



Martha Schwartz Partners. Landscape Art and Urbanism

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Martha Schwartz Partners (MSP) is a leading international design practice whose work focuses on activating and regenerating urban sites and city centers. Situated at the intersection of public realm, urban design and site specific art, the practice has over 35 years of experience designing and implementing installations, gardens, civic plazas, parks, institutional landscapes, corporate headquarters, master plans, and urban regeneration projects. MSP works with city leaders, planners and builders at a strategic level so as to advocate for the inclusion of the public landscape as a means to achieve environmental, economic and social sustainability. With offices in London, New York and Shanghai, the practice is engaged in projects and consultation around the globe and has to date worked on projects in over 20 countries and five continents.

MSP has continually been recognized for its contribution to the urban landscapes of the world and to the field of landscape architecture. The firm has received many international award recognitions, including the American Society of Landscape Architects Landmark and Honour Awards, the British Association of Landscape Industries Award in the Regeneration Category, the Chicago Athenaeum Award for Best New Global Design, the Urban Land Institute Award for Excellence and the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award.

With a foreword by Marc Treib, Professor of Architecture Emeritus at the University of California in Berkeley) and an introduction by Martha Schwartz, this monograph is the first publication to document 55 built projects and a selection of master plans by this internationally acclaimed practice.

Martha Schwartz: »When we design, our biggest objective is to create environments that people enjoy and come to love. We try to create environments that people take pride in and are happy to adopt these places that they live and work in as part of their identity. If this happens, people will strive to take care of it, maintain it and preserve it. People's love of place is fundamental to sustainability. That is not to say we don't work in the most ecologically sound way. We work with engineers, water specialists, horticulturists, soil specialists in order to do our best in capturing and recycling water, using planting that was indigenous to the area and sourcing our materials locally. But having people feel pride about where they live and feel they are living in a beautiful environment that they wish to protect and preserve is the big win.«

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Menges

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**Martha
Schwartz
Partners
Landscape
Art and
Urbanism**

Edition Axel Menges

Landscape can be about anything

Matthew Schwartz

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American landscape architecture in the 1980s was only hesitantly emerging from a grasp by ecology that had seriously dampened aspirations for landscape design as a creative enterprise. While science and art comprise the two components of the discipline and profession, for over a decade science had prevailed. Due in large part to the influence of Ian McHarg's epochal book *Design With Nature*, first published in 1969, landscape practice privileged planning over invention, and analysis over creativity. When Martha Schwartz entered the scene around the middle of the decade, her work landed like an aerial bomb that blasted the greenery still being planted in the "naturalistic" clumps so dear to those following in the tradition of Frederick Law Olmsted.

It may have been her background in art rather than horticulture, or perhaps her wayward personality, but from the earliest published project — a garden lined with bagels, of all things — Schwartz's ideas drove a wedge into the profession's complacency. Against her personal claims of legitimacy for this small work, a flood of retorts asserted that "this (i.e. bagels in a line) was not landscape architecture." But perhaps soon thereafter, each of the disclaimers was forced to pause for a moment and consider: "Well then, just what is landscape architecture?" At the very least, her instigating any reconsiderations of practice constituted a significant contribution to landscape architecture in the United States, and to some degree, even abroad.

From the start Schwartz's practice has straddled the fine line between art and environmental design — not that the two approaches should be, in any way, incompatible. In most cases, of course, an address of program, site, and climate immediately qualifies the project as "design." But a certain errant attitude toward form and space, her rejection of naturalism, and a resourceful investigation and use of materials, nudge the meter closer to art practice. In Schwartz's own mind, the two were neither independent nor oppositional.

The 1980s work was colored by a plethora of instant landscapes that accompanied instant developments, at times for housing, more often for commerce. The golden frogs in the Rio Shopping Center in Atlanta, Georgia, drew upon the elements of the American vernacular landscape but elevated them to higher aesthetic provinces through their arrangement in a grid — an ordering that was so much a hallmark of minimalism in art and modernism in architecture. Using mirrored gazing balls and other common elements from the American backyard, the ugly and ordinary — as described by the architect Robert Venturi — became the elegant and extraordinary in their new contexts and structure. Again, criticism attacked the playfulness and outré nature of Schwartz's work. Again she claims that this was not landscape architecture. Over time, however, the arguments weakened considerably and in time almost disappeared. Almost.

Seen from a position beyond the drafting room, the early partnerships — first with Peter Walker, and later Ken Smith and David Meyer — were mutually influential and times of fecund exchange. The Schwartz-Walker landscapes were strictly ordered, often structured by grids and fields of lines yet energized by a certain playfulness. The Marina Linear Park in San Diego, California, joined the railroad beds, avenue, and pedestrian ways within a greater "serape" pattern — in effect, reconfiguring the infrastructure as a vital element of the design. The exchanges with Ken Smith, one might suggest, reinforced the pop nature of the office's production, with David Meyer keeping things in check and contributing to the materiality and detailing of the realized projects. Their collaboration on the Yorkville Park in Toronto demonstrated a capability for addressing — simultaneously — art, locale, and behavior. Schwartz left those associations behind and moved on, opening her own office, first in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and lastly in London and New York.

Reviewing the impressive portfolio of realized projects one observes a fascination with synthetic as well as living materials. One would venture, however, that to Schwartz the question is not a reliance on any single material or medium, but instead a concentration on the idea behind the design and the ultimate perception of the landscape as realized. When plants are appropriate, by all means use them. When Plexiglas fits the bill, let's turn to acrylic. Each medium has its values, each its effect. But only rarely, if ever, has any design been based on plants of some characteristic species, as works by landscape architects deeply rooted in horticulture might. Instead, like Dostoevsky, she believes the "punishment should fit the crime." What is appropriate? What is most effective? What feels right? Perhaps MSP's most brilliant use of plants is found at the landscape that surrounds — and mounts — the Swiss Re offices in Munich, Germany. Here the design intermixes plants and minerals in a series of themed gardens that carpet the understorey of the building on four sides, each articulated with varied colors in planting and rocks — culminating in the vines that climb the façades of the buildings and literally root the architecture in the landscape. Each stripe is made up of a single plant species or inert mineral such as crushed colored glass or gravel. Through the seasons each of the quadrants rises to prominence. In the red quadrant, as the office describes it: "the *Euonymus* elates in a blaze of red in autumn, a field of bulbs blooms with a dazzling red in the spring, and shrubs provide red berries in winter." Of the landscapes relying more completely on synthetic materials, Plexiglas appeared to great effect in the landscape for the Kitagata housing estate in Gifu, Japan, completed in 2000. All the housing blocks were designed by women — and the landscape as well. The central pavilions sheathed in polychrome acrylic lent splashes of nuanced color to the gray and silver housing units

and filtered brilliantly tinted light to those seeking refuge and pleasure within the pavilions. While synthetic products played a key role, living materials completed the palette that added color and life to an otherwise gray architectural ensemble.

Throughout her career Schwartz has continued to simultaneously wage war on at least three fronts. First, was her campaign to operate as an artist as well as landscape architect. In a profession increasingly dominated by science, analysis, and academic research she has staunchly maintained a position rooted in creative response — albeit with an increasing awareness and incorporation of the natural processes now part and parcel of developing landscapes graced with that magic word “sustainability.” As educator and lecturer she has considered both process and product but has stressed the importance of what we ultimately experience in actuality, emotionally and psychologically. The invention, manipulation, and play with forms, color, materials, has remained a central interest.

Then there was her identity and stance as a woman. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a number of notable women maintained active and significant practices in landscape architecture although their number to some degree dwindled during the war years. In the decades that followed, as the organization of landscape offices turned from the sole practitioner or partnership to those more corporately structured, the individuality if not presence of women diminished. Without doubt, in the United States several outstanding practices are centered on women, while other women serve as associates or partners in larger offices. However, few if any of them have maintained an equally high profile as “other” than Martha Schwartz, although they may have actually realized more landscapes. Schwartz’s battles securing tenure at Harvard also illustrate the residual attitudes still affecting women in landscape architecture, and testify to her resolve and willingness to tackle the establishment when required. This may be one of the reasons she has been successful in executing projects in China and other countries. She has also remained the eternal provocateur, first as an enfant terrible, and now as a terrible, as the French say, “of certain age.”

Over time the approach, sophistication, and scale of the commissions have all increased. In some ways the earliest work, more art oriented, applied ideas to the site in a gut response executed with a certain aesthetic independence. Later works, in contrast, have drawn more from the site, transforming the pre-existing conditions into a new landscape that responds to the stipulations of the design brief. Maturity has set in. MSP projects of the 1990s, like Exchange Square in Manchester, England, demonstrate the ability of landscape architecture to reinvigorate a site fallen into decline, in this case one tainted by an act of terrorism. Yet in other places, often in other lands, the site lay as a vast plane — not exactly a tabula rasa, of course, given the existing soil, topography, and climate, but with few outstanding features upon which to hang a design. In these instances a formal statement becomes more valid and the structure more prominent. In some urban projects a matrix of greenery and paving may join — and to some degree soften — a set of high-rises despite the limitations of a landscape constructed on a concrete slab. The plaza fronting the courthouse in Minneapolis, Minnesota, referred more specifically to the state’s landscape, using the trunks of native trees as seating and mound-forms suggestive of the drumlins of Minnesota’s glacial landscape. In the first instance, the approach was more architectural, more applied to the world of construction, more polite and more reliant on geometry. In the second project, allusions were specific and local, and yet as a whole more assertive as invention. The transformation

of natural or architectural references into new forms is key; there has never been any attempt to replicate a “natural” landscape.

