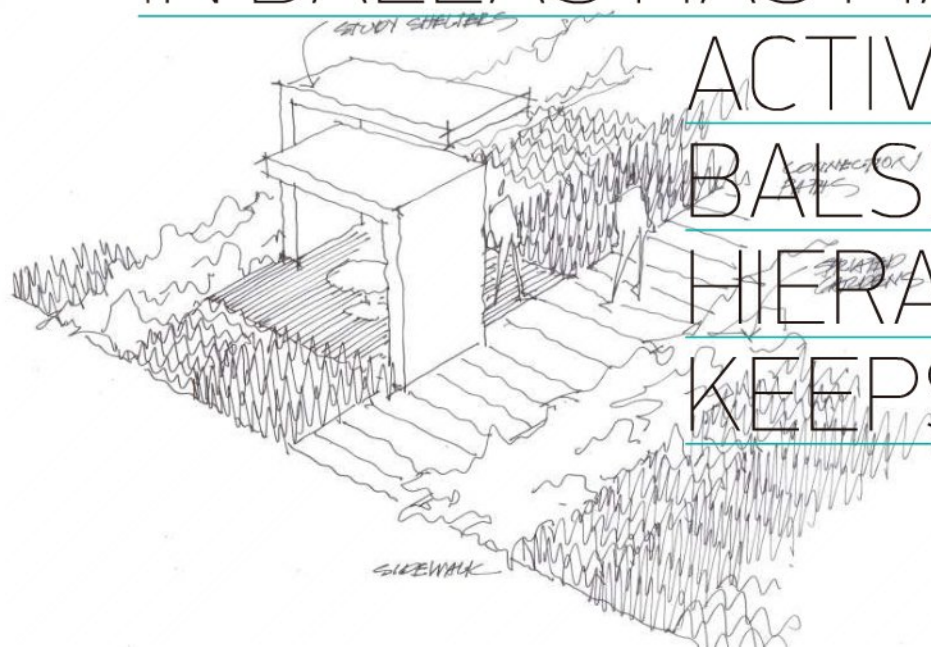
BELOW

Study shelters appear in a sketch of Main Street Garden Park.

IMAGE CREDITS

Patrick Pantano, top;
Courtesy Thomas Balsley
Associates, bottom

BALSLEY'S MAIN STREET GARDEN PARK IN DALLAS HAS MANY PREDEFINED ACTIVITIES, BUT BALSLEY SAYS THE HIERARCHY OF SPACES KEEPS IT FLEXIBLE.





LEFT

Good sight lines in Main Street Garden Park, far left, not only offer a feeling of security, but knit the greenspace into the urban fabric. A playful water feature, near left, appeals to the diverse constituency that visits the park.

BELOW

A parkwide Wi-Fi connection makes the bright green “study shelters” ideal for a working lunch.

IMAGE CREDITS

Craig D. Blackmon

children’s play area, and sculptural “study shelters” in a 1.75-acre block. (TBA teamed with local ALB + Blair Architects and landscape architecture firm Linda Tycher and Associates to build the park for the city of Dallas.) The dense programming is a direct response to the complex urban condition. It’s an effort to revive civic space. In November 2010, Willis Winters of the Dallas Parks and Recreation Department sat on a panel with Balsley at the 2010 ASLA Annual Meeting and EXPO in Washington, D.C. Cityparksblog.org quoted the discussion. “Main Street Garden served as the reason to revitalize the buildings surrounding the area,” Winters said.

The park, which replaces a parking lot, sits within Dallas’s Harwood Historic District, a collection of commercial buildings that date from the late 1800s through the 1950s. As is the case with many older downtowns, city officials and developers are hoping to redevelop the area. Landmarks surround the park—the Dallas Municipal Building, the Texas Commerce Tower, and the currently shuttered Dallas Statler Hilton, the chain’s midcentury modern flagship—but within just a few blocks, the urban core gives way to vacant lots. Rather than limit the use of the space, Balsley contends, predefined activities make the place usable for a diverse population.

“To a certain extent you can say that the defining of those spaces and uses removes some flexibility from the park,” Balsley says. “However, I mitigate that danger because I create a hierarchy of spaces, because we can’t predict what’s going to happen 10 years from now. There needs to be that big central space that can be anything to anybody at any given time. So, that flexibility is built in. And then the creation of these secondary and tertiary spaces offers more human experiences. I feel, to create that more human experience, you really have to literally define those more intimate spaces.”





THIS PAGE

On the far west side of Manhattan, Riverside Park South, above, is a green oasis, despite the looming highway. TBA's design transformed a derelict waterfront filled with crumbling piers, top right, into a rich ecosystem planted with grasses and crossed with boardwalks, bottom right.

OPPOSITE PAGE

A large esplanade and several smaller platforms jut out over the water, making reference to the working piers that once lined the shore.

IMAGE CREDITS

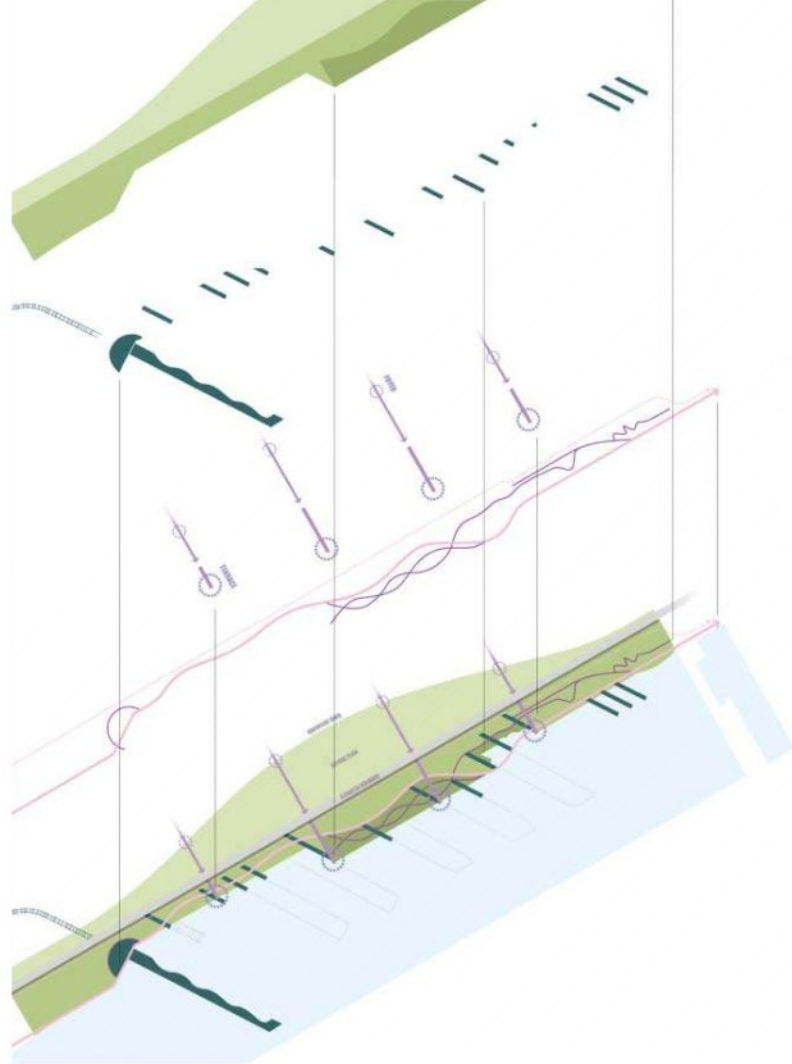
David Quinones, top left; Courtesy Thomas Balsley Associates, top right and opposite; Michael Koontz, Thomas Balsley Associates, bottom

Case in point, on a chilly November morning, white-collar residents who live in the lofts recently constructed nearby bring their dogs to the Main Street Garden Park's central lawn. Moms sit with strollers and lattes by the coffee kiosk (a boxy, lime-green structure surrounded by an ipe deck and sheltered by a dramatic shade canopy), and a few homeless men sit on the concrete seat walls that form lawn terraces, quietly warming themselves in the sun before shuffling off to another perch. Most surprising is that people are working on laptops. A dozen "study shelters" sit among grasses and azalea borders. Each small, bright-green shade structure brackets a metal café table and two chairs and, because the park has WiFi, provides neighbors and students a coveted Internet connection. (Outposts of Texas A&M University Commerce and the University of North Texas are housed across the street.) Here, Balsley's design, combined with technology, points to a redefined future of democratic public space: parks that are acutely aware of the pluralistic needs of the people they serve. "It may sound like we're throwing everything and the kitchen sink in there, but I don't think we're doing that," he notes. "We're thinking long and hard to make sure that we're reaching out to the different constituents. I don't think anyone is going to walk up into that park and feel like it's not for them."

Balsley believes that parks fundamentally express our democratic ideals. "They reflect how we feel about each other and how a city—or a municipality or a state—feels about the unspoken promises made to us, its citizens. They give the terms of the kind of quality of life that we should expect from that entity."

In New York City, Riverside Park South illustrates the complexities that come with democratic design. The park is a collaboration





with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and part of a 65-acre redevelopment that was first approved in 1991. The first phase of the project opened in 2001, and the past decade incrementally ushered in four of the proposed seven phases, with phase four finished in 2010. The park is a critical link between Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's 1875 landscape and the waterside promenade, designed by Gilmore D. Clarke and Clinton Lloyd under the administration of Robert Moses. The first piece of park along the river since 1930, the greenway covers 23 acres of waterfront from 59th Street to 72nd Street, but to reach the extensive network of sinuous and interwoven paved paths, wooden boardwalks, and overlooks, you have to pass under the elevated West Side Highway. Plans are in the works to remove the rumbling and fuming roadway and bury it, thus linking the parkland to the lineup of high-end apartment buildings that look out over the Hudson. Extell Development, which funded the Riverside Park South project, is pushing forward on hiding the highway underground, but that plan is wrapped up in a web of federal and municipal decision making and faces uncertain funding. Balsley strategically designed the park to accommodate eventual demolition and development, even if it takes another two decades.

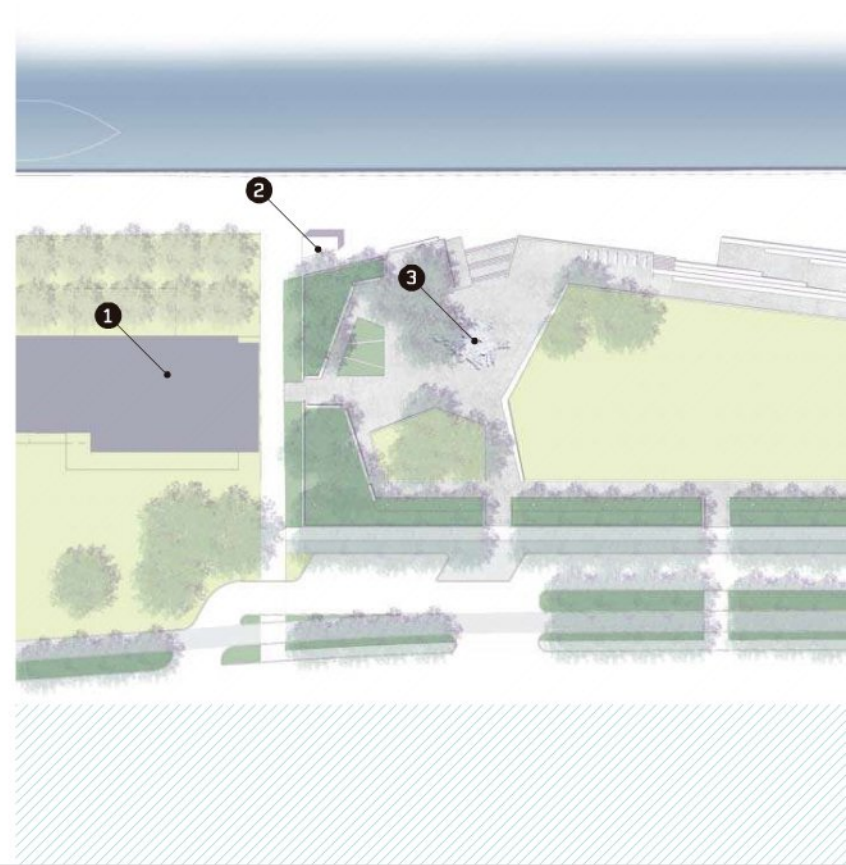
Meanwhile, locals vie for the coveted lounge chairs that dot the esplanade—some decadently arranged as if on the deck of one of the cruise ships that dock just south of the park. Balsley's design references the site's old piers (the remains of which are still evident) with a new brick-paved pier edged by a subtle scallop that reaches more than 800 feet into the Hudson and with several more modest wood-planked decks that jut out over the water. True to Balsley's desire to make places for people to sit and watch the world go by, each small deck is enclosed in a

BALSLEY'S
WATERFRONT
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sleek steel railing, and the intimate space is just large enough for a lounge and several high stools that are cantilevered from a countertop built into the protective rail. More industrial past is referenced in the wooden boardwalks that are edged with railroad ties and native grasses. In an effort to restore the Hudson River ecosystem, TBA reconstructed a marshy wetland by preserving a rocky inlet and planting native sedge along the shoreline. Also preserved is a black steel gantry that once lifted freight in and out of Manhattan. Its hulking outline, rising from the water, is a historic reminder and visual folly. There's even a vintage locomotive that, poised as sculpture, forms the focal point of the paved plaza at 62nd Street.

Adrian Benepe, Honorary ASLA, the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation commissioner, was instrumental in the park's development (it was his idea to install the locomotive), and he's also an enthusiastic user. He runs and cycles through it often, zipping down the dedicated bike path tucked under the highway. "I love [the landscape's] pastoral quality—the grasses, *Rosa rugosa* roses, the boardwalk," Benepe says. "It's amazing how that can take you away from the noise of the city. Once a park replaced the rail yard, it immediately attracted wildlife. Crickets and song





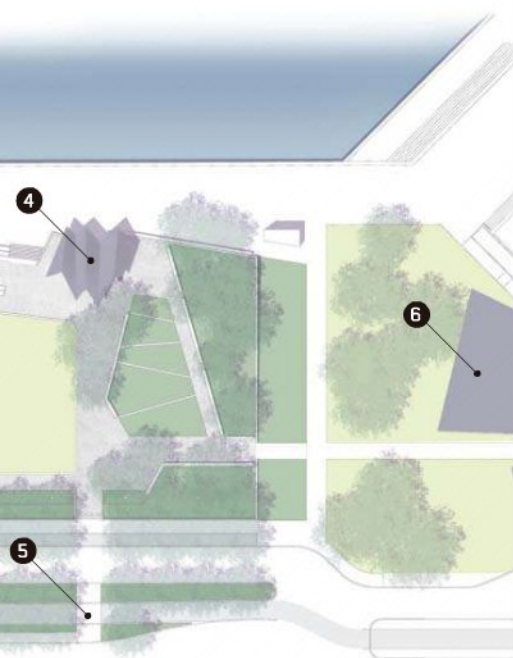
sparrows—a kind of bird associated with beach meadows—you really don't hear that anywhere else in Manhattan."

Over on the industrially frayed banks of the East River in Queens, Gantry Plaza State Park mirrors many of the design approaches at Riverside Park South. Both projects were developed over the same time period and, taken together, form the vocabulary that underpins TBA's work—historical nods, ecological sensitivity, esplanades, and, of course, places to sit: beaches, lounges, seat walls, chess tables, and bright red Adirondack chairs. Undertaken as part of the 26-acre Queens West Open Space Master Plan (the client is the Queens West Development Corporation), the first phase of Gantry Plaza State Park, located in the middle of the site, opened in 1999; the second phase to the north opened in 2003, and the last phase, Hunters Point South Park, is scheduled to open in 2012. Wrapping the southern edge of the Long Island City shoreline, this landscape is a collaboration between TBA and Weiss/Manfredi with the engineering expertise of Arup. The project, designed for the New York City Economic Development Corporation, is an ambitious combination of real estate development and environmentally minded infrastructure. The park encompasses 11 acres of the Queens West site. "The whole master plan takes into account what uses go together well. [Balsley's] taken very detailed care of each of the individual elements. He's created many small parks within the larger park," explains Arup's project manager, Matt Best.

Some of those uses include a recreational artificial turf field and an intensive marshland habitat reconstruction (plans include biofiltering plantings such as ferns, rushes, and asters); play areas and a dog run; Weiss/Manfredi's architectural pavilion (a sweeping folly that serves as park offices, a concession stand, and a shade structure for the water taxi dock), and the pathways that reconnect Queens residents to the water. Unlike Riverside Park South, where the luxury Trump Place high-rises overlook the parkland, here the hope is to build housing for a variety of tax brackets on the currently light-industrial blocks next to the river, a prospect that raises Balsley's spirits.

"A diverse constituency is one of the most critical elements in the sustained success of a park," he explains. "If any space is designed too much to the needs of a narrowly defined constituency, the public will come, and then they will go. I love the mix of the intense urban and the social sustainability and the environmental sustainability coming together."

Balsley's ability to engage a community (with all its varied needs) is on display at the West Shore Park in Baltimore's Inner Harbor. TBA and a local landscape architecture firm, Horde Coplan and Macht, Inc., were commissioned by the city of Baltimore. The



SITE PLAN

IMAGE CREDIT

Courtesy Thomas Balsley Associates

1 VISITOR CENTER

2 CAFE KIOSK

3 INTERACTIVE FOUNTAIN PLAZA

4 OVERLOOK/STAGE CANOPY

5 BIKEWAY

6 SCIENCE CENTER

OPPOSITE TOP

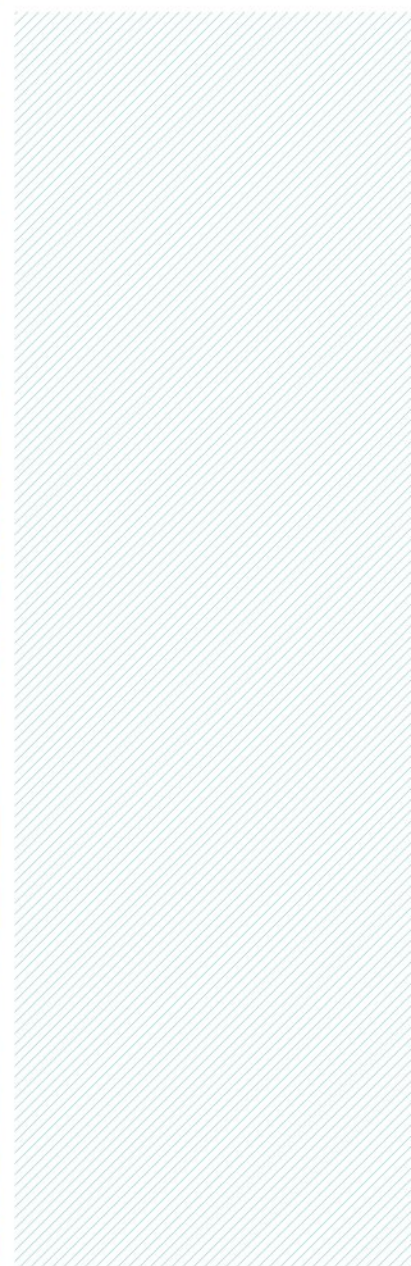
The Baltimore Area Visitors Center and the city's downtown backdrop the West Shore Park's red oaks and water feature.

ABOVE

Still hands on after 40 years of practice, Balsley consults with senior associate landscape architect Dale Schafer, ASLA.

IMAGE CREDITS

Patrick Ross, opposite top; Patrick Pantano, above





BALSLEY SAYS THAT LITTLE PARKS CAN SOMETIMES BE MORE IMPORTANT TO USERS THAN LARGE PARKS.

OPPOSITE

In view of Baltimore's harbor and the colorful facade of the National Aquarium, local kids splash in the TBA-designed fountain.

ABOVE

Benches set among Natchez crape myrtles, black-eyed Susans, and tall grasses are a tranquil respite from the active promenade.

