



Hunter's Point South
Waterfront Park
Queens. New York | USA
SWA | Balsley and Weiss | Manfredi
with Arup

ps paisea #12



Furniture for nature



- 
 Piezas robustas y duraderas
- 
 Listones de plástico reciclado
- 
 Modulable adaptable
- 
 Bajo Mantenimiento

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evaluation | Mar Añó Nadal / architect

New York City and its waterfront are currently at threat from shoreline hazards. These risks will only increase with rising sea levels and a greater frequency of more intense coastal storms. The city's 835 kilometres of coastline are incredibly diverse and each one of its areas faces specific types and levels of risks. Therefore, a variety of strategies are required.

On the Long Island side of the East River is the Hunter's Point South Waterfront Park project, which transforms a polluted and abandoned industrial zone into a green park full of community life while restoring the river habitat.

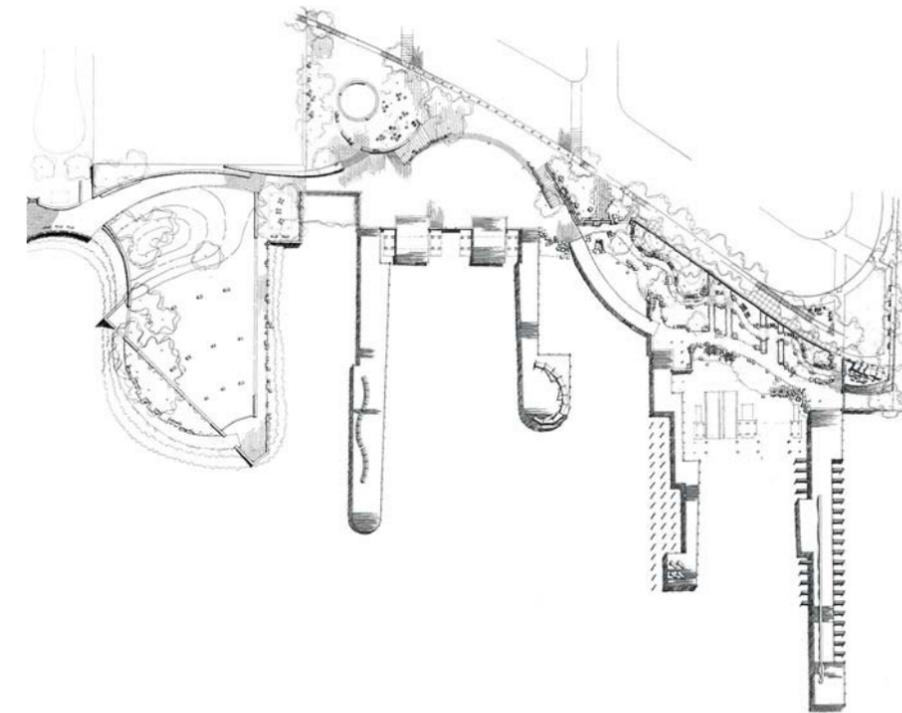
It represents a new model that provides resilience against water, with an approach that protects the neighbourhood from flooding. The new ecological corridors anticipate the inexorable flooding patterns and rising water levels that can be expected with climate change. The park was designed with flexible, innovative strategies and some parts can be submerged during flood events and retain the water that drains back to the river.

These linear axes form new ecological corridors that run parallel to the water's edge, providing multiple systems of paths that link the main precincts and programmes. The park achieves a multitude of zones with different identities, some calmer, inviting an intimate connection with nature, while others are much more active, allowing for activities and the interaction of different users or visitors.

This successful project has a major impact as a global model by considering social, cultural as well as ecological and sustainability aspects in the design.

The ambitions at an urban scale of the development of Hunter's Point South are supported by a careful layering of resilient materials and systems designed for durability and self-sufficiency. In terms of vegetation, a diverse landscape is sought that will endure and mature naturally, and as one of the aims is to forgo the use of automatic irrigation, an assortment of native trees and hardy, salt-tolerant plants is chosen.

The park not only serves as a model of sustainability, but also demonstrates the potential of the collaborative approach that landscape architects, engineers and architects should employ to design the resilient urban waterfronts of tomorrow to protect their communities and connect them to each other and to the natural world. This approach has already been echoed in other parts of the world such as Rotterdam, or other cities in China, which have invited the SWA/Balsley team to design and evaluate alternatives that implement flexible strategies to create cities with resilient waterfronts that are adaptable to the future.

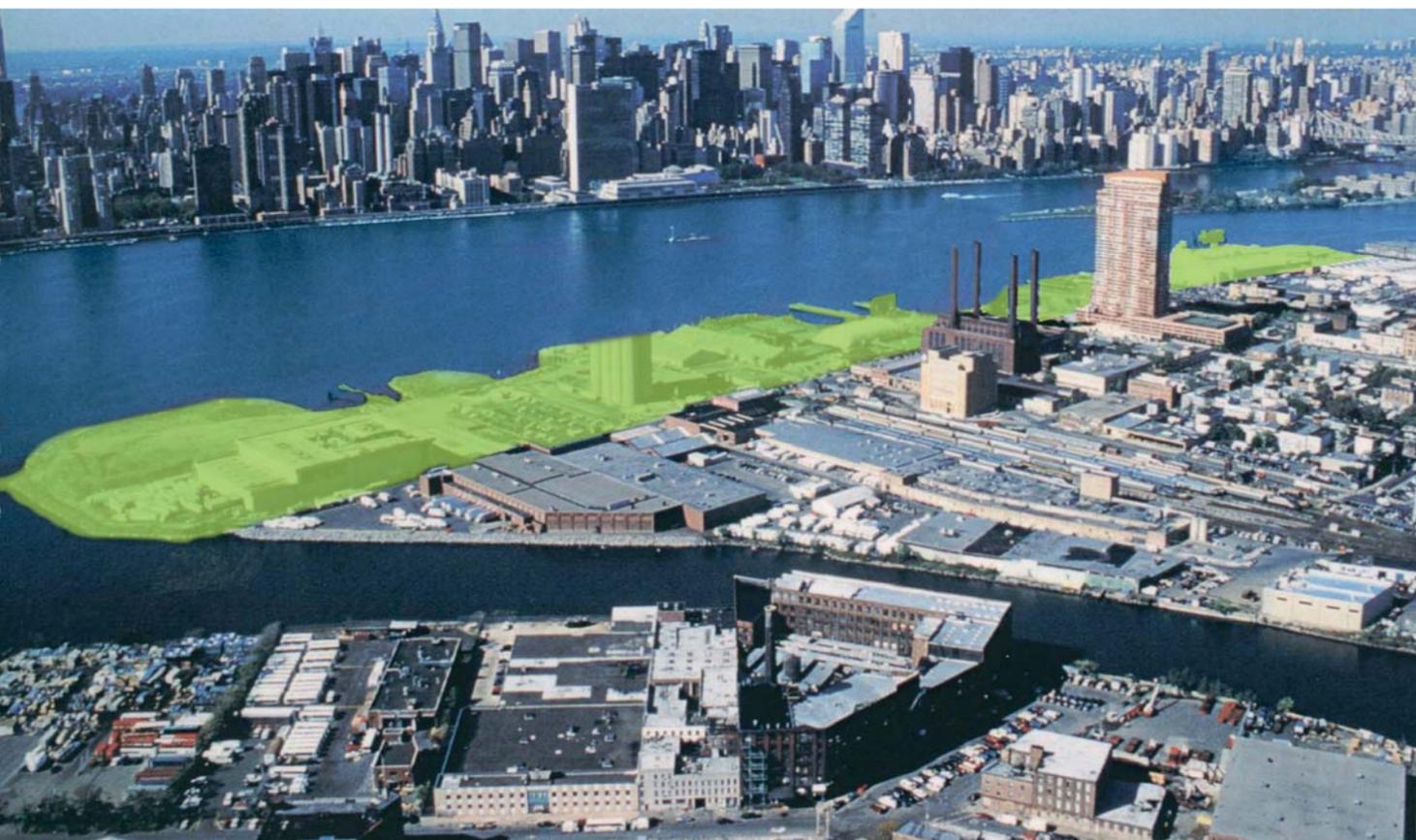


background

Queens West Parks Master Plan and Gantry Plaza Park

Queens West is a planned mixed-use community along the Long Island City shore-line, directly across from midtown Manhattan and the United Nations. Central to its mixed-use urban development plan is an extensive and equally diverse open space system that includes upland and waterfront parks as well as streetscape.