The dimensions of many projects have grown exponentially over time. When one compares tiny works like the early Splice or Bagel Gardens with expansive waterfront schemes and housing developments for hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, the nature of the differences and the differences in their natures become evident. One now witnesses in the designs a greater acknowledgment and understanding of the panoply of conditions that shape a landscape and the knowledge necessary to address the full range of design considerations. While the work of today’s MSP always maintains a noticeable identity, its starting point nearly always lies in ecological and political reality. The complex network of factors that comprise today’s landscape practice enriches rather than diminishes the resulting landscape. Consultants are required; the process is more complicated and more collaborative. While on some projects the architecture seems to lead, the landscape integrates buildings with the greater habitable environment of which the buildings are only a part. It is no wonder that many, if not most, of these larger works are located in China. The population is immense; the economy offers the financial means; the lands is available, as is the will to look toward the future rather than return to the past. These conditions have provided a situation open to creativity and innovation, in form and space as well as method. Given the vast differences in scale, economic resources, location, and time frame the question is: How can a landscape architect maintain a consistent stance from art installations to town plans?

To me, the answer has been a consistent use of abstraction. Abstraction, because of its simplification or distance from specific reference, is often considered as a quality divorced from reality. This is not the case, at least not historically. The origin of the word derives from the Latin for “to draw from.” One begins with the conditions of a particular situation and from it one draws what is key, what is pertinent, what needs to be reformed, reshaped, or at times intensified. For example, one may abstract topography or vegetal forms as a basis for patterns and order. From the existing conditions one devises an approach, albeit incorporating an existing design vocabulary that is personal and particular. One draws from and applies to, and by this manner Martha Schwartz’s design vocabulary while to some degree consistent has continued to evolve — at times applying a choppy biomorphic line we might call “bio-cubic,” or smooth curves that suggest flows; or forms more staid where the situation, normally urban, calls for restraint.

Quite unusually for most landscape architects, Martha Schwartz’s practice still embraces both the macro and micro scales, with projects that range from large scale site planning to the diminutive art installation, several of which have been collaborations with Allison Dailey. Outstanding among these is City and Nature, a perceptual labyrinth for a garden show in Xi’an China which manipulated physical passage with visual enigmas that result from periodic shifts in transparency and reflection. The materials were vernacular and timeless: grey brick, willows, one-way mirrors, and bronze bells. If the materials were common, the configuration was radical. Here the artist also served as perceptual psychologist and social scientist, not to mention a wizard who conjured surprise and delight. Where public art is often an alien artifact inserted into a place, landscapes such as these become new things characterized by an inextricable link with the site and insights into human behavior often lacking in work by artists less familiar with public space.

Martha Schwartz has noted that when she entered graduate landscape studies at Harvard she was told that art and landscape do not mix; that a “good” landscape should appear natural, as if untouched by human hands. That ecology produces its own forms and lacks an aesthetic. And that one must choose: be an artist or make viable landscapes as a landscape architect. You can’t have both. Through thirty years of practice, she and her collaborators — in what she called her “gypsy” practice, with the location of its offices shifting over time — have confronted and all but negated those precepts. The work always possesses an identifiable form; it is not nature as it was. Landscapes rooted in ecology can have an aesthetic; a new landscape must understand natural processes but has no requirement to mimic natural forms. That design and its realization can actually ameliorate a troubled situation. And most of all, that while supporting both natural and human existence, good landscapes can also delight. And she has even dared to propose, as a desirable goal, the pursuit of that elusive and much derided word beauty.

Marc Treib
Professor of Architecture Emeritus
University of California, Berkeley

This is book is a compendium of work that spans from 1979 to our most recent projects. Having practiced for over 30 years, the profession of landscape architecture itself has gone through a metamorphosis and has taken me on a surprising journey into uncharted waters. I had no vision of where my trajectory would take me and that I would be swooped up into a global practice. Through my practice I learned about the world, a place of wonders and ever accelerating change. I could never have imagined my life 30 years ago, as back then, there was no model for the kind of “gypsy” practice we seem to have. Still a small-ish office of around 25 people, we are like a dandelion seed that floats along the currents of the wind.

Our office has traveled from place-to-place. While we grew, instead of building local offices in different locations, we simply re-established ourselves in different places multiple time. Starting in Boston, I began by building my own art installations as manifestos. We then jumped to New York where we were given our first “real” project by Arquitectonica. After New York, the practice moved to San Francisco where it continued to do small but highly imageable landscapes and worked with developers who spent no money but wanted to do interesting work. It was from California that we did our first international work in Japan.

Next, was the move back to Cambridge, MA in 1992 where I began teaching at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and where I still teach. We became more involved with public work in the US as well as with European work. Our interest in public work lead us to Europe where there was an existence of the “public realm” — a concept that I often had to explain to Americans. Due to the popularity of our plaza done in Manchester in 1996, we were able to open up our fledgling office in London in 2005.

European city mayors were aware of the value of the public realm landscape for keeping their cities competitive. Investment in the public landscape was part of their cultures, and people seemed to be more accepting of design and art in the landscape. As exciting, the Europeans, in comparison to the US, were far more advanced in environmentalism to the point where they had moved to the scale of “healthy” cities while in the US we had just begun to become interested in green roofs. Working and learning in more environmentally aware cultures that were also highly urbanized was for me like being in heaven. Plus, London was much more cleverly positioned so it was an easy reach to Europe and the Middle East, both areas where we worked heavily from 2004 to 2009.

Now, we find ourselves working more and more in China. Although challenging, being part of this transformation of not only China but the world, has provided wonderful opportunities for our practice. The Chinese are such rapid learners that they will soon be a source of global leadership in climate change and environmental legislation. As well, they are ambitious and a place of cultural and youthful vitality. People are very open to new ideas and unafraid of change. Given the size of this market, as landscape architects, there is a great opportunity for us to help bring environmental and pedestrian-based city planning into the awareness of the development community. It is a great time and place for the profession of landscape architecture.

We now also have a small office in Shanghai to help us translate the Chinese culture and to help get our work built. So our “gypsy” practice continues to wander off to new areas across the world to serve those who call on us to do what we do, which is to design imageable and sustainable landscapes that people will love, interact with and will create value.

I knew almost nothing about the profession when I randomly decided to go to graduate school in landscape architecture in 1974, after spending my childhood and undergraduate years in art schools. My reason for choosing landscape architecture was unsophisticated. I knew nothing about the profession. I wanted to learn how to build big art, as I was an avid follower of the “Earth Works” artists who came into the art world spotlight in the late 60’s and early 70’s. Artists such as Michael Heizer, Richard Long, Walter de Maria, and Carl Andre created works that went outside the gallery and were built in landscapes of America’s southwest. They were heroic works that were integrated and resonated with the landscapes in which they were sited. They were the bellwethers of the burgeoning environmental movement, making us aware of the beauty of these landscapes by allowing us to see it through a new and contemporary lens. This was the first time that “site specific art” entered our vocabulary. I knew I wanted to do art that interacted with a site, but use the urban context for artistic exploration.

Although I thought entering landscape architecture was a reasonable way to explore these ideas, I quickly learned that I, along with one other person, was the only person with a background in fine arts in our class of 30. In that first year of graduate school, I learned five important things:

- A “good” landscape was a landscape that did not show the hand of man.
- There is no connection between art and landscape.
- There is no connection between having an environmental agenda and making art — one had to choose between the two.
- If you are part of building, you are also part of the problem.
- Ecology does have an aesthetic.

I did not agree with any of these “important” facts. I have spent the last 30+ years using these preconceived ideas about what a landscape “should” be as a springboard for the work that we do as a practice. I have approached the field from an artist’s stance: to question the status quo. I see the landscape as an artist’s medium, with a set of materials to work with; earth, water, sky and living plants, as well as any other materials that are necessary to express yourself. With these materials and a good imagination, landscape architecture can be a cultural art form, like sculpture, painting, dance, and architecture.

Of course, this does not preclude an environmental ethos that underpins any landscape work. In addition to a functioning natural environment, the built landscape must engage and embrace people. Our behaviour, psychology, culture, and society, must be included as part of the ecosystem if we are to create sustainability. The dialectic between man (bad) and nature (good) is an old one, but when played out within the realm of “landscape” it becomes even more fuelled by our own distinct images and mythologies held by individual cultures, many of which clash fiercely when confronted with our rapid urbanization. Without clarity about the fact that we are building our own landscapes in which we live, most landscape will be trivialized to perform as romantic remnants of a beloved image about which we fantasize, but have no resemblance to the environments in which we work and live. We carry these fantasies of nature close to us, like a beloved teddy bear, yet seem powerless to stop the environmental and visual degradation that has become our world in the 21st century.

The profession has expanded greatly within the last 30 years as the importance of environmentalism and globalism have connected and with the realization that we all live within limited resources. We are the green profession, so our voices are louder and our skill sets more needed now. We are making headway in helping people to understand that we must go beyond the garden to understand the landscape as functioning and multi-layered systems that must underpin city building. A healthy and environmentally functional landscape creates human health and quality of life for people.

Living in cities also allows for more efficiencies of resources, so the conundrum exists: how do we assist people living on dense, man-made islands (cities) to live in a way that is most environmentally friendly, low-carbon and creates a high quality of life? The answer is to build cities that are based on sound ecological planning and to design these cities for people. Without putting these two goals foremost and together, we can never reach global sustainability. There are simply too many people living in urban environments to neglect the human part within the sustainability equation. For optimum effectiveness, cities plans must be on an environmentally-based master plan where low-carbon/renewable energy goal along with the creation of environments where human scale, needs and communities are created. Uses must be intermingled to lessen the pressure on transport. In other words, people must come before traffic planning.

Within the texture and scale of a city, we must go back to those environments that are nurturing to our human needs and behaviours. The neighbourhood is a walkable domain where it is possible to shop, make important social connections, and walk or bicycle to work instead of being isolated in towers and dependent upon cars. People should be able to easily and safely cross roads and not be overwhelmed by the speed, noise and pollution of cars. Neighbourhoods are connected to other neighborhoods

and districts with tree-lined pedestrian-scaled sidewalks and bike-lanes, which in turn, fit into a larger environmental framework and infrastructure. Important for their quality of life, people need to find shelter and delight from the stresses of city life within multiple green and open spaces. Lastly, people strive to find beauty within their lives. All of these characteristics will help to create healthy cities where people will choose to live. A well designed, landscape-driven master plan is our biggest hope of creating this kind of sustainable environment.

