

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA



COMMON

PRESERVING OUR NATION'S HERITAGE WINTER 2011

GROUND



FIRST WORD

BY JON JARVIS

Restorative by Design

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE NATIONAL PARKS, visitors arrived by rail or coach or on horseback, and—often in their formal Victorian clothes—sat in the grass by the river or walked out to the glacier or posed by the ruins. They had ideas in those days about the restorative powers of nature, not only in a physical sense, but in ways that evaded description. Perhaps they sought to glimpse the wild nature of a recently tamed continent. In later years, the idea of the national parks called to mind the mythical cross-country trip in the station wagon or the classic panoramas from postcards and coffee-table books. **SINCE ITS FOUNDING 96 YEARS AGO**, the national park system has grown infinitely more complex. It includes not just the scenic wonderlands out west, but urban parks like Golden Gate in San Francisco, Gateway in New York, and the National Mall in Washington, DC. Our mission requires us to walk the fine line between stewardship and access, to understand the myriad ways in which people interact with the landscape. In large part, we achieve that balance through design. **THERE IS A CONNECTION** between design and conservation in the national parks that goes well beyond aesthetics. Extreme care and craftsmanship have gone into shaping the places that millions enjoy every year. Most do not notice the way the landscape unfolds before them, the subtle theater involved in its presentation. **IN THE '20S AND '30S**, the National Park Service had its own cadre of landscape architects, who created masterworks in the famous roads at Shenandoah and Glacier. In later years, we have brought some of the nation's most accomplished architects and designers to work in the national parks, a tradition that includes names like Eero Saarinen and Dan Kiley and Lawrence Halprin. It is a tradition we plan to uphold, but the 21st century brings challenges. As open space disappears into suburban development and strip malls, the subtle power of design can help people understand the fragility of the natural world and our responsibility to care for it. Design, as well, has an uncanny ability to convey the enduring lessons of history. **THE NATIONAL PARKS MUST NOT ONLY** do these things, but set an example of sustainability for the entire world. Our newest visitor centers get LEED ratings that meet the toughest standards in environmental design. The Craig Thomas Center at Grand Teton National Park uses geothermal and solar energy, light sensors, and composting bathrooms that save about 76,000 gallons of water annually. It achieved a platinum LEED rating—the highest possible. At Denali National Park, the visitor center was built largely with recycled materials, uses on-site cold water for air conditioning, and features a number of other sustainable qualities. At Mount Rainier National Park, the visitor center will cost an estimated \$7 million less to operate over its lifespan than its predecessor,

its pitched roof shedding snow in a place that gets 800 inches a year. You will be seeing more of such accomplishments not only at our visitor centers, but throughout the national park system. **YET THE UTMOST IN SUSTAINABILITY** may be having to care for no visitor centers at all. For the past few years, we have been part of a collaborative effort known as Designing the Parks, an initiative that promotes sustainable design. Its latest effort—studio competitions at some of the nation's top universities—invites architecture and landscape design students to envision parks “beyond the visitor center,” re-examining the very concept. **THE VISITOR CENTER HAS ALWAYS SERVED** as the gateway to the park, the repository of information. Today, many people—and not just those under 30—plan their visits online, downloading information to iPhones, iPads, and Droids. And while there is no question that people should be able to talk to a ranger, is the visitor center the best place to do it? **IT IS A QUESTION THAT THE REALITIES** of the 21st century demand we ask. And it prompts the deeper question of who uses the parks and why. I have heard young people say that when they go to a national

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park they want to leave all technology behind. I have heard others say they want the full suite of wireless wonders. **THE PARKS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN** places of discovery, as true in an urban environment as it is at Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon. Whatever course we take, it must lead us to the same destination: that of those early pilgrims to natural America. The parks should remain what they have always been: places that beckon us into the wilderness, and into the past. **THE QUALITIES WE SEEK IN PARK DESIGN** can be elusive, but we know what they are: sustainability, reverence for place, engagement of all people, expansion beyond traditional boundaries. While these qualities call for excellence in park design, they also resonate with the National Park Service stewardship ethos, and with conservation writ large as we practice it on a nationwide scale. **THE NATIONAL PARKS ARE EXPRESSIONS** of who we are as a society and what we deem important. They are meditations on the past and a message to the future. They occupy a unique juncture among culture, science, health, and civics. Design, at its heart, is an act of preservation that will help carry the national parks into their second century.

Jon Jarvis is Director of the National Park Service. Adapted from a speech last spring at the University of Virginia School of Architecture, Charlottesville, Virginia.



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Above: The Pocono Environmental Education Center, a Designing the Parks winner with its wall of tires fished from a river during community cleanup.
Front: The Liberty Bell Center, another winner.
Back: Dancers, Lowell National Historical Park.

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Facing Change

Embracing New Neighbors at Lowell National Historical Park

As the cradle of America's industrial revolution, Lowell, Massachusetts, has always been a magnet for those seeking a better life. Yet, unlike many places with a history of immigration, it's no melting pot. With the foreign born and minorities accounting for almost 65 percent of its 106,000 residents, it's more like a salad bowl. Or at least



that's the analogy used by a report commissioned to help Lowell National Historical Park connect with its new neighbors. "Lowell is definitely a changing landscape and it still has very distinct cultural groups," says Christoph Strobel, University of Massachusetts at Lowell associate history professor and co-author of *Ethnicity in Lowell*, written with fellow professor Robert Farrant. With immigration such a central theme at the park, "there was a desire to

But the report also gives fair space to the "New Lowellians," the ones who have come in recent years, particularly after the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which did away with the restrictive national origins quota system in effect since the 1920s. Unlike the immigrants of yesteryear, today's migrants have been largely Asian, Latin, and African. They arrived either as refugees or in search of opportunity. "Like earlier generations, these New Lowellians are once again shaping and enriching the city's ethnoscape with their unique and diverse presence," notes the report.

The Cambodians, perhaps the most prevalent group, make up around 25 percent of the population. Only Long Beach, California—where California State University sponsored about 100 Cambodian college students in 1958—has a larger Cambodian community. Immigration from the impoverished country, on the southern end of the Indochina Peninsula, was almost nonexistent until the mid-1970s, when thousands fled to escape hard labor and torture under the communist Khmer Rouge regime. Sambath Bo, one Cambodian interviewed for the report, recalls her mother being repeatedly choked almost to the point of suffocation before she could escape.

THE NEW IMMIGRANTS ARRIVED AT THE START OF THE "MASSACHUSETTS MIRACLE," A PERIOD OF INTENSE LOW-SKILL MANUFACTURING JOB GROWTH, PARTICULARLY IN THE HIGH-TECH AND FINANCIAL SERVICE SECTORS.

delve more deeply into immigration as a whole, and especially in the present," says David Blackburn, the park's chief of cultural resources and programs. The report provides not only a detailed profile of current audiences—essential in gearing the park to their needs—but also a complete history of the immigrant experience, invaluable in bridging past with present through stories based on commonalities.

The park is home to a collection of restored 19th-century textile mills—once a huge draw for waves of European immigrants in the 1800s and early 1900s. The report covers them all: the Irish, Greeks, Jewish, Polish, Lithuanians, Armenians, and even job-hungry French Canadians, some lured by the "glowing characterizations" offered by authors such as Charles Dickens and John Greenleaf Whittier.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Members of Lowell's Angkor Dance Troupe.

contact points email david_blackburn@nps.gov robert_farrant@uml.edu
christoph_strobel@uml.edu web Lowell National Historical Park
www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm *Ethnicity in Lowell Report* www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/lowe/ethnicity.pdf

After the end of the regime, between 1980 and 1985, America welcomed about 100,000 Cambodians. While many headed for Long Beach or other locales, Lowell quickly became a favored spot. Sucheng Chan, author of *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States*, cites three reasons: the local Theravada Buddhist temple, a strong job market, and the state's "refugee-friendly" policies.

Lowell took a nosedive between the 1920s and 1940s, as much of the textile industry moved south. By the 1970s, the unemployment rate was 12 percent. The new immigrants arrived at the start of the "Massachusetts Miracle," a period of intense low-skill manufacturing job growth, particularly in the high-tech and financial service sectors. Lowell was the headquarters of computer giant Wang Laboratories, and state first lady Kitty Dukakis was a strong advocate for the refugees. And while many came initially for economic opportunity, "what attracted them later was the existence of their community and just trying to find a little bit of flavor of home," Strobel says. Today that flavor is evidenced by the hundreds of ethnic businesses and restaur-



ALL PHOTOS ANDREW PAGE



THE CAMBODIANS, PERHAPS THE MOST PREVALENT GROUP, MAKE UP AROUND 25 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION.

rants all over town, not just in sequestered districts. Discrimination remains an issue, as many migrants have not fully assimilated, a process that often takes two to three generations. Despite such issues, there is appreciation for the broad mix of cultures, on display at several annual events such as the Southeast Asian Water Festival, which attracts about 60,000 each year to “thank the spirit of the water,” in Buddhist tradition. There is also the Lowell Puerto Rican Festival, the Lowell Latin American Festival, and the Greater Lowell African Festival. The park has grown increasingly involved with the New Lowellians, especially since its 30th anniversary in 2008. “We’ve recognized that civic engagement and connecting ourselves to the larger community is something that is really important to us,” Blackburn says. Efforts to embrace the Cambodian community include hosting the Angkor Dance Troupe, which teaches traditional Cambodian dance to community youth, working with social service agencies, and creating park tours that show Cambodian elders that immigrant challenges in Lowell have been faced by many before them. In addition, the park is working on a tour with the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association that will give non-immigrants “a taste of the city’s Cambodia Town.”

The report has been a valuable touchstone for both the park and the residents, suggesting how to build connections through exhibits, brochures in languages spoken by targeted groups, and other outreach initiatives. The report has also led to educational events allowing interviewees to publicly share their stories, as well as the publication of *The Big Move: Immigrant Voices from a Mill City*, which contains 9 of the report’s 35 oral histories in their entirety. One especially rewarding outcome of the report, spearheaded by Forrant, was “Immigrant Murals,” a 17-panel illustration of the city’s history created by Lowell High School students. “For historians, there is no better feeling than seeing their work used to inform the wider public and educate young people,” Forrant says.

ABOVE: The Angkor Dance Troupe performs the Apsara Dance. RIGHT: The Cambodian Fan Dance performed at the Lowell Folk Festival at the park.



Trujillo Homesteads

Ranch Site Honors the Legacy of Hispanic Peoples in the West

In the year 2012, few are the places that truly hearken back to the realities of the Old West. There are still a few left, however, and one such site, the Trujillo Homesteads, is likely to remain long after its recent designation as a national historic landmark.