This extraordinary barren post-industrial waterfront, sitting just a stone's throw from a world-famous skyline, had held the fascination of urbanists and developers for decades; yet Manhattan-centric bias kept it in that skyline's shadows. At first, most of the low-rise working-class neighborhood residents who enjoyed a one stop five-minute subway ride to Grand Central Station were delighted to remain undiscovered, which translated into preserving their views and quiet way of life. All of that changed when a consortium of NYC and NYS agencies sponsored and received approval for this far-reaching development plan which included long awaited public access to the river, where nineteen acres of park and playing fields would become part of their daily lives. Beginning with extensive research and public outreach, the design team of Thomas Balsley Associates and Weintraub di Domenico drafted a visionary waterfront open space masterplan that was unlike 20th century predecessor bulkheaded landfill parks; instead it embraced and exploited the jagged shoreline of peninsulas and piers and celebrated the site's rich industrial and rail heritage by boldly expressing the two towering gantries that were key to the transfer of rail cars and the growth of Long Island City.





phot: Vecerka / Esto



phot: Betsy Pinover Schiff



phot: Betsy Pinover Schiff

A thorough analysis of the site factors ensued including urban and cultural context; environmental conditions particularly along the highly regulated water's edge; and of course, views. A design program, which emerged out of community workshops, revealed a desire for a balance of active and passive recreation, culture, and environmental considerations. At the north and south planned neighborhoods, the linear open space widens to accommodate social and recreation nodes of activity in which multipurpose lawns, pavilions, play areas, and plazas could draw energy from each other. The new public realm to which the upland waterfront parks are a part includes streetscapes, sport fields, and private gardens. Like a narrative, this ecological and cultural ribbon weaves through and around coves for quiet contemplation and is bejeweled with overlooks at the river's edge and active places of play and socialization, stitching the new and existing neighborhoods to each other and their river heritage.

Taking its strong cues from a rich industrial past, Gantry Plaza Park was the first phase of an incremental nineteen-acre waterfront park at Queens West. The park is divided into three areas. The Peninsula is a terraced lawn intended for a wide variety of activities, foremost of which is enjoying the stunning view of the Manhattan skyline. In North Gantry Plaza this view is framed by the gantries, gigantic structures that once transferred railroad cargo onto barges, and which are now preserved as ruins. Elegant curving steps form a hemispherical plaza that connects with two of four piers projecting out into the East River. South Gantry Interpretive Garden, from which the other two piers project, takes form around two paths: one of stone, which passes over a bridge across a small inlet; a second of gravel, which rambles through weedy-looking vegetation and stone blocks from rail abutments. Here there is actual access to water in a landscape that looks as if it had been abandoned only yesterday.

The team's original plans included a restoration of the site's pre-industrial shoreline marsh in areas between the piers. In spite of sound environmental engineering, the waves from daily commercial vessels and storms were too much for the survival of the marsh. This proved to be an invaluable lesson for future phases.

Imagined as "marine follies", the piers raise waterfront activity to the level of poetry. While people will doubtlessly engage in each pier's designated activities, they can also experience the piers as intensified, symbolic expressions of waterside pastimes: loafing, eating, stargazing, and fishing. These stages for symbolic action—complete with ruins, a subtle but inescapable suggestion of environmental and industrial decay, and the Manhattan skyline as a backdrop—make Gantry Plaza Park theatrical in the best sense of the word.

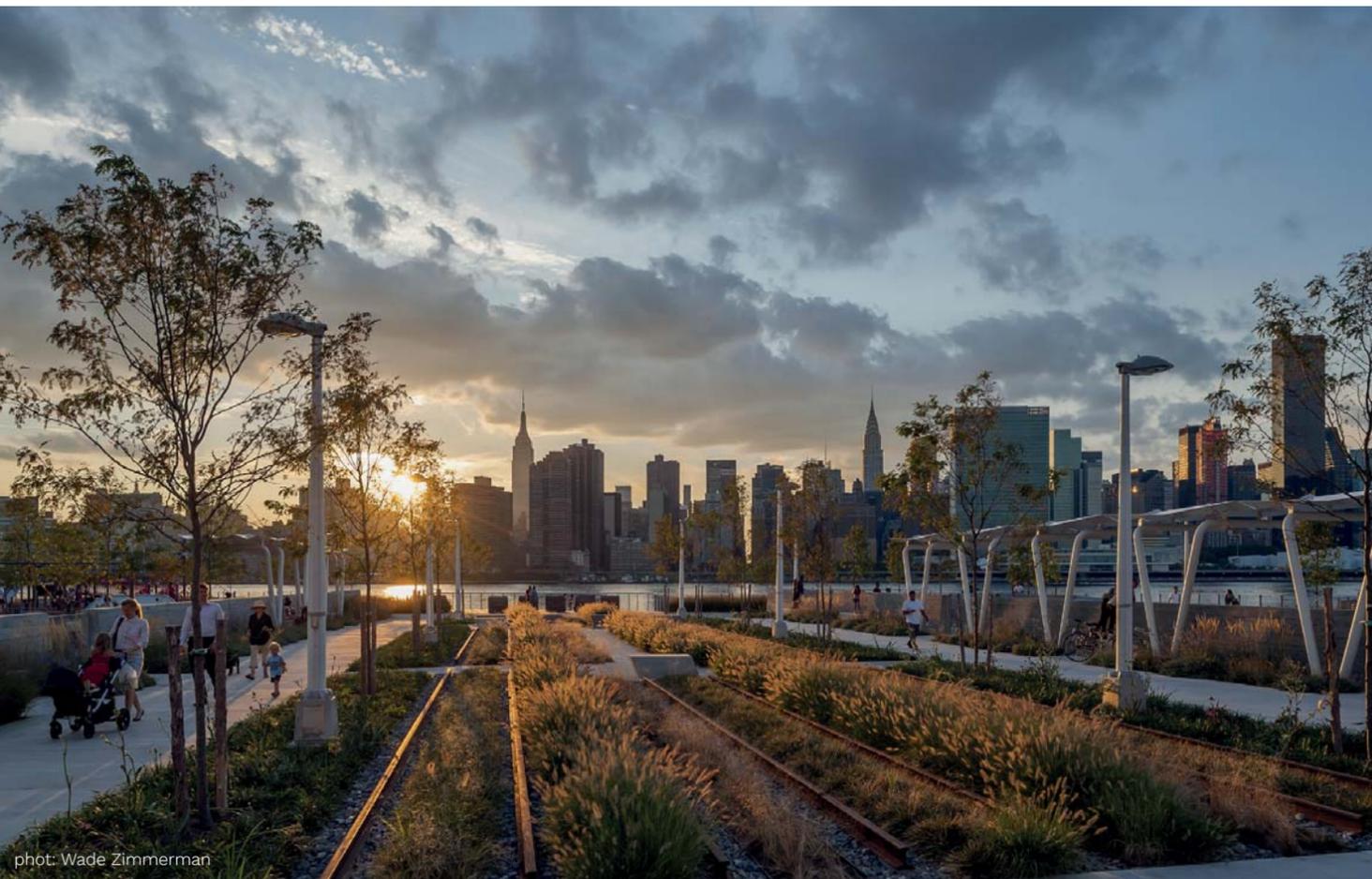
The park is now managed by the NYS Department of Parks. Help comes from the Hunters Point Parks Conservancy (formally known as the "Friends of Gantry Plaza State Park"), a volunteer organization made up of existing neighbors who had opposed the development and the new market-rate residents, testimony to the park's power to heal wounds and foster lasting community connections.



Hunter's Point South Waterfront Park

introduction

In 2009, the city invited engineer-led teams to submit proposals for the last Queens West stage, now known as Hunter's Point South Waterfront Park and Infrastructure. Appreciating the need for a soft engineering approach, ARUP teamed with SWA/Balsley, who, believing that a broader multi-discipline was needed to take on the site's climate change challenges, invited Weiss/Manfredi to join. The design team envisioned Hunter's Point South Waterfront Park as a laboratory of resiliency thinking and a global model for social, cultural and ecological sustainable design. With 5,000 affordable housing units and 11 acres of waterfront parks, it is one of the most ambitious and comprehensive projects undertaken by the City of New York in five decades. The holistic park and infrastructure design employ numerous green initiatives, transforming a strategically located but abandoned site characterized by long-term disinvestment into a new urban ecological paradigm teeming with community life and a restored riverain habitat.