In *Landscape for Living*, written by Garrett Eckbo in 1950, Eckbo focused on the relationship between creativity in the landscape and social interactivity, a topic that has been left out the recent discourse in landscape architecture. In our desire to expand beyond the site scale and deal with landscapes at an urban scale, we seem to have lost sight of the human scale and the value we can create through the connections we make between each other through the emotional content expressed in art and design. Garrett Eckbo and Lawrence Halprin, two of our founding fathers of the modern profession of landscape architecture, were humanists. They understood that we must keep our focus on people while living in balance with nature, and create places that will be loved, embraced and of cultural importance. This debate has evolved due to the expansion of the breadth of our profession. We should, theoretically, be capable of designing at all scales. However, while we must deal with urbanism and at a larger scale and should learn to integrate information and form multi-layered strategies to solve complex urban issues, we must not forgo the importance of physical design at the human scale. At this scale will be found human expression and care about detail, all of which will broadcast quality to the user. People will see whether care has been taken to create a place. This, in turn, will be absorbed in one’s esteem and identity. This all happens at a human scale, and people will know if the site has been designed with respect, humor and individuality. At the human scale a design can tell a story, create meaning, connection and create value to the people who come in contact with a space. Without a design that people value, we cannot achieve sustainability.

Quality design is essential to creating an environment that people will respond to. Art is the foundation for all design. Artists are the researchers of the visual realm and reflect what is immediate and topical in any culture. Art is a reflection of ourselves. Design and art are in close conversation and are capable of expressing ideas and a means of communicating on an intellectual and emotional level. However, it is through our emotions that we most strongly connect to each other. It is at the emotional level where art and design are at their most powerful.

Most importantly, as designers, we can create beauty, a quality that is arguably too difficult to define and therefore talk about, but is something that all people can recognize. Beauty is a quality that ranges from culture to culture, but is, none the less, a quality that all people respond to and deserve to have in their lives.

Lastly, the work in this book has been created through the efforts of many talented people who have worked at Martha Schwartz Partners through the years. Our in-house process is “the best idea wins,” and my job is to support and help to develop and support that idea through its construction. Our designers (I am but one of them) contribute so we have continually fresh and new ideas to work with. It is through the major contributions of the people in the practice that we have such a richness of variety and expression in our work. One of the characteristics of our practice is that we do not have a house-style and it’s

anyone’s guess what will come out next. We always produce a one-of-a-kind landscape that suits its particular site and client and tells a particular story.

Our practice remains focused on design, the urban environment and on placemaking. With our expanding understanding of how sustainable practice is deployed in urban environments, we have also grown to be scaleable, to be able to plan and design larger sites where we can insert meaningful ecological systems while still designing places that will attract and delight people. We are as enthusiastic about doing a temporary art installation as much as a large-scale waterfront project. We work as a good partner on master plans, representing the open space or public realm systems. We can lead large teams, working with other experts so we can harvest fundamental engineering, social and cultural information critical to ensuring that the landscape will function ecologically while reaching the larger goals to create places that people will use, enjoy and to which they will return. The intent of our work is to touch people and invite them to think, feel, wonder, have fun and to bring beauty and pleasure in their lives.

Martha Schwartz

More than half of the planet's population is now living in cities. This vast global trend towards urbanization that is underway encompasses a surge of new and old metropolises that are in the process of developing. Decisive to the city's performance, liveability and sustainability for future generations and underwriting this development is the urban landscape. It is rapidly becoming understood as a crucial factor in the ability of a city to provide the kind of healthy domain that will attract people, be environmentally friendly, create economic value, attract capital and contribute to a city's cultural advantages in a globally competitive market.

Traditionally, great urban landscapes have helped to fulfil the needs for environmental and human health, for social and collectivized urban space that generates a positive quality of life in cities that result in making these communities desirable and unique. The work of MSP demonstrates a deep commitment to this need yet raises the ante to propose that the contemporary urban landscape must go beyond the traditional typologies and embrace all aspects, sectors and territories of urban life especially the utilitarian spaces that characterize the city. The whole idea of landscape in the city needs to be expanded beyond the normal idea of parks or green roofs. We must consider that most of our urban environments consist of streets, sidewalks, utility corridors, parking lots and everything outside the buildings. This is, in fact, where people spend most of their time.

Yet, it is these undervalued urban spaces that constitute the public realm that serve as the platform for urban life today. Within the interstitial fabric of in-between spaces of buildings exists a panoply of diverse places and spaces that have the potential for citizens to informally meet, recreate and connect with one another. MSP through their design practice urges these settings to become humane and imaginatively detailed so that in the process we positively activate public and private territo-

ries with design qualities that bring delight, beauty, nature and playfulness to the city. Fundamental to the practice is the belief that the engagement of people and satisfaction of basic human needs for connection, identity and enjoyment underlie one of the deepest reasons why landscape is becoming so important. As humans we need to experience various identities and differentiation between neighborhoods, locales and individual sites especially in the face of increasing globalization and the tendency towards homogenization of our built world.

The other reason that landscape is in ascendancy is due to environmental concerns and issues of sustainability in the city. Great landscape design can perform functions that mitigate extreme heat, moderate the hydrologic cycles, harvest and recycle storm water, reduce energy use, lower carbon emissions, attract wildlife, benefit the health of residents and help ameliorate the harsher aspects of urban life. Many new technologies have emerged to address environmental issues and ecology has been embraced by the profession. Yet, no matter how cutting-edge the technologies employed or how ecologically correct a project may be, if people don't feel connected to that urban landscape it won't be successful. For this reason, MSP places a great emphasis upon the artistic expression of design that must be appreciated as a vital factor while also considering sustainability and ecological factors. Design can create a sense of place and engender a sense of belonging and individuality that encourages an emotional connection to a place by the people who use and then experience it. Design can also improve the platform upon which human and natural environments can be brought into an artful balance.

MSP's explorations in achieving this balance has led to the design of highly effective and well used public and private spaces. These public and private spaces constitute a new public realm landscape that is the stage for urban culture. MSP understands the expression of urban culture in the landscape as the space of appearance: where individuals and the society convey in built form the cultural aspirations as they wish to see themselves and be seen by the world. MSP operates transversally across landscape, architecture, installation sculpture, horticulture, engineering, ecology, science, technology and visual art deploying these modalities in varying ratios as each project requires to create a "place" that will meet the cultural aspirations of the city. To give a city the competitive edge, MSP is often asked to decipher what the image should be for an individual project, a community or even an urban entity that responds to its unique social, cultural and ethnic characteristics so that it will be embraced by the public. Consequently, the team's landscapes, installations and large urban projects continue to shape the environments they are part of and the lives of the people who use them.

This is now of utmost importance to the health of any city as it positions itself to be an attractor to people seeking a certain quality of life. Beautification as we have known it in the past in the sense of accessibility to green spaces and tree-lined streets is being used to entice knowledge-based workers to come to live and work in the city. Encouraging people to live together, collectively, mixing social classes, using less resources spent on energy, food and transport is vital to achieving a sustainable planet and MSP believes in the urbanization process that is underway for this reason.

Markus Jatsch and Edith Katz

City and Nature Master Garden

Xi'an, China (2011)

MSP was one of nine international landscape design firms to be invited to design a small garden installation on the theme of *The Harmonious Co-Existence of Nature and the City* at the 2011 International Horticulture Exhibition in Xi'an, China. The garden installation is composed of four elements: traditional grey brick walls and paving, Weeping Willows, one-way mirrors, and bronze bells. The aesthetic direction was derived partly from vernacular Chinese architecture and its close relationship to nature.