Located in rural Mosca, Colorado, with Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve and the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east, the homesteads' lonely two-story log cabin still stands as a reminder of when pioneers came to the great swaths of land west of the Mississippi. "This site is unique both to the history of Colorado and the nation," says Peter Ericson, western Colorado program director for the Nature Conservancy, which has owned the homesteads

since 1999. Part of the conservancy's 103,000-acre Medano Zapata Ranch, where modern-day cowboys still herd bison, the 35.6-acre site is considered historically significant both for its role in American Latino heritage and as a potential archeological treasure chest for the artifacts left by the Trujillo family.

The first of the site's two homesteads, its house no longer standing, was founded in 1865 when Teofilo and Andrelitta Trujillo and their son, Pedro, moved to the area from Taos, Mexico, some of the first permanent settlers after the passing of the Homestead Act in 1862. They started what would become one of its wealthiest ranches, their house reportedly one of the finest in the valley with luxuries including oriental rugs and stained glass windows. Pedro started his own 160-acre homestead just a mile northeast in 1879, choosing to build a two-story log cabin rather than the traditional adobe dwelling on his father's property. He raised cattle, horses, and continued to add land to the site where 9 of his 16 children would be born.

The family's success eventually came at a tragic cost, however. Teofilo, in addition to cattle, had one of the biggest sheep operations in the area, a source of conflict with Anglo-American cattle ranchers, who did not get along with the mostly Hispanic American sheep herders. The growing animosity towards the Trujillos came to a violent head in 1902 when Teofilo's grand homestead was burned to the ground and several of his sheep killed. He sold his land to the cattlemen, moving to the town of San Luis, with Pedro abandoning his own homestead too for fear of becoming the next target, even though he had no sheep. After the Trujillos sold it, the site passed through several

THE GROWING ANIMOSITY TOWARDS THE TRUJILLOS CAME TO A VIOLENT HEAD IN 1902 WHEN TEOFILO'S GRAND HOMESTEAD WAS BURNED TO THE GROUND AND SEVERAL OF HIS SHEEP KILLED.

owners but due to its remoteness has not been used since the 1940s. Limited archeological excavations reveal sheep ranching artifacts, as well as ground stone pieces, which suggest that early Hispanics in the area used Native American technology or trade items. The architecture of Pedro's homestead also reflects cultural mingling, how first-generation Hispanic Americans "adapted elements of the new culture into their traditional lifestyle." The designation is part of the broader American Latino Heritage Initiative championed by Secretary of the

Interior Ken Salazar. "We are helping to ensure the story of the settlers, how they lived, and the influence they had on the culture and history of Colorado and our nation will be carried down to future generations," he said of the homesteads' landmarking when announcing the designation in January.

Since purchasing the property, the conservancy has stabilized and reconstructed Pedro's cabin, above, but the site is not open to the public due to the private ownership of the land as well as concerns about issues such as road access, looting, and visitor safety. Nevertheless, making it more accessible in some fashion is a "long term vision," according to Ericson.

A virtual tour featuring both the cabin and reconstructions of Teofilo's homestead are being considered, according to Kathy Faz, acting division chief of interpretation for Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve. "We are excited to have the site included as a story of the park," says Faz, adding that it represents the very beginning of Latino culture in America. "It really goes back to 'how did we even get here?'"

ABOVE: Restored cabin at the site, managed by the Nature Conservancy.

contact points **web** Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve www.nps.gov/grsa The Nature Conservancy www.nature.org



THE EMERGENCE OF PARKS LIKE BROOKLYN BRIDGE is a manifestation of a national conversation about parks and open space.



river RENAISSANCE

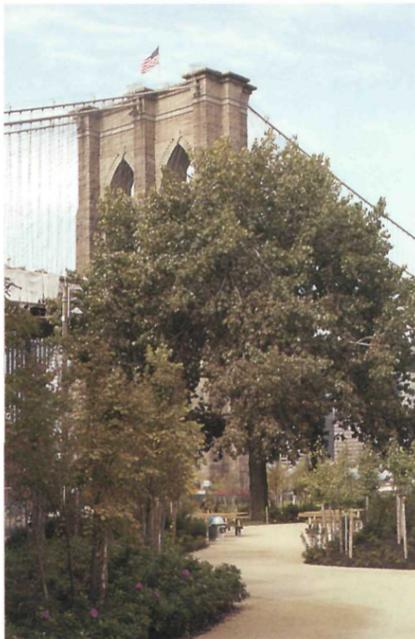
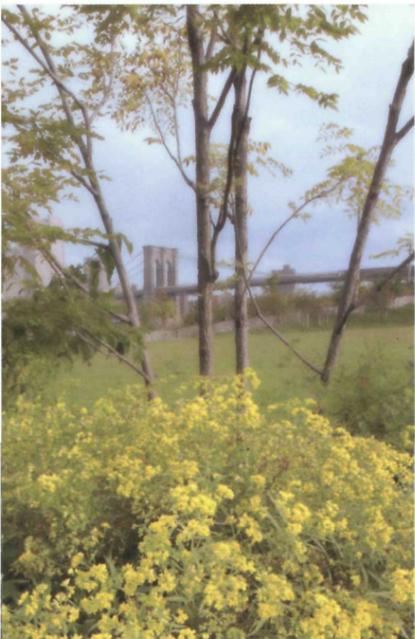
BROOKLYN'S INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONT
REBORN AS STATE-OF-THE-ART PARK *by joe flanagan*

Along the waterfront, below the steady roar of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, there is a stillness about the former piers and warehouses. Swales of green, little hillocks bounded by marsh grass and saplings, appear at intervals amid the remnants of commerce and industry. The vast once-working dockyard on the East River is transforming into what may be one of the premier urban parks in the United States. The 1.3-mile stretch was once a heart of commercial activity, its development going back to the 17th century, when landfill was used to bolster the shoreline. The waterfront continued to thrive throughout the 19th century and most of the 20th. In the 1950s, the port authority expanded it into an 85-acre shipping facility, building six massive concrete piers and a complex of warehouses. The BQE was built at about the same time, finalizing Brooklyn's separation from the river. But by the 1970s, when containerized shipping revolutionized the industry, the urban waterfront—like many across the nation—had become obsolete.

Left: Brooklyn Bridge Park with remnants of the old waterfront in the lower foreground while a crowd enjoys a film in the open air surrounded by green.

For decades the land and its infrastructure sat dormant, a gritty counterpoint to the sleek sophistication of Manhattan across the water. Now, it is an acclaimed work-in-progress by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, an award-winning landscape architecture firm with a number of notable projects to its credit: a re-envisioning of Harvard Yard; New York City's Teardrop Park; and the re-design of the grounds at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, another promising project in the works.

Brooklyn Bridge Park, as the site is now known, reconnects residents to the East River in a way that hasn't been possible for years. "For the



first time in a couple of generations . . . cities are becoming more attractive to younger generations raising kids," says Matthew Urbanski, lead designer and a principal at the firm. "Cities are becoming friendlier to families and children. Providing a connection to nature, that is the ultimate sustainability gesture we're trying to make."

Aside from landscaping and restored habitats, the park features playgrounds, performance space, and access points to the water. Free public programming—entertainment as well as education—is part of the experience. The Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy, an independent citizens' group instrumental in the creation of the space, uses it as a living classroom. "The Great Brooklyn Bridge," "The Birds of Brooklyn Bridge Park," and "Rove the Cove" are a few of the offerings intended to educate school children about the environment and the city's history. The conservancy also sponsors outdoor exercise classes, stargazing, history tours, and much more. This summer saw a recital by the Metropolitan Opera and thousands turned out for open-air film screenings, drive-in style, with the lit buildings of Manhattan as a backdrop.

For years, the abandoned site was a point of contention between citizens and developers. Dense, high-rise construction had been considered for a long time. The park was approved in 2006, after two decades of argument, study, and planning. Limited residential development—

about eight acres—is planned for either end of the parcel. The park is expected to be completed in 2015, with an estimated cost of \$350 million. It is intended to be economically self-sufficient, maintained not by city revenue, but by taxes generated by the buildings and businesses on site. This reflects a national trend where public parks are only approved where they can support themselves and don't have to compete with schools and city services for funds.

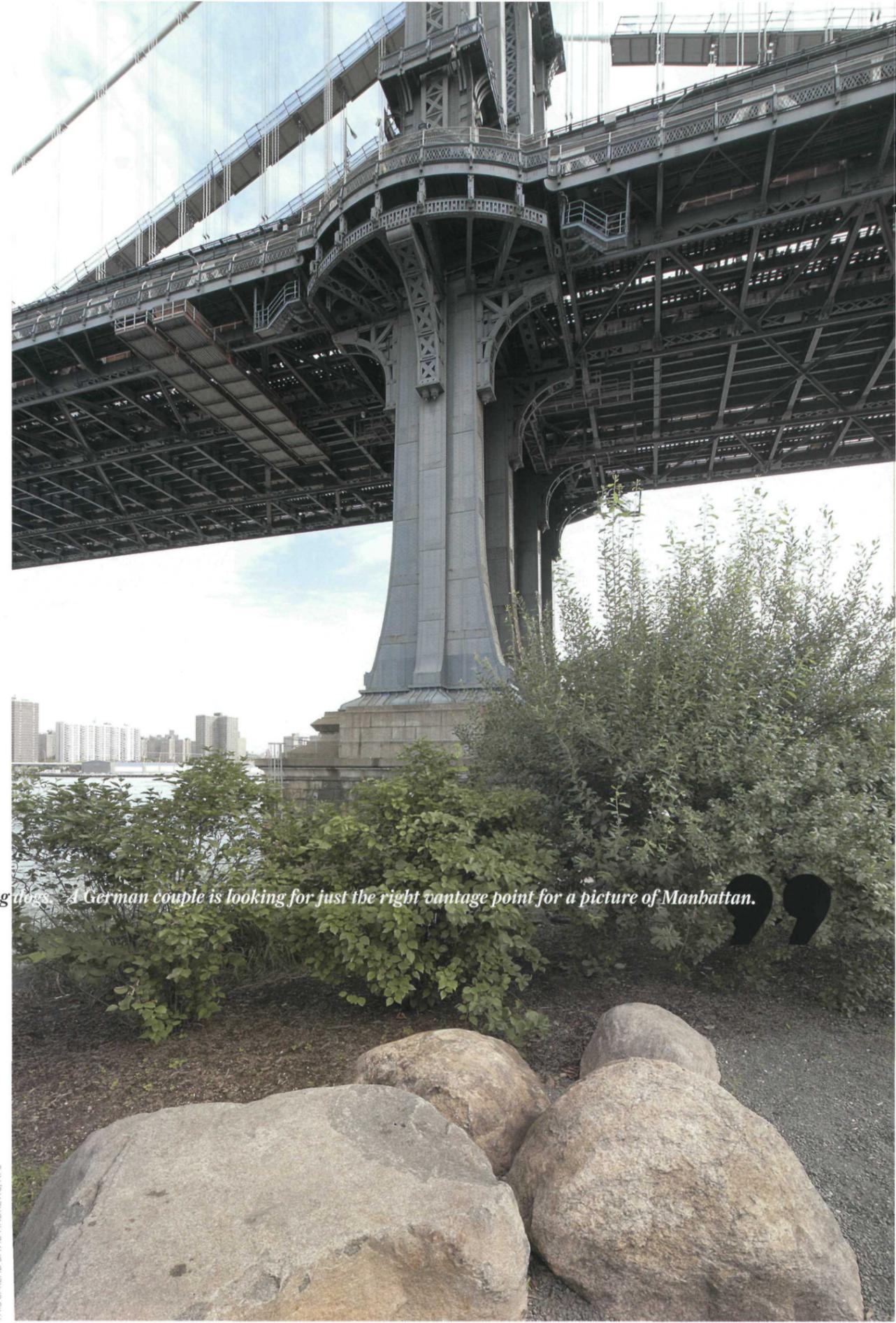
Van Valkenburgh Associates describe the parks they design as "founded on the idea of the commons—democratic, inclusive open spaces that anchor neighborhoods and serve as focal points in the daily rhythms of the lives of their users, while promoting ecological, programmatic, experiential, and social diversity." The emergence of parks like Brooklyn Bridge is a manifestation of a national conversation over the past several years about parks and open space. Development, climate change, demographic shifts, and what author Richard Louv describes as a "nature deficit disorder" hint at a future in which parks and preserves may no longer be sustainable. Americans are more technologically attuned—and more distanced from the natural world—than ever before. Many immigrants come from places with no history of parks and no cultural attachment to the American landscape or its narrative. We live increasingly sedentary lives, which plays a part in the rise in obesity, heart disease, and other illnesses.