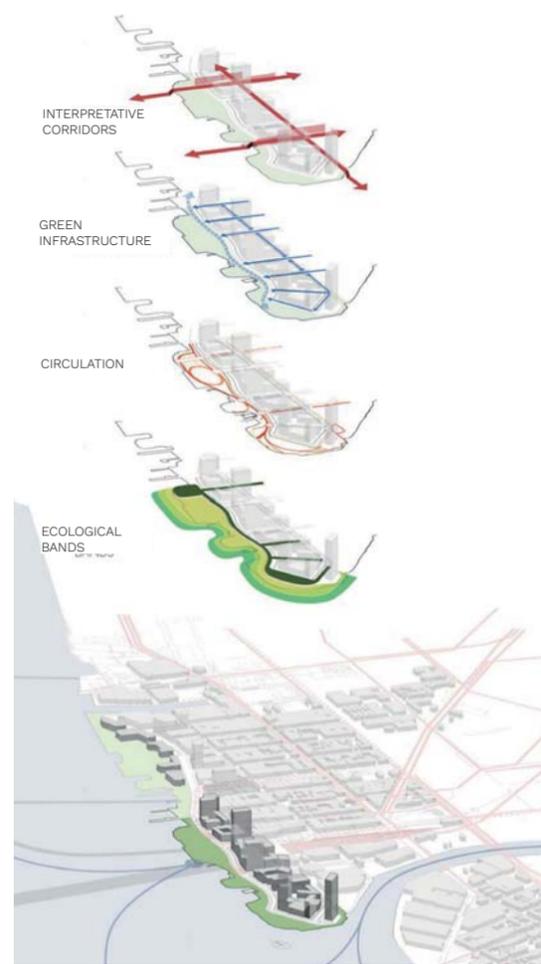


phot: Wade Zimmerman

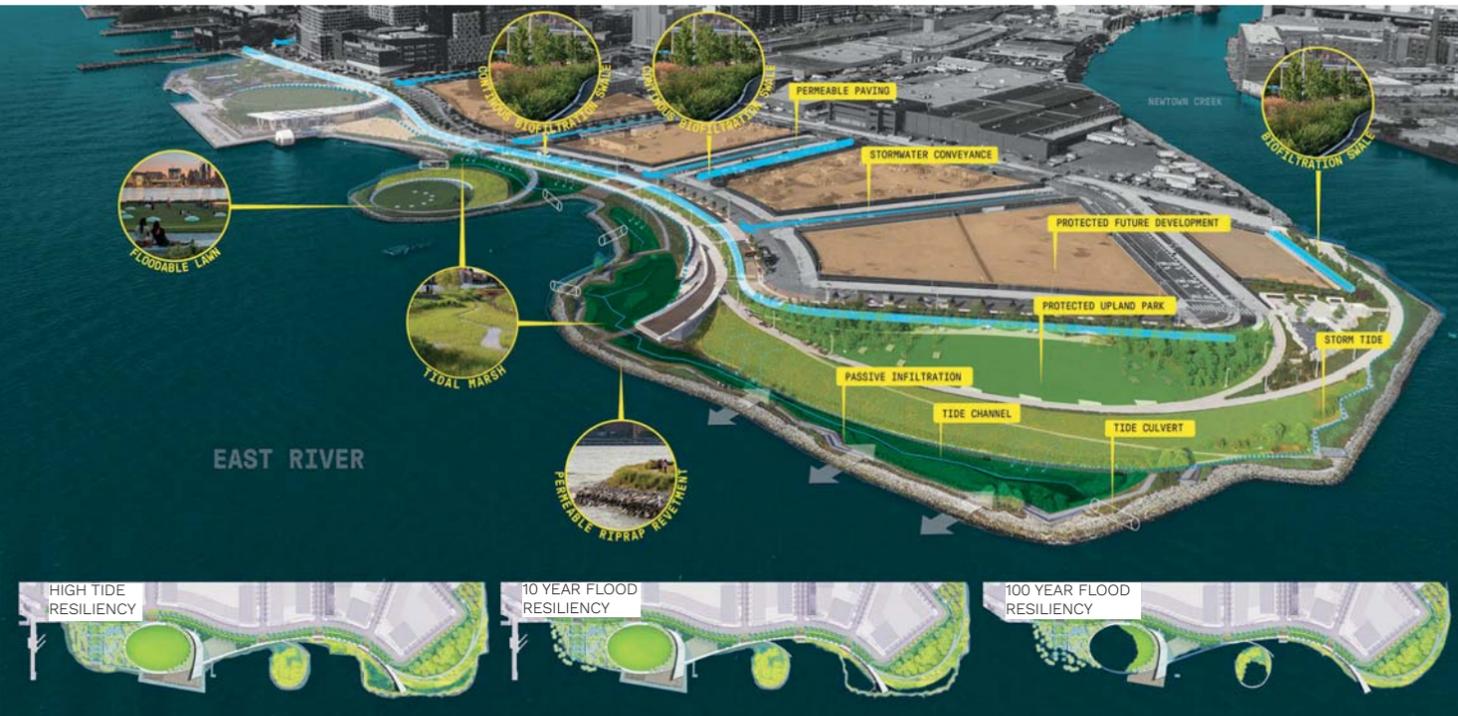
from a post-industrial waterfront site to a new park with ecological

Two hundred years ago, this post-industrial site was a series of wetlands and marshes flanked by the East River and Newtown Creek. After decades as Long Island railway's terminus, all signs of its ecologically rich history were eliminated with industrial and then East Midtown tunnel excavation landfilling. What remained was a brownfield with an irregular water's edge, steep bluffs, and decaying piers juxtaposed against the spectacle of the Manhattan skyline, behind which nestled a diverse, aspirational blue-collar community ripe for responsible growth, starved for open space, and one subway stop from Grand Central Station.

It is worth noting that this public park has no private funding or care and, as such, the detailing and materials choices were informed by years of NYC public space experience which in turn led to a palette of sustainable, rugged, and affordable materials without compromise to personal comfort, performance, or beauty. As an alternative to tropical hardwoods, Kebonized wood was used throughout for furniture and decking. Forgoing the use of automatic irrigation, the team developed a plant palette of native, hardy, salt-tolerant grasses and trees, ensuring that this rich and diverse landscape will endure and mature naturally.







100 YEAR FLOOD



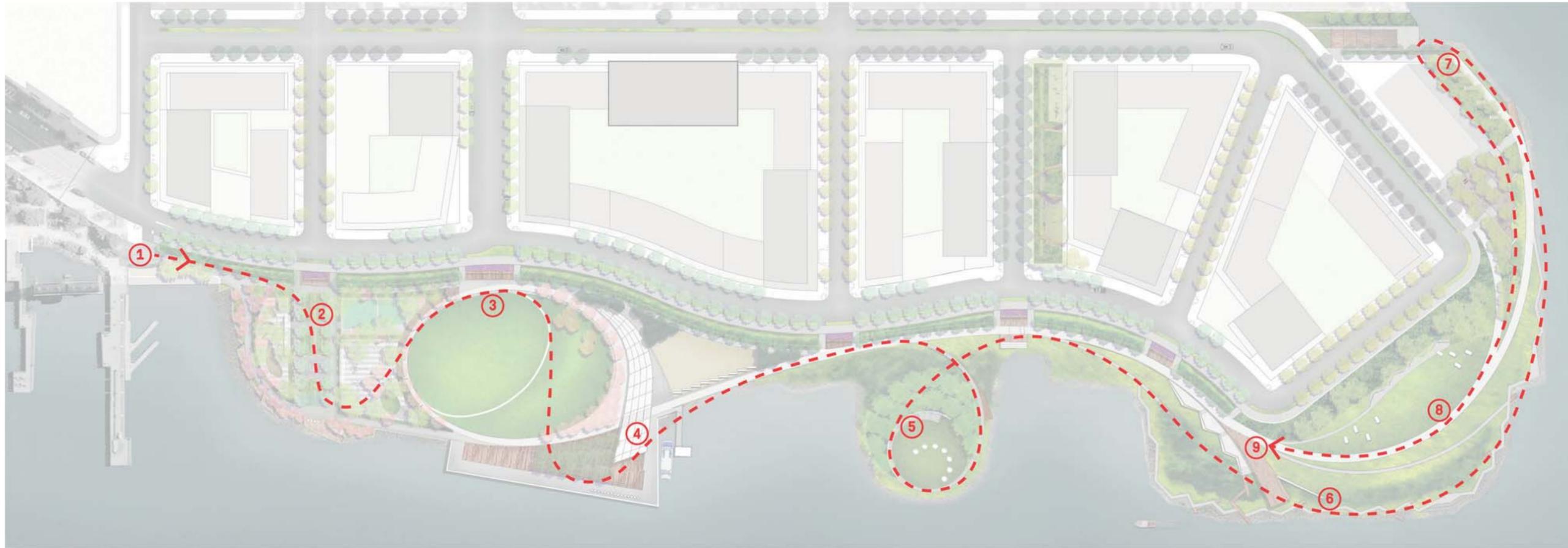
waterfront resilience

Started in 2008 and opened to the public in 2018, the design re-establishes the site's former marshland identity and introduces a resilient, multi-layered recreational and cultural destination that connects its changing community to nature, the river, and each other. The collaborative team of landscape architects, architects, and green engineers employed innovative and flexible strategies that were tested as Hurricane Sandy battered the shore and are now held up as models for progressive resiliency design.