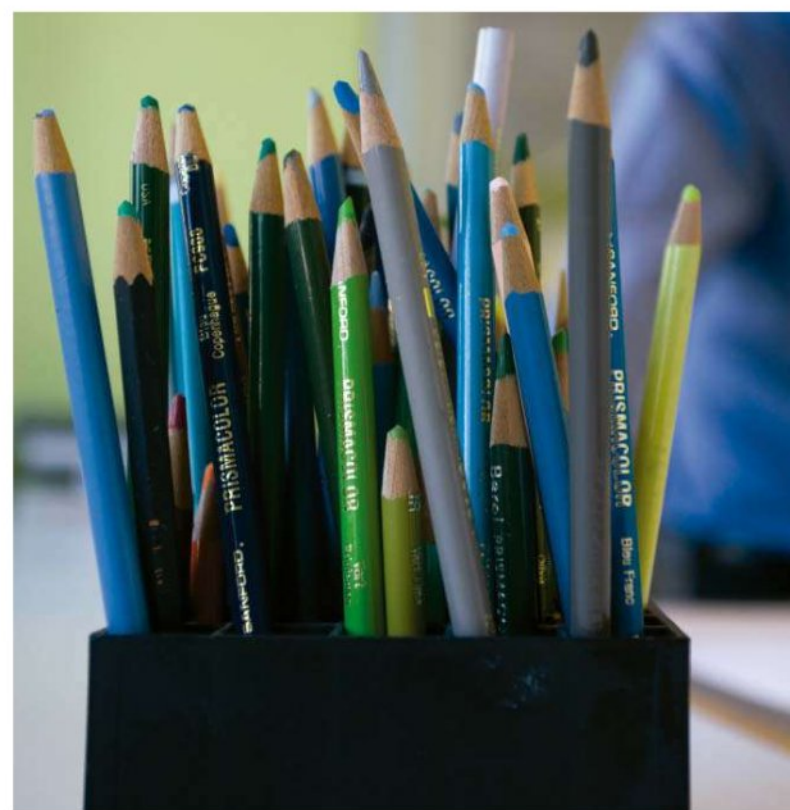
IMAGE CREDITS

Thomas Balsley, Thomas Balsley Associates, opposite and above; Patrick Pantano, right

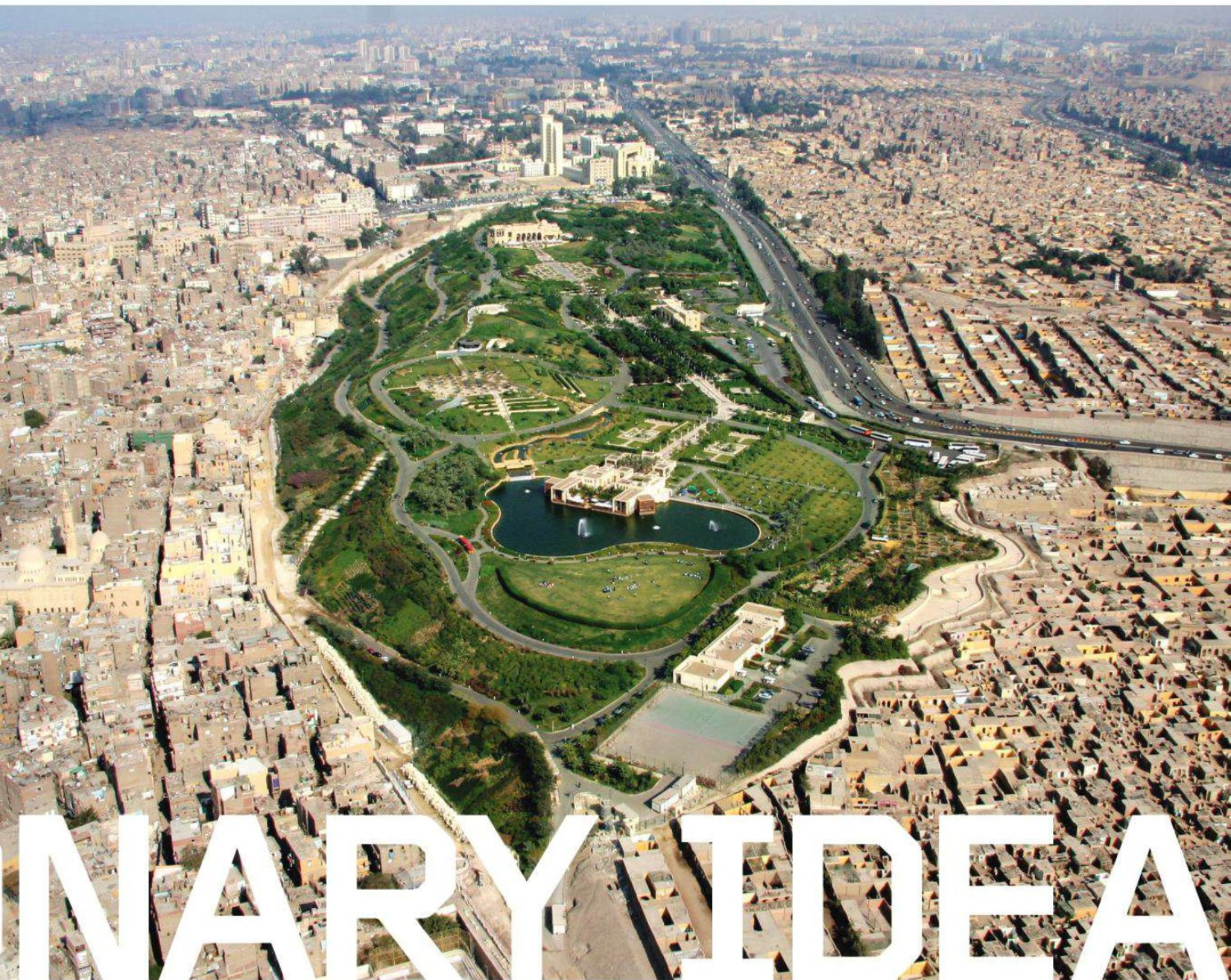
2.5-acre park they developed has transformed what was essentially a bus drop-off squeezed between the Maryland Science Center and the Baltimore Area Visitors Center into a space for civic performance. The park sits three feet higher than the brick-lined promenade, and the grade change allows for an elevated view of Baltimore's quirky waterfront skyline—the stocky World Trade Center tower, the National Aquarium's angular and colorful facade, and the tall masts of the USS Constellation. Built as part of a 30-year redevelopment of the industrial harbor into a tourist destination, Balsley's design, which replaces a parking lot, is a place for both locals and visitors to pause amid the promenade's renewed bustle.

A clipped lawn forms the centerpiece of the composition. Outlined by a walkway, a few shade trees, and geometric planting beds, it's large enough for sunbathers or for school kids on field trips to eat lunch and play tag, but it isn't a great lawn like in Central Park. It is, fittingly, the scale of a neighborhood park. There are simple benches and, in the warmer months, an in-ground fountain spurts water several feet into the air, much to the delight of the kids who run through the sprays. However, raised above the lower walkway, the green space takes on a civic grandeur. Two staircases—one on the north and one on the south—take you directly to and from the water's edge. In both cases, they grow out of the seat walls that line the promenade. Yet it is a gently sloping ramp, angled to catch walkers and joggers, that effortlessly eases the public into the park. If the pavers didn't change from red brick to gray hexagons, the transition would almost disappear. "It was immediately obvious to me that other than a few spaces outside the aquarium, there was no open space, just the promenade where you had to drink Coke, buy a beer, buy a T-shirt, have an ice cream, and keep moving," Balsley recalls. This park, on the other hand, is supposed to be a sort of stage for downtown Baltimore. "You're not going to have performances every day," he says. But the idea is that as more people began to pass by the area, they would pause, stick around, and start to populate a part of the city they had neglected to consider. ●

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**IN CAIRO, A NEW PARK ON A FORMER DUMP SITE
LED TO A LARGER INITIATIVE TO REVIVE
AN IMPOVERISHED NEIGHBORHOOD.**

BY HALA F. NASSAR

IMAGE CREDITS Courtesy Aga Khan Trust for Culture

A 1984
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The 14th-century Arab scholar Ibn Khaldun once called Cairo the “Garden of the World.” He marveled at its lush scenery watered by canals fed from the Nile. But today, few would call Cairo a garden city. With more than 18 million people living in its metro area, Cairo is the largest city in Africa and in the Arab world and also one of the world’s most densely populated places. A 1984 study estimated that for each person in Cairo, there was less than a single footprint of green space.

It seems improbable that a city, after more than 1,000 years, could create new green space in a dense neighborhood where it would be most valued. For Cairo, the opportunity came in the repurposing of a centuries-old dumping ground. Al-Azhar Park, completed in 2005, was not initiated by the recently overthrown Mubarak regime. Rather, it was donated by His Highness the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, who lives in Switzerland.

The Aga Khan is a direct descendant of the Fatimid dynasty that founded Cairo in the Middle Ages and the founder of the Aga Khan Development Network, which “is dedicated to improving living conditions and opportunities for the poor, without regard to their faith, origin, or gender,” according to its web site. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which oversaw the park’s development, did not limit its efforts to the park itself, but also worked to improve the surrounding neighborhood and uplift the chronically poor people living there.



ABOVE

With the help of landscape architects from Sites International and Sasaki Associates, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture transformed this longtime dumping ground (shown in 1992) into a major asset for the surrounding community.

IMAGE CREDIT

Courtesy Aga Khan Trust for Culture

AL-AZHAR PARK IS LOCATED in the eastern part of Cairo, about two miles from Tahrir Square, where protests led Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's longtime president, to step down in February. The park, which is gated and covers 74 acres (30 hectares), was neither a gathering place for protestors nor a target of the mobs that attacked some of Egypt's government buildings during the recent revolution. But you could say it is a fitting sign of the kinds of renewal that many Egyptians crave.

It is located just a few blocks from the Al-Azhar Mosque, after which it is named. Al-Azhar (pronounced AZ-har) was named after the prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatima Al-Zahra'a, and is Arabic for "the most resplendent." The mosque and its madrasa (or theological college) have attracted students from all over the world since their founding in the 10th century. The madrasa was the precursor to the nearby Al-Azhar University, which has been called the third-oldest university in the world. The park is enclosed on the north and west by the intricate medieval Islamic fabric of Cairo. To the east lies the City of the Dead, a Mamluk cemetery from the 15th century, and Salah Salem Street, one of Cairo's main arterial roads.

Although this location may seem an odd one for a landfill, the dump was a relic of an earlier period, when people would throw their trash just outside the city's walls. For hundreds of years,

household garbage and building debris accumulated here, creating the 40-meter-high El-Darrassa Hills. These hills offer spectacular panoramas of Cairo's Islamic skyline, with its many minarets, along with views of the Citadel and the Pyramids of Giza.

The Aga Khan announced his intentions to build a park in Cairo in 1984, at a conference he sponsored on Cairo's explosive growth. Work began in earnest on the park's design during the following decade. The AKTC brought on landscape architects from the Boston office of Sasaki Associates to develop guiding principles for the design. The landscape architects worked with engineers to analyze the soil and used that information to locate some of the paths and site features. Don Olson, FASLA, a principal with Sasaki, continued to advise the Aga Khan throughout the life of the project. The final design and detailing for Al-Azhar Park, however, was the work of Sites International, a Cairo-based multidisciplinary firm—one of the few professional firms in Egypt that practices landscape architecture.

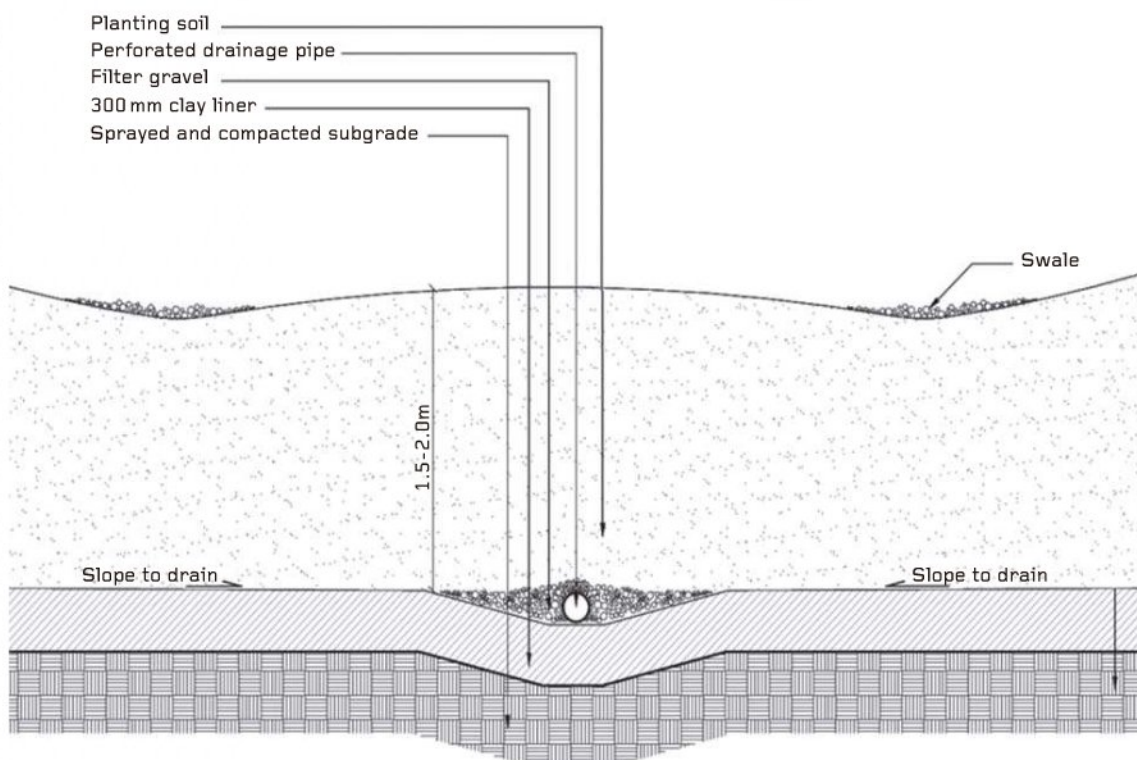
The soil on the site was extremely unpredictable and unstable in many places, Olson says. Unlike a modern landfill, where the trash is typically compacted with heavy machinery as it is brought in, the garbage was just dumped here. "I sank up to my knees in the soil on my first visit to the site," recalls Maher Stino, a landscape architect and principal at Sites International, who led the project

from 1998 until its completion six years ago. “It was really a terrible soil; loose, compressible, sandy, with a low rate of water absor-bency,” he says. The designers implemented several strategies to address this issue. Raft foundations or pilings were used beneath buildings. The top layer of the soil was excavated and replaced with two to three meters of “sweet sand” (sand with very low salinity), and the soil was carefully compacted to discourage settling in areas where hardscape was installed. A clay liner and below-grade drain-age system prevent irrigation water from percolating into the soils below and causing them to settle.

The soils were not the only challenge posed by the site. During the planning stages for the park, the General Organisation for Greater Cairo Water Supply expressed its intention to install three 80-meter-diameter underground reservoirs there with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development. The design-ers worked with the agency to make sure it would be possible to add hardscape and plantings on top of the reservoir structures.

It may sound surprising, given that they were building on a dump, but the landscape architects also needed to work with the historic resources existing on the site. This was a historic dump, after all. During the massive earth work and preparation of the site’s western slope that descends toward the Darb Al-Ahmar neighborhood, crews uncovered Cairo’s medieval Ayyubid wall, built by Saladin between 1176 and 1183 AD to defend the city from European crusaders.

The medieval wall extends for 1,500 meters and has a number of towers, galleries, entrances, and arrow-throwing slits still intact. It is considered one of the most important archaeological discoveries within Islamic Egypt in the past decade. The wall is being restored,



ABOVE

Local stonemasons reconstruct a portion of the Ayyubid Wall, revealed during efforts to regrade the edge of the dump site.

RIGHT

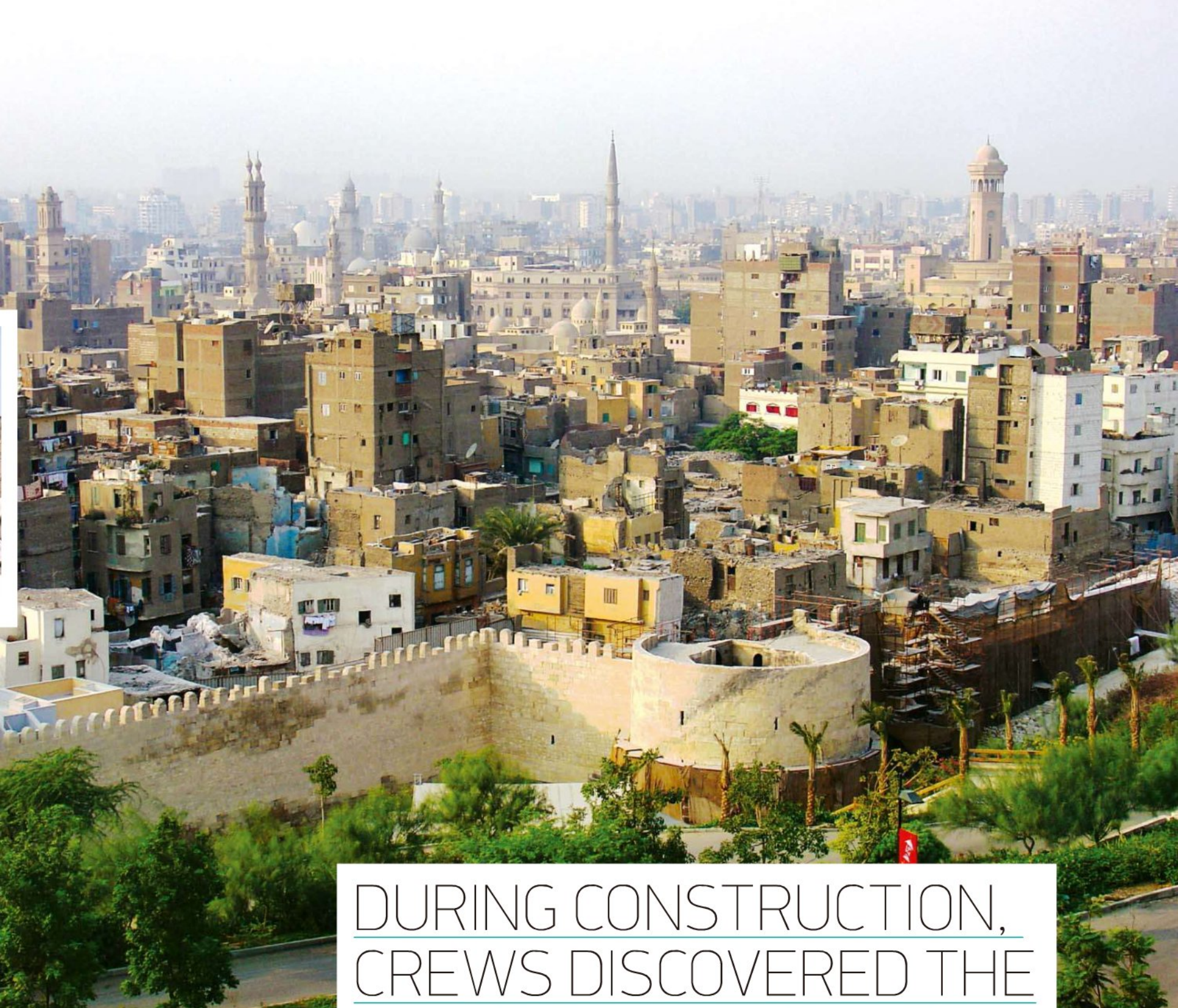
The historic Ayyubid Wall defines Al-Azhar Park's northwestern edge and provides the foreground for views of Cairo's Islamic skyline and the Darb Al-Ahmar neighborhood.

LEFT

A detail shows the clay liner and the drainage system installed to prevent irrigation water from percolating into the landfill soils below and causing them to settle.

IMAGE CREDITS

Courtesy Sites International, left and above; Hala F. Nassar, right



DURING CONSTRUCTION,
CREWS DISCOVERED THE
AYYUBID WALL, BUILT BY
SALADIN TO PROTECT
CAIRO FROM MEDIEVAL
CRUSADERS.

SITE PLAN

IMAGE CREDIT

Courtesy Sites International

1 MEDIEVAL ARTIFACT

The Ayyubid Wall extends along the park's northwestern edge.

2 RECREATIONAL FIELD

Al-Azhar Park is designed primarily for passive recreation, but a small playing field is provided for neighborhood residents near the park's administration building.

3 LAKESIDE CAFÉ

The Lakeside Café is surrounded by water on three sides. Proceeds from the restaurant and an entry fee help to pay for the park's maintenance.

4 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture converted a historic school building on the edge of the site into a community center for residents of the Darb Al-Ahmar neighborhood—one of many interventions in the surrounding neighborhood.

5 OVERLOOK

The landscape architects took advantage of the landfill's hilly terrain to create a number of overlooks.



- 6 FOUNTAIN** A spray pad welcomes visitors as they enter through the main gate on Salah Salem Street.
- 7 FORMAL GARDEN** Water flows along a narrow path through the center of the formal garden.
- 8 RESTAURANT** The Hilltop Restaurant and Café provides sweeping views toward the Citadel, Sultan Hasan Mosque, and Cairo's skyline.
- 9 PLAYGROUND** A children's playground sits on top of a water reservoir installed in concert with the park project.
- 10 URBAN PLAZA** A parking garage with an urban plaza on top is planned for the far end of the site along Al-Azhar Street.



THIS PAGE

A number of men escape the heat of Cairo by lounging on a shady patch of lawn in Al-Azhar Park. The park's Hilltop Restaurant and Café, visible in the background, was designed by Ramy el-Dahan and Soheir Farid and commands the highest elevation in the park.

IMAGE CREDIT

Courtesy Aga Khan Trust for Culture





and its original gates will eventually serve as a major entrance to the park from the historic Darb Al-Ahmar neighborhood.