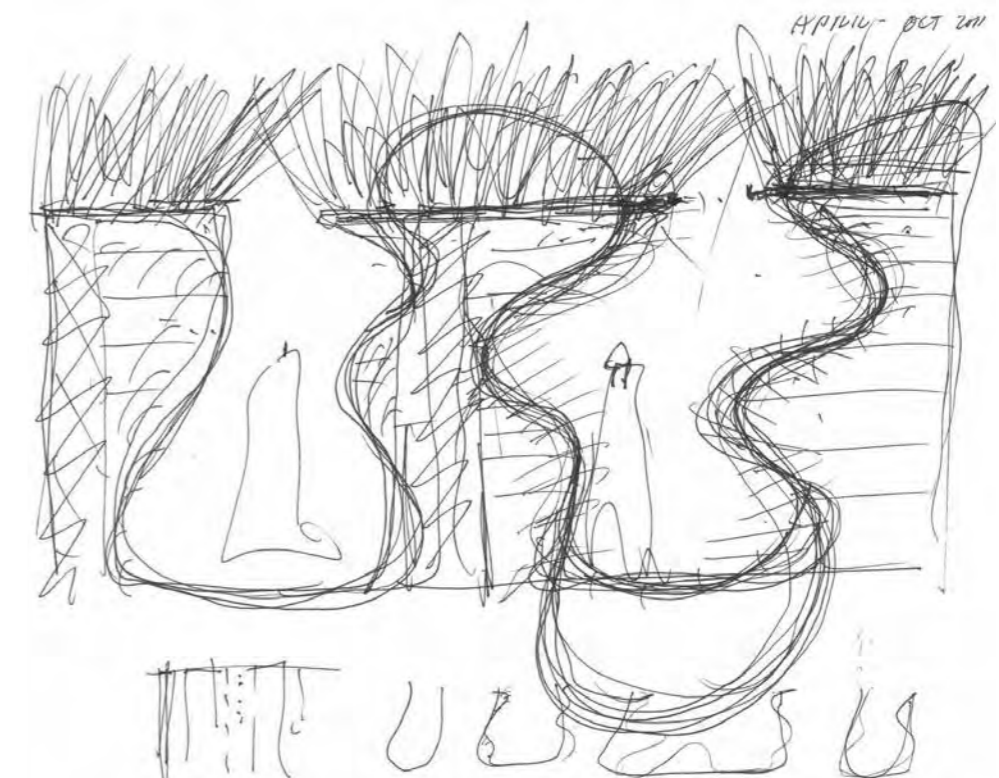
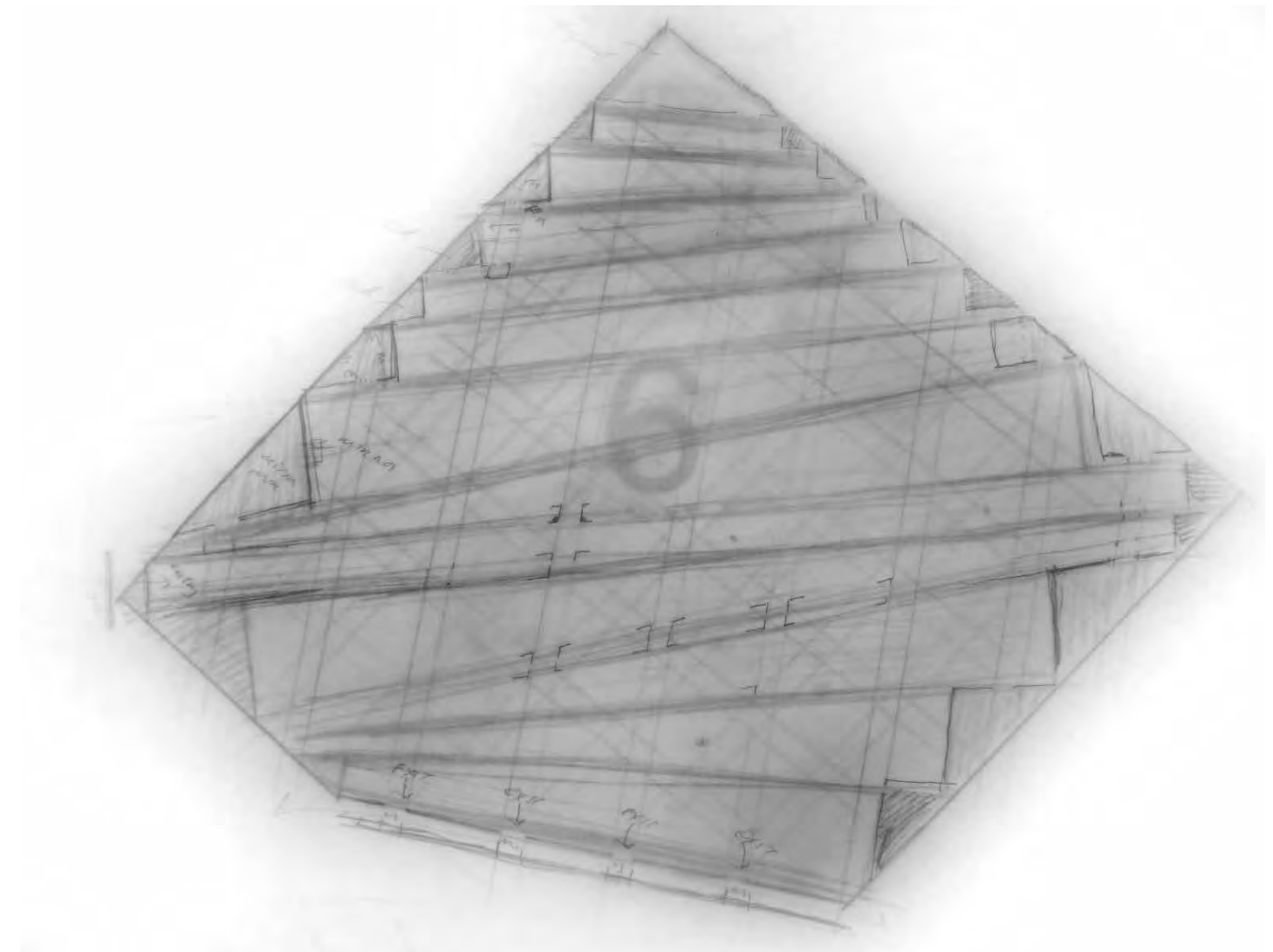
Grey brick has long been the principle construction material for vernacular architecture. Such walls are the most popular element to create space and protect privacy in cities, and are frequently used in palaces to express power. For many people living in courtyard houses for generations, these walls provide the separation line of the inside and outside world, city and country.

The Weeping Willow has a special place in Chinese poems, history, stories, calligraphy, and painting. Weeping Willows have been intensively used to express longing, for friends or home, and feelings of nostalgia. They are often used as a symbol for feminine beauty, for its soft, subtle, lissom and graceful figure.

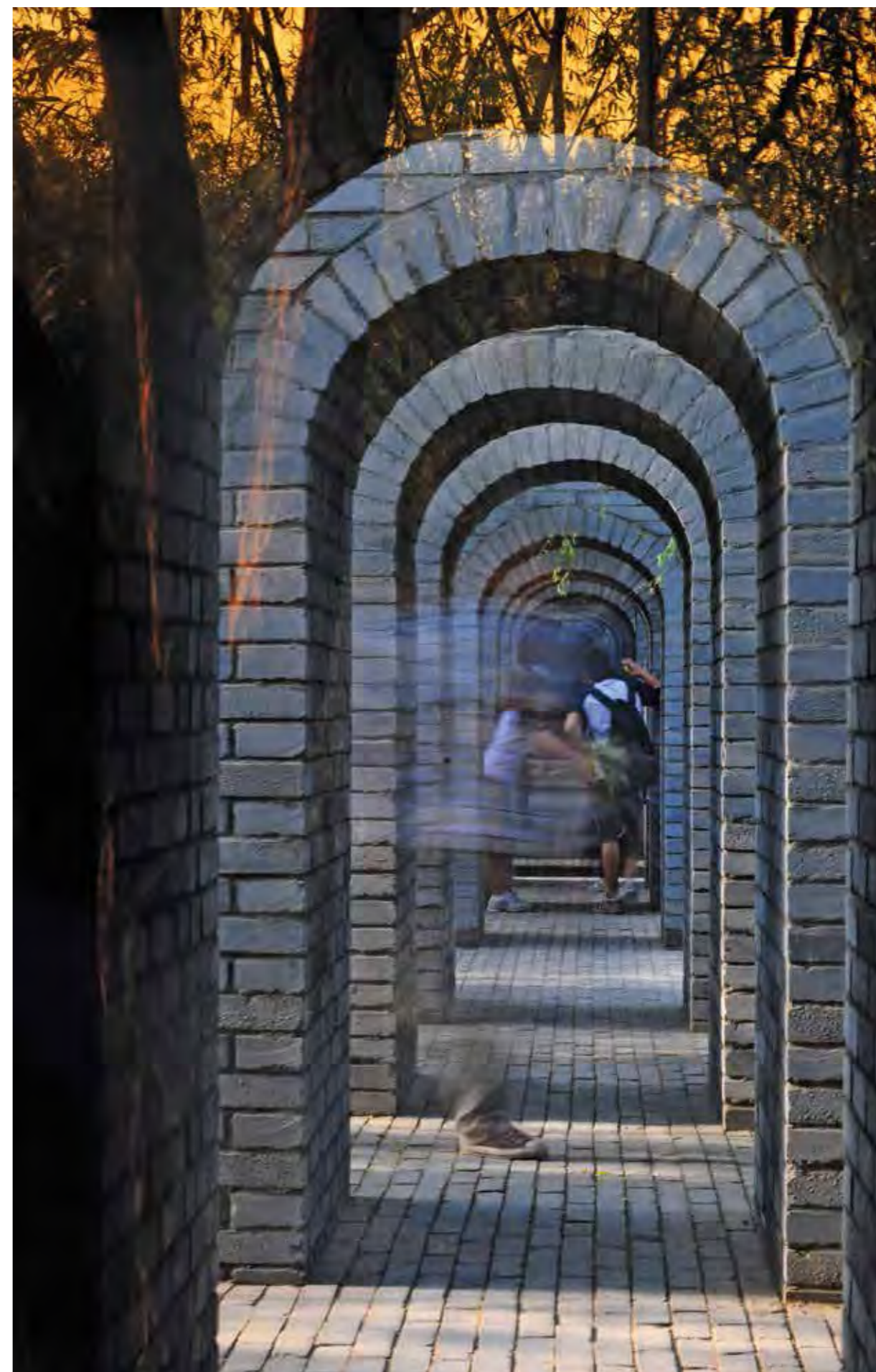
The combination of living willows and solid grey walls is an expression of the harmonious co-existence of nature and city. The "City" is entirely walled by simple, 3-meter high brick walls that seem to have no entrance. One enters the "City" through two ends of an open hallway created by a blank but totally mirrored wall facing a façade of 5 archways. These archways penetrate 1.5-meter thick walls with Weeping Willows on top and connect to a series of courtyards. They are overarched with Weeping Willow branches which are hung with over 1000 small tuned bronze bell wind chimes. The sonic pitch of the bells is aligned with the width of the courtyards below. The number of possible archways to move through increases as one begins to walk through the space, creating a situation where people must begin to choose where to go and what route to try – an endless choice of routes through the maze. At the same time, no one quite knows where they are going and what to expect. It creates an experience of fun, discovery and perhaps some anxiety.