Dealing with these trends is a big issue among preservationists, land managers, and anyone else with a stake in parks, be they local, state, or national. The National Park Service has made relevance to the public one of its top priorities. There is a push to promote parks as critical to the nation's health system, as evidenced in President Obama's America's Great Outdoors initiative, the international Healthy Parks Healthy People movement, and the First Lady's Let's Move Outside program. All intend to reconnect Americans to the outdoors, not only for its healthy physical and social effects, but to provide teachable moments in which the impor-

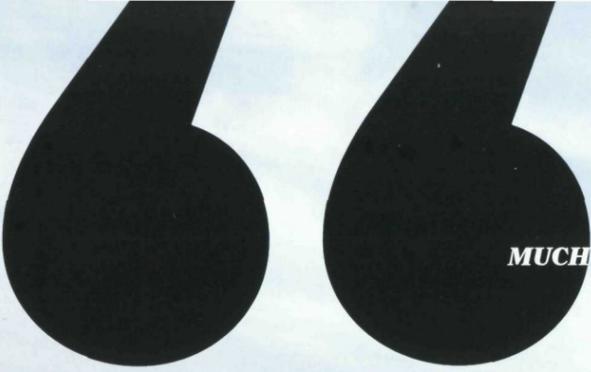
tance and fragility of the natural world can be communicated. The urgency has occasioned a movement whose aim is to assert the importance of open space, re-examining the way we think about, use, and create parks. The National Park Service has been a leader in this endeavor, forming a partnership with the University of Virginia, the National Parks Conservation Association, the Institute at the Golden Gate, the Van Alen Institute, and others. The result, an initiative called "Designing the Parks," is an effort to produce "healthy, vibrant public parks as a core of civic life." The partnership has established principles critical to creating sustainable parks. Perhaps the most important is consulting with those who will use them and engaging them in the planning.

Above and right: The presence of both the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges ensure that the park is defined by New York iconography while nature—in an artfully disguised randomness—softens urban edges. In the context of the park and its natural elements, the bridges play like sculpture.

THEY'RE PUSHING BABY STROLLERS, riding their bikes, jogging, and walking dogs. A German couple is looking for just the right vantage point for a picture of Manhattan.



THIS SPREAD DAVID ANDREWS/NPS



MUCH OF THE INDUSTRIAL INFRASTRUCTURE has been allowed to remain.



The former piers are actually massive concrete platforms, each about the size of a football field, that extend into the river.



DAVID ANDREWS/NPS

THE MARGINS OF THE WATERFRONT ARE PLANTED to seem like dozens of micro-parks: winding trails, copses of trees, marshy inlets, that offer momentary isolation from the harsh and frantic feel of the city.

TO THIS END, DESIGNING THE PARKS HAS SPONSORED LECTURES AND DESIGN CHARENTES to explore approaches to creating public space. At a recent event at the University of Virginia School of Landscape Architecture, National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis and Michael Van Valkenburgh talked about the future of the national park experience. The event posed a question relevant not just to national parks, but to public spaces everywhere: "As the social and environmental contexts of the national parks continue to change, is the basic aspiration of the National Park System—to conserve natural and historical places while making them accessible for public benefit—still feasible or even desirable?" The theme of the talk, embodied in much of Van Valkenburgh's work, was how 21st-century parks can not only address new conditions, but thrive in them.

Both Brooklyn Bridge Park and Teardrop Park have received awards from the partnership. Van Valkenburgh's conception of a revitalized Jefferson National Expansion Memorial looks to re-connect downtown St. Louis with the Mississippi River—and with a park long isolated by urban infrastructure.

Van Valkenburgh's ideas about landscape—influenced by Frederick Law Olmsted and earth artist Robert Smithson—have found a conceptual common ground with the burgeoning open space renaissance. Describing his firm's work, he writes, "[We] operate with our own kind of preservationist agenda and creating a new social and environmental purpose through its transformation into public space." His approach to the St. Louis project is representative: recognizing not only the historic context of the Arch, but its modern significance as well; honoring the park's reference to the past while recreating it as a place that will be used and loved by the city of today.

The grounds were designed in the 1960s by landscape architect Dan Kiley. Van Valkenburgh Associates' proposed re-design aims to honor his vision, but "revitalize it in order to reintroduce ecological diversity and function to the currently inert monoculture of lawn." Three new "gateway" areas have been established, opening the edges of the park to bordering neighborhoods currently in the process of revitalization. The redesign is intended, in fact, to drive such improvements. Many of the same ideas are at work in the Brooklyn project.

A large part of the challenge—in the minds of potential users—is overcoming the seeming incongruity of green space in intensely urban environments. Why go walking down by the East River, even on a sparkling warm autumn day? But people are doing exactly that, even with the park unfinished. They're pushing baby strollers, riding their bikes, jogging,

and walking dogs. A German couple is wandering around with expensive-looking camera equipment looking for just the right vantage point for a picture of Manhattan. People have taken to the entire work in progress, from the lush landscapes at each end to the concrete-and-macadam remnants in between. Much of the industrial infrastructure, in fact, will remain. Even in this incomplete state, the vision is compelling, which is why the project has already earned high marks.

In discreet turnoffs, behind tall grasses and young saplings, silent little playgrounds offer kids an opportunity for wonder and adventure. Residents said they wanted to be able to get to the water; rocks serve as a breakwater for ramps down to the river, launch points for canoes and kayaks. Old pilings recall the river's story. The former piers, actually massive concrete platforms each about the size of a football field, extend far into the river. The margins of the waterfront are planted to seem like dozens of micro-parks: winding trails, copses of trees, marshy inlets that offer momentary isolation from the harsh and frantic feel of the city. Many of the species are native, lending a carefully executed randomness about it. You could almost think that this patch of tall grass, or this bunch of young trees, were completely accidental.

They look like what you might find growing wild along an eastern river, but for a barely discernible artifice. Though not necessarily an example of what Van Valkenburgh calls "Olmstedian irregularity," they do evidence the master's penchant for the random, naturalistic placing of things. The curved landforms and long hedgerows, Van Valkenburgh writes, "have been composed to complement the angular geometry of the waterfront rather than impose a normalizing aesthetic traditionalism." The composition serves to shield users from the wind and glare off the water, and the noise from the BQE.

Previous pages: An ode to the past. The skeletons of warehouses that formerly lined the waterfront will be allowed to remain as part of the design. While expressive of the river's economic history, some will serve as shade structures—with foliage trailing up their framework—and others as recreation space.

Above: The park was designed with children in mind. Open space is sorely needed in urban environments and Van Valkenburgh Associates created a number of hideaways where kids can experience the thrill of discovery, one of the park's most compelling qualities for children of all ages. **Right:** Wetlands regain a foothold on the East River in the shadow of Brooklyn Bridge.



ABOVE AND LEFT ELIZABETH FELICELLA

IN DISCREET TURNOFFS, behind tall grasses and young saplings, are silent little playgrounds that offer kids an opportunity for wonder and adventure.



THE CHALLENGE OF CREATING A PARK OUT OF A FORMER INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONT WAS, OF COURSE, daunting. Full ecological restoration was not considered feasible. What the designers have done instead is create what Van Valkenburgh calls “new environments that attempt to emulate a higher level of ecological diversity within the constraints of found site conditions.” He points out that ideas about ecology have changed since the concept first gained recognition in the 1970s. With this change has come a shift in how landscape architecture is understood. The ideal of returning to a truly natural state is largely illusory. Natural environments are dynamic. The only constant is change, a fact that can be used to full advantage in park design. Van Valkenburgh Associates does not attempt to restore sites to their historic—and often idealized—conditions. This approach misconstrues the meaning of ecology and works against creating a landscape that is truly vital in the present. Van Valkenburgh prefers to let a landscape “continue to grow and thrive in its own particular (and perhaps unpredictable) way.” He refers to Robert Smithson’s maxim that in order to restore, one must transform.

The past—in the form of the original idea behind old landscapes—can continue to live in the present even if its particulars do not. When Van Valkenburgh Associates were called in to work on Harvard Yard, its rows of historic elms (planted by the Olmsted brothers firm as part of a turn-of-the-century restoration) were not only near the end of their lives but had been decimated by Dutch elm disease. Replacing them with another species was considered unwise (the monoculture of ash trees at the St. Louis Arch is being similarly destroyed by the emerald ash borer). Replacing Harvard’s elms with a mixture of species, however, made sense. Van Valkenburgh chose trees that were suitable for the microclimates within the yard—black tupelo and sweet gum for wet areas; hackberry in compacted, heavily trafficked places.

To counter the risk of what Van Valkenburgh described as a “salad bar” look, the trees were pruned so that the height of the canopy was consistent, in keeping with the spatial effect the Olmsted brothers had originally intended. The idea of a broad palette of species to replace the venerable elms was a radical one, but the guiding concept was that of Harvard as a cathedral of higher learning, an effect that was accomplished with large, high-canopied trees that create the stately atmosphere suitable to the place.