To enter the park today, you must pass through its main gate along Salah Salem Street. The park is walled off from the surrounding community, and visitors must pay a fee to enter, similar to most botanical gardens in the United States. "The Aga Khan's idea was that the park must be economically sustainable," Stino says. He explains that the income generated from ticket sales, parking, and the restaurants on site is used not only for maintaining the park but also to subsidize various preservation projects in the adjacent neighborhood. This self-sustaining development model is based on the Waqf or Islamic Endowment system, which uses income-generating businesses to sustain public facilities donated to the community.

The park's central feature is a formal linear promenade, eight meters wide, that runs along the entire length of the park. It is anchored by the Hilltop Restaurant on its northern end and is aligned with a spectacular view of the Citadel at its southern end, where another restaurant, the Lake Café, sits slightly off axis. As you walk along the promenade, beneath an allée of royal palms, you pass by a number of orthogonal gardens with water runnels and fountains that were inspired by traditional Islamic gardens such as the Alhambra in Spain and the Mughal gardens of India.

But the design is not entirely orthogonal. "We did not want to mimic historical gardens," Stino says. "We wanted to capture the spirit of history and revive design principles that fit the modern context." Encircling the more formal core of the park is a network of curvilinear paths that follow the hilly topography of the site,

THE SELF-SUSTAINING DEVELOPMENT MODEL IS BASED ON THE WAQF SYSTEM OF ISLAMIC ENDOWMENT FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES.





“WE CAN’T JUST RESTORE MONUMENTS AND IGNORE EVERYTHING ELSE!”

SEIF EL-RASHIDI, FORMER HEAD OF THE AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE’S URBAN PLANNING OFFICE IN CAIRO, ON THE NEED TO IMPROVE THE NEIGHBORHOOD FOR RESIDENTS.



4

1 WATER

Water cascades and shallow water channels connect one end of the park to the other.

2 GEOMETRICAL GARDEN

A large geometrical garden was inspired by various historic Islamic gardens.

3 LAKESIDE CAFÉ

The Lakeside Café, designed by Serge Santelli, is an

interpretation of the traditional Fatimid belvedere. The spacious lake at the southern end acts as the park’s main water reservoir for irrigation.

4 MAN-MADE STREAMS

Man-made streams with a “natural” edge attract wildlife, especially birds and insects.

5 PLANTINGS

The edges of some water channels have been

planted with grasses and other plants that recall the natural landscape along the Nile.

6 PLAYGROUND

Neighborhood children are admitted without charge into the park, where they can play on a large playground.

IMAGE CREDITS

Hala F. Nassar, 1, 3, and 5; Courtesy Aga Khan Trust for Culture, 2, 4, and 6



providing access to additional places for retreat, shaded orchards, and elevated viewing points.

Some of the plants were chosen for the fruit they bear, and there are a few large lawn areas, but there are also many native succulents, flowers, and trees that require minimal water. “Egypt is an arid country, and water is very valuable,” Stino notes. Thus, water in the park is mostly confined to narrow channels, though a larger pond embraces the Lakeside Café. Stino says the large pond is supplied by a municipal line from the Nile, and, in addition to being the centerpiece of the southern end, it is the primary source of irrigation for the park.

While American landscape architects may be tempted to judge this park against more water-efficient parks recently constructed in the American Southwest, this comparison may not be reasonable. The park’s context is very different. In the Southwest, parks aren’t the only landscape features using large amounts of water; there are numerous private lawns and swimming pools as well. In this section of Cairo, water-intensive plantings and features are limited exclusively to the public sphere, and there is almost no greenery whatsoever in the surrounding neighborhood.

HAVING EXISTED FOR A VERY LONG TIME next to a dump, the Darb Al-Ahmar neighborhood was itself in dire need of upgrading and regeneration. The neighborhood is densely built

up and has many artisans with small wood and metal workshops adjacent to their homes. Sixty-five registered historic monuments and several hundred unregistered historic buildings more than 200 years old line its streets. However, the neighborhood’s poverty, lack of infrastructure, and the poor condition of its historic buildings have discouraged tourists—and even other Egyptians—from visiting the area.

The AKTC realized the park and neighborhood were inseparable. “Although not part of the original idea, the Al-Azhar Park project quickly evolved to include the upgrading of [the] Darb Al-Ahmar neighborhood,” says Seif El-Rashidi, the former head of the urban planning office of AKTC Cairo, who worked on the revitalization of Darb Al-Ahmar from 1997 to 2007. Views into the neighborhood, especially of its minarets, shaped the experience for park visitors. So, in collaboration with the World Monuments Fund and other funding agencies, AKTC funded the restoration and preservation of a number of key Islamic monuments in the area including the mosque of Umm as-Sultan Shaaban, the Khayer Bek complex, and the Darb Shoughlan School.

But the work was not limited to a few monuments. “We can’t just restore monuments and ignore everything else!” says El-Rashidi. The value and charm of historic Cairo lie in the community, with its legacy of social ties, its arts and crafts, and the economic activities that have functioned in this place for centuries.



ABOVE

Although Al-Azhar Park may not meet the expectations American landscape architects have for conserving water in the desert, there are no pools, lawns, or foundation plantings anywhere in the surrounding neighborhood.

IMAGE CREDIT

Hala F. Nassar

There was concern that this new park would encourage new development that would displace residents and affect the neighborhood's traditional arts and crafts. There was also a misconception that the neighborhood was infested with drugs and crime. Some had suggested its population was extremely transient, but surveys by the AKTC found that many of its residents had lived there for quite a few years. "It was a historic community of hardworking craftsmen and artisans with a strong community spirit," says El-Rashidi. The people who lived there wanted to stay there.

The AKTC Cairo worked with Egyptian government agencies and various nongovernmental partners to improve the quality of life for residents without displacing them. They are providing jobs for neighborhood residents within the park, improving health care and educational facilities, and supporting local civic groups that direct development. They have made microcredit loans available to young people for starting small businesses. And they have promoted local crafts and provided training opportunities for artisans to supply the park with site fixtures.

"Almost everything installed in the park was custom made by local artisans and craftsmen," says Stino, from the benches to the light fixtures to the bollards. With very few large landscape architecture projects happening in Egypt, "there were no landscape furniture manufacturers in Egypt or professional plant nurseries to supply the plant palette that we wanted," he explains. But they were able

to turn these challenges into opportunities by establishing off-site plant nurseries on land supplied by The American University in Cairo and by conducting site furniture workshops in the adjacent Darb Al-Ahmar neighborhood.

"Darb Al-Ahmar people have a very strong sense of belonging to their community," says El-Rashidi. "This project did not only preserve and improve what is valuable to them but also empowered them to continue thriving where they belong." ●

HALA F. NASSAR GREW UP IN CAIRO. SHE IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AT CLEMSON UNIVERSITY AND A PRINCIPAL AT HEWITT/NASSAR STUDIO WHO WRITES REGULARLY ON HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES.

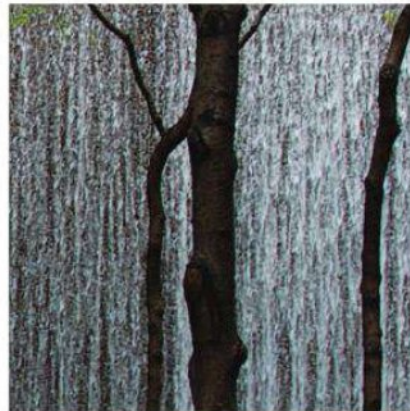
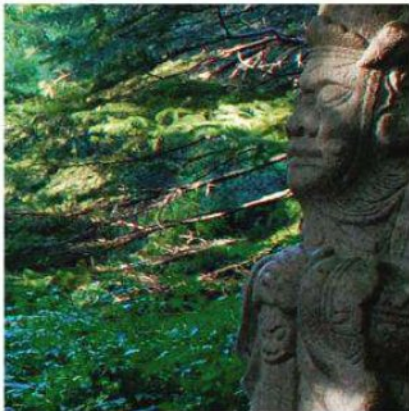
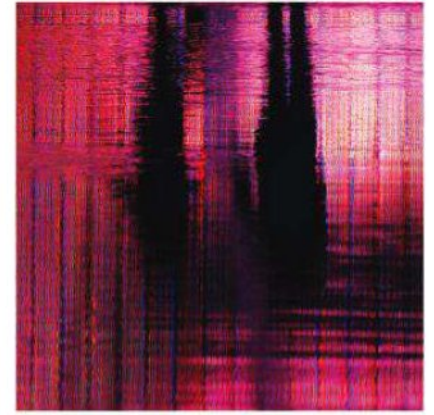
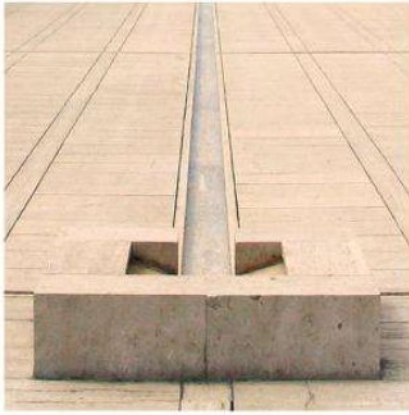
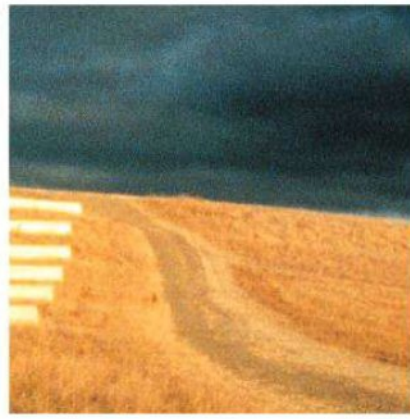
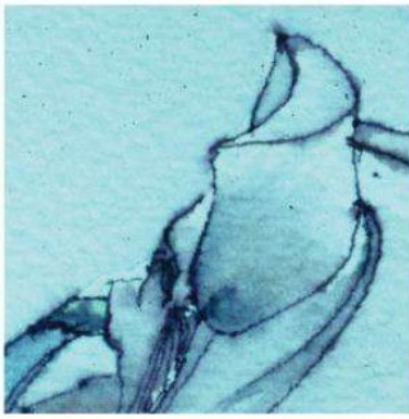
Project Credits

MASTER PLAN AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE DESIGN SITES INTERNATIONAL, CAIRO (MAHER STINO AND LAILA EL-MASRY STINO, ASLA, PRINCIPALS; M. ABDUL MONEM EL SAYED, TECHNICAL DIRECTOR; KHALED MOUSTAFA, SENIOR ASSOCIATE). **PRELIMINARY MASTER PLANNING STUDIES** SASAKI ASSOCIATES, BOSTON. **ARCHITECTURE** HILLTOP RESTAURANT AND ENTRY GATE: EL DAHAN & FARID ENGINEERING, CAIRO. LAKESIDE CAFÉ: SERGE SANTELLI, ARCHITECT AND INTERIOR DESIGN, PARIS; SITES INTERNATIONAL, PRODUCTION ARCHITECTURE AND ENGINEERING, CAIRO. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING: SITES INTERNATIONAL, CAIRO. **LIGHTING DESIGN** PHOENIX LARGE/LIGHTMATTERS, LONDON. **INFRASTRUCTURE ENGINEER** MISR CONSULT, CAIRO. **GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEER** ARDAMAN-ACE, CAIRO. **PROJECT/CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT** SITES INTERNATIONAL, CAIRO.

BACK TO THE SOURCE

**TWELVE AWARD-WINNING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
SHARE THE PLACES THAT MOVE THEM.**

EDITED BY DANIEL JOST, ASLA



APRIL IS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MONTH, AND TO HELP CELEBRATE, WE ASKED SEVERAL RECENT RECIPIENTS OF ASLA PROFESSIONAL AWARDS TO SHOW US THE PLACES THEY FIND MOST INSPIRATIONAL IN THEIR DESIGN WORK. THEY DESCRIBE CHILDHOOD MEMORIES, UNEXPECTED EPIPHANIES, REPEATED PILGRIMAGES, AND A SENSE OF WONDER THAT IS NOT ALWAYS EASILY PUT INTO WORDS.





THE SPIRIT PATH

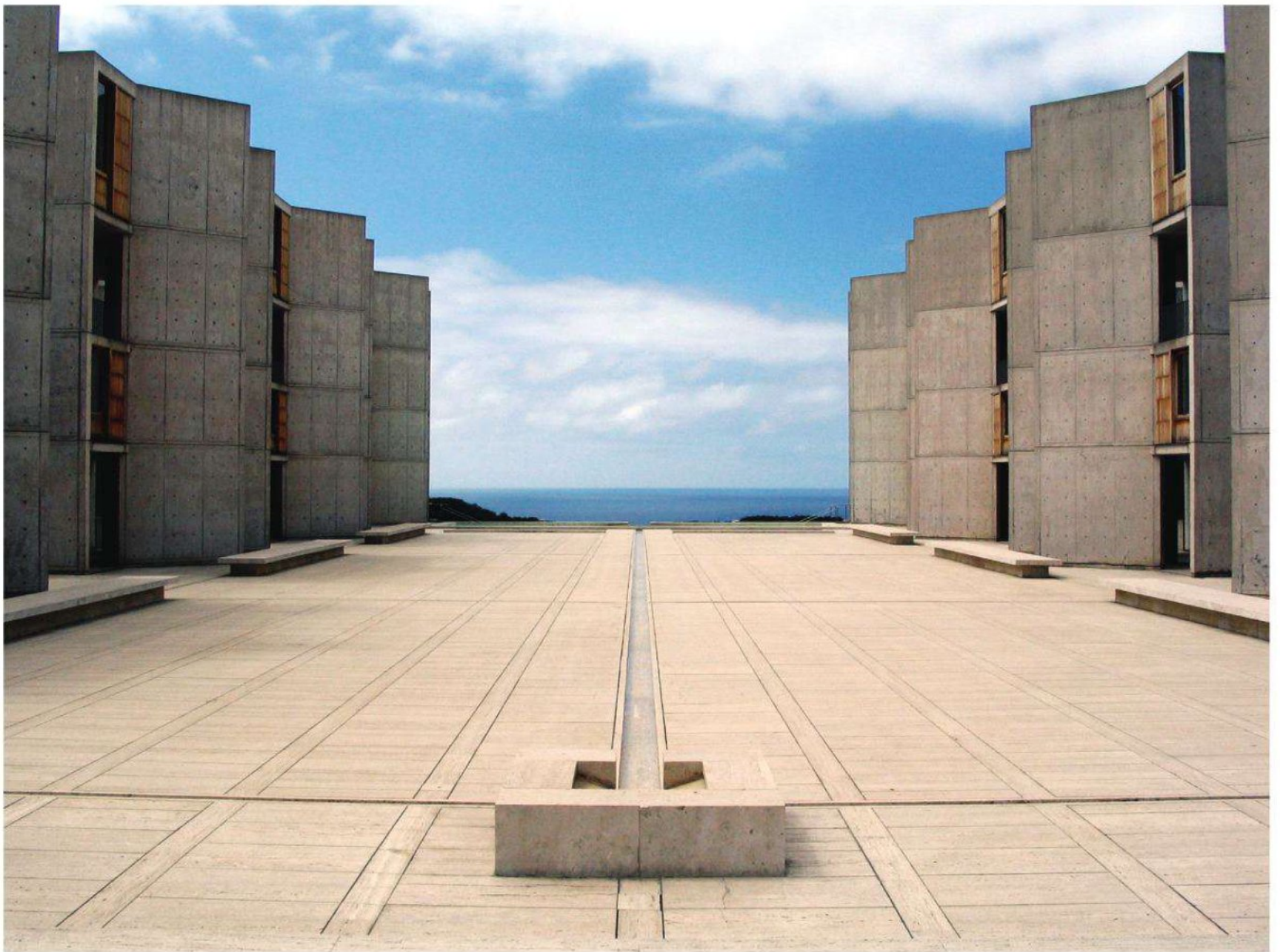
ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER GARDEN,
SEAL HARBOR, MAINE

The space between matters. The Spirit Path at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden in Seal Harbor, Maine, is powerful in its simplicity. Beatrix Farrand created an experience shaped equally by the objects within the garden and the spaces formed between them. It is the tension between the six pairs of larger-than-life sentinel figures on either side of the path that ultimately creates a sense of connectedness. These figures come from royal Korean tombs of the 17th and 18th century, a statuary custom that dates to China's Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). Learning this adds a dimension of time and purpose, furthering the power—and my appreciation—of this amazing garden. Devoid of any excess, this walk is a compelling example of a landscape centered on clear, concise design intentions, where more is achieved by including less.

TODD RICHARDSON, ASLA, PRINCIPAL, RICHARDSON
& ASSOCIATES, SACO, MAINE

IMAGE CREDIT
Todd Richardson

A PLEASING
TENSION BUILDS
IN THE SPACES
BETWEEN OBJECTS.



THE SALK INSTITUTE

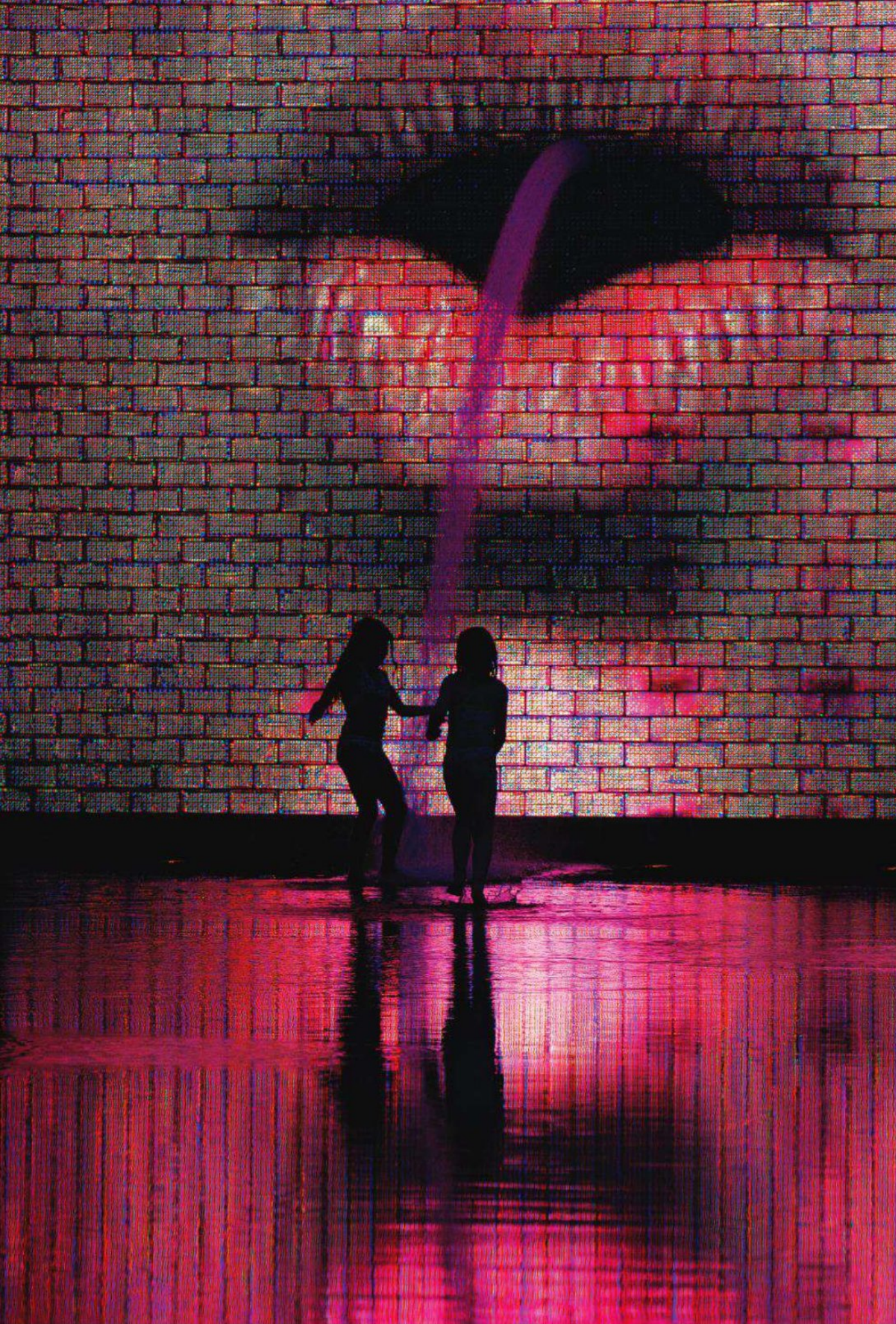
LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

Louis Kahn's Salk Institute is a sublime expression of the relationship between people and landscape. It is a constructed metaphor that conceptualizes the very site it occupies. It symbolizes ecological function by eloquently interpreting local hydrology as a shimmering band of water running to the ocean, and the surrounding grounds reference historical land-use patterns by incorporating lush, fragrant groves of citrus. Kahn has distilled the site to its essence and effectively incorporates those most ephemeral elements of nature: light and space. At sunset, the sun reflects up the long narrow runnel and brings light deep into the central court. In turn, the long runnel draws you out to the limitless expanse of the Pacific Ocean beyond.