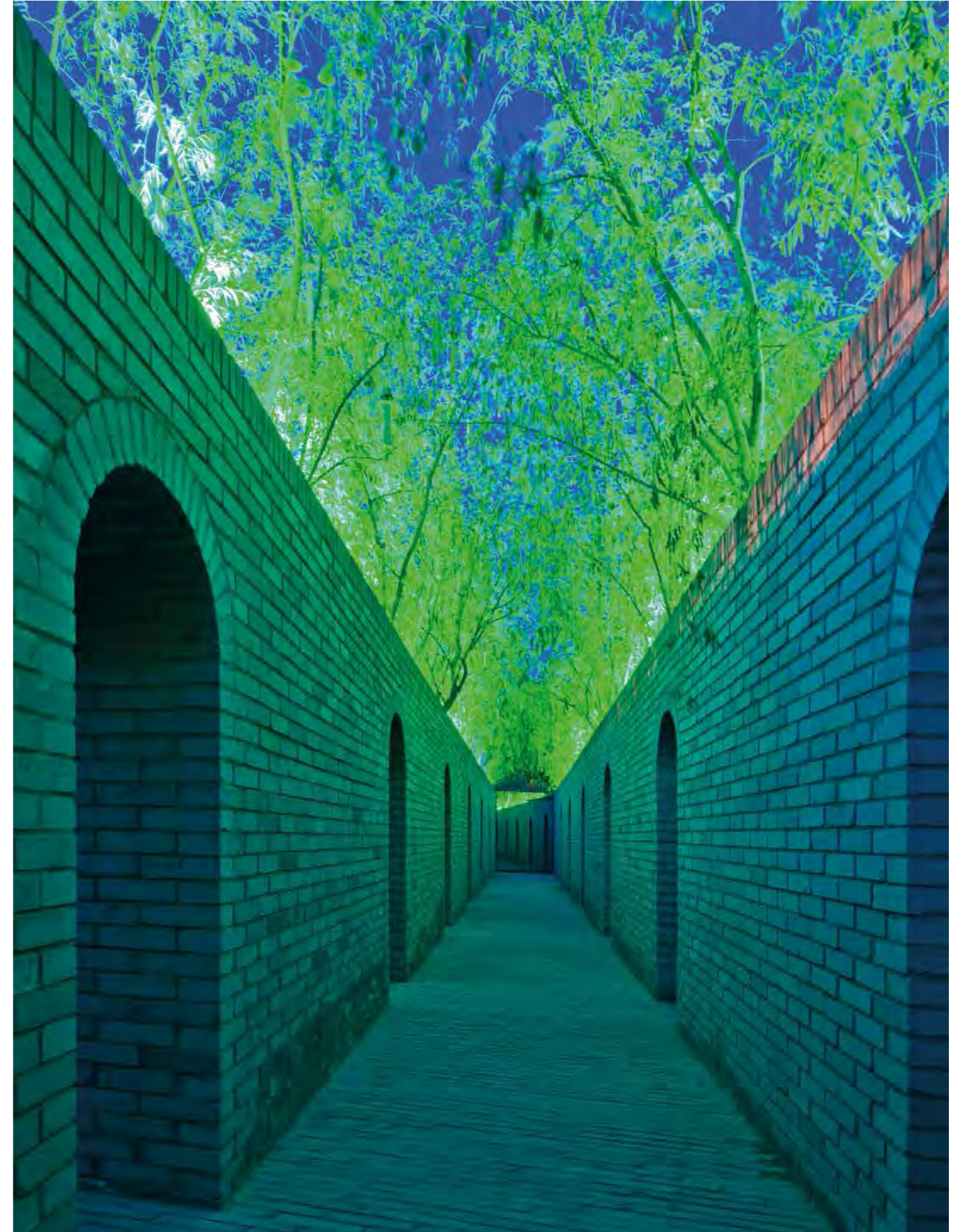
At each end of the transverse courtyards are mirrored walls which create an illusion of infinite space. As one penetrates the last of these courtyards, one enters a dark, enclosed exit corridor and is confronted with a wall of one-way mirrors facing a mirrored garden room with a grid of willow trees that seems to go on forever. One abruptly transitions from endless city to endless nature. Exiting via dark covered corridors, one discovers that many of the mirrors they had encountered on the way through the transverse courtyards are actually one-way mirrors, through which they can observe others from the hidden dark corridor. This effect comes at a surprise to the visitors who were not aware until now that they can be watched from behind the mirrors. People can vicariously and secretly watch newcomers in the maze while hidden in the hidden dark corridor.

The garden is a minimalist work of contemporary land art that speaks to the antiquity and timelessness of China, the flexibility and durability of its culture and people. It is Ying and Yang, light and heavy, masculine and feminine. It is rich by its own simplicity. Everybody can sense it in their own way.









HUD Plaza

Washington, D.C., USA (1996)

Although Marcel Breuer's 1968 building for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Washington, D.C. bears a richly textured facade, its six-acre plaza was a casualty of the Modernist aesthetic. Without trees or public amenities, the plaza was designed to showcase the building, but was virtually unusable by HUD's more than 4,800 employees.

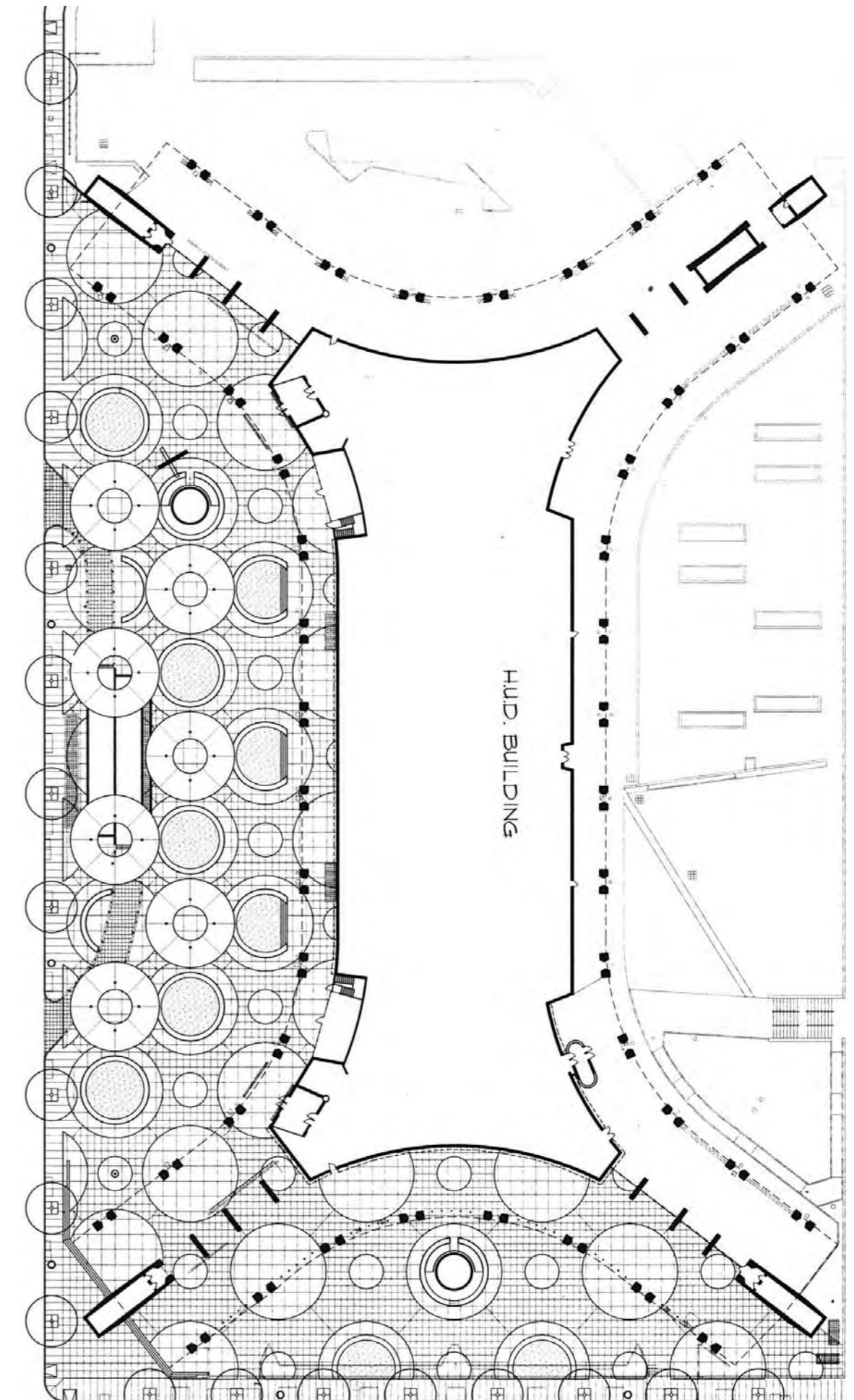
HUD's objective for the plaza was to enliven it with a new design that would be more people-friendly, which also corresponded more to their own mission of creating habitable spaces.

The existing plaza landscape was an empty, barren place compounded by the base of the building, which contained a solid wall of dark stone that acted as a barrier between interior and exterior: A forbidding transition.

The scheme developed for the plaza repeated a circular motif in white, yellow, and grey that recalled Breuer's use of geometric designs for screens, walls, and ceilings. The plaza was transformed through a strong ground plane, a series of concrete planters containing grass, and white, lifesaver-shaped canopies.

The 30-foot diameter planters double as seating. The canopies, fabricated of vinyl-coated plastic fabric, are raised 14 feet above the ground plane on steel poles. In sharp contrast to the heaviness and somberness of the architecture, these canopies and planters appear to float. As this plaza was built over an underground garage, the canopies also provide shade on a plaza that was not designed to support the soil required for trees.

Lighting also gives identity to the plaza. Lit from within, the canopies glow at night, recalling the lanterns that illuminate paths in Japanese gardens. A fiber-optic tube casts colored light under the planters, making them appear to float on a cloud of light. For the dark wall at the base of the building, a backlit mural has been planned to reflect the people and faces of HUD and create a dramatic backdrop for the plaza.