Left: Playing amidst the green at one of the many micro-parks. **Right:** The park is as much about culture as it is nature. Created to thrive in the city of today, it is designed to attract families as an extension of the surrounding neighborhoods. Public engagement—encouraged by these features—ensures that the space is vital.



ABOVE ELIZABETH FELICELLA, RIGHT TOP DAVID ANDREWS/NPS, RIGHT BOTTOM MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH ASSOCIATES, INC.

AT BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK, AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE INTENT WAS PRESERVING THE site's maritime past, which in the context of the park, is not what is normally understood as preservation. It is more reference and allusion: the old pilings in the water, now a habitat for fish; the concrete platforms in the river, expressive in their mass and ambition of a former economic vitality. Similar allusions are conjured up by the Brooklyn Bridge, which serves as the park's visual centerpiece, and further on, by the Manhattan Bridge as well. In addition to this, there are the buildings of Brooklyn Heights, and across the river perhaps the best view anywhere of the Manhattan skyline. The story that unfolds is not a single narrative, but many; that of a dynamic and ever-changing waterfront, its edges somewhat softened now by the rolling green and stands of slender trees. The metal frame of an industrial warehouse, allowed to remain on one of the concrete piers, speaks volumes about the city's mercantile past. "It was an interesting challenge," says Urbanski. "What do you keep and what do you change? Not just for practical reasons but for experiential reasons." The firm rejected the typical things you might see in a waterfront restoration, like "nice Victorian lamp posts," he says. "We didn't want to do that—it would take away its character as an industrial site, take away its generosity of scale." The rolling landforms that make up the park were sculpted out of 59,000 cubic yards of fill trucked from excavations for a tunnel to connect Grand Central and Penn Stations. The fill was deposited in layers, each reinforced by polyethylene mesh, allowing rainwater to percolate, which prevents slumping and erosion. The top layers are horticultural soils to foster plant growth. Fertilizers are all natural, a practice that will continue in the park's future maintenance. And, instead of feeding New York's sewers—an already taxed system mixing storm water with household and industrial waste—the park recycles rainwater to meet almost all of its irrigation needs.

One of the biggest challenges was the presence of the BQE, which is cantilevered out from the escarpment of Brooklyn Heights and its 19th-century buildings high above the park. The solution to alleviate the sometimes deafening traffic was not a conventional solid barrier but an acoustically engineered earthen berm. At 38 feet tall, it was digitally modeled in 3D to coax out its maximum ability to shield noise, which is expected to be about 75 percent. Of primary concern was how the park mingles with its edges. This is true of all urban landscapes, but particularly here where the waterfront evolved to exclude casual access, useful for commerce but otherwise forbidding to visitors. The margins of the park are designed to be porous, to invite passage from the neighborhoods to the water. "Buildings are about edges," Van Valkenburgh

says. "Landscapes are about continuities." The latter fails when it imitates the former. Furman Street, which runs parallel to the river, is no longer one way, which Urbanski says "humanizes" it. A tall chain link fence has been removed and parking will be available along its length, which will abut green space. Major arteries like Atlantic Avenue lead directly to the park.

The firm intends to "push the boundaries" of public landscapes, Urbanski says. Passive use—the Olmstedian concept of sitting there admiring the scenery—is largely a thing of the past, he adds, as is the trend of using the outdoors for straightforward recreation. "Parkgoers want more engagement," he says. "They want edgier things like rock climbing. They want kayaking. There's a level of involvement with nature they're after. It isn't just about beauty. It's about scientific understanding of what they're seeing."



“YOU COULD ALMOST THINK

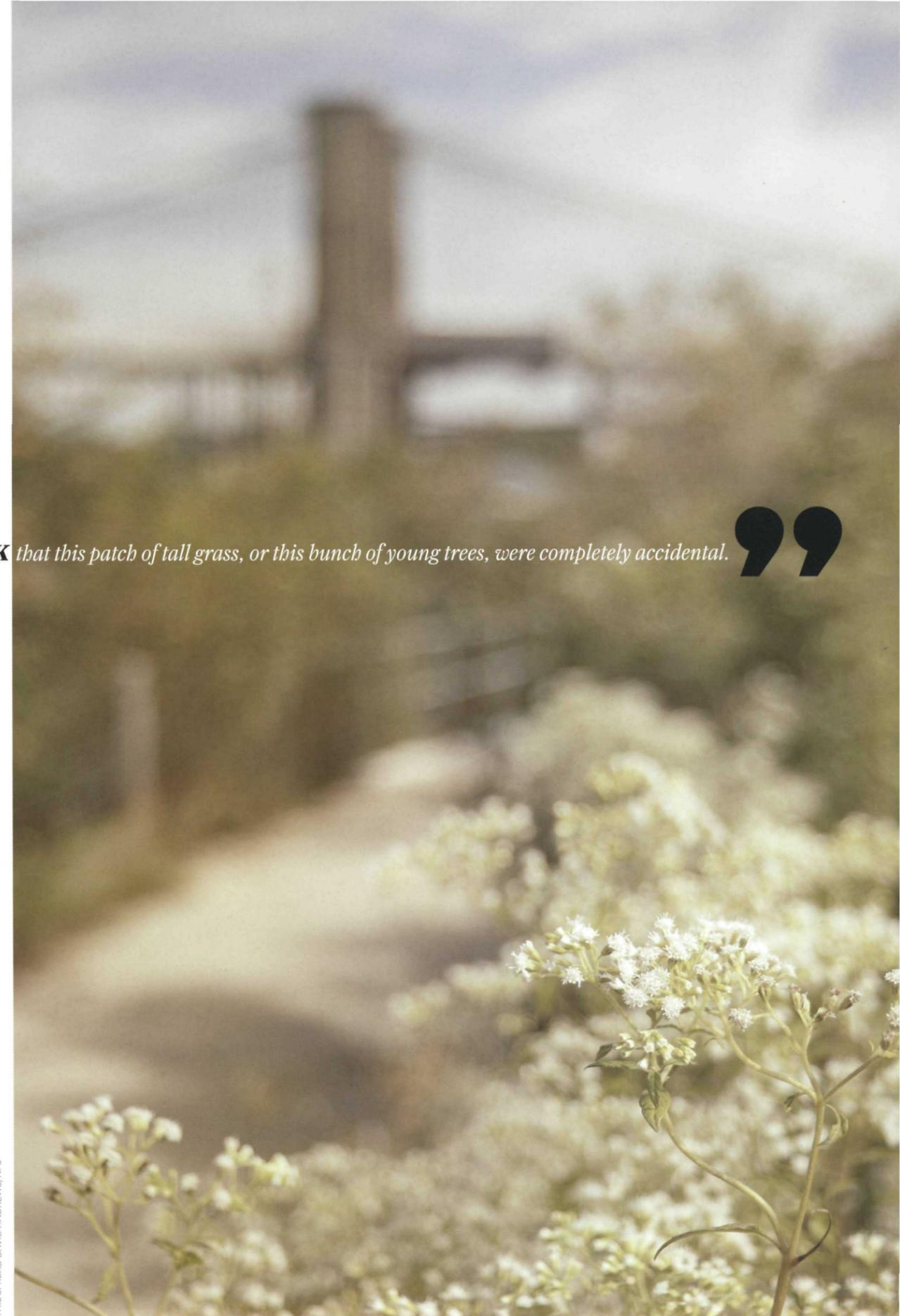
that this patch of tall grass, or this bunch of young trees, were completely accidental.”

IF PARKS AS IDEA AND EXPERIENCE ARE TO REMAIN relevant, designers and stewards need to embrace such flexibility and innovation. This means opening up understanding of public space as not simply commemoration or reproducing a moment in time. Robert Smithson captures the idea in his essay, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape": "A park can no longer be seen as 'a thing in itself,' but rather as a process of ongoing relationships existing in a physical region—the park becomes 'a thing for us.'"

contact points web Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy www.brooklynbridgepark.org Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates www.mvvainc.com Designing the Parks www.designingtheparks.org

Above and right: While restoring the shoreline to a long-ago state was not feasible, the designers reintroduced the natural world in a way previously seemed unthinkable. Fish, birds, and plant life have all returned, the park becoming a classroom for environmental awareness. **Following pages:** Viewing a film drive-in style in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge, depicted in a concept rendering of the park.

THIS SPREAD: DAVID ANDREWS/NPS





“ *THE STORY* that unfolds is not a single narrative, but many. ”

RENDERING BY MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH ASSOCIATES, INC.

unplugged in the woods

PITCHING THE FOREST AS DIGITAL-FREE REFUGE

IMAGINE A HOUSEBOUND FAMILY, EACH MEMBER ABSORBED IN THEIR PERSONAL DIGITAL accessory. The house is suddenly invaded by a gang of woodland animals, who load the family in a van, drive them off, and “free” them in a sunlit forest. That’s the gist of the latest TV spot from the U.S. Forest Service and the Ad Council, encouraging families to break free from their daily routines and experience the natural world. Its message is summed up by a single word: unplug. Created pro bono for the council by ad agency Turbine, it is part of a series developed for television, radio, print, social media, billboards, and bus stops nationwide. The ads are the latest in the Discover the Forest campaign, begun in 2009 to encourage families to get outside. To date, media outlets have donated more than \$70 million in time and ad space to the effort.

The pioneers of the conservation movement were moved by some of the same concerns we have now over development and the ills of urban

THE ADS ARE THE LATEST IN THE DISCOVER THE FOREST CAMPAIGN, BEGUN IN 2009 TO ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO GET OUTSIDE.

living. Yet today, with alienation from the natural world and obesity, diabetes, ADD, and heart disease all on the rise, there is an urgency that neither John Muir nor Teddy Roosevelt could have anticipated. Children spend 50 percent less time outdoors than they did 20 years ago, reports the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The result is what Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, calls “nature deficit disorder.” The trend has been amplified by shifts away from rural areas, technology, a litigious culture, and overly cautious parents. “Kids today can tell you lots of things about the Amazon rain forest,” says Louv in an interview with *Salon*. “They can’t usually tell you the last time they lay out in the woods and watched the leaves move.” Kids and adults alike often say they care about the environment but Louv contends that the relationship has become intellectualized. “I don’t think there’s much that can replace wet feet and dirty hands,” he says. “It’s one thing to read about a frog, it’s another to hold it in your hand and feel its life.”

RIGHT: Billboard from Forest Service media campaign with the Ad Council.

ABOVE: Smokey Bear joins in on the effort, appearing here at a bus stop in downtown Washington, DC.

