

Terrain

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The Newsletter of the New York Chapter American Society of Landscape Architects

2

Trustee Report

3

President's Message

4

NYRP Brings Good Design
and More to Community
Gardens

6

Five Teams Selected for
Design Competition for
Governors Island Park
and Open space

8

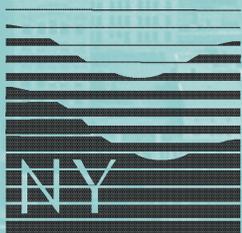
NY ASLA Holiday Party

10

ASLA President's Dinner

14

Play is Designers'
Top Credential
Update on Continuing
Education



ASLA

NY ASLA 2006 Awards Presentation and Holiday Party Rocks the House

If you were anywhere in the vicinity of the Center for Architecture on the evening of December 11, 2006, you would have heard the good times happening on the lower level. The 2006 NY ASLA Holiday Party featured the sounds of our very own version of the Rolling Stones. With Jeff Grob, ASLA (Vollmer Assoc.) on Lead Guitar, Len Hopper, FASLA (NYC Housing Authority) and Christopher Crowley, ASLA (NYC Parks) on Guitar, David McConnell, ASLA (Vollmer Associates) on Bass Guitar, Marcha Johnson, ASLA (NY ASLA Executive Committee Member and NYC Parks) on the Harmonica, and George Ranalli (Dean of the School of Architecture, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture, CCNY) on the drums.



Talent runs deep in the landscape architecture community here in New York and we're grateful to the band members who didn't make a dime for playing all night long.

Rock and Roll was the dominant theme for the evening as song after song got every one toe tapping and dancing. But the crowd also enjoyed a delicious spread of holiday party food and drink rolled out by the Center for Architecture's on-site caterer.

The crowd was filled with members, friends and guests from Smith College, City College, Pratt, New York Botanical Garden, Mark Morrison Associates, Vollmer Associates, EDAW, City Planning, Parks and Recreation, Housing Authority and many others. Among our many guests, we were fortunate to have Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, FASLA, who was visiting from Vancouver, B.C. along with her husband, architect H. Peter Oberlander. Cornelia won a NY ASLA chapter merit award for her work with HM White Site Architects on the New York Times building.

About midway through the evening, Jen Cooper, President, and Adrian Smith, President Elect of the NY ASLA presented the 2006 Chapter Awards. The Chapter Awards Program was a tremendous success this year. Everyone who entered deserves congratulations. You probably remember Tom Balsley's recent article in Terrain that encouraged us all to submit work to the local and national awards programs. It appears that word is out; because we had over 30 entries of which 13 received awards. Entries that were not awarded a prize this year may simply need another year for the plants to mature or possibly better photography. So if you didn't win last year, please don't be discouraged, and enter again this year.

For the past two years, our awards program has been a joint venture with the Colorado Chapter. We put together a group of practitioners from our area to serve as the jury for their awards and they do the same for us.
Continued on page 8.

New York Restoration Project Brings Good Design and More to Community Gardens

By John Ewing

In 1999, Bette Midler's New York Restoration Project joined other New York greening groups to save 114 community gardens from the city auction block, ensuring the preservation of these threatened open spaces in perpetuity. This visionary intervention also marked a new era for landscape design in the city. With 57 of the most beleaguered plots in its permanent care, NYRP's program to restore and endow community gardens has made them an ideal showcase for good design, while at the same time promoting urban conservation and community development in the surrounding neighborhoods.

This hasn't happened overnight. In fact, owning the gardens was only the first and perhaps least complicated step toward transforming them into permanent community amenities. The next hurdle has been securing funding, to the tune of \$250,000-\$300,000 per garden. Corporations, foundations, and individuals have stepped forward to provide all or part of this support, including The Tiffany & Co. Foundation, Linda Allard and Herbert Gallen, Rodale Inc., The Brownstone Family Foundation, G-Unity Foundation, The Rhodebeck Charitable Trust, and others mentioned below.



NYRP community gardens are then matched with landscape architects and designers who develop plans with the community, many of which include innovative "green design" features. The projects are also innovative in the ways they stimulate community involvement in the design and use of the gardens, from school groups to neighborhood gardeners, to university design classes and local cultural programs. All of the gardens are located in underserved, lower-income neigh-

borhoods—many in Brooklyn and the Bronx—so providing green open space and community resources is the reason they came into being in the first place. NYRP's mission is to support and expand that grassroots effort beyond the commitment of a few dedicated gardeners.

"What's interesting to me about working with NYRP and their community partners is the opportunity to work on a smaller scale. There is an immersion into the local community," says Lee Weintraub, FASLA, who designed the restoration plan for NYRP's McLeod Garden in East New York, Brooklyn, which was funded by Goldman Sachs on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of its Community TeamWorks employee volunteer program. Weintraub met with local gardeners onsite and at his Yonkers studio to discuss plans for the garden. "The local residents are the clients AND the partners in the project, which sharpens and leavens the experience. Anytime you develop a project for the community, the process is about building consensus as the design evolves to meet the community's needs."

Weintraub's design—prepared with assistants Giovanni Diaz, Anderson Moraes, and Juliana Alzate—has a homey feel: there's a grove of birch trees at the entrance, a gazebo sitting area in the center, and an outdoor "kitchen" with barbecue at the back of the garden. Bioswale planting beds in the front are designed to collect rainwater runoff. Goldman Sachs employees volunteered in several garden workdays, often alongside community volunteers.

"My goal is to bring a level of design integrity to community gardens that raises the bar on the way they are ultimately perceived," says Weintraub. "Historically, they've been designed and built with whatever was available—there's a charm in that, but after they've been there for a while and established themselves, the gardens need to be given a structure that honors and supports their important role in the local community and the city at large."