The design embraces a new model for waterfront resilience, with a “soft” approach to protecting neighborhoods from floodwaters while providing the social and recreational public spaces needed for a sustainable upland community. The East River's strong tidal currents demanded a protective revetment to ensure a successful marsh establishment. A “green” engineered causeway protects nearly an acre of newly-established in-water habitat that was once an eroding contaminated landfill peninsula that, ironically, replaced what was once a wetland marsh. The team seized upon an opportunity to widen the causeway which hosts a narrow spartina flanked trail whose angular path purposely slows one's movement from the city into a contemplative and interpretive journey of shifting perspectives and a provocative dialogue between the natural habitat and city skyline.

A new tidal habitat marsh has also been carved behind the smaller landfill peninsula to “release” it from land, creating New York City's newest island which is accessed only by footbridge and an arcing path sprung from the green oval. Sheltered from the urban world with a crescent-shaped berm and a black gum grove, this unique island sanctuary hosts intimate gatherings and “Luminescence”, a public art installation by Nobuho Nagasawa, which pays homage to the site's tidal heritage and interprets the moon's seven stages with luminescent mineral applied to the spheres.





- ① North Gateway
- ② The Grove - Dog Run, Play Zone, and Rail Garden
- ③ The Green Oval and Promenade
- ④ The Pavilion, Pier, and Urban Beach
- ⑤ The Island
- ⑥ The Tidal Marsh, Trail, and Overlooks
- ⑦ Newtown Creek Trail, Terraces, and Kayak Launch
- ⑧ The Promontory
- ⑨ The Overlook

the tour

We have tried to replicate the route and visual experiences of the tours that are typically conducted at the park. We have assembled a series of images that capture the essence of a journey through and encounters with the park's key features, discreet spaces, and the rich diverse experiences.

Throughout, one can take in the interwoven meaning of the park's social, cultural, environmental, heritage, art, and social equity; all key ingredients of the resilient urban waterfronts of the future we dare to imagine.



phot: Singleton/SWA

1. north gateway

The Gateway is comprised of a continuation of the Gantry Plaza Park promenade and its material mixed with the upland street entrance “foyers” of Hunter’s Point South Waterfront Park. This confluence of design language and materiality has ensured a smooth and coherent continuation of the park journey from one park to the next.



phot: Vecerka / Esto

2. the grove

Contrary to other gentrification models, this project responsibly transforms a neighborhood to create a social and open space infrastructure that did not previously exist. The park creates new gathering spaces, common ground for a new growing community on which a diverse array of new affordable market residents will connect with their existing neighbors.

An extensive dialogue with stakeholders led to a consensus program which called for a robust active recreation component. The urban dog run, play zones, and courts are brought together to benefit from the synergies that come from proximity to each other and the adjacent green oval. Even here under the grove, traces of the site's industrial heritage can be found in the interpretive rail garden and board form concrete that whispers the previous lumber yard.





phot: Wade Zimmerman

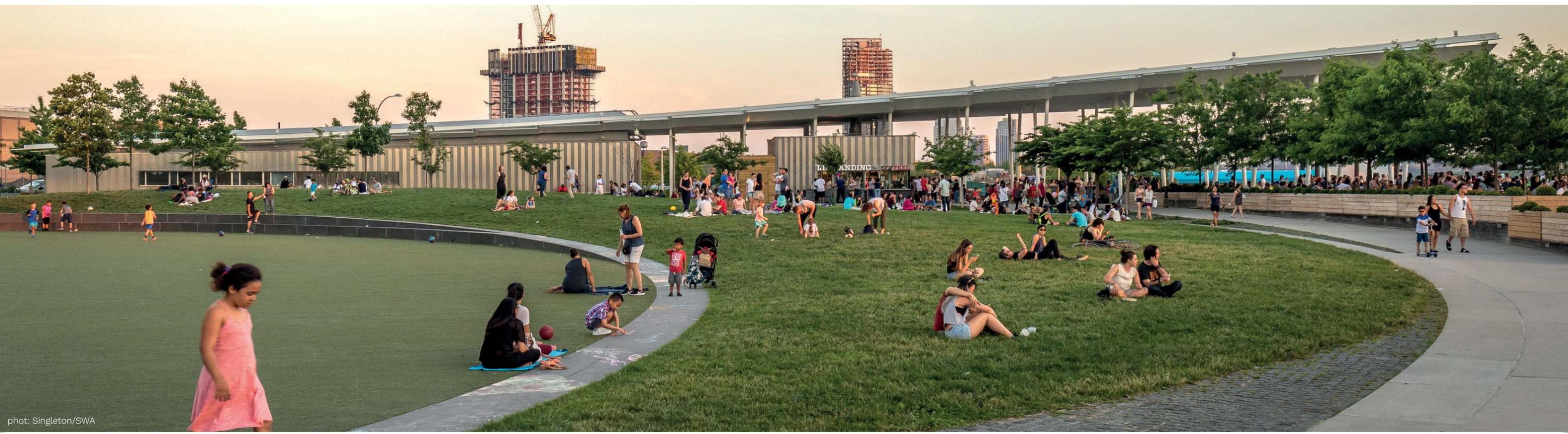
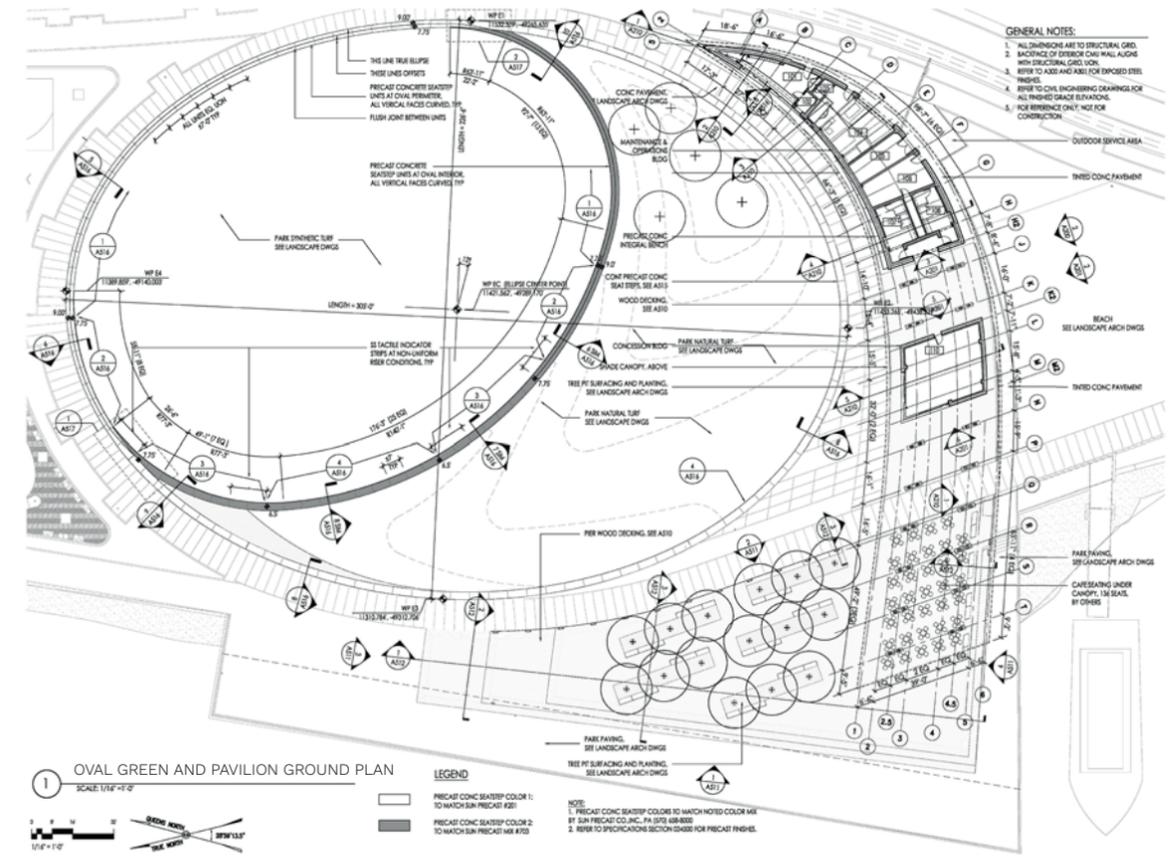


phot: Vecerka / Est

3. the green oval and promenade

The oval serves as the park's centerpiece for activities and views across the river to Manhattan. It has been divided into two parcels: a bermed lawn from which to view sports, events, the cafe and the river, and a flat multi-purpose turf field that hosts planned and impromptu activities including storm surges whose water is caught and released. Its curving pre-cast retaining edges provide informal seating, part of which unfurls from the oval and continues as a park promenade which runs parallel and connects each entrance foyer to the gabion bioswale and terminates at the dramatic overlook.