THE IDEA LITERALLY COMES TO LIFE IN THE LATEST TV SPOT. SAFIYA SAMMAN, DIRECTOR of the Forest Service conservation education program, was at a talk Louv gave in 2005. “We were scratching our heads, trying to find out how to make people recognize the importance of connecting to nature.” One part of the equation is that more than 245 million Americans live within 100 miles of a national forest. Another part was arrived at through focus groups and research, which indicated that the message needed to be aimed not only at the kids, but at their parents, the ones who schedule family time. Then, she says, “we reached out to the Ad Council. They bring a lot of assets.” The council pools talent from the communications industries to help government and organizations promote quality of life, community well-being, and conservation. Its most famous campaign is a collaboration with the Forest Service featuring Smokey Bear, begun in 1944. Smokey joins in on the current campaign, along with Universal Pictures,

with characters and footage from its upcoming 3D feature, *The Lorax*, Dr. Seuss’ environmentally themed story from 1971—the heyday of the ecology movement.

Research shows that children who play outside have lower stress and reduced obesity risk. Unlike organized sports or an exercise regimen, outdoor activity is often spontaneous and prolonged. Children who spend time outdoors tend to have more active imaginations and are more likely to become environmentally conscious adults.



Perhaps the key part of the equation, however, revolves around relevance: whether nature will continue to be important to an increasingly indoors population. Integral to the Forest Service initiative is a social media effort on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

contact points **web** *Discover the Forest* www.DiscoverTheForest.org (in Spanish www.DescubreElBosque.org) **facebook** www.facebook.com/DiscoverTheForest **youtube** www.YouTube.com/DiscoverTheForest **twitter** www.twitter.com/cheecker



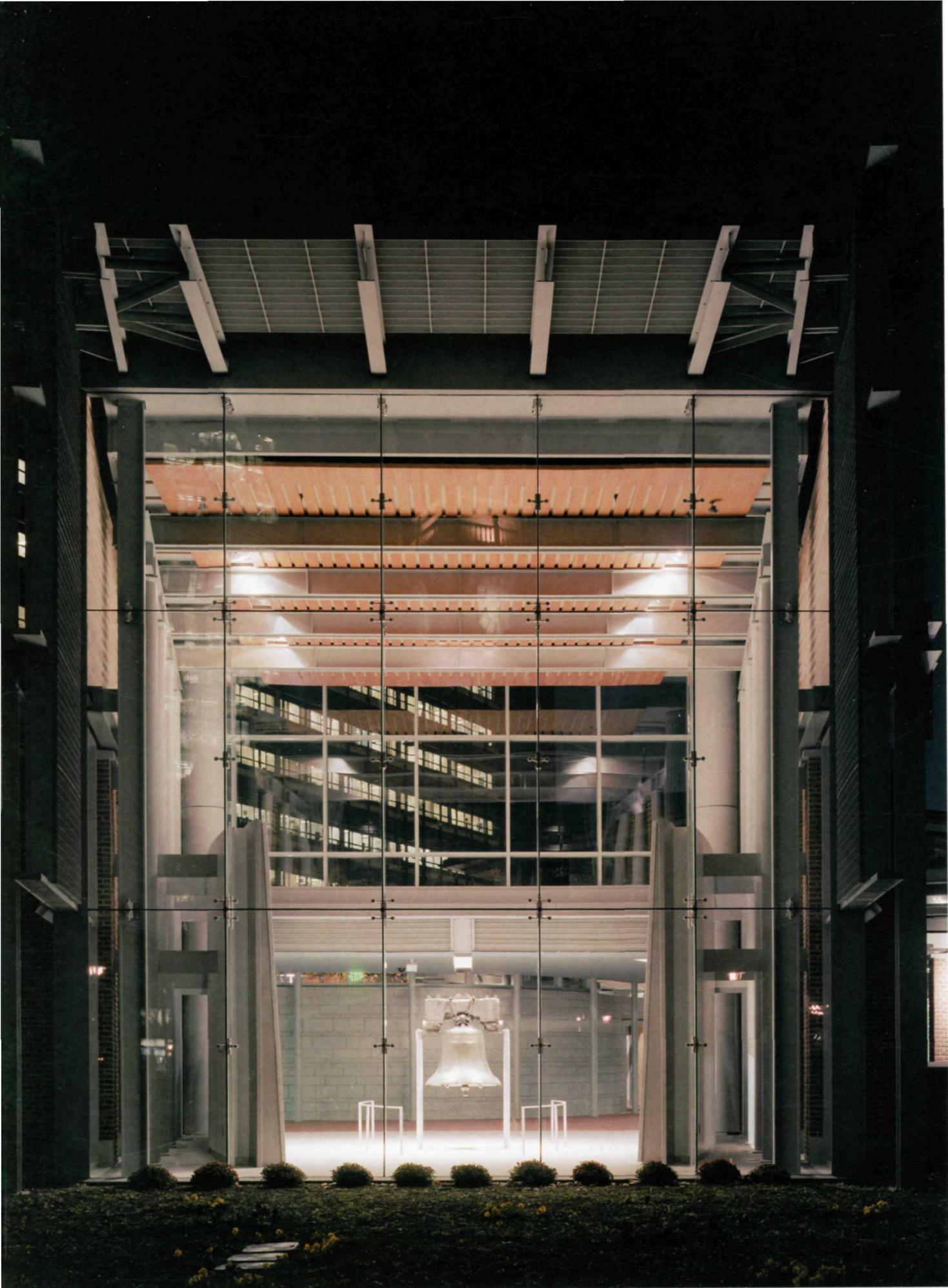
Unplug.

Discover The Forest.org



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portals of ima **g**ination

designing the parks of today . . . and tomorrow

a conversation with **chris donohue and chris matthews**, michael van valkenburgh associates, landscape architects, **rodger evans and shaun eyring**, designing the parks initiative, national park service, **mary gibson scott**, superintendent, grand teton national park, **catherine nagel**, executive director, city parks alliance, and **john reynolds**, former deputy director, national park service moderated by **lucy lawliss**, superintendent, george washington birthplace national monument/thomas stone national historic site and **tim davis**, national park service historian and cultural landscapes specialist

Designing the Parks began as an international conference convening the best thinkers to look at the park experience, from its roots in countryside jaunts by European aristocracy, through the make-work projects of the New Deal—key to America’s most iconic parks—to the state-of-the-art projects of today. As the National Park Service centennial approaches, the initiative is among the most prominent championed by Director Jon Jarvis. The goal: nothing less than a new set of principles to guide parks of the 21st century. “Designing the Parks intends to re-energize the design tenets of the national parks, and of parks worldwide, to connect with audiences of today,” says Rodger Evans, who with Shaun Eyring leads the initiative for the Park Service. The key, he says, is integrating research, planning, design, and review towards an outcome that engages all people. **He says that the best Park Service projects**—where outside architects and designers work closely with planners intimate with the resource—are all the more impressive given tenets that often focus on the bottom line, rather than on reflecting reverence for place. Evans points to Denali’s Eielson Visitor Center, one of the award winners singled out by Designing the Parks: “It’s built into a hillside, you don’t even know it’s there when you arrive.” **Evans and Eyring join contributing editors Lucy Lawliss and Tim Davis** for a discussion with Chris Donohue and Chris Matthews of Designing the Parks award winner Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates; Mary Gibson Scott, a Park Service leader on both coasts at Gateway and Golden Gate National Recreation Areas and now superintendent at Grand Teton, site of two new visitor centers; Catherine Nagel, executive director of City Parks Alliance, a hothouse of emerging ideas on urban parks and open space; and John Reynolds, a former Park Service deputy director. The conversation touches on the critical challenges in the design of public parks today, presaging the next step for Designing the Parks: design studios at some of the nation’s top universities—already underway—with students challenged to come up with their best ideas for the next 100 years.

Lawliss: Let's start with award-winner the Liberty Bell Center. Shaun?

Eyring: The first consideration was the site. The design came out of an intense collaboration between landscape architects Olin Partnership, architects Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, and the Park Service planning team, looking to rethink Independence Mall within the urban context. The idea was to arrange all the buildings on the edge, like a city street, rather than have the bell in the center, encouraging visitors to interact with it from many angles. So it is as a person experienced it during colonial times, walking down the street. The building itself emerged from this approach.

Lawliss: It's not just great architecture, but a re-envisioning of the space.

Evans: Right. The team re-imagined the mall, and the process was key to the result. It's a great example of integrating research, planning, design, and review. When you have a group like that all sketching and talking at the same time, sharing a common language, there's incredible strength in the synergy that comes out of it. Lots of ideas fly around the room, but when the group hits a unifying point, it can be a galvanizing moment where everybody suddenly gets it. Both visitor and place reap the benefits.

Lawliss: What design lessons can one take away from the first century of the national parks? "America's Best Idea" started with majestic scenery, then evolved to embrace touchstones like the bell.

Nagel: It all started with Central Park. Frederick Law Olmsted designed a grand scenic experience for New York City, a democratic gesture creating open space for all. His ideas were key to the birth of the national parks.

Eyring: One lesson was the integration of careful design with resource conservation. For a lot of the early landscape architects, getting people there was critical, but how you did it was key. The design could either destroy the landscape or contribute to its conservation. In recent years, when you talk about new design in a national park, the idea is often viewed with skepticism. Designing the Parks aims to reclaim that discussion.

Reynolds: There are exceptions. Certainly, it was a lesson learned early when concessionaires brought development too close to Old Faithful. The new guidelines for Yosemite do a great job showing how excellent design can aid in welcoming visitors while preserving a national treasure.

Gibson Scott: Whether you're designing a landscape or a trail or a visitor

Liberty Bell Center *This sleek design is a universe away from what one might expect in a place as old as the United States. Context is everything, with an abundance of glass and openness so visitors sense not only the dynamism of downtown Philadelphia, but of the democratic ideal.* **Location:** Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia **Architect:** Bohlin Cywinski Jackson **Built:** 2003 **Cost:** \$11 million **Size:** 12,000 square feet **Funding:** NPS, City of Philadelphia, Pew Charitable Trusts, Annenberg Foundation, William Penn Foundation **Green:** Minimal southern exposure and reduced western fenestration to minimize summer heat gain, sunlight-controlling vanes, brick and granite obtained within 500 miles of site **Awards:** 2010 Honor Award for Building Design, Designing the Parks; 2006 Tucker Award for Design, Building Stone Institute; 2005 Honor Award for Design, ALA Pennsylvania; 2004 Honor Award, ALA Philadelphia; 2004 Golden Trowel Award, International Masonry Association; 2004 Excellence in Craftsmanship Award, General Building Contractors Association of Philadelphia; 2000 Honor Award for Design, ALA Philadelphia



center, the important point is letting the resource speak for itself.

Matthews: Olmsted had a sophisticated understanding of the experiential characteristics of the landscape, how to choreograph your arrival as a picturesque experience. He made the landscape legible, inviting people into it in a democratized way. He had a vision of what it meant to move through a space. These days, even among landscape architects, not many people understand the mechanisms you can use to choreograph the experience. The focus is less on what it feels like and more on the functional

creasing our ability to take care of things. The change was needed, but now I sense a better balance emerging.