For landscape designer Billie Cohen, "any design must be 'site specific' and well integrated or it doesn't work—who, what, where, and what for are all important to consider." Cohen attend-



ed City College with NYRP Executive Vice President Amy Gavaris, ASLA, and has provided design plans for a number of NYRP community gardens, as well as the Riley-Levin Children's Garden and Swindler Cove Park, NYRP's crown jewel in northern Manhattan. Her latest NYRP project, The Heckscher Foundation Children's Garden, is located in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and was designed with local school children who will use the space in school and summer programs.

The garden features raised vegetable beds constructed of galvanized metal and laid out in a sunburst pattern. There are also two arbors and an ingeniously designed wooden shed with a rammed earth wall, an American Indian construction technique, and a porch-covered deck for an "outdoor classroom." The garden will also contain a rainwater collection system, composting toilet, and solar panel. With few green spaces in the area, the garden has traditionally served the neighborhood as an active growing space, including existing cherry, peach, and apple trees that Cohen's design plan incorporates.

"When you're working with an active, existing community garden, you've got to be able to prove how your redesign can actually make it better," says Cohen. In some NYRP projects,



she has accomplished this by narrowing pathways to increase bed space and by adding grape arbors, covered shelters, and tool sheds. Additionally, Cohen has introduced raised beds and containers for senior gardeners. Her goal is to make gardens as beautiful as possible without losing any functionality, and hopefully making them more functional. Cohen also wants to extend the neighborhood presence of the Heckscher garden with street trees that connect it to nearby I.S. 49, thus "greening the links" between the NYRP partner school and the garden.

"It feels great to give good design principles to a community that wouldn't necessarily have them otherwise. Community gardens typically don't have enough resources on their own to put in shrubs and trees, which can really enhance what they already have. Even people who are just walking by and don't have any involvement will get something out of it. In fact, community gardens need to be beautiful to get people interested—an unattractive growing space may not get noticed or people might have the impression it's a throwaway space," says Cohen. "Beauty is really important. It's incredibly calming and gives respite, something many of these communities have little of."

When Ken Smith, ASLA, met with local residents to discuss renovating NYRP's Lola Bryant Community Garden in Bushwick, Brooklyn, whose restoration is being funded by Dr. Leslie Johnson, he waited until after the discussions to present the several plans he had prepared in advance. "You learn very important things in these meetings," says Smith. "The community wanted to discuss garden management and security issues, particularly fencing, and wanted to keep existing trees. And there were certain neighborhood politics at work, naturally. When I later presented the schemes, I had some understanding of what they were looking for."



No stranger to community gardens, Smith worked with the New York City Housing Authority early in his career to "humanize the very sterile environment of housing projects." As Smith notes, "Community gardens are one of the things you can do to give people some sense of empowerment and connection to the place." At Smith's onsite workshop with the neighborhood, the Lola Bryant gardeners considered two designs—one with daisy-shaped plots ("J. C. Loudon-esque, 18th century Pop art," says Smith) and another with an arbor and shallow terraces. The residents picked the second design. "It's a little more conservative, but it better suits their needs...and it's their garden!" says Smith. "They liked the rectilinear layout of the beds and the central lawn for social gatherings. There's also talk of hanging porch swings under the arbor."

Smith describes his design aesthetic for Lola Bryant as "off-the-shelf." Vegetable beds are traditionally edged with two-by-fours or granite blocks, but Smith is considering a more visually interesting and durable material—pre-cast tire stops used in parking lots. Made of hard plastic in bright colors, these smooth and rounded borders would be easy to install, anchor, and then later move if the beds are ever reconfigured. Also, Smith plans to use metal scaffold tubing for the garden's arbor—another traditional garden amenity constructed from a tough, non-traditional material. The garden will also contain a rainwater collection system to be sourced from the neighbor building's conveniently located gutter—Smith is searching for an interesting, non-traditional container to serve as a rain barrel.

In Janice Parker's experience, site analysis is the most critical component of her landscape design practice. With her work in NYRP's La Casita community garden in East Harlem, however, "site analysis" had to be defined more broadly to include the history of the site, the current users, and the surrounding neighborhood dynamics, which she came to understand through garden meetings with local residents. "It's been an incredible education for me and my firm to work in this way. So many preconceptions were dispelled—you have to be prepared to learn from your mistakes and understand that there is no single process that fits all situations," says Parker. "In fact, the less you attach



your own agenda, the more receptive you can be to what is actually there and happening in the space."

Just as there were destabilizing political structures at work in the neighborhood, the La Casita site itself suffered from structural instability—after removing dead trees and debris, Parker discovered that the retaining wall along one entire side of the property needed to be rebuilt. Born and raised in Manhattan, Parker has seen other instances where the forces of time and politics have eroded the urban landscape. As a child, she delighted in the stands of cherry and crabapple trees that lined the West Side Highway. Now, few of these remain. Parker is thrilled to be involved in NYRP's efforts to plant flowering cherry and crabapple trees along the Harlem River Drive just south of Swindler Cove Park. Funded by NYRP donors, the project will begin in spring 2007.

Parker has chosen tree varieties with bright blossoms, small fruit, and pest resistance. Her proposal also includes contract growing of plant materials for foreseeable future needs, an efficient, cost-saving measure to avoid the common problem of last-minute purchasing at top dollar. "Longevity is planned into the Harlem River Drive project—this is often not the case with public spaces and public gardens, which are notoriously underfunded in terms of plant materials and upkeep," says Parker. "The odds are against public spaces being well planted and cared for."

But like all of the landscape designers and architects working with NYRP to restore and develop public open space, Parker has a passionate commitment to creating and preserving a beautiful city. "New York is more than your hometown, it's your family. NYRP has an emotional attachment to the city that I can really identify with." She's in good company.