RON LUTSKO JR., ASLA, PRINCIPAL AND FOUNDER,
LUTSKO ASSOCIATES, SAN FRANCISCO

IMAGE CREDIT

© Shawn Kashou/Shutterstock



CROWN FOUNTAIN

MILLENNIUM PARK, CHICAGO

The Crown Fountain in Millennium Park is one of those places that inspires me with its multisensory experiences. Jaume Plensa's landscape transforms with the scale and speed of engagement from a dynamic and intense pulse to moments of contemplative silence. A translucent pool at the ground plane can be reflective and then suddenly activated into a fountain of water and splashing feet. This fluid surface connects two large pillars of glass that display LED images of faces from the city. When water appears to pour out from the lips of a giant face on an LED screen, kids and adults alike scream with delight as they feel, touch, and hear the spray of water. The bold scale of the glass towers that hold these digital faces creates a direct dialogue with the architectural fabric of this intense city. This is a composition; it is music, and an experience at its very best.

MIKYOUNG KIM, ASLA, PRINCIPAL,
MIKYOUNG KIM DESIGN, BOSTON

IMAGE CREDIT

© Adam Jones/Getty Images

PALEY PARK

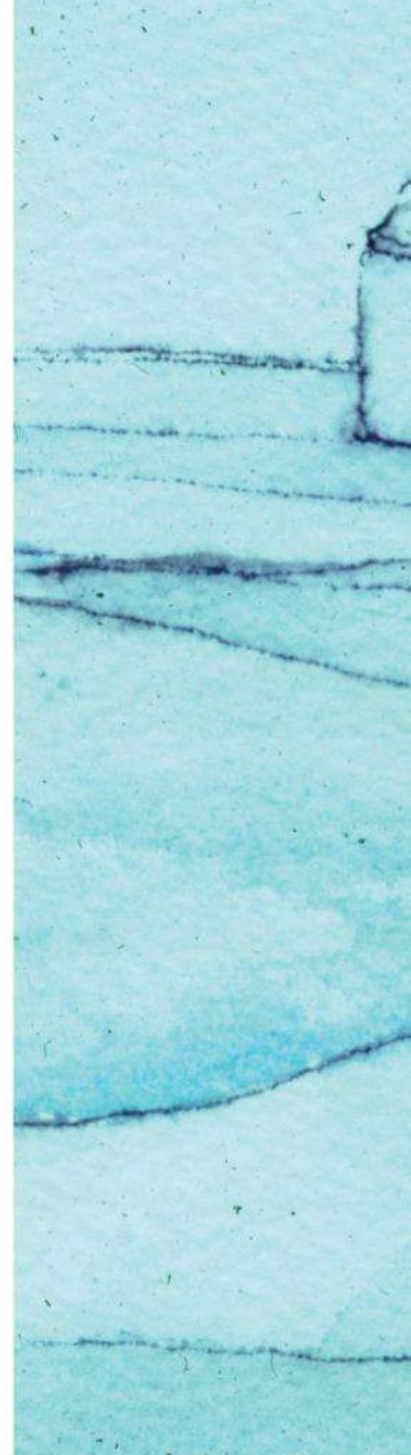
NEW YORK CITY

Designed by Zion and Breen, New York's Paley Park was one of the first works of landscape architecture that I consciously experienced as a student. It is the place where I first began to comprehend the meaning of design as an expression used to manifest an experience. Paley Park also opened my eyes to the power of design restraint. The thoughtful, intentional, and yet modest use of material, texture, color, and furnishings creates a powerfully refined and urbane place. The exploitation of scale, the elevation change, and the sound of the waterfall combine to provide immediate relief as you step from the busy street into an intimate oasis.

DIANE M. DALE, FASLA, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY DESIGN, WILLIAM MCDONOUGH + PARTNERS, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

IMAGE CREDIT

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COOL WATER
ARRIVES FROM
A DISTANT
MOUNTAIN
SOURCE.

FONTANA DELLA BARCACCIA

ROME

The cold sweetness of the water of La Barcaccia is a taste I will always remember and never refuse. Like many of Rome's fountains, the Barcaccia celebrates the arrival of water, which comes directly from the Apennine Mountains via aqueducts built during the Roman period and revived during the Renaissance. Drinking from it, surrounded by the cool rush of crystal clear water on a hot summer day, connects you to the larger landscape of the region more viscerally and more memorably than any experience I know. I go back to that exquisite urban form to draw it and draw from it as often as I can.

MICHAEL VERGASON, FASLA, PRINCIPAL, MICHAEL VERGASON
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

IMAGE CREDIT
Michael Vergason





BYXBEE PARK

PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

Within the context of the designed landscape, Byxbee Park shines as the single best example of the 20th-century American sublime. A collaboration between Hargreaves Associates and the artists Michael Oppenheimer and Peter Richards, the park was created on top of an old city dump. Its design is part political, part sculptural, part alchemy. It merges art, culture, industry, and ecology in a way that redefines park making in contemporary society. With a strikingly austere formal agenda and an unapologetically direct and contemporary vocabulary, Byxbee is able to simultaneously engage the eye, the body, and the mind. Its design connects people to the site and, in the process, creates a deeper understanding of the planet.

MICHAEL BLIER, ASLA, PRINCIPAL AND FOUNDER,
LANDWORKS STUDIO, BOSTON

IMAGE CREDIT

John Gollings, Courtesy Hargreaves Associates



BONNET HOUSE

MUSEUM & GARDENS, FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

Over the years, the Bonnet House Museum & Gardens has provided a place for me to get away, to find solace, meditate, or get creatively inspired. It was once the winter estate of the Bartletts, who were artists, and their creative energy still lingers there. Situated on 37 acres between the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway, it is an oasis in the heavily developed South Florida landscape. The gardens mix formal and informal treatments, but most of the grounds are left in their natural state—they are live art forms that keep changing over

time. The property is one of the last examples of native barrier island habitat in the area, with five distinct ecosystems that hold hundreds of thousands of living plants and animals, including orchids, wild monkeys, and many species of tropical birds. I love going there, and I keep discovering new treasures every time.

JOSEPH J. LALLI, FASLA, PRESIDENT AND CEO, EDSA,
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

IMAGE CREDIT

Amy Strycula Photography



THE EMERALD NECKLACE

BOSTON

A masterpiece by Frederick Law Olmsted, Boston's Emerald Necklace helped define the profession of landscape architecture and widen its scope more than any other single project. The way the park integrates multiple services—including water management, transportation, recreation, and aesthetics—and its vision of nature, urbanism, and social justice will continue to inspire landscape architects from all over the world.

KONGJIAN YU, INTERNATIONAL ASLA,
PRESIDENT, TURENSCAPE, BEIJING

IMAGE CREDIT

© Philip Schermeister/National Geographic/Getty Images





CENTRAL PARK

NEW YORK CITY

For me, a visit to New York is never complete without a quick trip to Central Park. Frederick Law Olmsted's masterful design testifies to the power of public space to create community from the most diverse of demographics, and speaks to the foresight of the civic-minded people who set aside such a large area of land and preserved it as the city grew around it. Central Park remains a model of park design today even in the face of changing density, uses, and pressures. Olmsted's hierarchy and variety of spaces are functional at all times of the day and year—for both large events and day-to-day activities, and huge volumes of traffic are deftly handled by his hidden vehicular routes. An effective backdrop for the daily theater of city and temporary installations like Christo's *Gates*, the landscape also draws our gaze and inspires us with its ever-changing beauty.

JANET ROSENBERG, ASLA, PRINCIPAL, JANET ROSENBERG + ASSOCIATES, TORONTO

IMAGE CREDIT

© Gary 718/Shutterstock

MELLON SQUARE

PITTSBURGH

My admiration for Mellon Square grew from innocent discovery as a conference visitor to downtown Pittsburgh in 1999, when I was as yet unaware of its history as a midcentury antidote to so many urban woes. As attendees spilled into the terrazzo plaza from the splendid William Penn Hotel, our gazes were drawn to the spectacular array of heroic architecture. Years later, working in the former ALCOA building, the square became my respite from cubicle land. I spent many lunch hours with a \$3 coffee, enjoying a quiet shady corner or sun-drenched fountain-side seat. Despite more than 50 years of use, Simonds and Simonds' great democratic space still attracts an ever-changing mix of hacky-sacking students, buttoned-down business types, buskers, skate punks, and store clerks. Today, as the square is being restored and the garage and shops beneath are poised for a facelift, the city is working on its first-ever comprehensive plan. We hope to invent equally visionary solutions to today's problems.

JOY ABBOTT, ASLA, ASSISTANT PLANNING DIRECTOR, CITY OF PITTSBURGH

IMAGE CREDIT

Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania





HUMAYUN'S TOMB

NIZAMUDDIN EAST, DELHI, INDIA

How seldom does a place move you? Humayun's Tomb, the burial place of a Mughal emperor, cast its spell on me at first sight. It was designed by the Persian architect Mirak Mirza Ghiyath almost 500 years ago, and almost a century later it served as one of the inspirations for the Taj Mahal. Yet it feels more vital than most contemporary projects ever do. I seem to end up spending a few hours there, alone, every time I make it to India. Is it its intriguing sense of place? Is it the clarity of its design? Is it the strength of its simple gesture? Is it the bluntness of its raw materials? Is it the purity of the water? Is it its whisper? Is it the sublime ancestral trees? Is it the feeling of stillness it instills? Or is it me coming to my senses? Seldom does so little do so much.

VLADIMIR DJUROVIC, INTERNATIONAL ASLA, PRINCIPAL, VLADIMIR DJUROVIC LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, BROUMANA, LEBANON

IMAGE CREDIT
Vladimir Djurovic





VERMONT

When I was growing up, I spent a great deal of time alone exploring the glacial landscapes that surrounded my parents' farm in rural Vermont. Horses in the pasture gave scale to views across folds in the landscape, which were defined further by rustic split-rail fences. As the child of a geophysicist father and an art historian mother, I became deeply ingrained with the tectonic and visual qualities of the landscape. Looking at my work now, I can see how my analytical understanding of the forces that have shaped the landscape over eons combines with a more emotional response to fleeting phenomena, such as weather, light, and human-induced change, which alter the land more frequently and less predictably.

SUSANNAH C. DRAKE, ASLA, PRINCIPAL,
DLANDSTUDIO LLC, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

IMAGE CREDIT
Susannah C. Drake

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EPHEMERAL.

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**AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**

ASLA Honor Award Recipient, The Red Ribbon - Tanghe River Park by Turenscape (Beijing Turen Design Institute) and Peking University Graduate School of Landscape Architecture, (photo by Kongjian Yu, Cao Yang)



THE BACK

**WESTERN HORIZONS: LANDSCAPES
FROM THE CONTEMPORARY REALISM
COLLECTION** At the Denver Art
Museum through October 23, 2011

The wonders of the West are as engrossing today as they were for the Rocky Mountain School painters Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran, and, later, Georgia O'Keeffe. This show of contemporary takes on these wild lands—fittingly, in Denver, where a collection has been building for 20 years—includes topographically grand paintings by Gordon Brown and Len Chmiel, stark prairie horizons by Jeff Aeling and Keith Jacobshagen, and the mournful *Fog* by Daniel Morper, a detail of which is shown here. Many of these works date from the past decade, proof enough that this tradition is very much alive.

IMAGE CREDIT

Courtesy Denver Art Museum

THE BACK / RESEARCH

THE FULLER



BUILDING
BETTER METRICS:
THE SYNTHESIS
OF ECONOMICS,
ENVIRONMENT,
COMMUNITY,
AND ART.

BY KURT D. CULBERTSON, FASLA

MEASURE



In October 2010, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced the winners of \$100 million in Sustainable Communities grants. These grants went to 45 areas of the country to create what HUD is calling Regional Plans for Sustainable Development. The grants are a huge step forward, part of the Obama administration's Partnership for Sustainable Communities, which unites HUD, the Department of Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency to coordinate public investments in infrastructure, facilities, and services across various federal agencies. The hope is that this kind of coordination will amplify the economic, community, and environmental benefits of the projects we target with tax dollars. By considering housing, transportation, and environmental protection in a full, synthetic way, the move marks a potential turning point in land-use planning and design in this country. For landscape architects who are adept at bringing together diverse, complex sets of knowledge in projects, this program presents a huge opportunity.

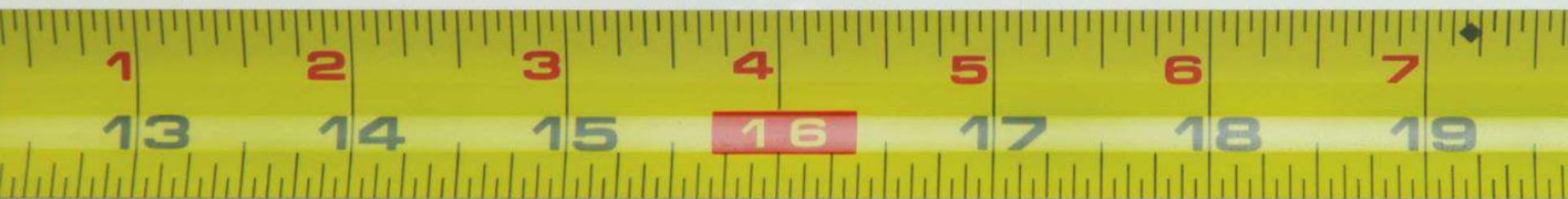
The Sustainable Communities grants are remarkable because they bring together these three federal departments that profoundly shape our natural and built environment—agencies not known in the past for their collaboration—but also because they look for measurable outcomes and heavily emphasize computer modeling and metrics to track the progress of proposed interventions. They help to formalize a new emphasis on measurement in planning and design issues.

These days, landscape architects are obsessed with green certification and rating systems and are busy searching for “points” to achieve the desired rating for their projects. Measurement has taken on a life of its own, especially since the founding of the U.S. Green Building Council nearly 20 years ago, which brought on huge growth in the development and application of rating and certification systems for green building—the council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, program now covers approximately 8,500 currently certified buildings. The number of ENERGY STAR-rated buildings is over 13,000. These are just a few of many such systems built around the notion that “what gets measured gets done.” A National Association of Homebuilders/McGraw-Hill construction survey shows that more than half of the NAHB's members, who build more than 80 percent of the homes in the United States, will incorporate green practices into their development in the next two years. Metrics-based systems, which reward projects for their proven ability to reduce water or energy use or provide measurable performance in a number of areas, have moved the environmental design discussion from platitudes to positive action. In that regard, they are to be applauded.

But making a limited number of environmental measures synonymous with sustainable design is short-sighted. A project can save water or cut energy use, yet contribute little to the success of a community culturally or economically. The benefits of sustainable development and, by extension, sustainable design

IMAGE CREDIT
Charles Steck

WE CAN MEASURE SAFETY AND HEALTH;
THE HARD PART IS MEASURING HAPPINESS,
IDENTITY, AND A SENSE OF BELONGING.



are commonly illustrated by three overlapping rings: environment, community, and economics. LEED and related programs such as Sustainable Sites typically deal with only one of these rings—environment. And they often focus on a very limited set of environmental issues. LEED-ND, which targets neighborhood developments, for instance, does not directly address the carbon impacts of development.

The LEED-ND rating system does indirectly contain elements that address questions of community, such as attainable pricing, parks, and transit and the proximity of jobs to housing. The establishment of maximum block lengths is meant to encourage walkable communities, which will help improve public health while promoting richer social connections. However, LEED-ND hints at only a few of the components that would comprise a healthy community in a social sense or promote cultural preservation.

ASLA's Sustainable Sites Initiative begins to strive for a broader view of sustainability. The bulk of the score sheet addresses environmental factors such as conserving water and preserving native plant communities, but the program also encourages designers to provide places for outdoor physical activities and social interaction. Of the 250 points possible within the scoring system, 32 pertain to human health and well-being. Among them are points awarded for promoting equitable site development and use, for promoting sustainability awareness and education, and for maintaining and protecting cultural and historical sites.

The Sustainable Sites Initiative suggests that there should be a more comprehensive system of metrics to address more than just a landscape's environmental performance. What might such a system look like? The path to more comprehensive sustainability may lie in a fusing of multiple approaches. There are precedents of sorts. The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership, which the Urban Institute began in 2001, monitors community health to help understand the ways a neighborhood's characteristics affect the health of its residents. The various neighborhood indicator systems have their strengths and weaknesses, but these programs provide multiple advantages for developing a more complete system of metrics. Although the neighborhood indicators program is not a rating system involving certification, the extensive use of metrics does allow the comparison of a community relative to its peers based upon common lines of measurement. And for the 35 cities these programs cover, you can find good baseline data against which to measure how individual projects perform.

Health care administrators are figuring out how external factors affect a person's health and using that information to weigh policy choices, which has in turn inspired architects and interior designers to begin refining their own kinds of evidence-based design. And the research of landscape architects such as Larry Frank, ASLA, the Bombardier Chair in Sustainable Transportation at the University of British Columbia, is increasingly focused on the ties between urban form and public health. Frank is one of the principal researchers working to apply empirical data to issues of community design.

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EXISTING RATING SYSTEMS DON'T REALLY ADDRESS THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF LANDSCAPE.

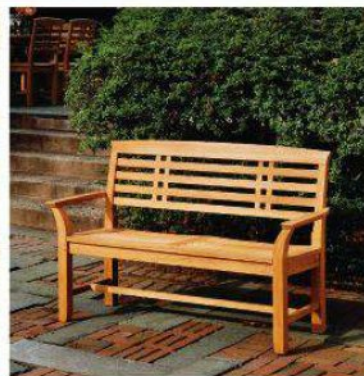


None of the programs I've described so far, though, really address the social dimensions of landscape. Is it possible to measure community spirit? Not all human endeavors can be reduced to numbers. Measuring community involvement and social capital, however, is precisely what the Harvard Professor Robert Putnam sought to do in his book, *Bowling Alone*; Putnam suggests that the decline of direct social contacts has increased isolation within our society. Putnam pointed out, for example, that a 10-minute increase in commute times cut involvement in community affairs by 10 percent. We can measure safety and health; the hard part is measuring happiness, identity, and a sense of belonging.

Similarly the community-based design approaches of Walter Hood, ASLA, and Randy Hester, FASLA, seek to address these questions as well. Hester's *Design for Ecological Democracy* is a manifesto for greater participation by the users of the landscape in the design of our environment. Hester argues for a participatory design process with the degree of public support for a project as his main metric.

What about economics? For development projects, we might think of economics in two ways. One we know well is the real estate income statement and balance sheet. An income statement is a metric. What is the net present value of the proposed project? What type of internal rate of return does it generate? What is the multiple of invested capital that is achieved? If projected values are sufficiently positive, development or redevelopment will proceed. If not, a project development or redevelopment will not occur.

Such questions, however, address only one side of the economic equation. A developer and its investors may make money on a project, but what about the community in which it's located? Does



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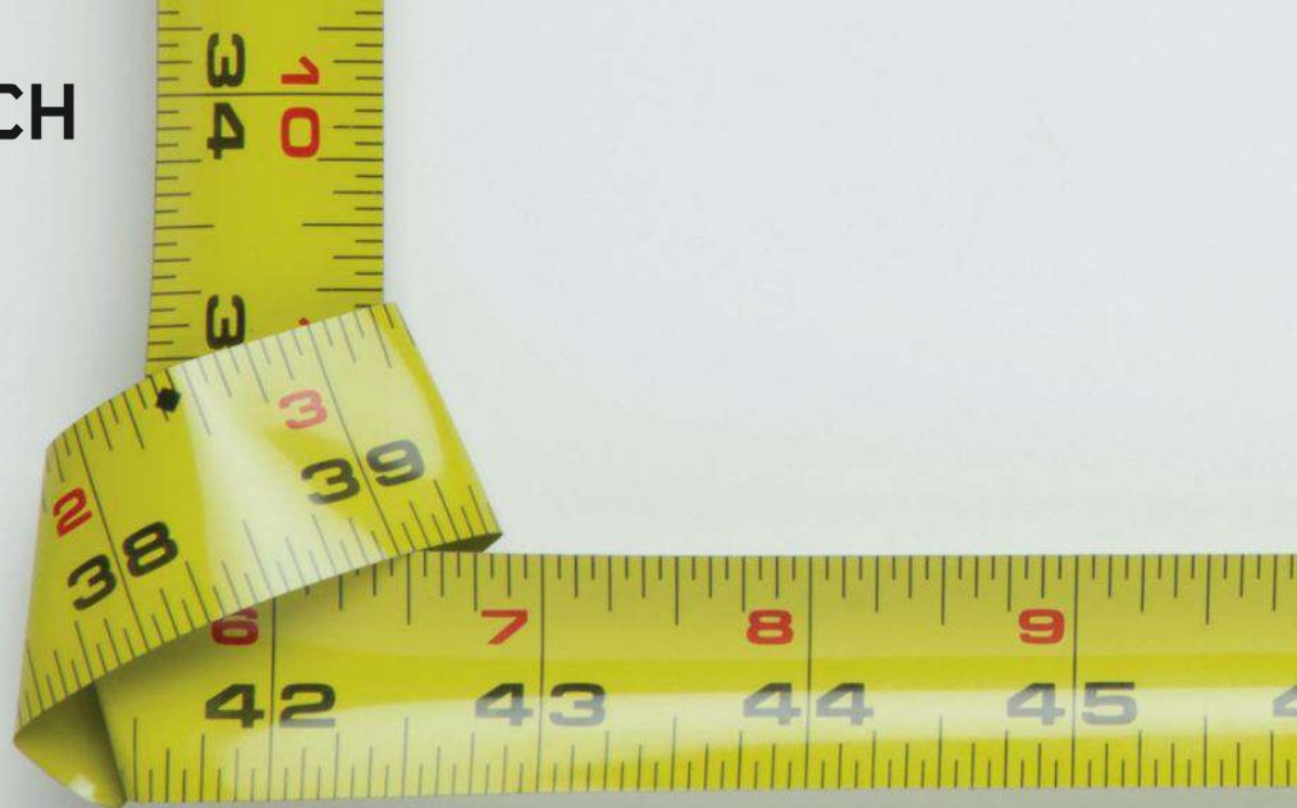
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WE NEED TO ADD ART AND AESTHETICS TO THE WORKING DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

it cost more to service the project than the taxes that can reasonably be collected (as is often the case with residential-only projects that lack the tax bases needed to provide significant revenue to the community)? Do public investments in parks, infrastructure improvements, or other amenities that stimulate redevelopment actually yield a return? Does the provision of tax-exempt bond funding to facilitate a development actually generate a return on the community's investment? Does the investment create jobs? Does it make transportation easier or harder for commuters?