Davis: In the '60s, there was a rebellion against the dominance of landscape architects, who were said to champion the "façade management" of the parks—their value as scenery—over their biological integrity. The 1963 Leopold Report—named for its lead author, conservationist A. Starker Leopold—asserted that the focus should be ecological balance. Today, we're reconciling the followers of Leopold with the followers of Olmsted.

The design came out of **an intense collaboration** between landscape architects Olin Partnership, **architects Bohlin Cywinski Jackson**, and the **Park Service planning team**, looking to rethink Independence Mall **within the urban context.**

requirements, like where can I buy a cup of coffee or get information.

Lawliss: When you said "choreograph," I thought of how that happened. The early scenic designers were more concerned with the dance, less with what the dancers might trample. When the trampling became the concern, the safe thing to do was just satisfy the need for restrooms and picnic tables. And often the dance was lost. Now we're coming out of that self-consciousness and seeing some really good things happen.

Reynolds: That was a consequence of the environmental movement. There was a lurch towards what is natural is right and what is unnatural is wrong. The lurch took us away from a focus on design, though in-

Matthews: St. Louis Arch—a postwar landscape we're working to rejuvenate—is an example of what you alluded to. The design, by Dan Kiley and Eero Saarinen, is certainly significant, but the horticultural knowledge of the day was limited. Now we know how to manufacture soils for the urban environment. We know what trees do well. We know how to maintain without abusing chemicals.

Donobue: We're not redesigning the grounds, though there are major changes to improve the connection to the city. A lot of what we're doing is subsurface, a plan to manage the place more ecologically.

Matthews: It doesn't matter whether you're in the desert or up a mountain

LEFT AND BELOW © PETER AARON/ESTO





Bricks and mortar **are more attractive** to donors than **a drainage system**. So we try not to **talk about things** you can build. We talk about **the experiences** you want to have, **the memories** you want to make.

or in a city. You know when you're in a healthy landscape. And when you go to the south rim of the Grand Canyon, it's urban, too, with all the same pressures you have to deal with in design. You have this place with lots of people, vehicles, and buildings, but then there are tiers outwards toward wilderness. There are different layers of experience. That's the brilliance of the parks. Yet the awareness of the design is not what it used to be.

Gibson Scott: I'll point to a project we're in concept on at Grand Teton—the renewal of Jenny Lake and the trail to Inspiration Point. It's an orchestrated experience, sequencing to wilderness from a heavily developed area next to a parking lot. The key is well-thought-through design, without over-manipulating the environment.

Matthews: Olmsted's thing was experiential range. The full range of emotions can be conjured up by a single walk through Central Park. How that relates to the national parks is a compelling conversation.

Reynolds: Look at Larry Halprin's work on the path to Yosemite Falls. He





ABOVE AND LEFT NIC LEHOUX, BELOW EDWARD RIDDELL/WWW.EDWARDRIDDELL.COM

Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center Like part of the landscape itself, the center is rustic, open, and welcoming. Sited between a sagebrush meadow and a forest along the Snake River, it is a reference to both the land and its history. Built with materials endorsed by the Forest Stewardship Council, it uses the full suite of green technologies. The interpretive experiences—including video rivers, slow-moving media embedded in the floor—were developed with Ralph Appelbaum Associates, renowned for their work with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. **Location:** Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming **Architect:** Boblin Cywinski Jackson **Built:** 2007 **Cost:** \$18.5 million **Size:** 22,000 square feet **Funding:** Congressional appropriation, Grand Teton Association, Grand Teton National Park Foundation; \$8 million public, \$10.5 million private **Green:** High efficiency cooling and electrical, natural lighting, Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood elements, recycled glass tiles **Awards:** 2011 Honor Award, AIA Northwest and Pacific; 2010 Green Good Design, the European Center for Architecture and the Chicago Athenaeum; 2008 Honor Award, AIA Seattle; 2008 Silver Medal, AIA Pennsylvania; 2008 American Architecture Awards, Chicago Athenaeum; 2007 Award of Excellence, AIA Northeastern Pennsylvania

got the Park Service to consider coming back in a way that creates an entirely different experience. Getting there is straight, fast, and open to the grandeur. Coming back is winding, hidden in the trees, and slow. Experiential range is important, but today such projects are in the hands of park superintendents and contract managers, rather than landscape architects. That practice is pretty much gone now—an unbalanced overreaction.

Nagel: What happened in the urban arena was a drop in public funding. Now there is an explosion of nonprofits ranging from small friends groups to the Central Park Conservancy to the Boston Harbor Islands Alliance. All kinds of models are emerging. These groups are raising money and hosting design competitions and very much involved. In some cases, they run the park. But once people are engaged, they demand more. And so

Olmsted's principle of design that meets a variety of needs is critical to how parks are developed and managed today.

Lawliss: The problem is, when the entity has a perpetual fundraising need, it has to adapt constantly in pursuit of new audiences. The Park Service has a continuous funding stream. It's a good question whether one is more conducive to good design than the other.

Matthews: It's easier to raise money for something when you put someone's name on it, and bricks and mortar are more attractive to donors than a drainage system. So we try not to talk about things you can build. We talk about the experiences you want to have, the memories you want to make. So that people understand that what you build is a means to an end. And the end is your experience. We've developed images to help people



The entrance façade of the new **Pocono Environmental Education Center** has a wall of tires **gathered by the community during river cleanup . . .** The people have **a connection now.** It's a story, a story that will be **passed down.**

think about what it's like to be in a landscape, rather than do you want this sports field or dog park or play equipment. The same would be true for a national park. I'm heartened by the hope that interpretation in the future is going to rely less on bricks and mortar and more on being in the open air with something like a hand-held that can interpret things for you. It's a shame to spend so much time in a building. That's very odd to me.

Gibson Scott: It is true that donors gravitate toward something that is a structure, but there is a niche who want to get involved in revegetation and restoration and trail design. We have to figure out how to make those kinds of projects more appealing.

LEFT AND TOP NIC LEHOUX

Pocono Environmental Education Center *A study in sustainability, from the thorough integration with its natural environment to a wall of tires pulled from the Delaware River during community cleanup. Sited to maximize light and climate control, the center is a multi-environment experience, its interior passing from forest to wetland.* **Location:** Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Pennsylvania **Architect:** Boblin Cywinski Jackson **Built:** 2005 **Cost:** \$2 million **Size:** 7,750 square feet **Funding:** Private and public **Green:** Built w/recyclable materials, passive solar heating, thermodynamic cooling, radiant-heat floors **Awards:** 2010 Honor Award for Building Design, Designing the Parks; 2009 Award of Excellence, Educational Facility Design Awards, AIA Committee on Architecture for Education; 2009 Green Good Design, the European Center for Architecture and the Chicago Athenaeum; 2009 Silver Commonwealth Award, 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania; 2008 Top Ten Green Projects, AIA Committee on the Environment; 2006 Citation Award, Wood Design Awards

Reynolds: The comment on memory and experience is on the mark. We have to rebuild the dialogue about the value of these places, how they fit with people's lives, how they make us richer as a people. The whole discussion lately is that parks are entitled—give us money, give us money, give us money. Congress has run out of patience. Let's get back to origins.

Nagel: The sequencing of experience made me think about the relationship of wilderness to urban communities. Having a wilderness experience is so important to developing the next generation of advocates. It's hard to support the Park Service if you've never been to a national park.

Reynolds: On top of the Presidio at Golden Gate is Rob Hill, an Army camp that has been re-designed for kids who have never spent the night

in nature. It's the epitome of the experimentation going on now. Director Jarvis aims to get more of that happening.

Lawliss: It's all about showing how places connect, how the things in our own backyard are part of a boundless experience. Shaun, how have the Designing the Parks award winners taken on the challenge?

Eyring: The ones that rose to the top connected creatively while expressing reverence for place. For a public art center and plaza in Japan, whole communities went out and cut down bamboo to incorporate into the design. The entrance façade of the new Pocono Environmental Education Center has a wall of tires gathered by the community during river cleanup. A Bronx River park was built around a defunct concrete

Minute Man National Historical Park takes **the visitor right into the** landscape with **a long trail unifying** an array of experiences. It **blurs the notion of** boundaries—physical, intellectual, and emotional.

plant, recycling infrastructure as well as forsaken real estate. The community didn't want it demolished, it's part of their memory. The structural elements were painted dusty pink, a fun color against the landscape. Communities participated in the design of these places. The people have a connection now. It's a story, a story that will be passed down. Minute Man National Historical Park takes the visitor right into the landscape with a long trail unifying an array of experiences. It blurs the notion of boundaries—physical, intellectual, and emotional.

Evans: That's a phenomenon in the student studios. The younger generation doesn't want hard boundaries. They get information in a variety of ways. Going to a visitor center to get information or see a film is maybe not what their interest is. They are more interested in self-exploration.

Davis: Isn't this emphasis on physical design just so 'last millennium'? How does it relate to expanding audiences through digital media? Shouldn't we be giving design awards for best virtual experience on the iPhone?

Eyring: In the studios, many students have come to the table focused on

using technology in their designs, but when they get to the park, they are so intrigued by the textures, the scents, everything about the place, their approaches start to evolve. We'll see where the final designs go.

Lawliss: No matter how perfect the screen, no matter how perfect the 3D technology, it will never replace the sights, the sounds, the smells of a real place. Not if we want to fully develop as living, breathing beings. You can't keep an animal in a cage and just show it pictures.

Davis: That's the argument of a century ago when the Park Service embraced the automobile to make the parks more accessible. Traditionalists claimed that motoring was an inauthentic way to experience nature. Now there's this new technology that's inauthentic.

Lawliss: I would never think of the automobile as an inauthentic way to get outside. With digital media, even if it's a crystal-clear virtual space, that's an animal in a cage. I don't care if it's a giraffe or a four-year old child. To go back to Chris, it's not a healthy environment. A living room with popcorn on the floor and a great picture of Yosemite will never be

Yosemite. The brain scientists say we have to engage all our senses; it's what makes us human. Pictures won't do it.

Reynolds: Look at surveys that say, I may never get there, but knowing it's there and knowing what it looks like is important. And if they're eating popcorn on the floor and watching a picture, that's still a connection.