Along the promenade's length and at the terminus of upland streets, park "foyers" are detailed with perennials and long banquette lounge seating which invites visitors (and the high school students) to pause and socialize before entrance into the park proper.



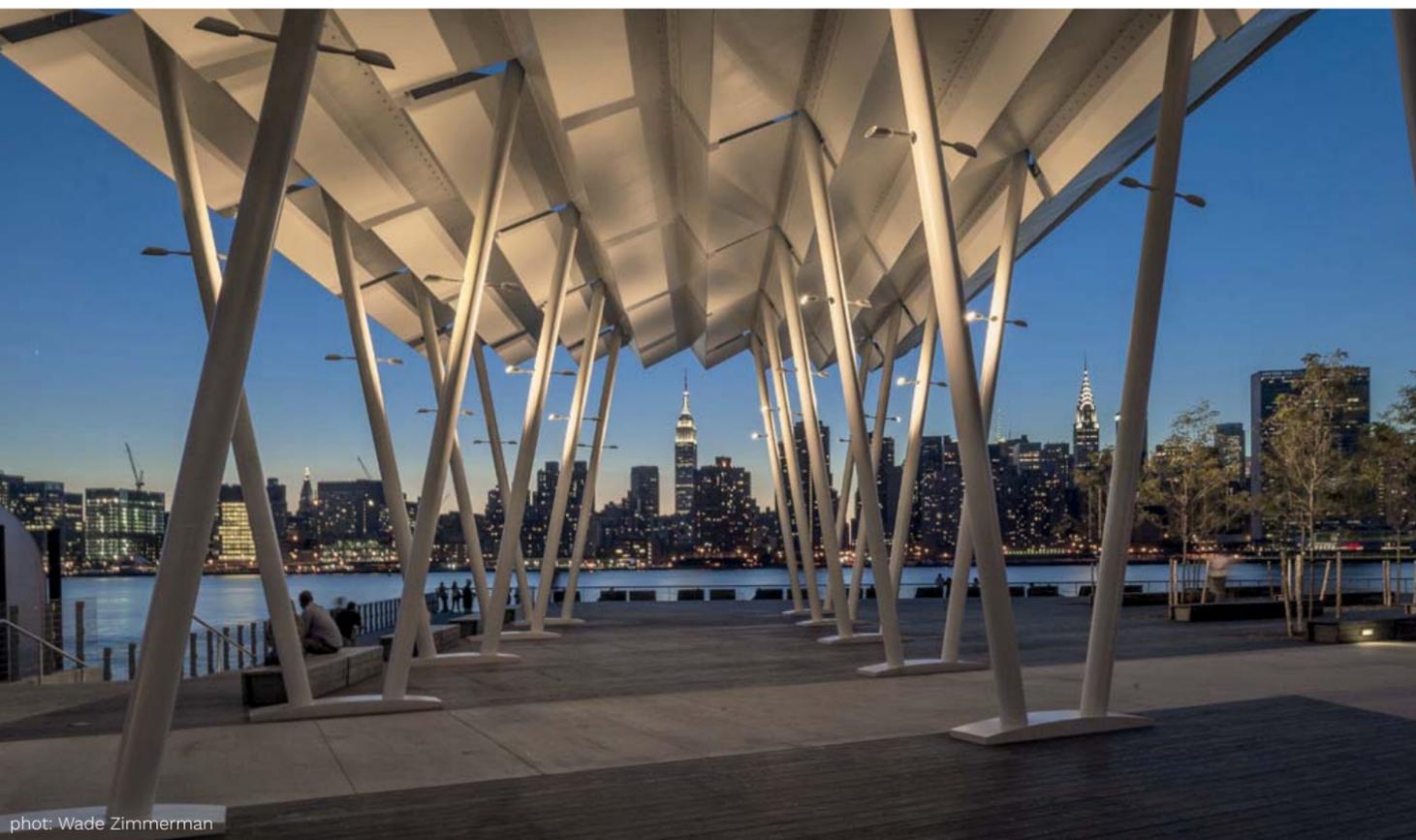
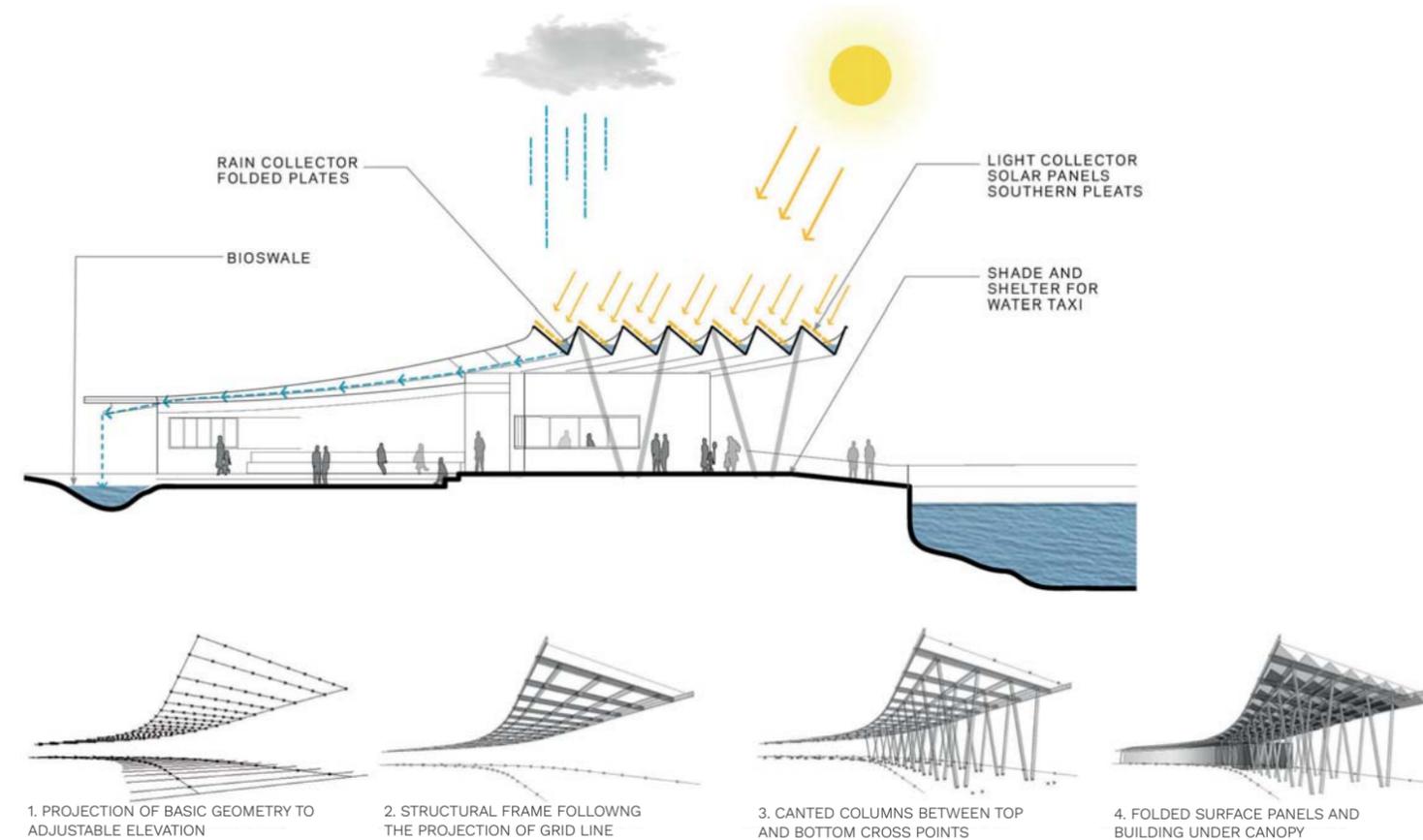