A project may be financially successful in the short term but a failure over time. To be sustainable it must hold its own economically over many years. By adding financial metrics, a more complete measure of sustainability can be obtained. The sustaining effects on the community, environment, and economics all tend to reinforce each other.

Efforts to combine all of these measures are emerging, such as with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which began in 1997 among an international alliance of businesses willing to report annually on their economic, environmental, and community performance. Today, more than 1,400 global companies participate in this program. The GRI's work bears on our concerns as landscape architects

because it is continually refining methodologies for measuring business success across economic, environmental, and community dimensions. It suggests that private profit and community benefit do not necessarily exclude each other. A similar program, the Star Community Index, which just released its first set of principles and goals in October, builds on the foundation of LEED and other environmental measurement systems to consider sustainability beyond individual projects for entire communities, but it hasn't yet defined the ways it will measure progress in terms of performance.

The convergence of all these diverse initiatives is bound to produce a much more comprehensive view of sustainability—but it will inevitably fall short. Have you ever seen a LEED-certified project that simply wasn't attractive or didn't contribute to the spirit of the community? Or a project that is a financial success but a visual blight on the landscape?

We need to add art and aesthetics to the working definition of sustainable development. But can these things be measured? The pioneering efforts of the U.S. Forest Service and individuals like Carl Steinitz, Honorary ASLA, and Stephen Sheppard, ASLA, in the field of visual resources assessment are efforts to measure aesthetic impacts of landscape change. This is tricky to measure, because the creation of art is a highly personal act, as is the evaluation of that creativity. Who decides how successful it is? Only professional peers? Post-occupancy interviews with users? Did the landscape design involve collaboration with other artists? Is the design successful compositionally? How are line, color, form, texture, and light and shadow expressed in the landscape? Does the work create authenticity and identity for the community? These kinds of questions may never appear on a LEED or Sustainable Sites score sheet, but they are still essential to a complete realization of the concept of sustainability.



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Elizabeth Meyer, FASLA, addressed this issue in her article “Sustaining Beauty: The Performance of Appearance,” published in the Spring 2008 issue of the *Journal of Landscape Architecture* (and reprinted in the October 2008 issue of *LAM*). Meyer pointed out that Frederick Law Olmsted, in 1868, had the foresight to claim that “A park is a work of art, designed to produce certain effects upon the mind of men.” Olmsted did not suggest that such effects be measured, but he clearly believed that landscape design involved purely aesthetic concerns, among others.

As my firm, Design Workshop, has described this theoretical approach to our work with clients, collaborators, and our staff, we are repeatedly asked to show its tangible benefits. For the past seven years, we have applied these metrics to our projects and begun to gather evidence of success when measured by these factors. Thus far we’ve learned that to be effective, we have to clearly articulate the baseline conditions of our target metrics. Without the base data, improvement is hard to quantify. Our ability to establish metrics in certain areas, such as the carbon generation of individual real estate developments, is problematic. However, we should not be deterred by the absence of perfect measures, but should continue to experiment and try to improve their formulation.

One point of resistance firms encounter when they try to put performance measurements in place is that clients perceive the efforts as additional work, especially when money is tight. Some designers might argue that they must choose between the potential qualitative benefits that rigorous inquiry can produce or a profitable practice. Others might see the choice as one between the science of landscape architecture and an approach focused on

art. Still others may see a choice between rigor and creativity. In their 1998 book, *Built to Last*, authors Jim Collins and Jerry Porras spoke of “the genius of AND versus the tyranny of OR,” the belief that one cannot live with two seemingly contradictory views at the same time. They argued that firms that have achieved both longevity and enduring excellence have found a way to embrace the extremes of a number of dimensions simultaneously.

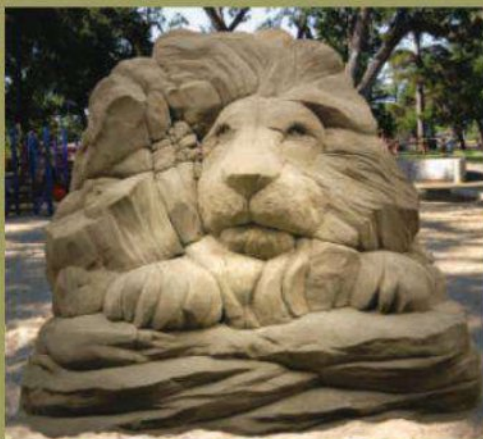
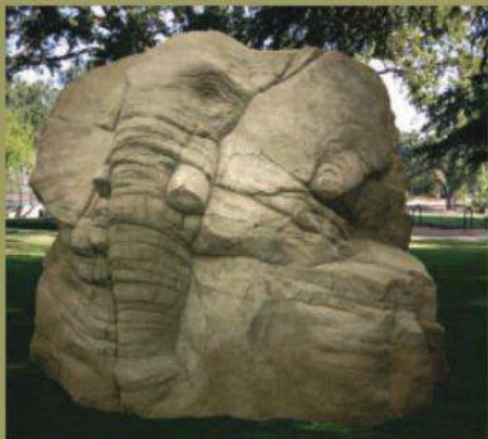
Since the first Earth Day in 1970, various efforts have been made to emphasize the landscape architect’s role as environmentalist, social reformer, entrepreneur, or artist. At times in the past 40 years, the profession has tended to place greater emphasis on one or the other of these roles. Ian McHarg, in his seminal *Design With Nature*, reminded the profession of its role as stewards of the environment. The pioneering work of Clare Cooper Marcus, Honorary ASLA, and William Whyte in the use of social research methods such as structured interviews, systematic observation, and post-occupancy evaluation taught landscape architects about the importance of the social and psychological aspects of landscape design, and particularly the value of community open space. The decade leading to the Great Recession illustrated the landscape architect’s role in the American housing economy and the emergence of landscape architecture firms as major business enterprises. The works of Martha Schwartz, ASLA, and Peter Walker, FASLA, are examples of design informed in large measure by principles of art. Today, many firms are trying to recenter landscape architecture at the intersection of all four areas of inquiry, and as they do so, it’s a good time to rethink the systems we use to measure a landscape’s success. ●

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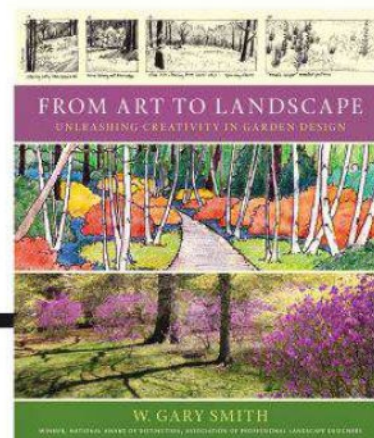
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FROM ART TO LANDSCAPE: UNLEASHING CREATIVITY IN GARDEN DESIGN

**BY W. GARY SMITH, ASLA; PORTLAND, OREGON:
TIMBER PRESS, 2010; 300 PAGES, \$39.95.**

REVIEWED BY PETER JACOBS, FASLA



W. Gary Smith, ASLA, is an accomplished artist and landscape architect whose voice falls outside those usually associated with the presentation of professional practice. His approach is based on a quiet passion for the inspiration that art can provide in shaping the landscape and the garden. His message is one of sensual delight, of personal exploration, and of youthful joy in discovering the magic of special places.

The author's premise, "Begin with who you are," is built on establishing a personal dialogue between himself and the reader, a dialogue filled with personal anecdotes and observations peppered with references to people and places that have inspired and influenced his approach to design. While at times the chatty tone can

although, once again, there are perhaps too many personal references. The projects include using native plants in Peirce's Woods at Longwood Gardens, designing a small mosaic garden in the Naples Botanical Garden in Florida, and challenging the tiresome, politically correct use of natural ecosystems through the playful design of a wilderness garden for the New England Wild Flower Society. The projects are beautifully illustrated with well-chosen photographs and provocative sketches, diagrams, planting plans, and pastel drawings by the author. The author's obvious expertise in the use of plants, his sense of construction techniques, and his clear eye for appropriate and even intriguing design effects is everywhere evident.

W. GARY SMITH SUCCESSFULLY DEMYSTIFIES MUCH OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS.

be distracting, one senses that we are overhearing conversations that convey the excitement and pleasure of experiencing the elusive "aha" moments that characterize the creative design process.

From Art to Landscape is divided into two parts; the first discusses a wide variety of sources that can unleash and nourish the imagination. The initial chapters, gathered under the banner of "cultivating the artist's eye," provide an excellent primer of basic design principles. The visual sources used to explain the shapes, forms, and patterns of landscape are drawn from nature, supplemented by a few examples of professionally designed landscapes. The author's own paintings and sketches illustrate ways of seeing that link us to the design process and how nature can inspire our sense of creativity. This is further explored with reference to the Winterthur garden of H. F. du Pont that Smith believes "is one of the greatest—and the most unrecognized—examples of a 20th-century garden created as a work of art."

The second part of the book focuses on the author's own garden design experiences. The discussion is informative and lively,

The presentation and discussion of the design of Enchanted Woods at Winterthur is one of the book's most intriguing chapters. The project best illustrates Smith's creative drive, his ability to think sideways, to explore his childlike side,

and to give expression to his fertile design imagination. Smith wrote in his journal that Enchanted Woods should not be "a running-around-on-high-octane" place, but rather a place "to feel exhilaration and wonder and a sense of humility in the presence of nature."

A number of contemporary landscape architecture publications link art and landscape through case studies of professional work. In most, the creative process is implicit and we are left to wonder how the problem statement and the program were transformed into the formal images that reflect the design intent. Smith successfully demystifies much of the creative process that bridges these two conditions by illustrating design opportunities that can be built on personal experience and a careful reading of all manner of source material available in the environments that surround us. *From Art to Landscape* is a primer for design students in a number of fields and an important reference for professional landscape and garden designers. ●

PETER JACOBS, FASLA, IS PROFESSOR OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTREAL.



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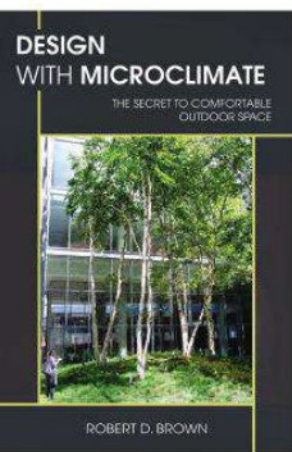
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DESIGN WITH MICROCLIMATE: THE SECRET TO COMFORTABLE OUTDOOR SPACE

BY ROBERT D. BROWN; WASHINGTON, D.C.:
ISLAND PRESS, 2010; 179 PAGES, \$30.

REVIEWED BY DIANE HELLEKSON



In my professional studies, microclimate pertained to plants, not people. I learned the design rules for northern latitudes (orient dwellings south with deep eaves, and don't build your amphitheater facing north), but that's about as far as it went. Favorable microclimates were places where plants survived in otherwise hostile landscapes, not where people enjoyed "thermal comfort," to use a term from Robert D. Brown's new book, *Design with Microclimate: The Secret to Comfortable Outdoor Space*.

This slim, friendly, and occasionally overwhelming primer urges landscape architects to understand the deeper implications of the big trio—topography, vegetation, and structure—and employ these elements more effectively by adding solar and terrestrial radiation, wind, and other climatic elements to the mix. Brown, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Guelph, employs both expertise and enthusiasm to argue that thermal comfort contributes more than any amenity to successful site design.

The trick for a passionate expert, of course, is to find a didactic level that will enlighten without inducing frustration or putting the audience to sleep. While *Design with Microclimate* is neither dry nor academic, it is far from bedtime reading.

Brown presents some surprises, including the fact that air temperature, humidity, and the presence or absence of sunshine aren't necessarily what makes a place seem hotter or cooler. He supports his assertion with this counterintuitive tidbit: air temperature and humidity, measured 1.5 meters above the surface at roughly the same time, vary little in a given landscape, even though thermal comfort in different parts of that landscape might be dramatically different.

Terrestrial radiation, among the most important influences on thermal comfort, does not change the temperature of a place, but rather warms the people and things that occupy it. Hence the misery of a bituminous parking lot on a sunny summer day—even though the air temperature there isn't different than that of a lawn a few blocks away.

Lest this sound like an interesting "so what?" Brown persuades us that understanding the specific reasons a place feels uncomfortable is key to finding the most effective strategies for improving it.

A trustworthy, sometimes goofy guide (who intersperses "yikes!" and "duh" into the milieu of pyranometers and conduction channels), Brown offers terrific anecdotes to illustrate microclimate concepts.

For instance, his snowy Saskatchewan childhood offers a lesson in how prevailing winds, slowed by buildings, lead to increased snow deposition and more shoveling on the east side of the street.

After a fat middle chapter on the "Components" of microclimate—the most challenging and scientific segment of the book—the final two chapters come as a relief. "Modifications" offers examples and a process for analyzing microclimate; "Principles and Guidelines" summarizes concepts both verbally and graphically. While these final chapters aim to hit the high points of the previous 98 pages, Brown can't resist digressing—on grizzly bears, evolutionary psychology, even tips for meeting with clients ("dress smartly"). The latter bit condescends to his professional readers and, more importantly, weakens the punch of his message.

The manuscript needed one more edit to curb Brown's veering and correct a few errors. (The worst is in the otherwise useful "Prototypes" section, which recommends a vine-covered trellis on the north side of homes, even though this same strategy was earlier—and correctly—lamented as ineffective.) The just-adequate graphics seem to reflect a limited budget, though the book's \$30 price gives that theory pause.

Despite its weaknesses, the book provides plenty of nerdy kicks. I found myself digressing on the web after Brown mentioned the Koppen Climate Classification system (which I recommend Googling). A fascinating take on climate data, Koppen maps reveal surprising geographic patterns, such as the climatic similarity of such places as Limoges, France; Vancouver; Bergen, Norway; and parts of Tasmania and Chile. Such cross-global climate connections, Brown suggests, offer an expanded menu of design precedents for managing microclimate.

At the headiest end of the microclimate analysis spectrum is the sort of process Brown and colleagues used to understand shade and wind patterns for the New York Times Building. Employing computer models and visual simulations, their work helped determine whether architect Renzo Piano could effectively fill an enclosed courtyard with the sun-loving paper birches he desired. It turned out he could, but only if contractors installed mature trees that would reach sufficient sunlight. Today this mossy microclimate, created by landscape architects and a very tall building in Manhattan, is a space both people and plants can enjoy. ●

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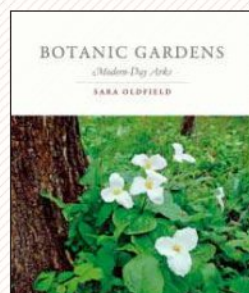
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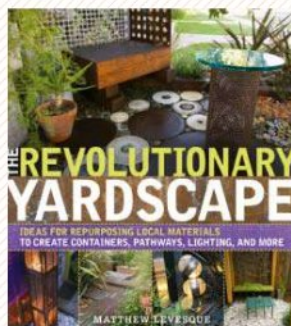


BOTANIC GARDENS: MODERN-DAY ARKS

BY SARA OLDFIELD; CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS: THE MIT PRESS, 2010; 240 PAGES, \$29.95.

"Scientists estimate that at least one-third of all flowering plant species are threatened with extinction," Sara Oldfield notes in the early pages of this tome. "Over the millennia plant species have adapted to changing climates or have migrated as a gradual response to temperature and rainfall changes, but now dramatic climatic changes are simply too rapid to allow plants to respond. Botanic gardens are finding a new role as modern-day arks, rescuing plants from the brink of extinction." Oldfield, who is the secretary general of Botanic Gardens Conservation International, provides examples from botanic gardens around the world. ●

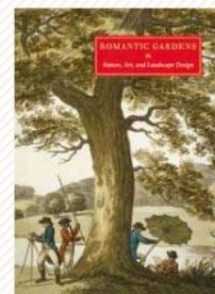
**"BOTANIC GARDENS ARE...
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THE REVOLUTIONARY YARDSCAPE: IDEAS FOR REPURPOSING LOCAL MATERIALS TO CREATE CONTAINERS, PATHWAYS, LIGHTING, AND MORE

BY MATTHEW LEVESQUE; PORTLAND, OREGON: TIMBER PRESS, 2010; 189 PAGES, \$22.95.

In Matthew Levesque's hands, old doorknobs become pavers, rusty steel baskets become tables and chairs, and steel skeletons left over from machine manufacturing become unique screens. Geared more toward the hobbyist than the professional designer, this book may still provide inspiration to landscape architects who are looking to create gardens out of salvaged materials. Some of the ideas are sort of strange and otherworldly, like a "skirt" made out of plastic pallet strapping attached to the bottom of a fence. Others are quite chic. Levesque is the program director and master of recycled art at Building REsources, a San Francisco nonprofit. ●



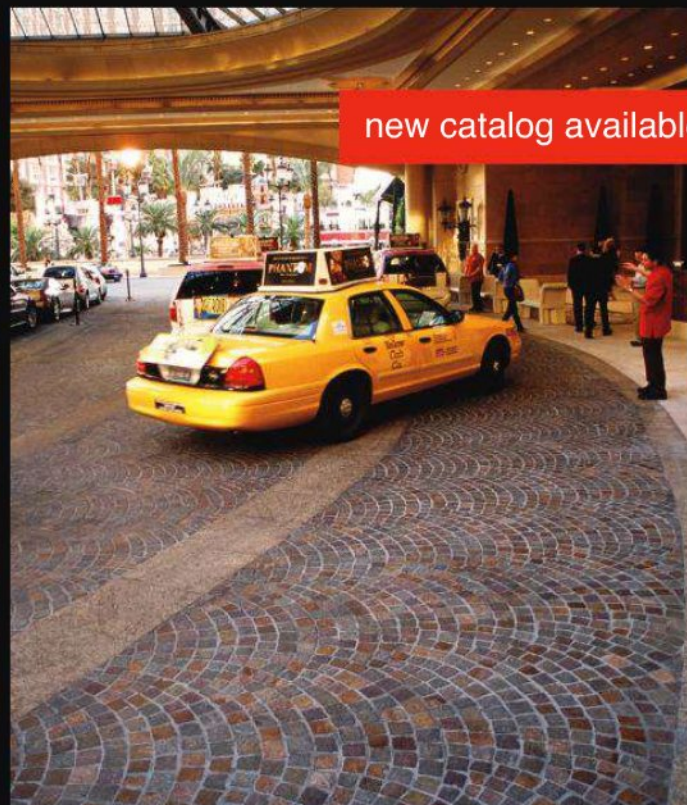
ROMANTIC GARDENS: NATURE, ART, AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN

BY ELIZABETH BARLOW ROGERS, HONORARY ASLA; ELIZABETH S. EUSTIS; AND JOHN BIDWELL; BOSTON: DAVID R. GODINE, 2010; 197 PAGES, \$50.