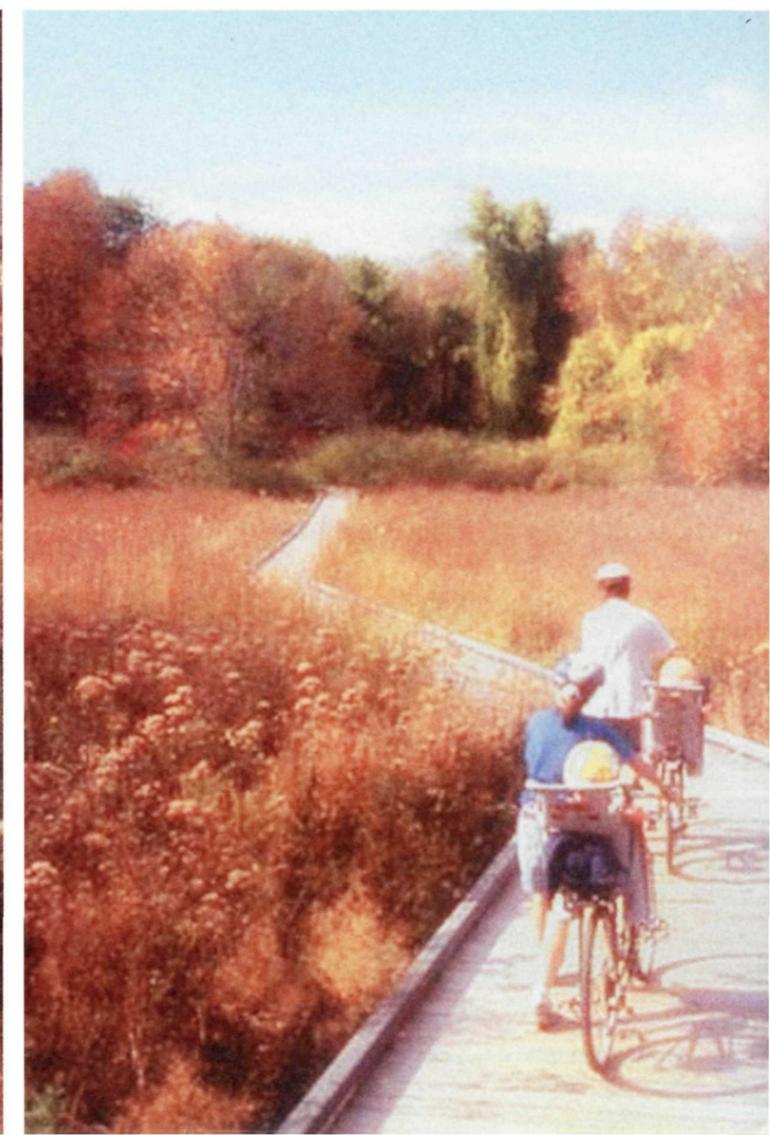
Davis: I bet many people would be happy virtually visiting Yosemite Valley. It might even relieve the pressure of too many visitors.

Reynolds: I couldn't disagree more. To set up this dichotomy where experiencing nature the old fashioned way is out of date, that's misleading. It confuses direct experience with an interpretation of it. The excitement is a future that uses both. I spend too much of my life in front of a screen.

Davis: I agree with you, but I wonder if an iPhone app is a culturally framed way of experiencing nature in a tradition going back to the stereopticons of the 19th century. And if people growing up on the other side of

Battle Road Trail *Following the route used by British troops retreating from Concord and Lexington in 1775, this universally accessible trail winds through an immortal New England landscape. Wandering through farm fields, wetlands, and forests that appear untouched by time, the trail—and its wayside exhibits—blends seamlessly into its surroundings. The triumph of the design is not only its minimal impact on the land but the impression of timelessness it conveys.* **Location:** Minute Man National Historical Park, Massachusetts **Architects:** Bargmann Hendrie+Archetype, Inc./Carol R. Johnson Associates, Inc. **Built:** 2000 **Cost:** \$3.9 Million **Size:** 5.5-mile interpretive path **Funding:** NPS federal lands highway funds, NPS line-item construction funds, and (for the Hanscom Drive underpass) a public lands highway grant. **Green:** Plastic lumber boardwalk posts, organic binder, raised boardwalk through wetlands to create minimal footprint **Awards:** 2010 Merit Award for Master Plan, Designing the Parks; 2001 Merit Award, American Society of Landscape Architects

BELOW CAROL R. JOHNSON ASSOCIATES INC.





LEFT MARION BRENNER, RIGHT KODIAK GREENWOOD

Davis: In its early years, the Park Service benefited from the deep pockets of America's wealthiest individuals, who viewed the creation of the parks as a patriotic duty, ecological imperative, or both. Where are the big checks from today's billionaires? Do they not see the parks as patriotic?

Gibson Scott: Laurance Rockefeller gave over a thousand acres to Grand Teton a few years ago, and developed it in turnkey fashion as restored habitat with a LEED platinum visitor center and preserve, worth about a million dollars an acre. So it's still happening, but maybe not at the same magnitude.

Lawliss: My sense is that much of the big money is going to groups like the Nature Conservancy, which are working globally to save the last natural areas. Germany is working in China and in some small South American countries where there's only 10 percent of the forest left. I think groups feel compelled to save the last—to use Muir's words—untrammelled places.

Davis: So putting money into the national parks is like buying a couple of planters for the *Titanic*?

Mattbeus: It's probably a dead-end argument. Everybody has something they care deeply about. Horses for courses. I don't see them as comparable.

Reynolds: This discussion about deep pockets is off the mark. It ignores the Herculean efforts throughout the Service—at big park and small, urban park and rural—to court new audiences. As opposed to Daddy Warbucks donating land or giving a bundle for a building. Sure, those things are important. But what's more important is re-democratizing the parks.

Mattbeus: One challenge is that cities and states don't do strategic planning anymore. If parks are done project-by-project, it's hard to make a system. You can get a neighborhood park, but anything complex is difficult.

Nagel: Brooklyn Bridge Park, a *Designing the Parks* winner from your office, was chartered to be financially self-sufficient. The city has developed real estate next to it to help cover costs. It's a new model but has raised questions about the role of partnerships with the private sector.

Mattbeus: It gives you predictability with funding. You're no longer beholden to changing administrations. Parks have long suffered because looking after landscapes requires predictability and long-term vision.

Davis: In this era of cutbacks—where public/private partnerships are all the rage—what are some of the tradeoffs to enhance profit?

Mattbeus: In general terms, the advantage accruing to developers is open space. So they can charge more for what they develop, but they also give back to the community. It's the way many of the London squares were built, the way housing and a lot of public space in Boston came to be. Ab-

Lawliss: Does NPS face similar challenges pursuing design excellence?

Evans: Often, when the Park Service takes on a project, more attention is paid to the constraints than to looking broadly at the opportunities from a design standpoint. The chance to really develop reverence for place gets encumbered by a process tied to the bottom line.

Lawliss: If excellence is the goal, cost is a problem that can sometimes be solved creatively, as we've seen in our discussion.

Evans: With projects like our award winners, partners bring their own money to the table. They are certainly cost-conscious, but their primary focus is elevating the design. When they discover that they have to go through value analysis, cost litmus tests, and a development advisory board, their eyes roll back.

Reynolds: In my experience, when partners first face these things, it strikes them as needless process, and they want action. But later they may see there is more bang for the buck, and the potential for controversy is reduced. Those things can mean something big to a donor.

Eyring: Certainly partners have the flexibility to select the most appro-



Cavallo Point Lodge Using the buildings of WWI-era Fort Baker, designers created a 142-room lodge that is not only environmentally low-impact, but commemorates the past as well. Sightlines feature San Francisco's spectacular views with upgrades done using an array of LEED-approved techniques. To heighten the impact, the natural habitat around the former military installation is being restored and the menus feature organic food fresh from local farms. **Location:** Sausalito,

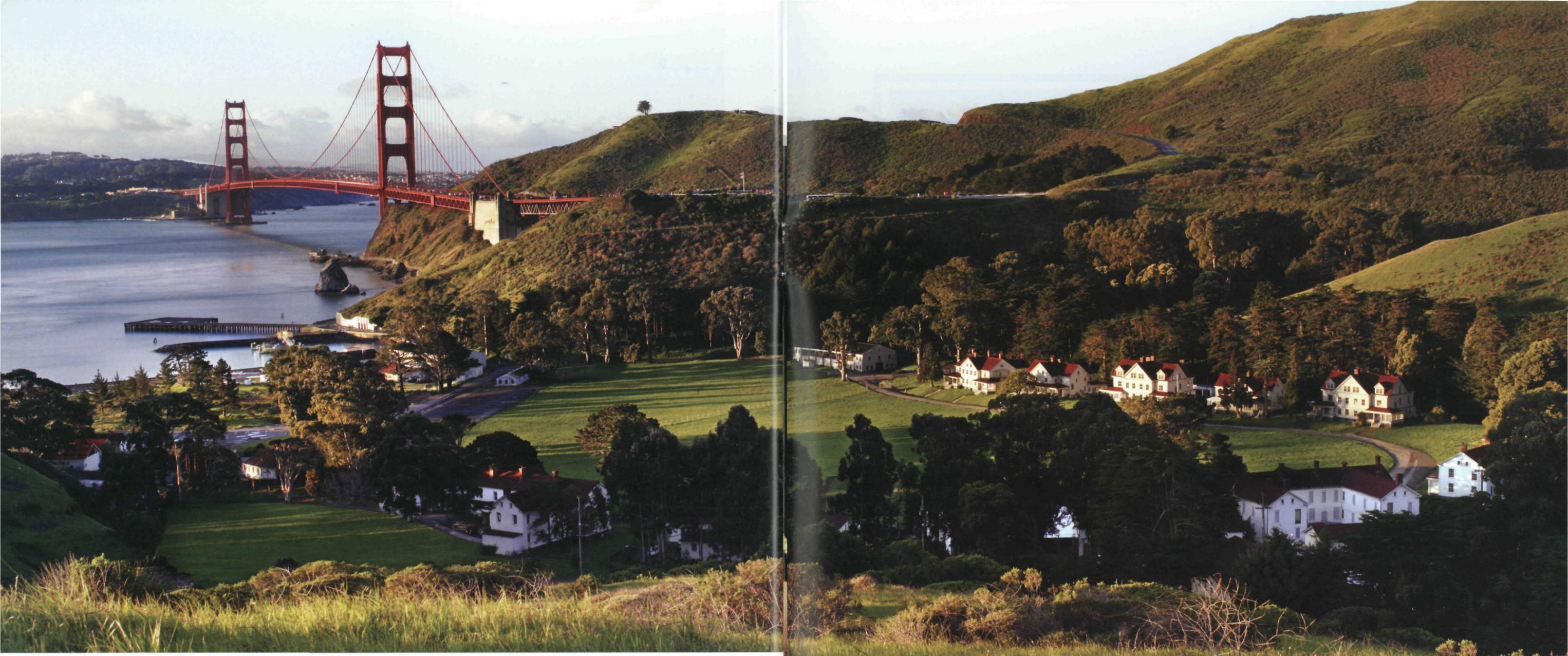
Once you realize that parks are valuable commodities, there are people cleverer than we are who can put a value on it. The minute you do that, it changes the equation.

olutely for-profit, not philanthropy. Once you realize that parks are valuable commodities, there are people cleverer than we are who can put a value on it. The minute you do that, it changes the equation.