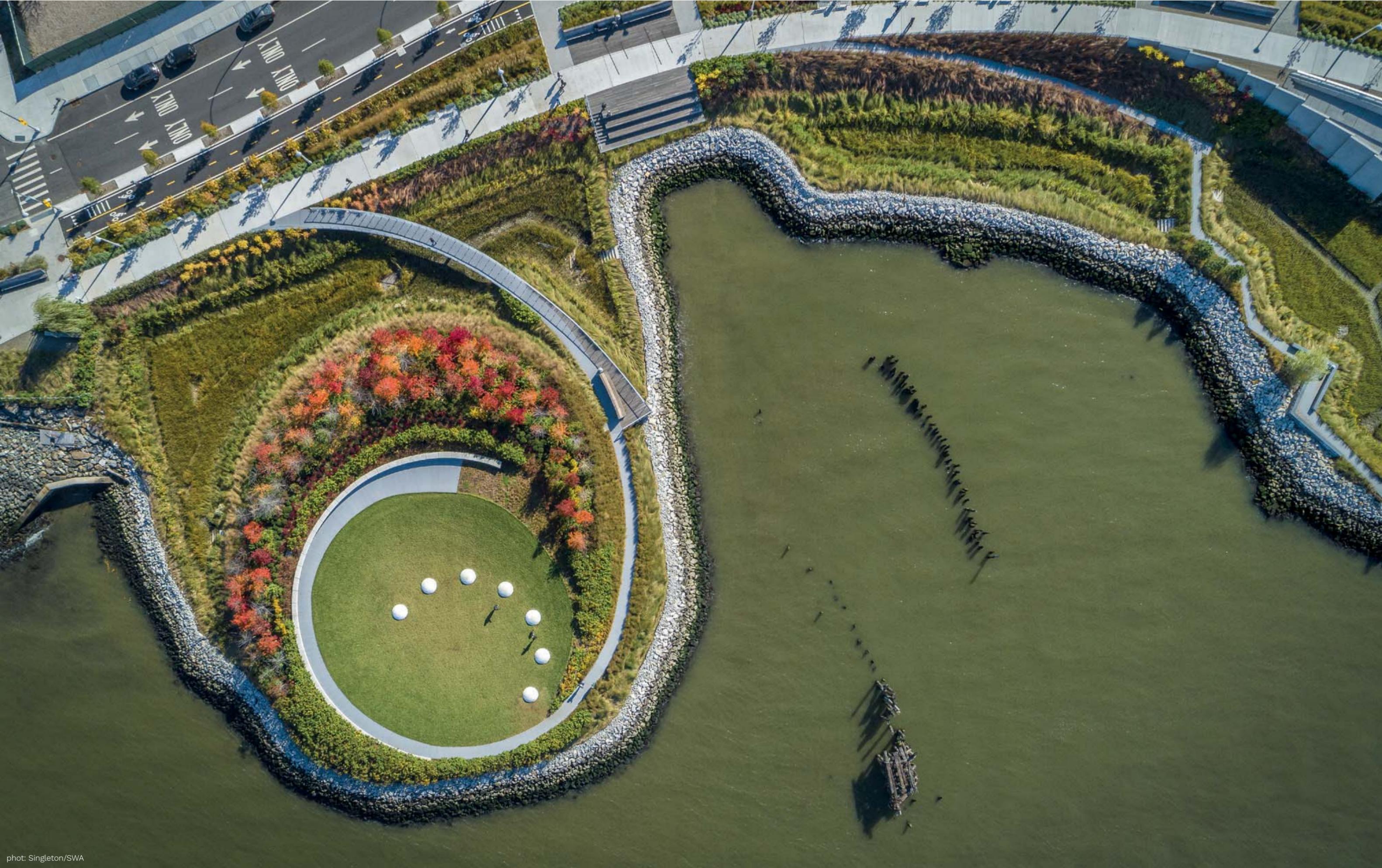
4. the Pavilion, pier and urban beach

To celebrate the park's unique perimeter, the design team strategically located program elements and resilient infrastructures – often combined – to capture views and to maximize use and performance. For example, the pavilion defines the most generously open part of the site and serves as a key public space. Like the Pavilion, the oval is not only recreational but was designed to safely collect flooding water and gradually release it back to the river. The curved pavilion frames the southern edge of the oval and extends to form a pleated steel canopy, providing shade for an outdoor café and the East River Ferry stop.

The 18' high canopy frames dramatic views across the river to the Empire State Building and the Manhattan skyline. A new urban beach, adjacent and sheltered by the pavilion, recalls the precolonial history of this site. The pavilion's pleated roof integrates photovoltaic panels that power the pavilion and park lighting. These pleats also collect stormwater that channels through biofiltration subsoils, improving water quality and reducing flood risks. Together the pavilion and oval collaborate to become an iconic public center for park activities.









phot: Lloyd / SWA

5. the island

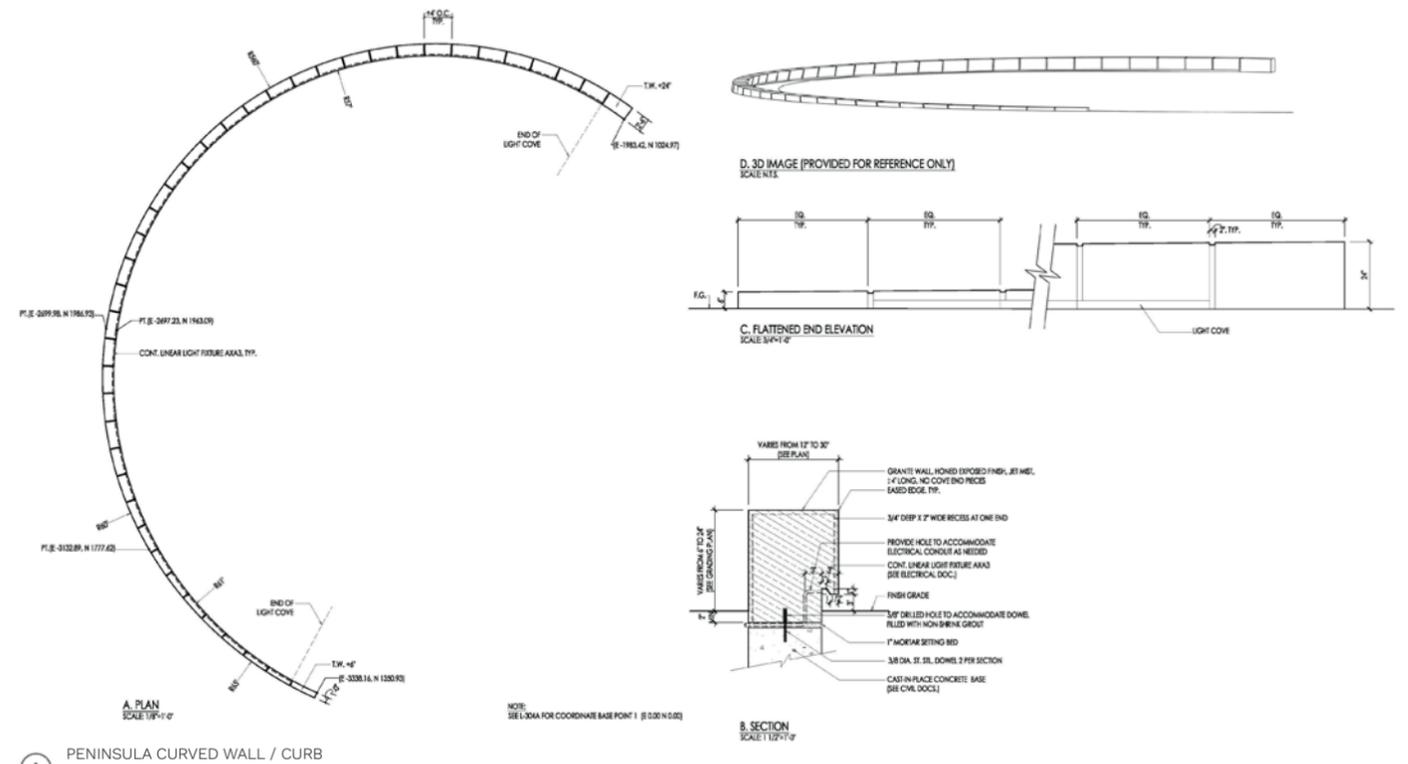
With the goal in mind to maximize and diversify the park experience, the team recruited more tidal marsh to carve into the inland side of the smaller peninsula, releasing and transforming it into New York's newest island. A curving, elevated walkway transports visitors from this protected sanctuary into another world. Other than the wall's cove lighting, light poles that could have compromised the skyline view were dismissed. As the remains of the smaller landfill, a crescent berm topped with a black gum grove serves as the buffer for this unique experience. A curving seatwall raises to the high point and looks over the site's sculpture's seven moons "Luminescence" by Nobuho Nagasawa.



phot: Noburo Nagasawa



phot: Wade Zimmerman



1 PENINSULA CURVED WALL / CURB
SCALE AS SHOWN



phot: Lloyd / SWA



phot: Vecerka / Esto

6. the tidal marsh, trail and overlooks

The team's research revealed a marsh habitat heritage along this shoreline of the East River that existed long before 200 years of industrial filling. Besides the contamination, the filling on both shores also narrowed the river and accelerated its tidal currents.