Landscape historians celebrated the 2010 exhibit at the Morgan Library in New York on how the Romantic movement's philosophical principles and aesthetic ideals influenced landscape design in England, France, Germany, and America in the 18th and 19th centuries. This is the exhibit's catalog. Presented in large format with a lengthy and erudite introductory essay, numerous color images, and insightful descriptions of the exhibition's content, this superb book belongs in every landscape historian's library. ●



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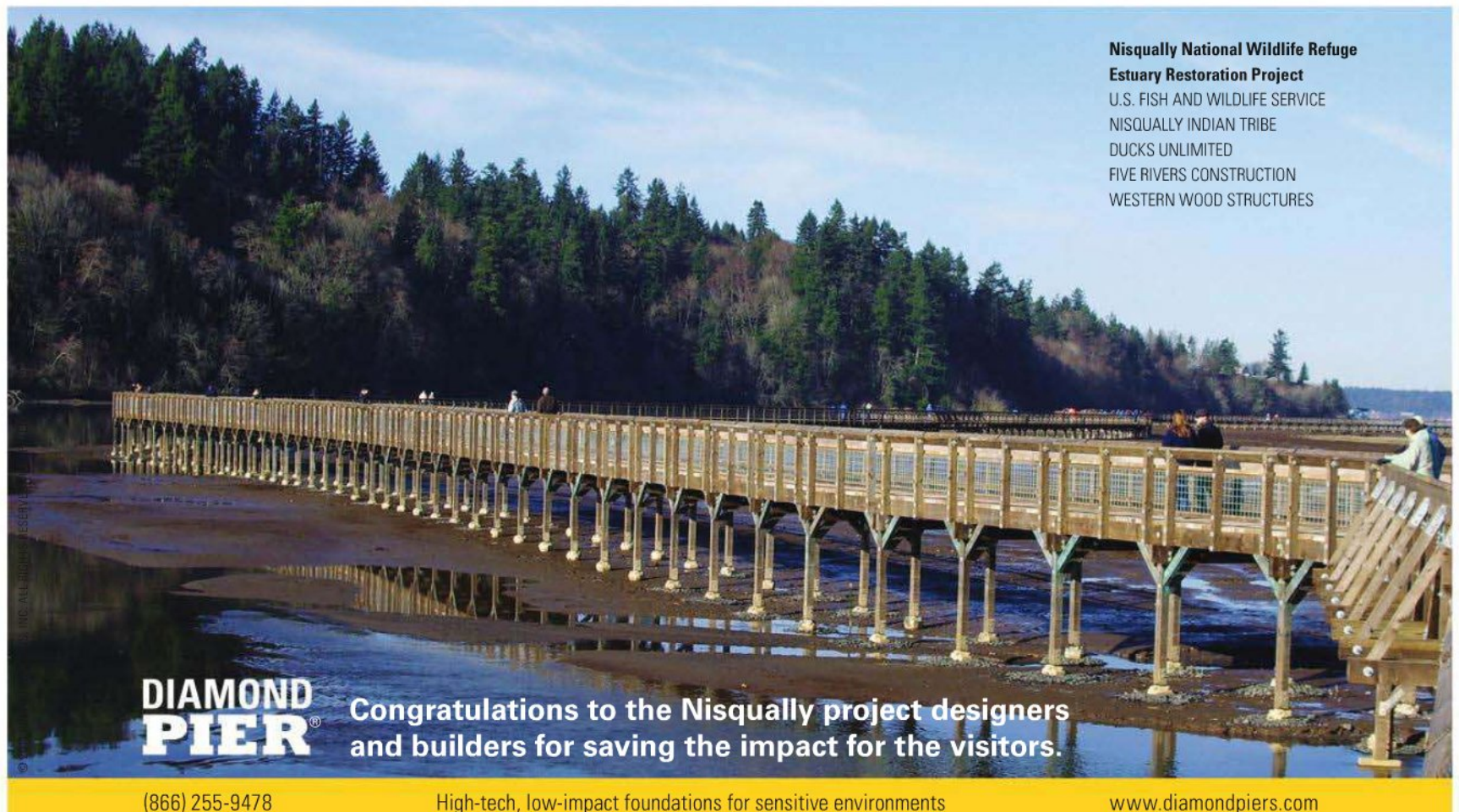


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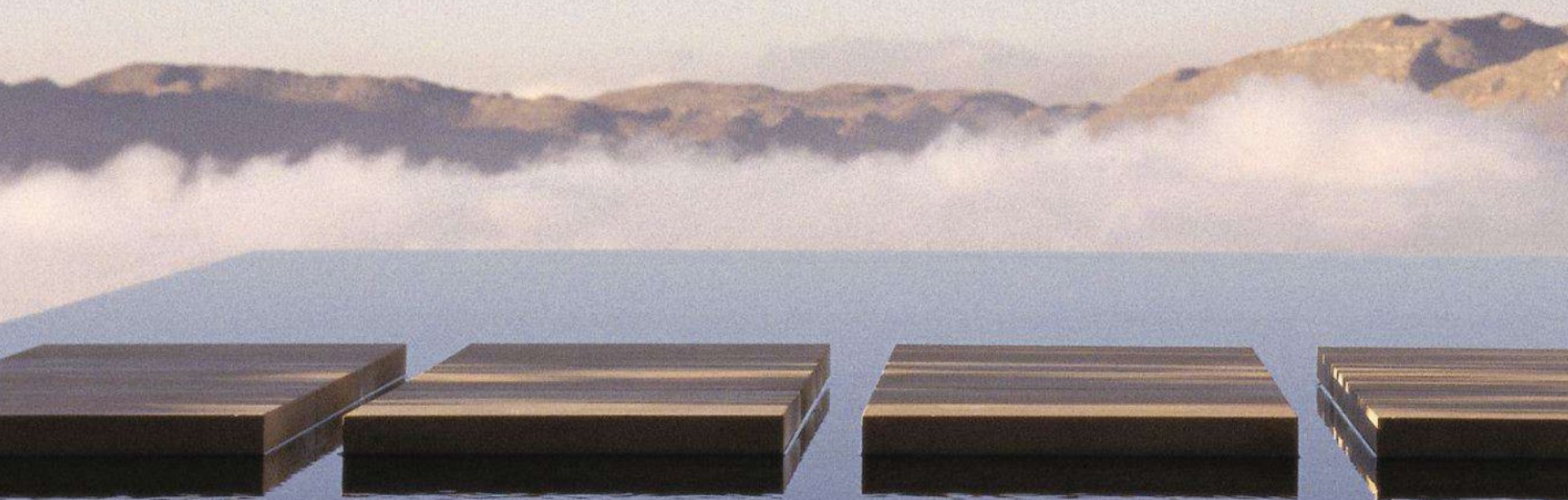
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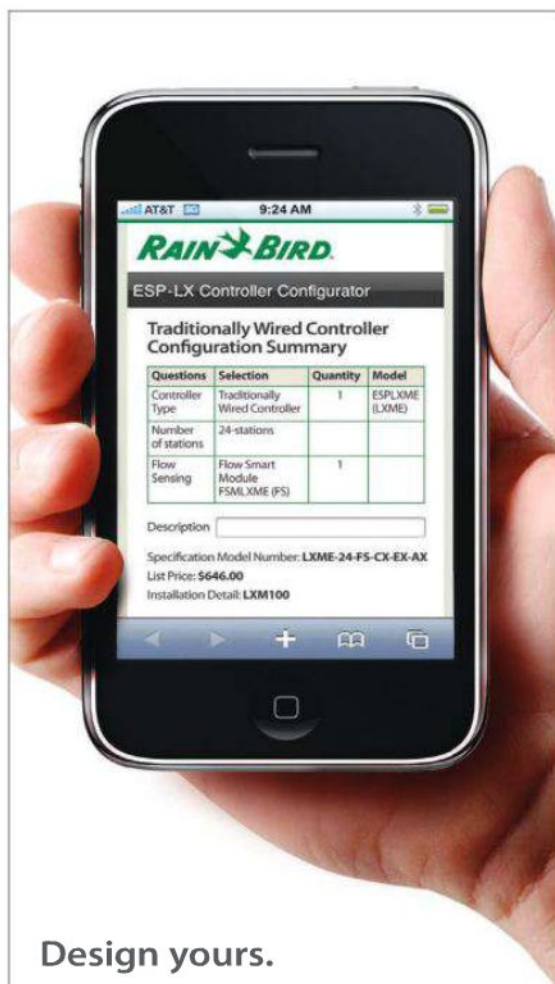


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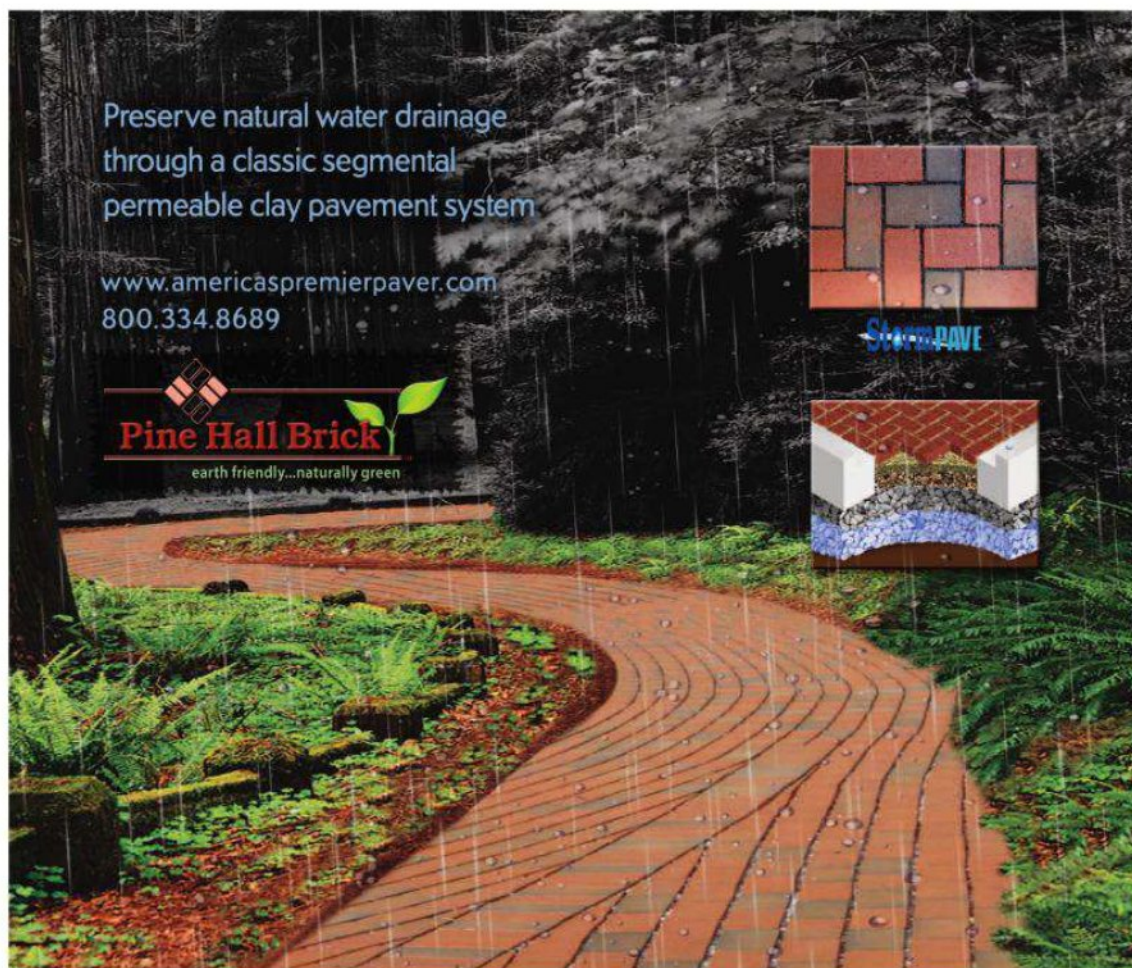
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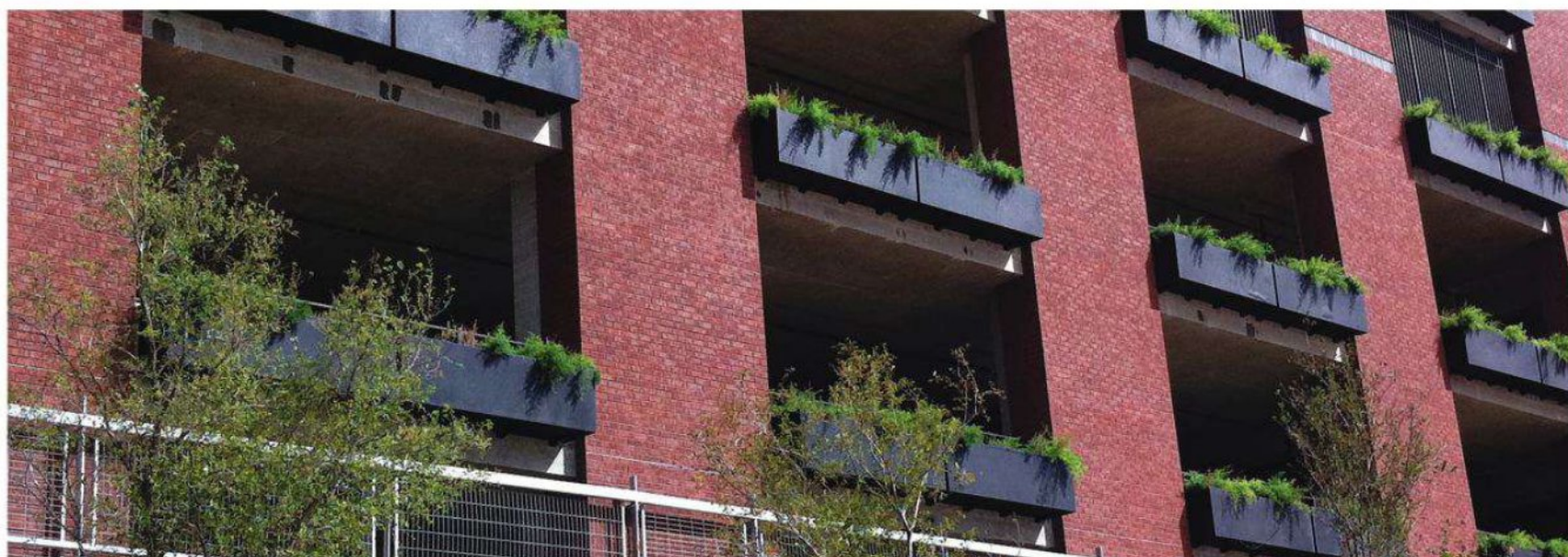


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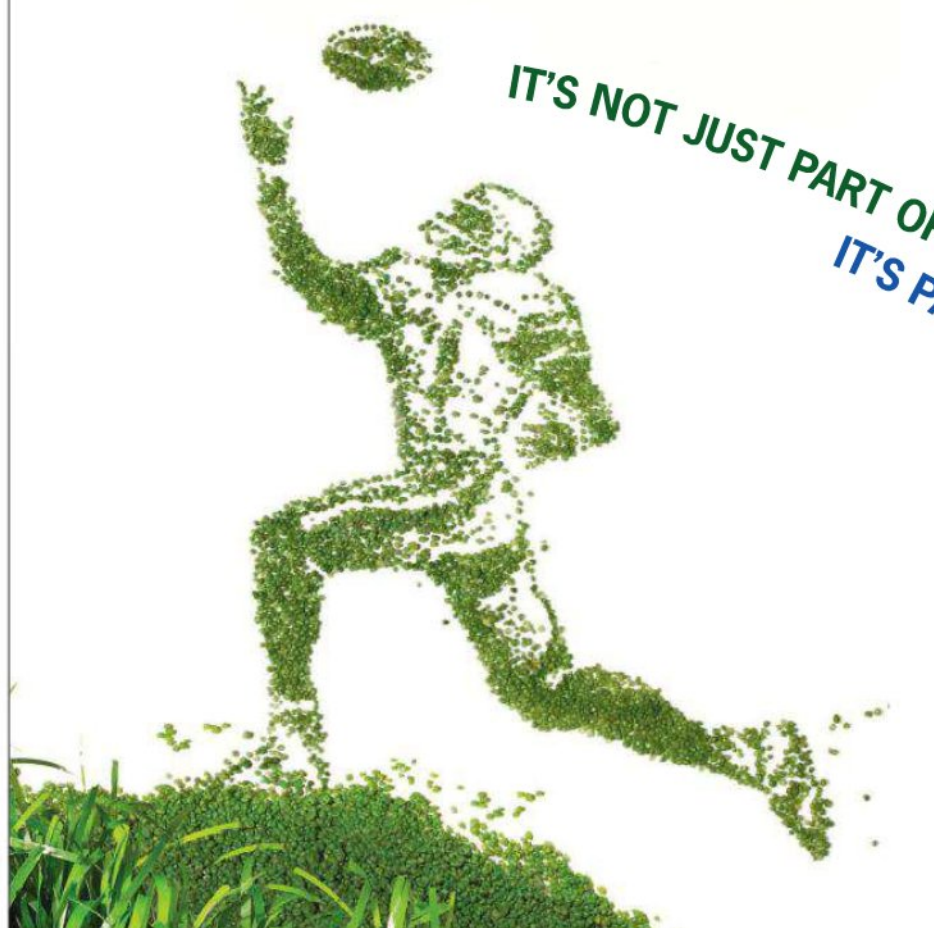
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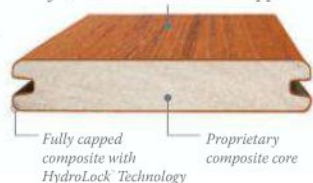


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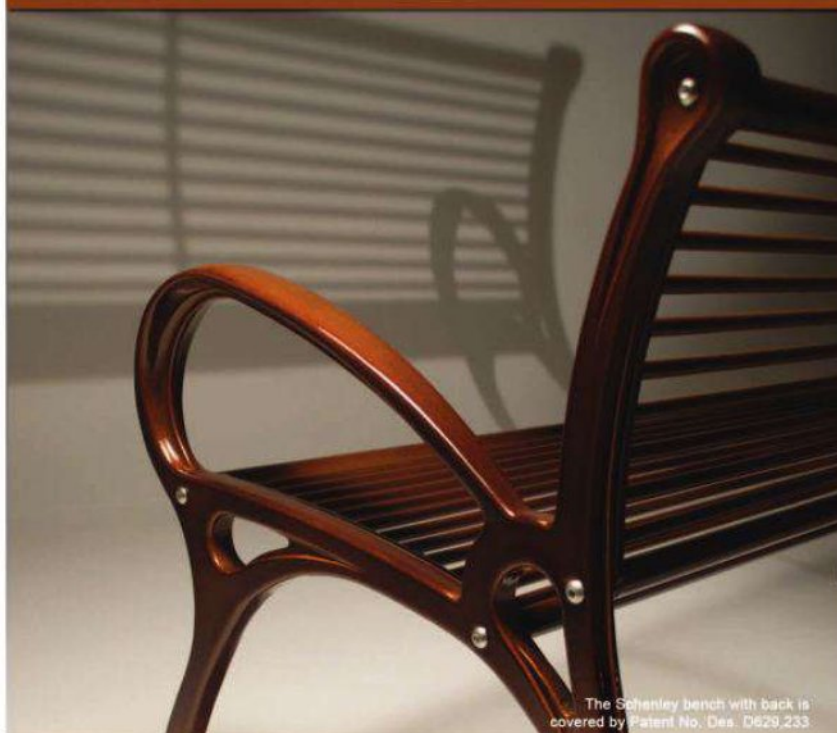
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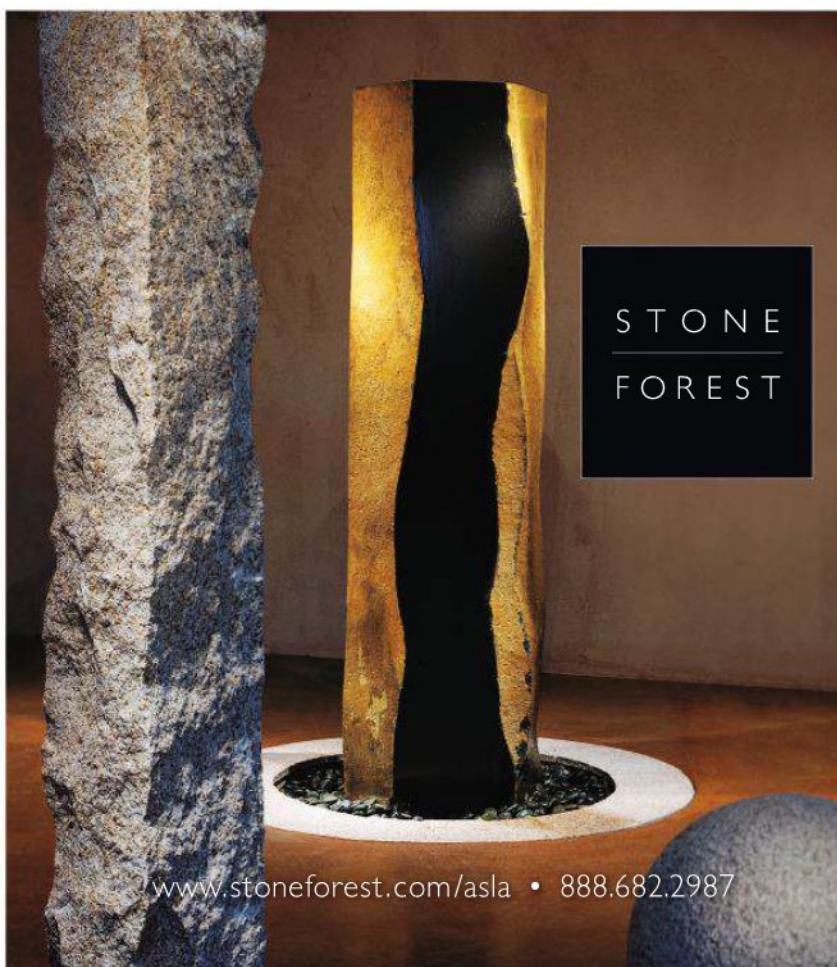