Davis: At least as far back as Central Park, a major justification has been boosting property values and tourism.

Mattbeus: That's an interesting conversation. Here in Cambridge, it's tempered by the fact that new development comes with a big swath of affordable housing every time. So for everybody that stands up and screams gentrification, there's somebody else saying I don't want 500 affordable units in my neighborhood. When you're having that conversation, you got something right, I would say.

California Architects: Architectural Resources Group and Ledy Maytum Stacy Architects / Office of Cheryl Barton **Built:** 2008 **Cost:** \$138 million **Size:** 350 acres **Funding:** NPS, Fort Baker Retreat Group, Bay Area Discovery Museum **Green:** LEED Gold Certified, low VOC glues, paints, and carpets; green building materials; film solar panels **Awards:** 2010 Honor Award, *Designing the Parks*; 2009 Governor's Historic Preservation Award, California State Office of Historic Preservation; 2009 Green Building of America Award, Real Estate & Construction Review; 2009 Honor Award, National Trust for Historic Preservation; 2008 Award for Excellence in Historic Rehabilitation, National Housing & Rehabilitation Association; 2008 Preservation Design Award, California Preservation Foundation, 2008 Must See Green American Landmarks, Travel+Leisure



MICHAL VENERA

priate designer. Federal contracting can be long and tedious; often it's easier to pick from a pre-approved contractor list than to recruit a designer with the best skills for the job.

Lawliss: Catherine mentioned a wealth of models emerging. Do any public entities offer examples worth mentioning?

Evans: The GSA design excellence program is one. The process allows the agency to select architects based on both credentials and proposals for specific projects. Research, planning, design, and review are all integral.

Matthews: Everybody is looking at New York to figure out how to do it. Clearly other cities can't invest that kind of money. But as a model, the whole country is looking at the New York waterfront.

Lawliss: What San Francisco is doing in the Bay Area is exciting, including the Olmsted brothers' plans for the Berkeley Hills. Fabulous things are happening on both coasts. How do we engage that dynamism?

Donobue: Brooklyn Bridge Park uses this idea of hypernature. Not everyone has the opportunity to camp in Yosemite for a week; the park reverses the idea by bringing the experience to them. It's a hybrid blending a seemingly boundless natural environment with the feel of an intimate neigh-

Above: Award winner Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

borhood park. Pier 6 has exploration gardens for children of all ages. Pier 1 has the grandeur of a national park, but instead of set against mountains, it's set against the Manhattan skyline.

Nagel: There's unexpectedness. You're in the middle of the city and all of sudden you see wildlife that you never thought you'd encounter.

Donobue: It's not the typical promenade. You get the environments that you would in a national park, not just street trees and mowed lawns, though there are some for seeing a movie or kicking a soccer ball around. There are marsh gardens and ways to interact with the river that just weren't there before.

Matthews: Our other Designing the Parks winner, Teardrop Park, has rock formations erupting out of the ground as if to evidence the geology, surrounded by high rises. Michael grew up in upstate New York and said Olmsted did this in Central Park, how do you do it in two acres? It took a lot of figuring, but go there. It's amazing.

Lawliss: Once success is out there, people want to repeat it. But you can't

repeat these things. They're distinct to a place, like all our parks. People called Olmsted and said we want Central Park. He'd meet with city officials and say this isn't a Central Park city, this isn't a Central Park setting. Instead he would do a design inspired by the place.

Matthews: That's where community involvement comes in. It's unpredictable, but always leads somewhere good. The idea that you can repli-

That's where **community involvement** comes in. It's **unpredictable**, but always leads **somewhere good**. The idea that you **can replicate one idea** somewhere else is **just not possible** . . . be open to what **the site wants** to do.

cate one idea somewhere else is just not possible, given quirky neighborhoods and issues like contamination. That's why two places never end up the same. Be open to what the site wants to do, and embrace the community.

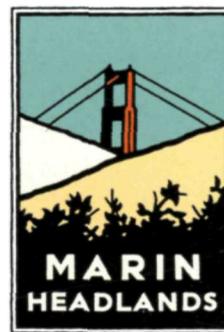
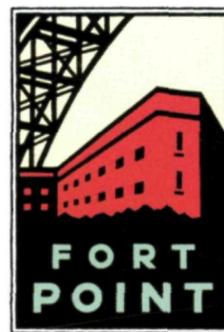
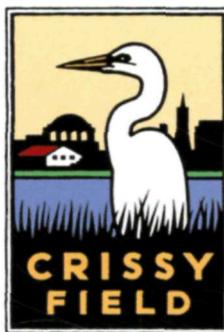
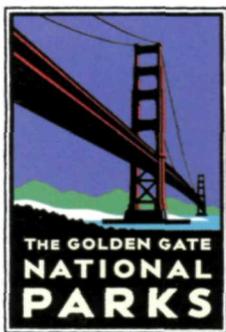
Lawliss: The Park Service has found that out. It's a shift in this century.

Take part in the ongoing discourse at the upcoming conference, **Greater & Greener: Re-Imagining Parks for 21st Century Cities**, July 14-17 in New York City. Go to www.urbanparks2012.org for information.

contact points email tim_davis@nps.gov cdonohue@mvvainc.com
rodger_evans@nps.gov shaun_eyring@nps.gov mary_gibson_scott@nps.gov
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romancing the parks

RECALLING A GOLDEN AGE AT GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA



MUCH OF THE WEST COAST'S MOST STRIKING GEOGRAPHY—AND MUCH OF ITS RICHEST history as well—is concentrated in the area where the Pacific flows into San Francisco Bay. Vast, boulder-strewn beaches, high seaside meadows, and ancient redwoods characterize its natural beauty, while the remnants of the early Spanish presence and artifacts from the Cold War signify its historical sweep. Over 75,000 acres are preserved as national parks, collectively known as Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Yet

SILVERSTEIN'S APPROACH, SAYS SCHWAB, WAS TO "BRAND THE PARKS AS IF THEY WERE A BUSINESS." GOLDEN GATE EMBRACED THE IDEA.

it was clear that San Franciscans were unaware of everything the area encompassed. "Everyone in San Francisco was familiar with the fact that Golden Gate National Recreation Area was all this green land around the Golden Gate Bridge," says eminent illustrator Michael Schwab, who was hired to help solve the problem. People readily associated Alcatraz and Muir Woods with the park, but lesser known sites, such as Fort Point, Point Bonita, or Sweeney Ridge, in spite of their beauty and historical interest, were largely overlooked.

The National Park Service, realizing the problem, consulted with its friends group, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, established in 1981. Part of the issue was the phrase "national recreation area," which was considered vague and uninspired. "The collective identity was weak," says executive director Greg Moore in a case study published by the National Park Service after the project's runaway success. "So we spent a lot of time trying to make that collective identity known by dealing with [the area] as one overall park."

An inspired ad campaign turned things around, and the iconic images shown here were a powerful part of the strategy. Created by Schwab, their simplicity of design and warm, hand-hewn look won the public over.

THE CAMPAIGN'S ARCHITECT WAS RICH SILVERSTEIN, WHO WAS ON THE BOARD OF THE conservancy. His advertising firm, Goodby, Silverstein & Partners, took the project pro bono. Silverstein's approach, says Schwab, was to "brand the parks as if they were a business." Golden Gate embraced the idea. The team immediately confronted the title "recreation area," an official term used to describe a collection of parks as one entity. For the campaign, they decided to simply use "Golden Gate National Parks."

Initially, Schwab's role was limited to creating a series of 18 posters, each bearing his hallmark vision. People often believe they are vintage WPA posters from the Depression, which was part of his intent. He was looking to re-instill "a sense of adventure and romance" in the image of the parks, he says. While his contemporaries were going digital, he headed in the other direction—toward a hand-drawn, artisan look. "I wanted the icons to feel like they came from the past," he says, "but also be very hip and present." With bold colors and single-figure silhouettes (a lighthouse, a crane, Alcatraz Prison), his images seem to say little while speaking volumes. They were being stolen off of bus stop shelters within 24 hours of being put up. "At Alcatraz," says Schwab, "the cash registers pump all day long"—a perfect place to offer his designs for sale on mugs, T-shirts, and a wealth of other material. Today, revenue from what Golden Gate calls its "park-identity merchandise" averages about 25 percent of sales a year. The money is used for projects such as the restoration of Crissy Field (a former military installation-turned-parkland), a new visitor center at Muir Woods, walking trails along the shores of Alcatraz, and programs for urban youth. Flush with success, Schwab was hired by the Department of the Interior to redesign logos for eight departments including the National Park Service, but it was not a priority for the incoming Bush administration. He still has the prototypes.

contact points web Golden Gate NRA www.nps.gov/goga Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy www.parksconservancy.org Goodby, Silverstein & Partners www.goodbysilverstein.com Michael Schwab Studio www.michaelschwab.com



Dinosaur Park



DINOSAUR DIGGING IS A POPULAR TOURIST ACTIVITY in South Dakota, with its fossil-rich landscape. But one of the most loved attractions might be the above-ground dinosaurs. Perched atop a sandstone ridge overlooking Rapid City, not far from where the real thing roamed, stand five life-sized concrete and steel dinos. LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES—and recently photographed by Renee Bieretz of the Historic American Buildings Survey—Dinosaur Park is home to a Triceratops, Tyrannosaurus Rex, Stegosaurus, Trachodon, and a 28-foot-tall Brontosaurus that is visible for miles. “It is one of the most elaborate examples of roadside tourist sculpture in the state,” notes the National Register nomination. A QUICK GOOGLE SEARCH REVEALS dozens of dinosaur parks across the country, but in 1936, when this one was constructed, the concept was new, possibly inspired by the mechanically operated Brontosaurus at Chicago’s 1933-34 Century of Progress International Exposition. “The creation of concrete dinosaurs hit three nerves in the American aesthetic,” notes the nomination, “a sense of the history of the West, an enjoyment of things scaled larger than present-day life, and a sneaky enjoyment of being frightened.” Built as a WPA project, to provide jobs and attract more tourists to the Black Hills (home of the new Mt. Rushmore), the dinos were designed by sculptor Emmet Sullivan, who was also key in creating the now defunct Dinosaur World in Beaver, Arkansas, once the world’s largest dinosaur park. THE GREEN-PAINTED STATUES HAVE SEEN BETTER DAYS—a chunk of the Brontosaurus snout recently fell off. Maintaining the 20-acre city-owned site, which also features a gift shop, snack bar, and “100 Mile” views, has been difficult, but there are plans for a fundraising foundation. “Generation after generation have visited the park with children and grandchildren to have their pictures taken with them,” says city parks manager Lon VanDeusen. “It seems that many have pictures of the family from earlier visits when they were kids.”

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