The team was committed to a green engineering and marsh habitat approach to the resilience challenge but needed to collaboratively engineer a model that would protect the marsh from the East River currents and waves but also accommodate the community's long-awaited access and enjoyment of their river. An engineered wall or conventional breakwater would be expensive and would not serve both goals. During a series of workshops with the engineers, the design team began to wonder, "why can't the inside edge be planted? Why can't we widen it to invite public access close to the river?"

The team proposed lowering the barrier to the minimum to protect the marsh but to allow storm flooding, planting the inside slope with spartina, widening the revetment top to accommodate a narrow walking trail, enhancing the experience with pause points and overlooks, and slowing the journey to a stroll with an angled layout that captures shifting perspectives.

The result is the community's favorite destination, a special place where one is apart from but a part of. As one's focus moves from marsh habitat to river, a rare unforgettable dialogue emerges.



phot: Singleton/SWA



phot: Barrett Doherty



phot: Lloyd



phot: Singleton/SWA





phot: Singleton/SWA

7. Newtown creek trail, terraces and kayak launch

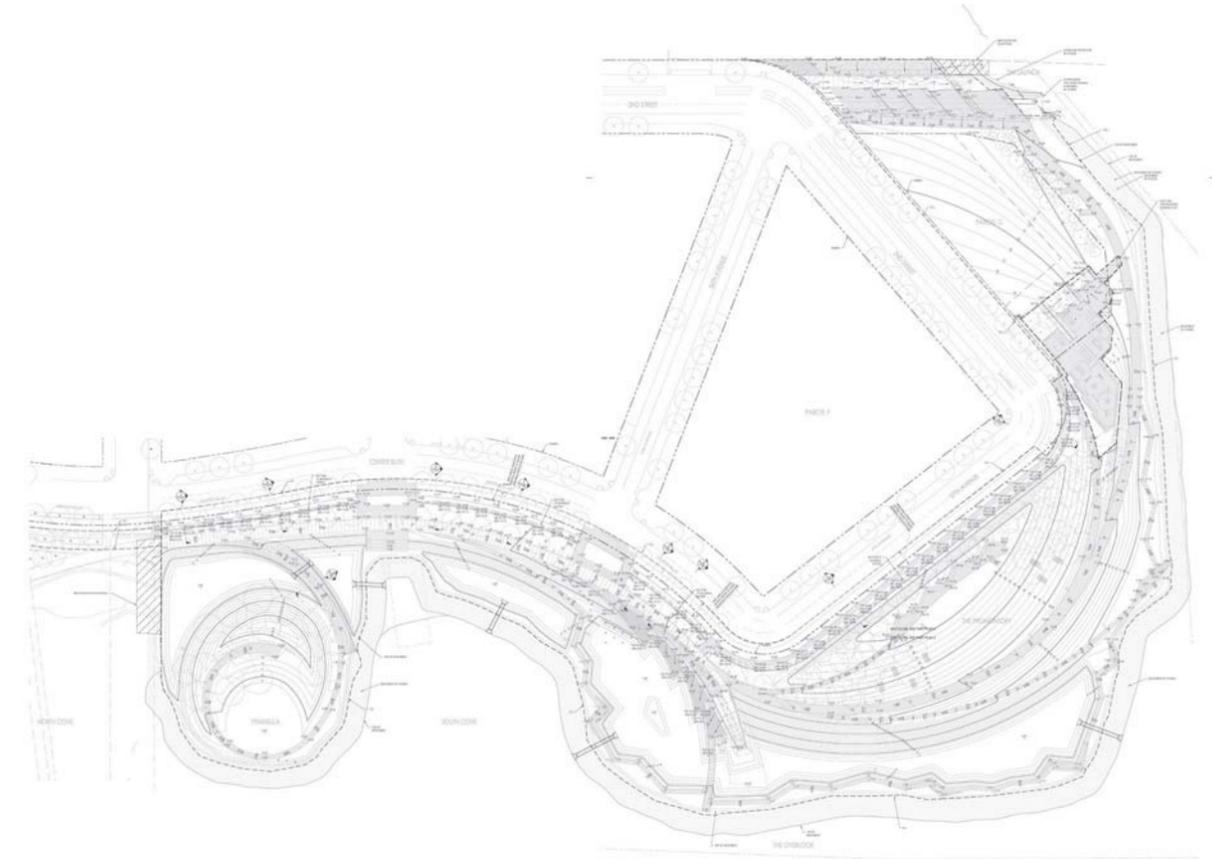
The park promenade and tidal marsh trail meet at the mouth of Newtown Creek, a historic waterway whose WWII industrial traffic tonnage was the second largest of all US waterways. Seating niches in birch groves, overlooks, and a kayak launch line this dense grassland riparian walkway.

The design also leverages the site's dramatic topography with a shaded grassy promontory, a kayak launch, exercise and picnic terraces, and a collection of intimate "break-out" lounges off the pathways. The exercise and picnic terraces create intimate spaces with expansive views of the river for individual exercise activities and family gatherings. The kayak launch with its dramatic sloping precast concrete walls provides access for all types of non-motorized boating on Newtown Creek.





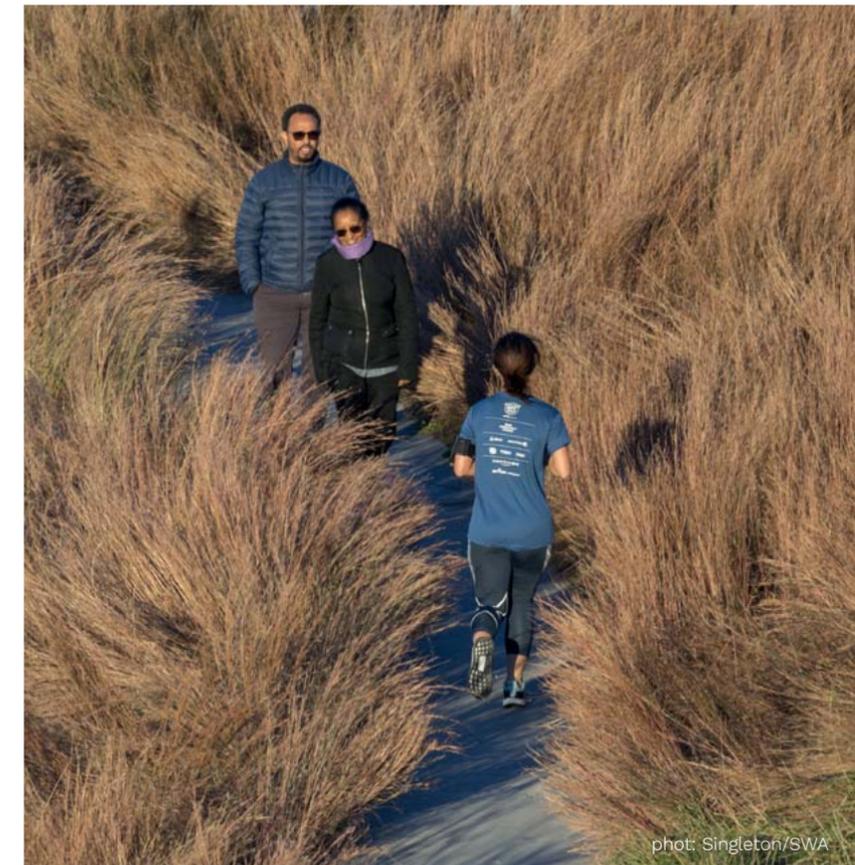
phot: Singleton/SWA



phot: Lloyd / SWA



phot: Lloyd / SWA



phot: Singleton/SWA



phot: Lloyd / SWA

8. the promontory

The promontory was sculpted from the existing 40' high landfill to leverage the extraordinary views from this important bend in the river and its highest vantage point on an otherwise low-lying Queens riverfront.

Dense deciduous woods and understory buffer this magical lawn venue from the adjoining streets, bike path, and buildings. Angled banquette seating at the wooded edge fosters group seating and timber “family rafts” have been embedded into the slope as the first choice for the million-dollar views.

The Promontory and its companion Overlook reflect the team’s commitment to make these elevated views fully available to the public without the means to occupy the tall buildings.