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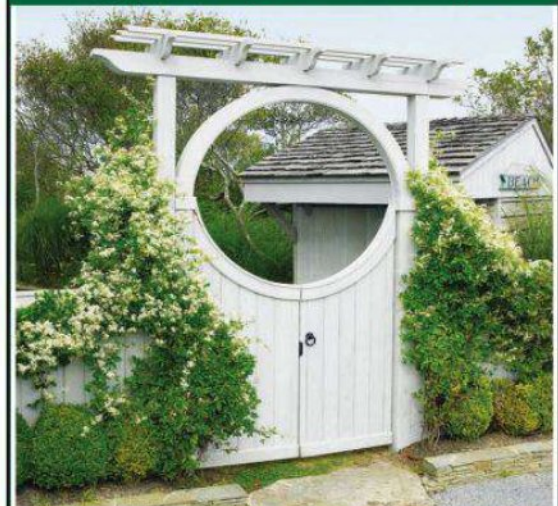
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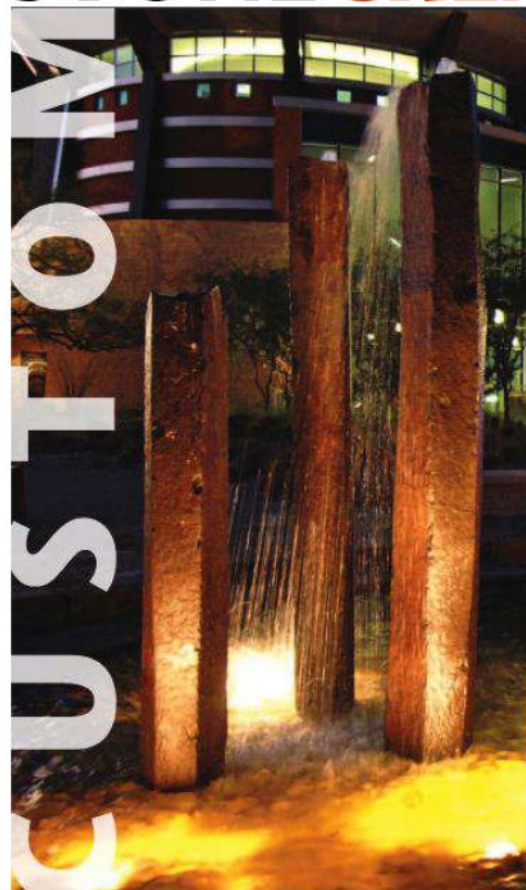
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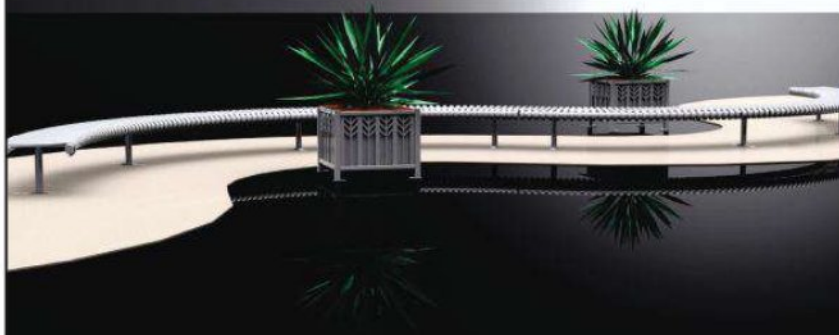
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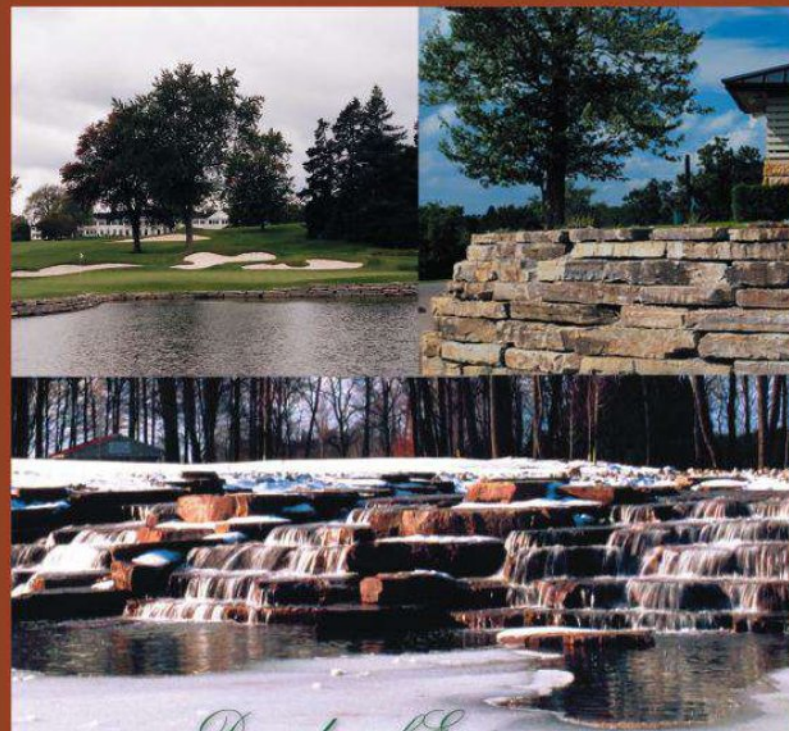
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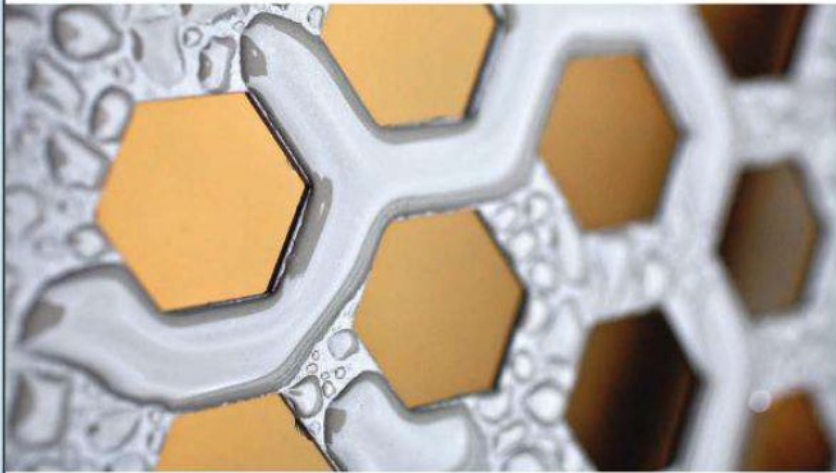
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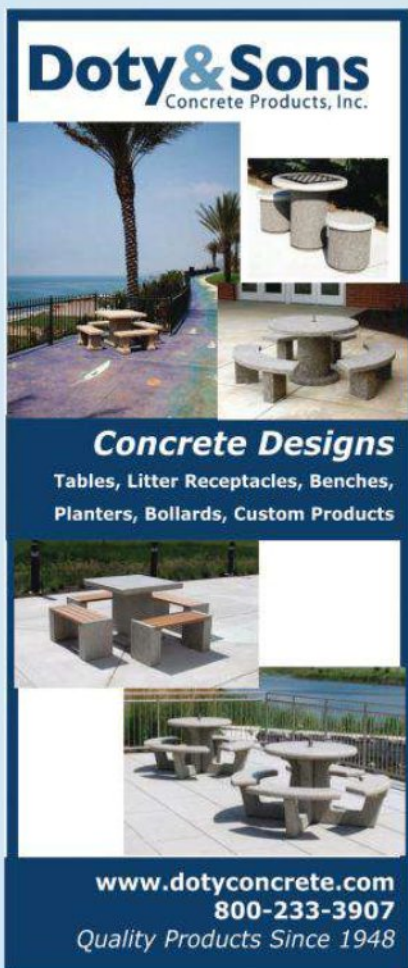
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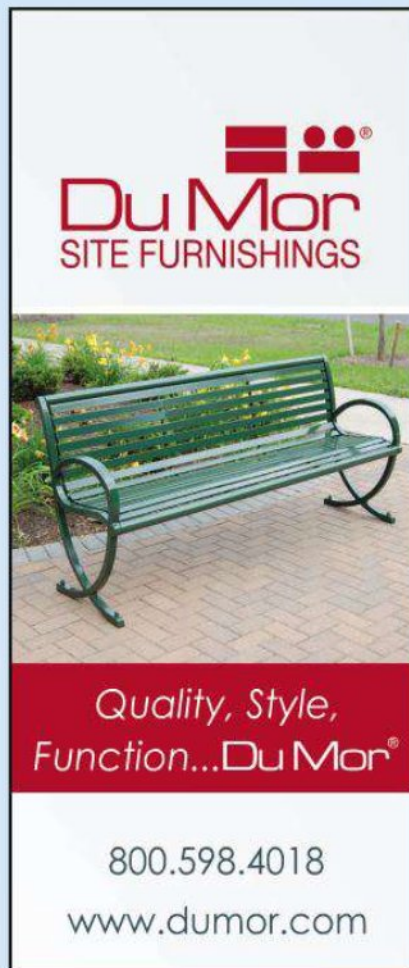


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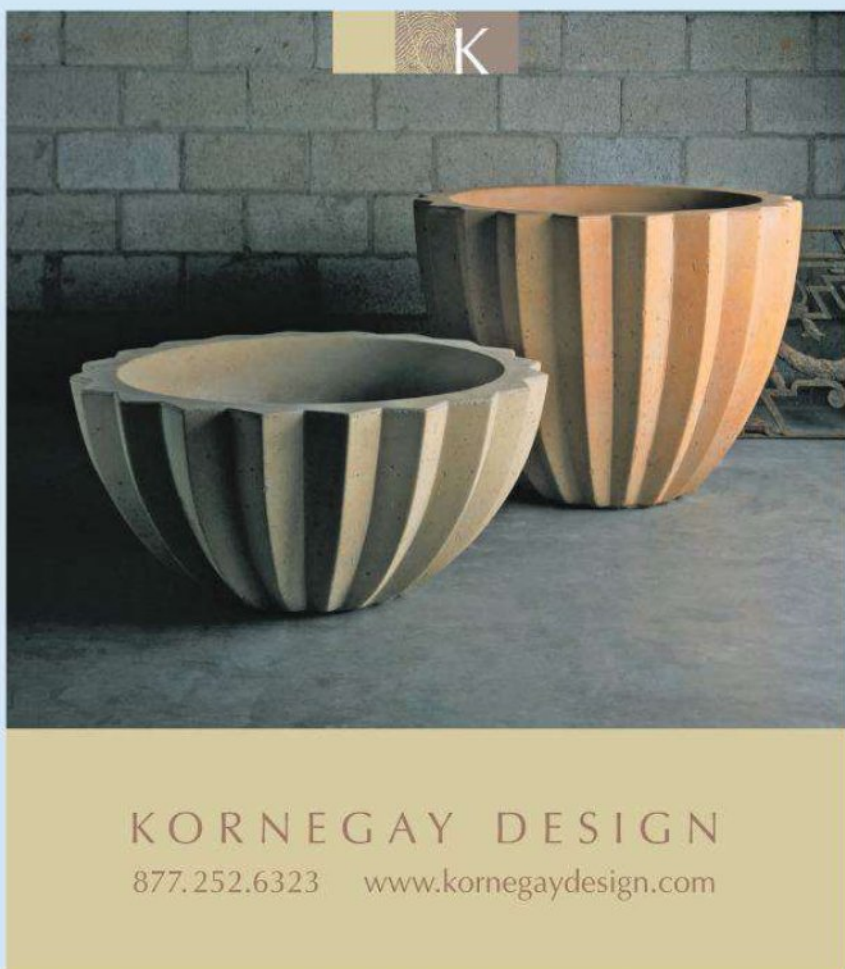
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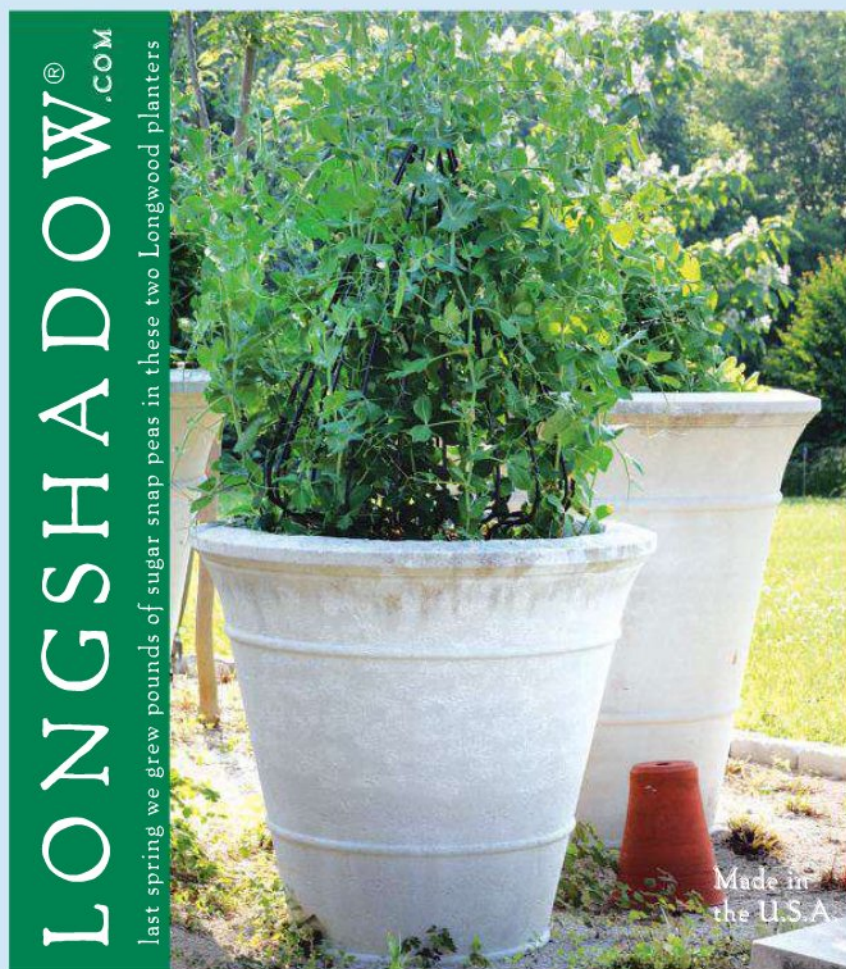


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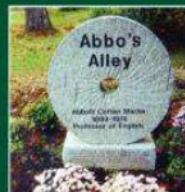
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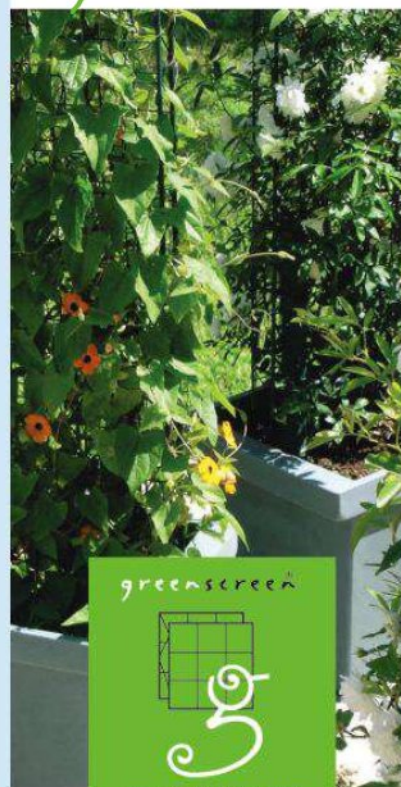
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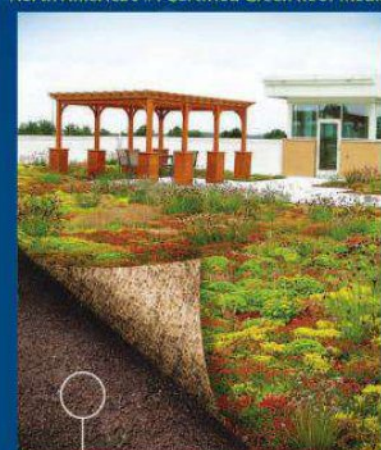
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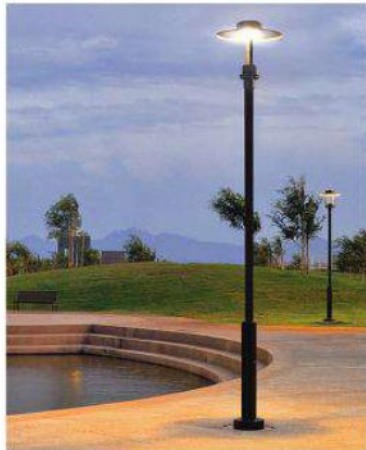