Corporate



Grand Canal Square

Dublin, Ireland (2007)

Inspiration for Grand Canal Square came from the existing landscape and the theatre by Studio Daniel Libeskind slated to be completed in 2010. The €8 million project has replaced a smaller paved space built over an underground car park.

Grand Canal Square is the major public open space in the Dublin Docklands Development area. It is located on Grand Canal in Dublin and forms the focal point of this new development. In a setting dominated by contemporary architectural expression, we have created a public space that will offer color and dynamism to Dublin's open spaces. Due to its cultural celebrity setting, we have developed a scheme with a central red carpet that leads from the theatre out onto the canal and vice versa. A green carpet connects the new hotel to the office development.

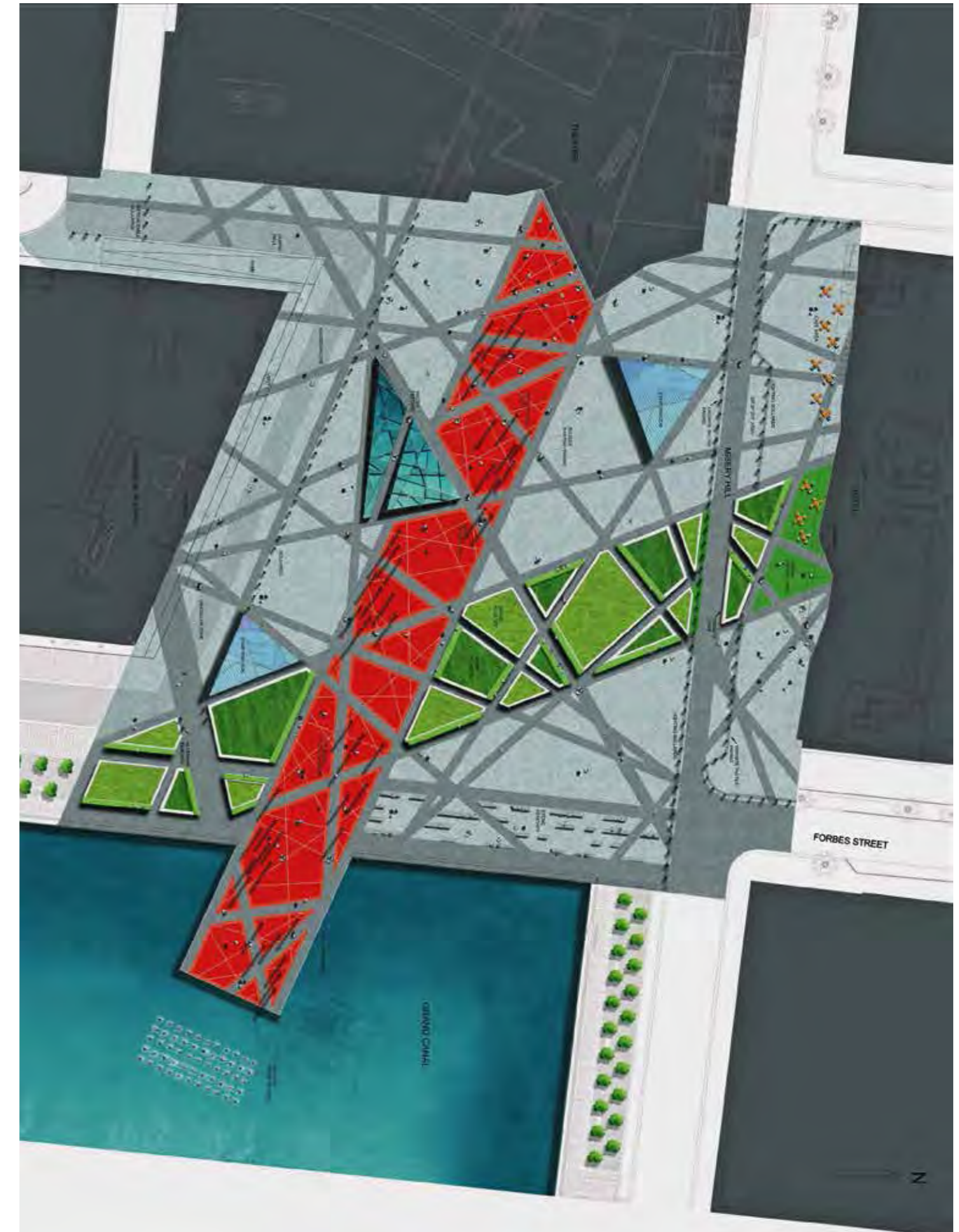
The hardscape consists of a cracked-glass scheme – a series of criss-cross “paths of desire” stretching across the length of the square connecting various points of interest for pedestrians. The original square was much smaller. MSP wanted to enlarge the square by extending the hardscape up to the buildings' edges. Granite paving from the previous square, laid out just two years ago, has been recycled in the new design to create paths across the square in every direction while still allowing for the space to host major public events such as festivals and performances.

Extending out from the steps of the theatre, the red carpet rolls into the square, spilling the magic of the theatre into the public space and down to the water's edge. The carpet is made from bright red resin-glass pavings that reflect and capture light during the day. The red pick-up sticks imbedded into the carpet provide dramatic light at night.

The green carpet has a calmer expression and offers ample seating on the edges of planters of various heights. The planters, extruded polygons of the green carpet, are planted with marsh vegetation as a reminder of the historic wetland area of this site and some offer immaculate lawns for lingering and enjoying the spectacular setting. Pushing out of the plaza is a water feature of randomly stacked green marble that is overflowing with bubbling water. The square is further criss-crossed by narrow paths that allow for movement across the square in any possible direction while still allowing big activities such as markets or fairs. The new square will be an urban magnet with 24-hour activity and is an accurate interpretation of Dublin's energy.

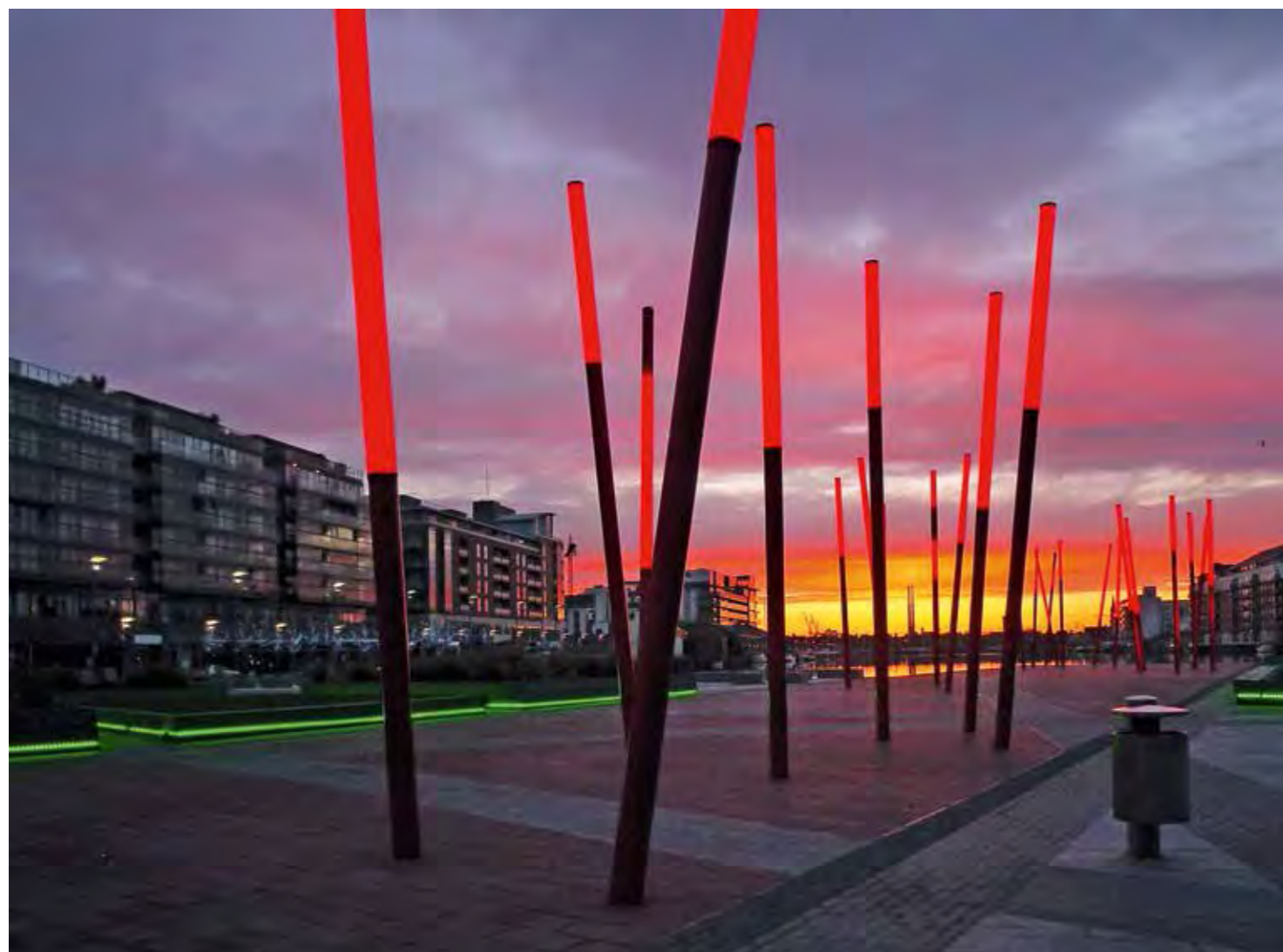
The three triangular objects are the two pavilions and the water feature. The two pavilions allow access to the stairs and elevator leading to the underground parking as well as add ventilation. The pavilions are stainless steel mesh with blue walls and blue LED lights. The third triangle, a cascading fountain, evokes a boulder being pushed from the ground with different layers representing a “brook in spring.” White LED lights illuminate the water at night.