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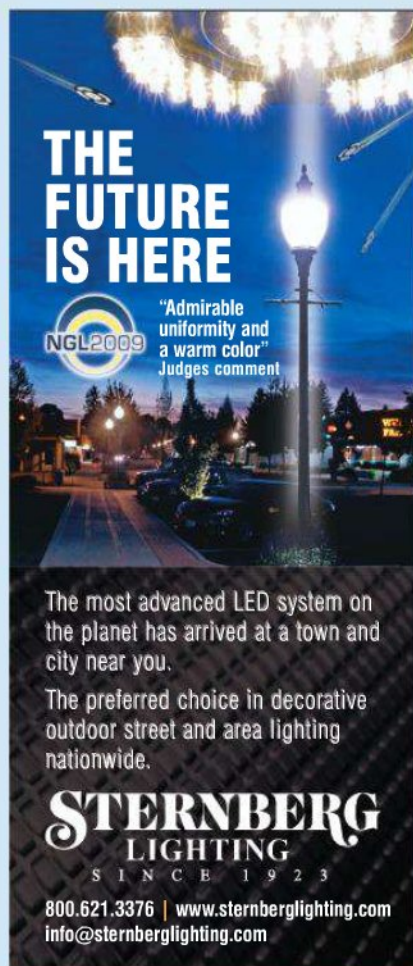
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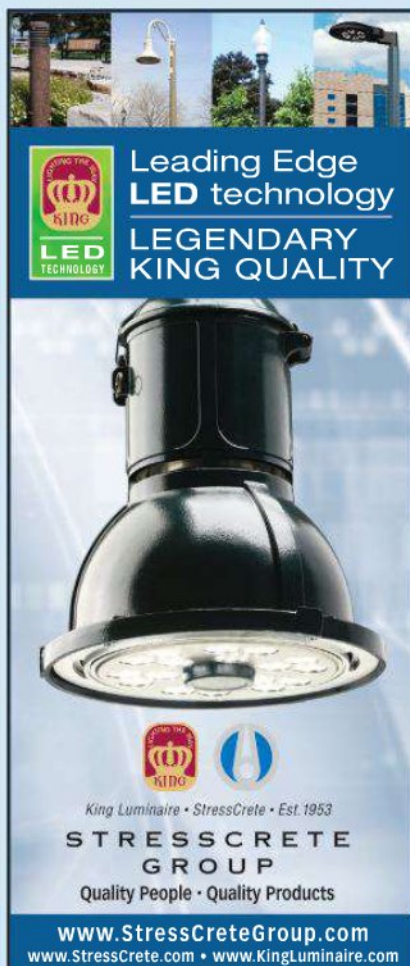
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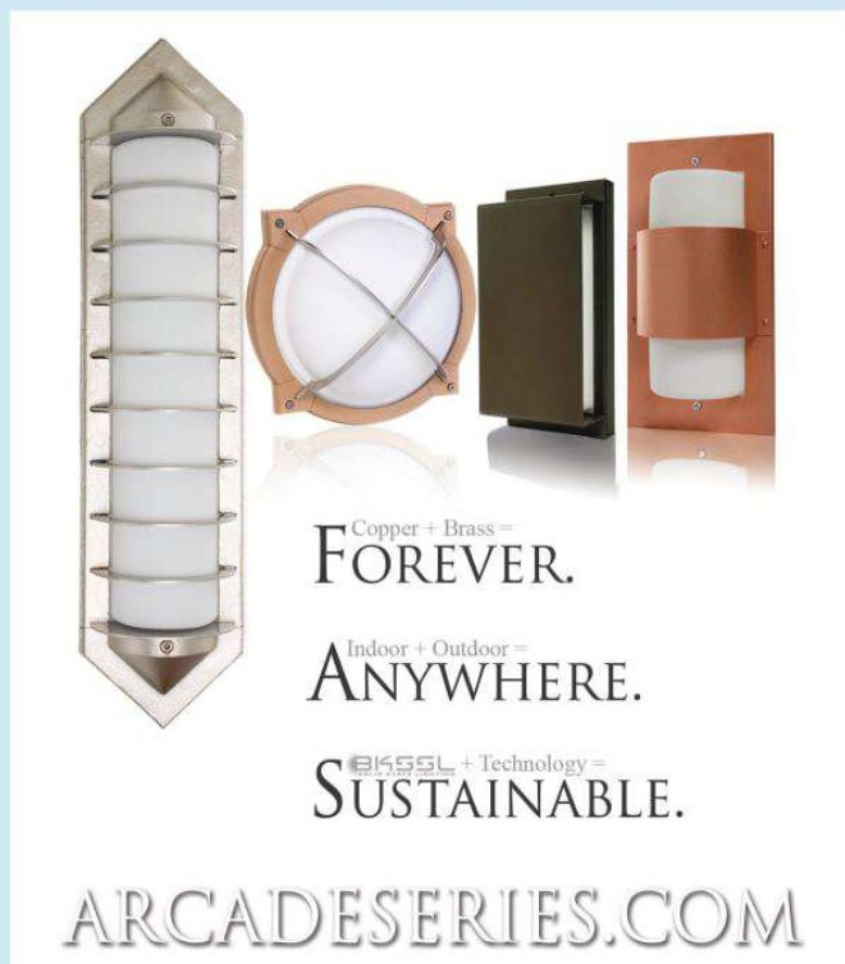
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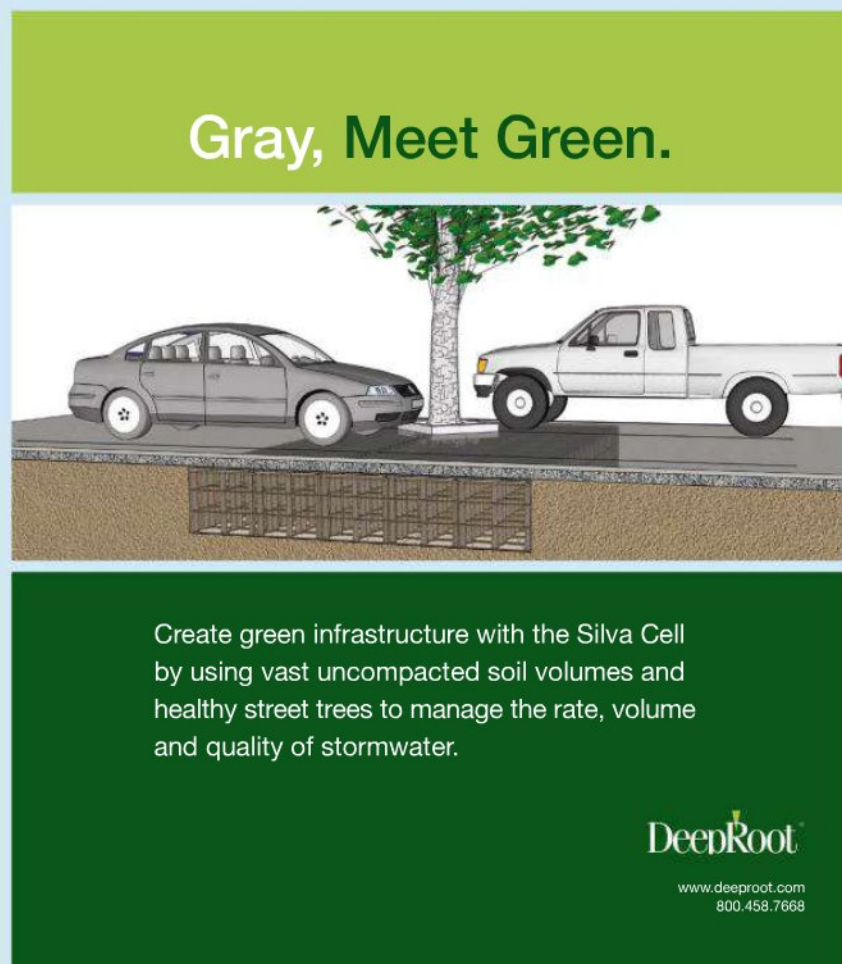
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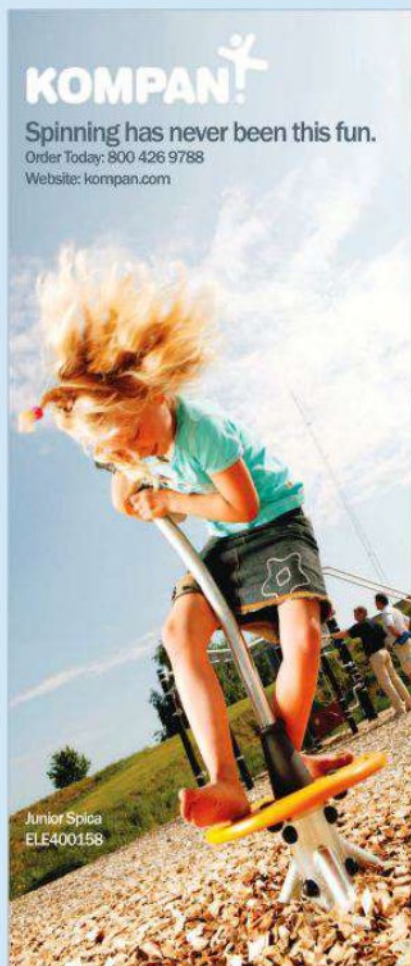
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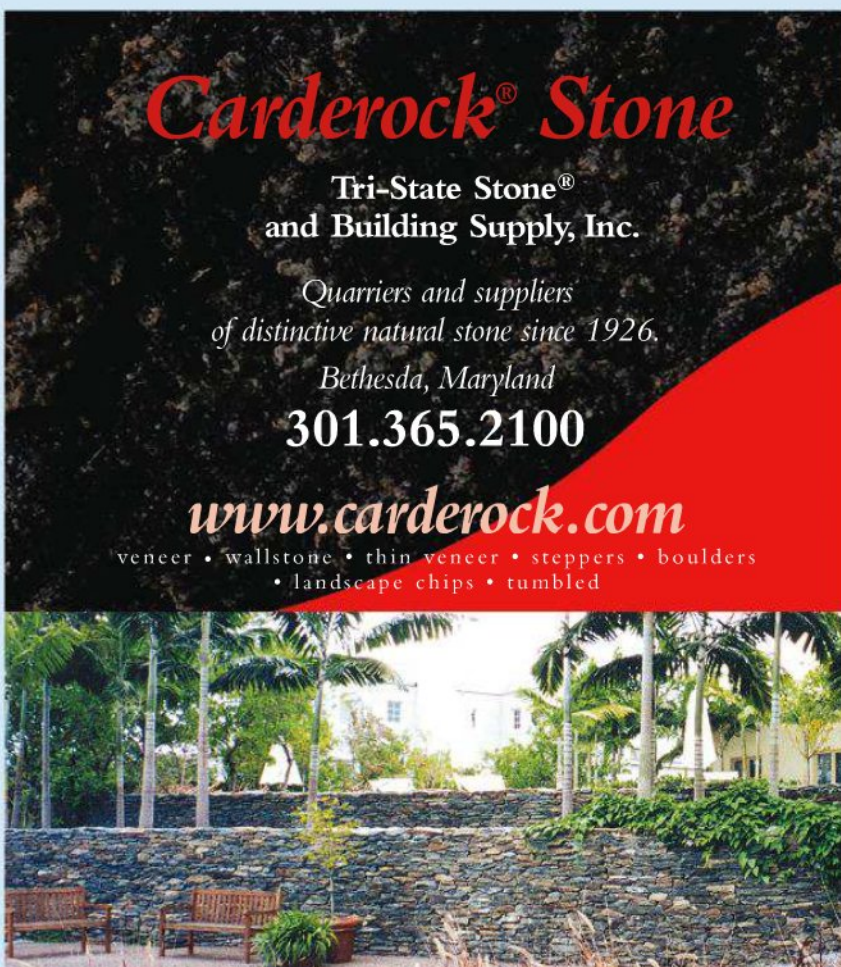
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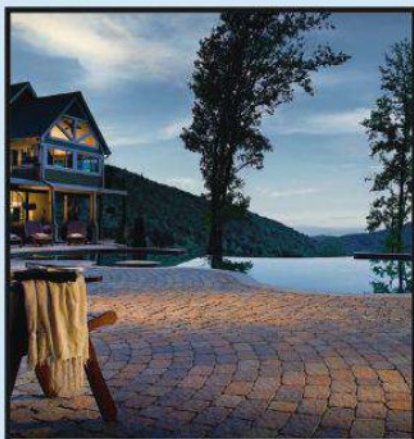
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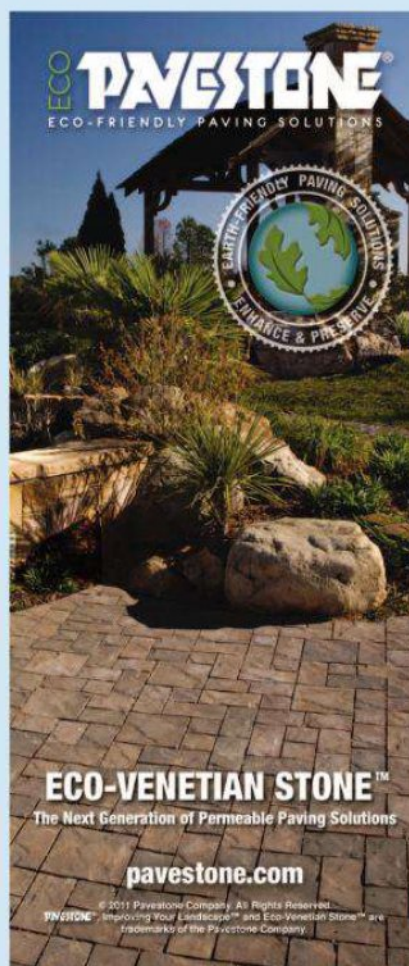
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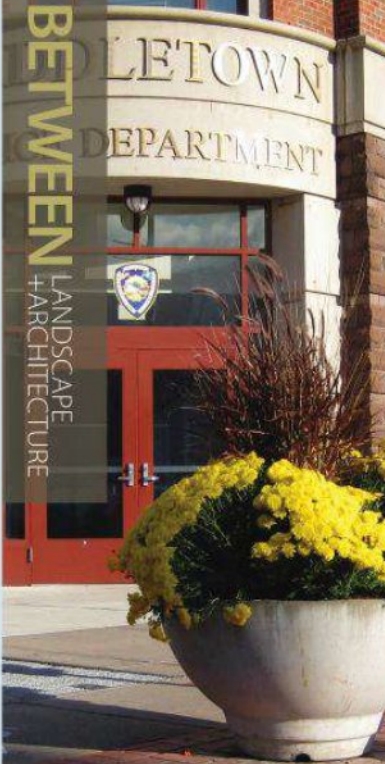


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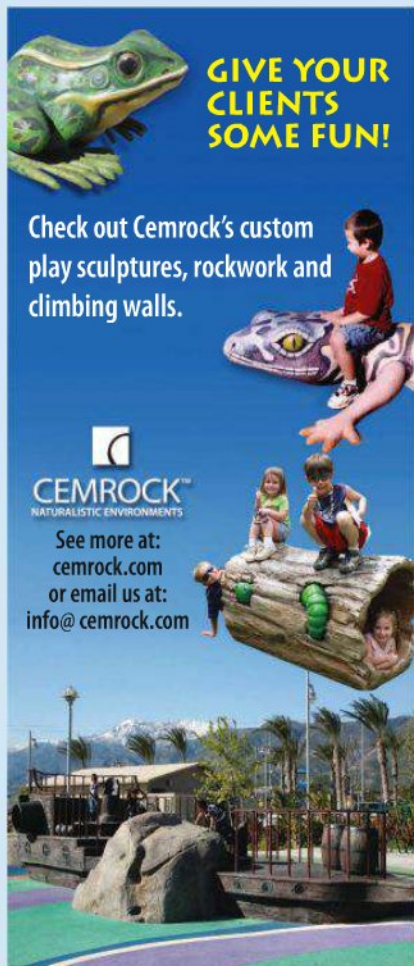


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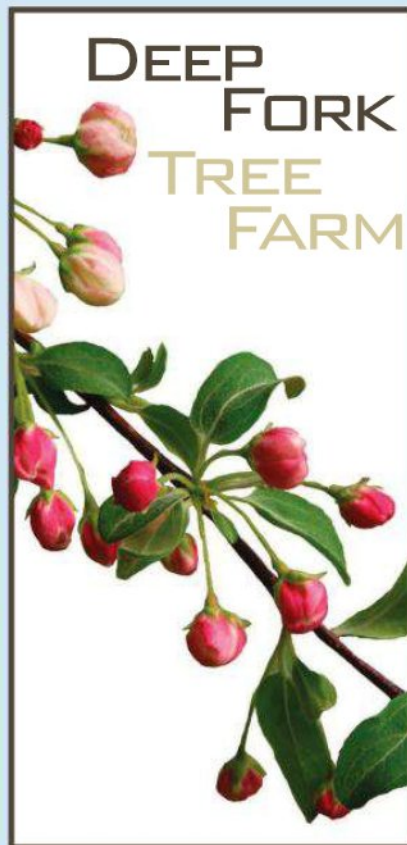
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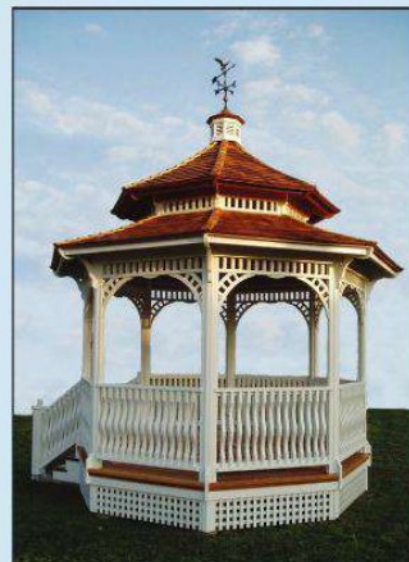
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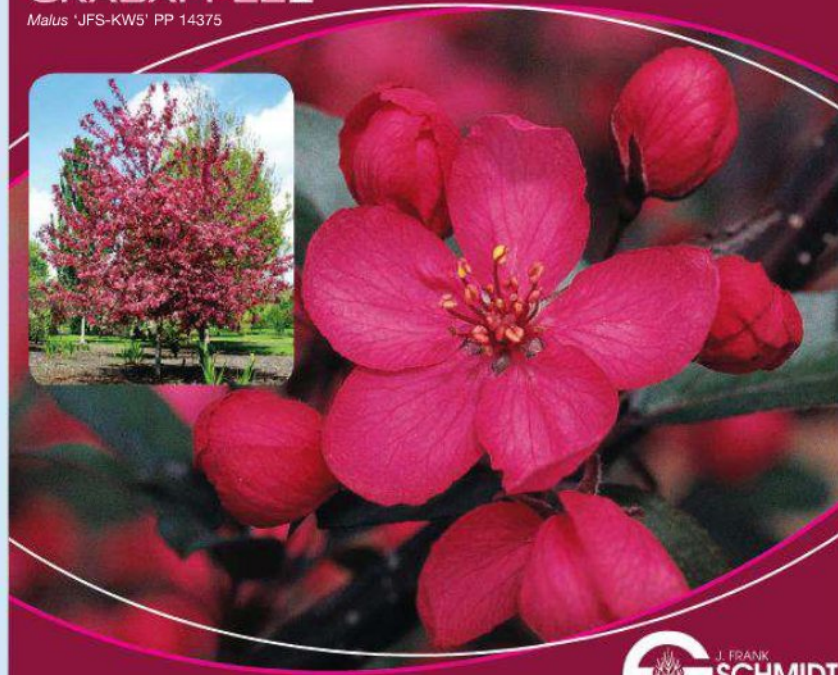
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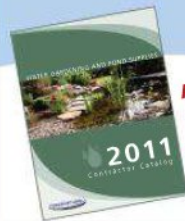
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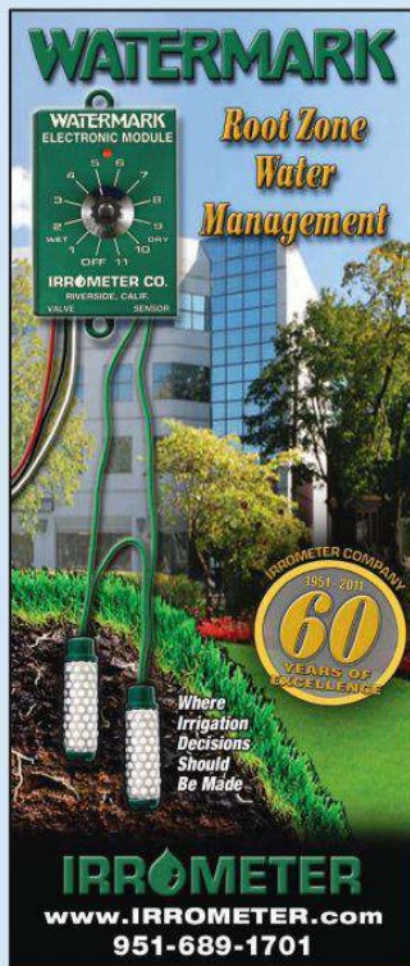
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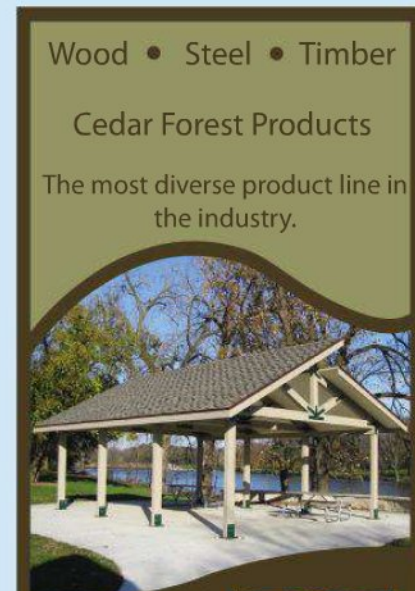
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THE SUBURBS' SECOND GROWTH

BY ALEXANDER GARVIN

RIGHT

The intersection of North Druid Hills and Briarcliff roads in DeKalb County, Georgia, today and what it could become.

IMAGE CREDITS

Courtesy AGA Public Realm Strategists

For decades, people have bewailed sprawl and demanded that we stop developers from spreading it any farther. While urbanists have proposed numerous alternative development patterns and zoning regulations that might improve the quality of future new construction, there hasn't been much discussion about the millions and millions of acres that already exist.

The attention that has been paid to this existing suburban landscape has been primarily form based, when it should have been concerned with how to change that landscape and should, therefore, have been process oriented. It finally is time for a process-oriented approach, because the existing single-function landscape, created for an automobile-dependent population, is getting steadily older and obsolescent—sufficiently so that we need practical proposals for what should come next and how to make it happen.

Because the mid-20th-century suburban landscape is aging, there is an opportunity for second growth. Many single-story manufacturing facilities are closing down, open-air shopping centers find it difficult to compete with big-box retailers and climate-controlled malls, railroads have abandoned once-profitable rights-of-way, and aging office parks with out-of-date infrastructure are being taken out of service. Moreover, development has now leapfrogged into the exurbs, and residents and businesses that once occupied mid-20th-century suburbs are following farther into the hinterland. We need to recognize this mounting problem but think of it as an opportunity to shape what will be inevitable second growth.

Underused manufacturing properties, shopping complexes, and office parks can now be purchased by county and town governments in suburban areas and reused as public parks. Some vehicular lanes on major traffic arteries can now be replaced with wider sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and light rail or bus rapid-transit corridors. Some clusters of small, deteriorating bungalows can now be replaced by higher-density residential development. We should seize this opportunity by eliminating single-function zoning, introducing alternatives to private automobile travel, acquiring sites for the development of new public parks, and providing a public-realm framework that ties these communities together. All this can be accomplished once there are models to be used in local redevelopment efforts, financial mechanisms to pay



BEFORE ↗



↙ AFTER

for them, and agencies established to implement schemes for second growth that undo sprawl.

The model I propose is similar to what my firm proposed and was adopted by the County Commission in DeKalb County, Georgia. It can be financed through a tax increment district, which uses the increased taxes paid by properties whose value has been increased by investment in the public realm and rezoning to pay debt service on the bonds that would finance the investments in the public realm. While the money for these public-realm investments would come from bonds, the construction itself could either be done by private developers implementing a government-approved plan or by a redevelopment agency set up for that purpose by the local government.

At the start of the 20th century there may have been a rationale for separating land uses. But much of that rationale is now irrelevant. Environmental regulation now precludes the air and water pollution that made it essential to separate manufacturing from residential areas. Similarly, bicycle and light-rail networks in Denver, Minneapolis, and other cities are being extended into the suburbs, thereby diverting enough traffic to reduce the rights-of-way used by motor vehicles. As a result there is a growing opportunity for a major change in land-use patterns and, with that change, major improvements in the quality of life throughout suburban areas that were once decried as sprawl. ●

ALEXANDER GARVIN IS PRESIDENT OF AGA PUBLIC REALM STRATEGISTS, AUTHOR OF *PUBLIC PARKS: THE KEY TO LIVABLE COMMUNITIES*, AND PROFESSOR OF URBAN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT AT YALE UNIVERSITY.

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