Grand Canal Square has helped to create a presence that gave the area's development community confidence to move forward. The space created a strong address and presence and is now the address for several international company headquarters. It helped to keep this neighbourhood thriving during an economic downturn by creating a desirable area in which to work and live.









Place de la République

France, Paris (2013)

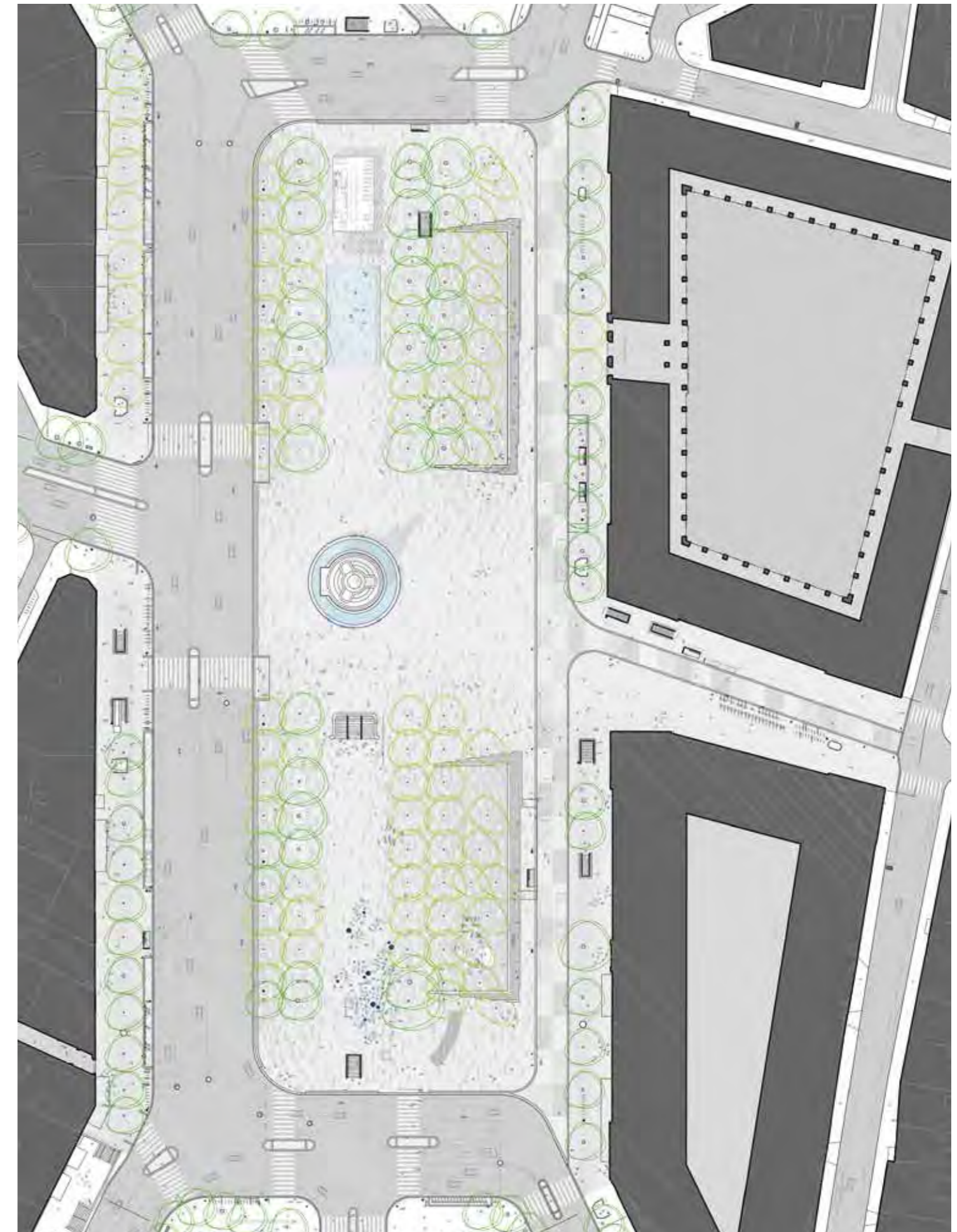
Once a vibrant and active urban plaza, the Place de la République had recently been crushed by the demands of modern mobility. Each day the site hosted over 114,000 subway commuters and a complicated array of tourist buses, parked taxis, cyclists, car traffic and municipal bus routes – all of which reduced it to a congested, fractured, and unsafe transitional space that had lost its local character and urban significance.

The MSP proposal restored the civic relevance to the plaza by improving its ability to sustain a moving population, while providing a reason to linger for more stationary people. By unifying the disparate parts of the site and redirecting vehicular traffic away and around the central core, MSP reclaimed a large functional surface that can support a range of activities and urban programs. Everything is designed for maximum activity.

Embedded infrastructure and variable spatial arrangements allow the plaza to seamlessly transition from urban boulevard to weekend market, from evening market to Christmas market, from rock concert to film festival, and from summer festival to winter ice-skating rink. Residents, commuters, and tourists alike are able to return day after day, year after year, to look for new ways to experience the space and to relive old ones.

The simplicity of the scheme included the addition of new trees to the plaza and carefully calibrated shallow water pools – both of which improved the micro-climate and increased the potential to enjoy the plaza.

The plaza represents a viable and a socially sustainable city space because it continues to support the needs of an ever-changing urban population, making it endlessly adaptable. It has demonstrated that evolving urban transportation demands can be integrated into historic urban places to broaden their place-making appeal, when combined with thoughtful interventions that cater to contemporary life and the way it is now lived in cities. This means that these great, historic plazas can continue to provide an open-ended, truly public stage for the city's inhabitants and its visitors.







Beiqijia Technology Business District

Beijing, China (2016)

The project is located in Changping district, Beijing, and belongs to the Beijing Technology Business District and is the first phase of the overall master plan development. The landscape site area is approximately 60,000 square meters. The site is a mixed use development, including residential, offices and retail.

The overall site is designed to consider the LEED Gold accreditation, through effective and efficient use of water, reduction of urban heat island effect by decreasing the amount of paved surfaces and increasing the green ratio, taking into account the microclimate of each zone, by screening the north-westerly winter winds and welcoming the south-easterly summer winds that are cooled further by passing over a large water feature in the south.

The landscape consists of three different zones or character areas, responding to the requirements of each type of programmatic use: Commercial/Retail, Central Park and Residential. The Commercial/Retail area includes the landscapes around the Headquarters Offices, the office courtyard gardens, the Qui Bei Road Promenade and the Eco Zone Area, which is located at the very north of the site - a linear landscape with an ecological function - collecting and absorbing all the storm water runoff from the site. This mesic habitat also provides room for seating, strolling and one of the two the artistic gateway structures, which draw people into the green heart: the Central Park. The Central Park is an open space with the "public green" and the "sunken gardens." Here, a sunny corner garden frames the sunken lawn area with raised planters which are planted with low hedges, ornamental grasses and perennials. Along its edges people can sit and enjoy the sun or lay down on the lounge chairs carefully positioned in the sunny spots of the gardens. The cool breeze from the central water feature will create this beach like atmosphere in an urban setting.

Another major component of the Central Park is the central water feature, which utilizes treated rainwater to create play opportunities for the local residents and the public. It takes the form of a large curving arc that functions to separate the private residential area in the south from the public open space to the north.

This southern Residential Zone holds small garden rooms, semi-enclosed by tall hedges or feature walls as intimate landscapes for meditation, play areas for children with unique play elements to cater for all age groups, fitness area, gardens with water features and variety of seating elements positioned in sun and shade. Each uniquely designed room celebrates a moment in life. Surrounding the site, a fitness path is also provided as a sports and recreational trail.









Fengming Mountain Park

Chongqing, China (2013)

Fengming Mountain Park is set on a 16,000-square-meter site, located in the growing Shapingba District of Chongqing. The site extends south to the old housing quarter, north to the Huayu City Project, west to Shangqiao Road and east to Fengxi Road, which is the main entrance and highest point of the site. Opened in Spring 2013, visitors are taken on a dynamic journey via a series of iconic mountain-shaped follies, plazas, greenery and wa-ter features to the proposed Vanke Golden City Development sales centre.

The brief was to design a demonstration park and urban public realm to express a unique identity in order to market the future development. The park is required to draw attention to the development sales centre from the upper main road and entrance from Fengxi Road; and be adaptable for retrofit and integration for the adjacent future development.

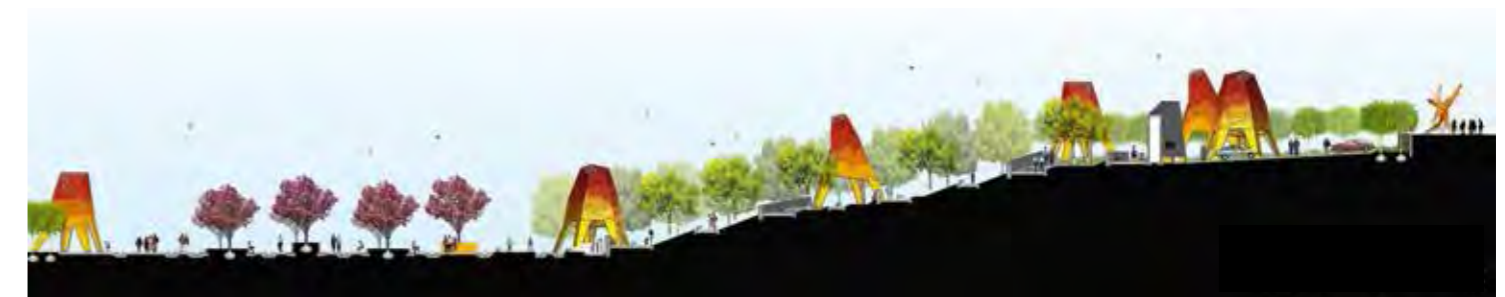
Extreme topography creates both a functional challenge to facilitate pedestrian and vehicle movement from the upper carpark to the sales centre at the lowest point; and a unique opportunity to provide a dynamic landscape – the “mountain.”

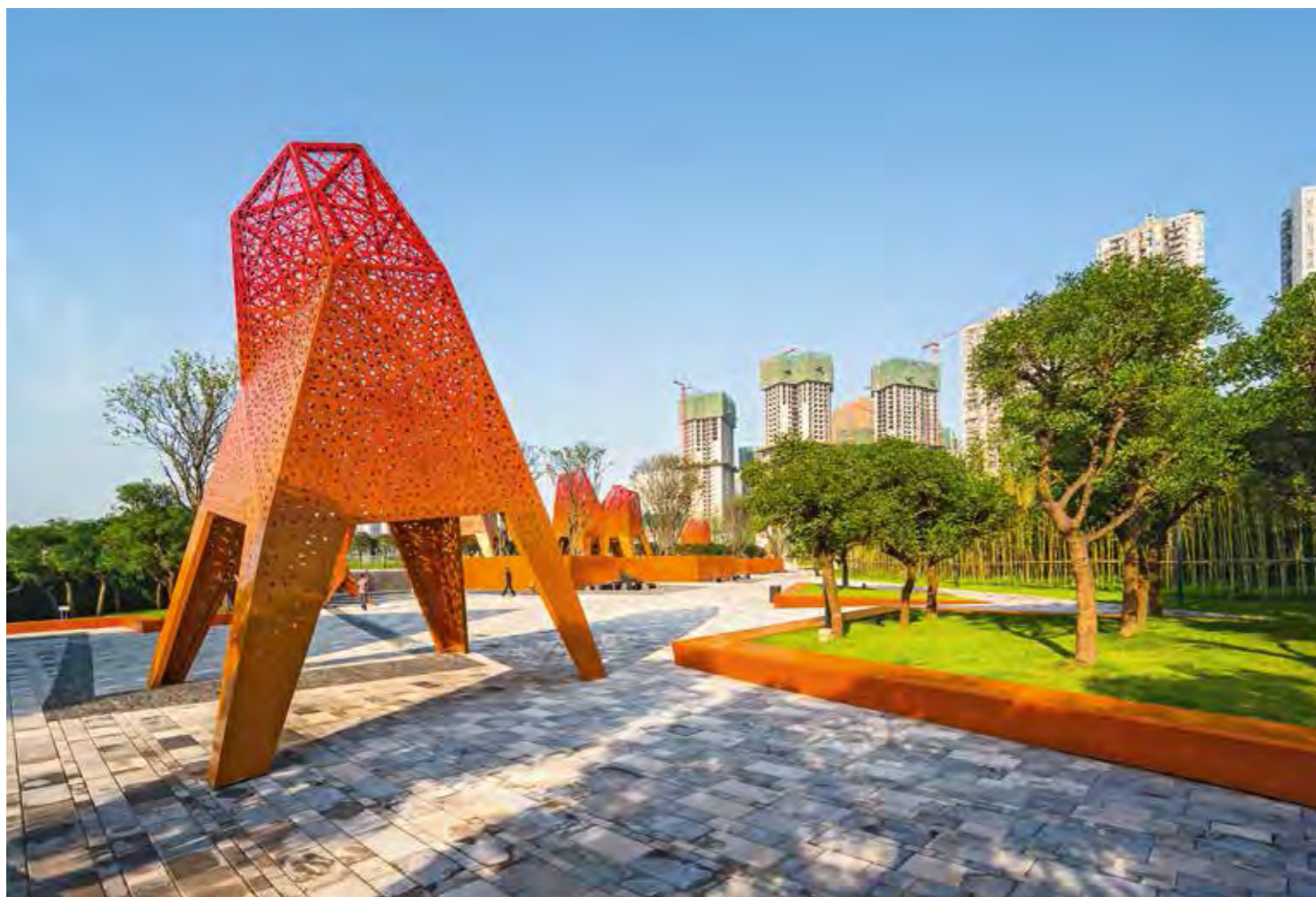
The vision was to create a strong connection between the setting of the site and the surrounding backdrop of the mountainous peaks, valleys of the Sichuan Basin; the agrarian patterning of rice paddy terraces; the Chang Jiang river; and the mysterious white/grey misty sky of Chongqing. These elements provide the inspiration for the mountain pavilions, zigzag patterns, orchestrated terrain and the use of vivid colours (to contrast against the sky).

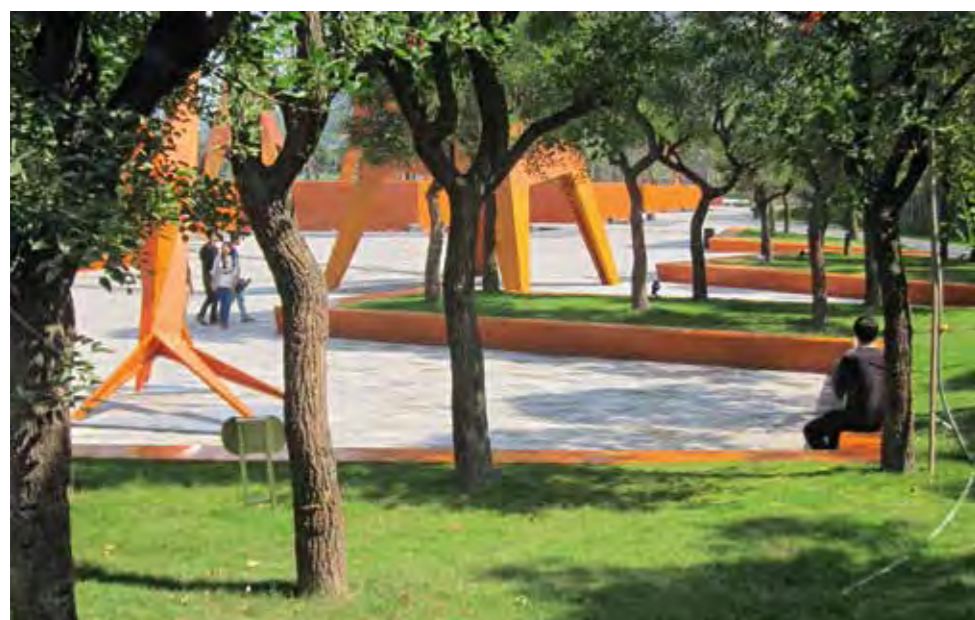
On arrival from Fengxi Road, dancing red and orange sculptures line the entrance to draw people into the arrival plaza carpark. The first of the mountain pavilions stands at the entrance, to mark the start of series of visual mountain peaks, descending down the slope. Each pavilion is strategically positioned along the zigzag path, leading pedestrians down the ‘mountain’, towards the sales centre area. The pavilions provide shade during the day and at night, are lit to create a spectacular glowing lattern effect.

The zigzag path esures the extreme level change is accessible for all, the path also becomes a geological pattern language, as if one is a walking on trails winding up a steep mountain. At each turn, a platform provides a place to sit and enjoy the view or take respite from the hill. The zigzag path is lined with balustrade walls constructed from large pieces of deeply textured dark concrete to create a rocky silhouette looking up the hill. The valleys or crevices that are created by the walls become sources for streams which run through the project.

The presence of water is an important part of Fengming Mountain Park and is expressed as a “flow” of water from the arrival plaza to the sales centre, using a variety of different water effects, such as: channels, pools and jets to assist with cooling, provide sounds and atmosphere to what is a captivating landscape. This entire park is a sequence, a triumphant journey, from the patterned markings in the arrival plaza; down the zig zag path; into meandering water features; through the plazas and then on to the final destination at the sales centre. Fengming Mountain has become a vibrant, joyful and well loved part of the Chongqing cityscape.









Winslow Farm Conservancy**Hammonton, NJ, USA (1996)**

This is a large-scale agricultural project that was designed as a marriage between art and the practicalities of reclamation and ecology. The 600-acre McNeil property is an estate located within the New Jersey pine barrens; it contains a diverse range of landscape conditions including dense forests, gradually rolling topography and a 75-acre abandoned clay quarry that holds mineral-rich turquoise water and served as the community dump.

The objective for this project was to reclaim the spoiled and polluted acreage of the clay quarry so that it could once again serve as a habitat for local flora and fauna, to create open fields for organic agriculture, to serve as a retreat for artists who are interested in site-specific, landscape-scaled artworks, and lastly, as a training grounds for McNeil's champion Labrador field dogs.

The working process was richly collaborative, on-site and hands-on, working between the client, contractors, ecologists and the MSP design team. Initially, the task was to remove pine trees so to create fields for organic farming. Spaces were carved into the site by calculated, selective clearing. Next, the site was graded to enhance the rolling landscape and create juxtapositions with sculpted forms. Soils were amended by mixing the harvested wood that had been chipped so to incorporate organic matter and to aerate the sterile clay. This mixture would eventually support plant life.

The aesthetics were derived to combine the landscapes of nature, agriculture and culture into a unique mix of these three typologies. Elements of the natural landscape were used in conjunction with formal garden language to create work that posed a dialogue between the undisturbed landscape and more formalized gardens. Paths and roads have been carefully composed and sited so to create vistas and to pique one's curiosity and desire to explore. Agricultural sheds and storage buildings have been transformed into gallery spaces and meeting rooms with attendant gardens.

The composition results in an intriguing combination of unlikely uses and spaces: agricultural fields of organically grown crops are designed as a large-scaled garden. Clipped topiary elements run across these agricultural fields conflating the image of farms with a latter-day baroque garden. The reclaimed quarry is shaped in unlikely surreal forms while wildlife once again inhabits this landscape built for art installations and training hunting dogs. In the end, this site has provided a new life for a once degraded area. Given that there are thousands of such sites in New Jersey, this site has provided a template for cultural and ecological regeneration for others to follow.