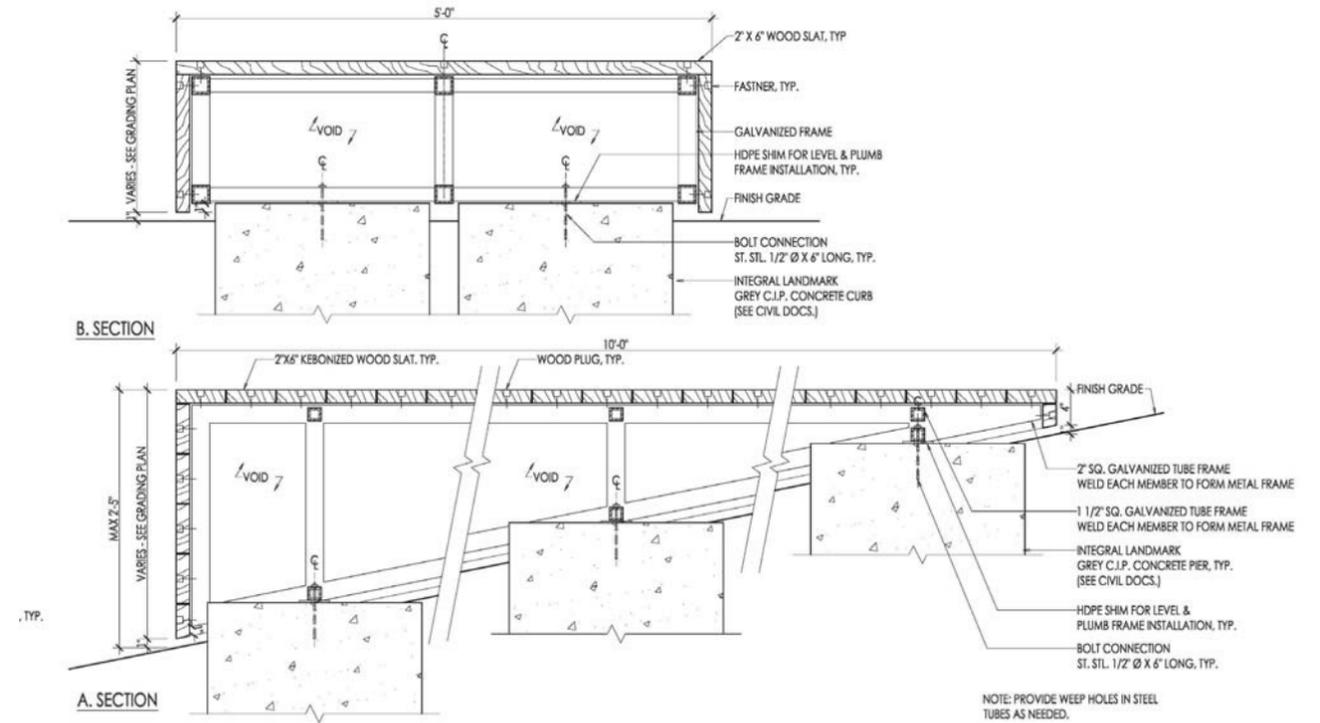
phot: Wade Zimmerman



phot: Lloyd / SWA



phot: Lloyd / SWA



1 **TIMBER PLATFORM**
SCALE: 1 1/2" = 1'-0"





phot: Vecerka / Esto

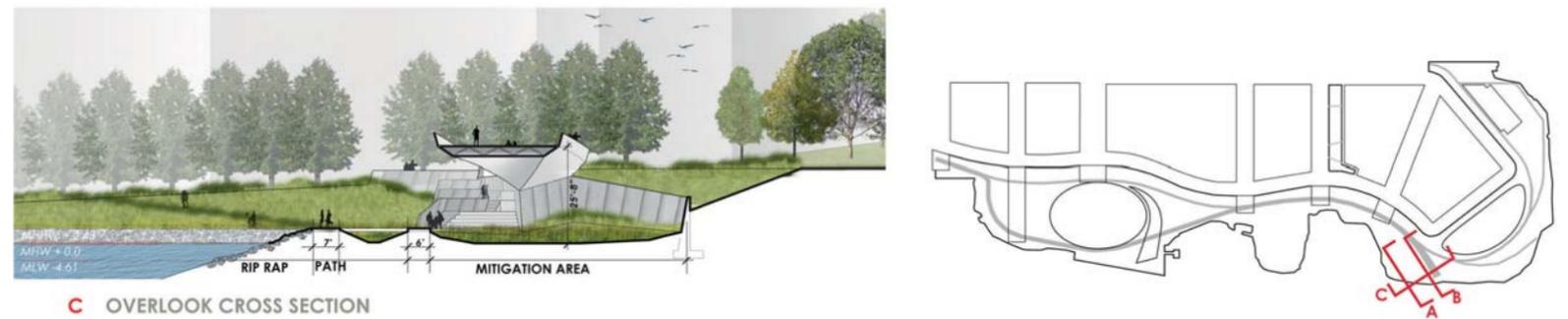
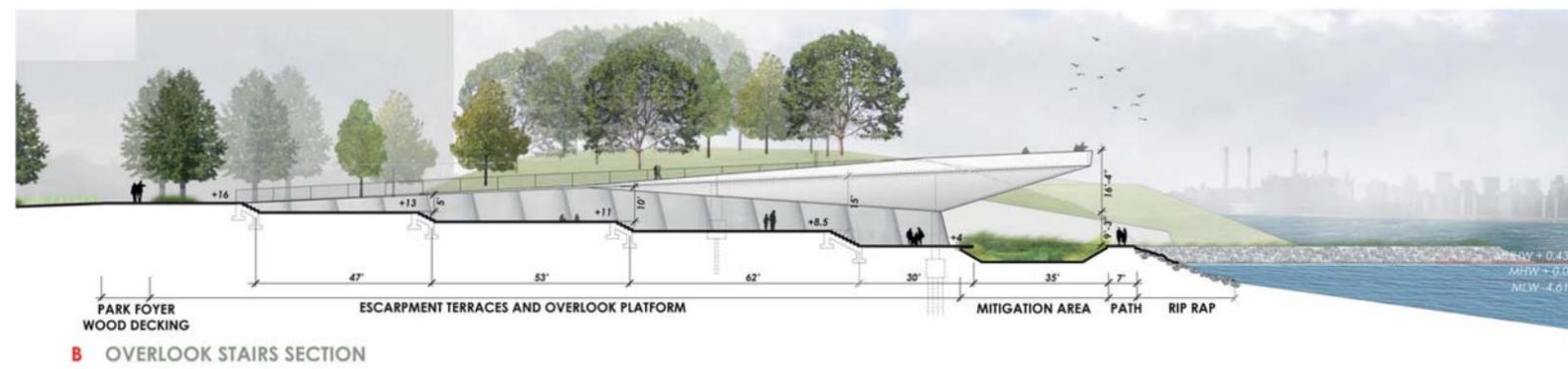
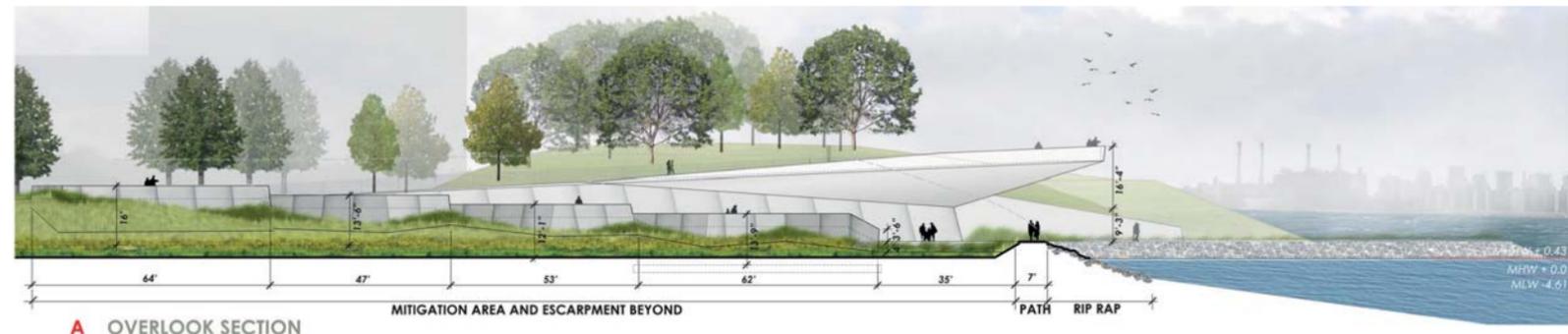
9. the overlook

The main path unfurls into an elevated overlook that extends out above the wetlands to offer panoramic vistas of the Manhattan skyline and the East River. Hovering 26 feet in the air and cantilevering 50 feet beyond the edge of land, the overlook is 36 feet at its widest. Topped with a wide wood boardwalk and generous seating, it provides a public platform for both spontaneous and programmed activities. The overlook is supported by a unique curving steel structure which, like the hull of a ship, is created using welded steel plates. The overlook also includes stepped precast concrete terraces that descend to a wetland walk at the water's edge. At once urbane and otherworldly, the elevated overlook becomes a new topography, connecting park and water to frame anew the urban horizon.

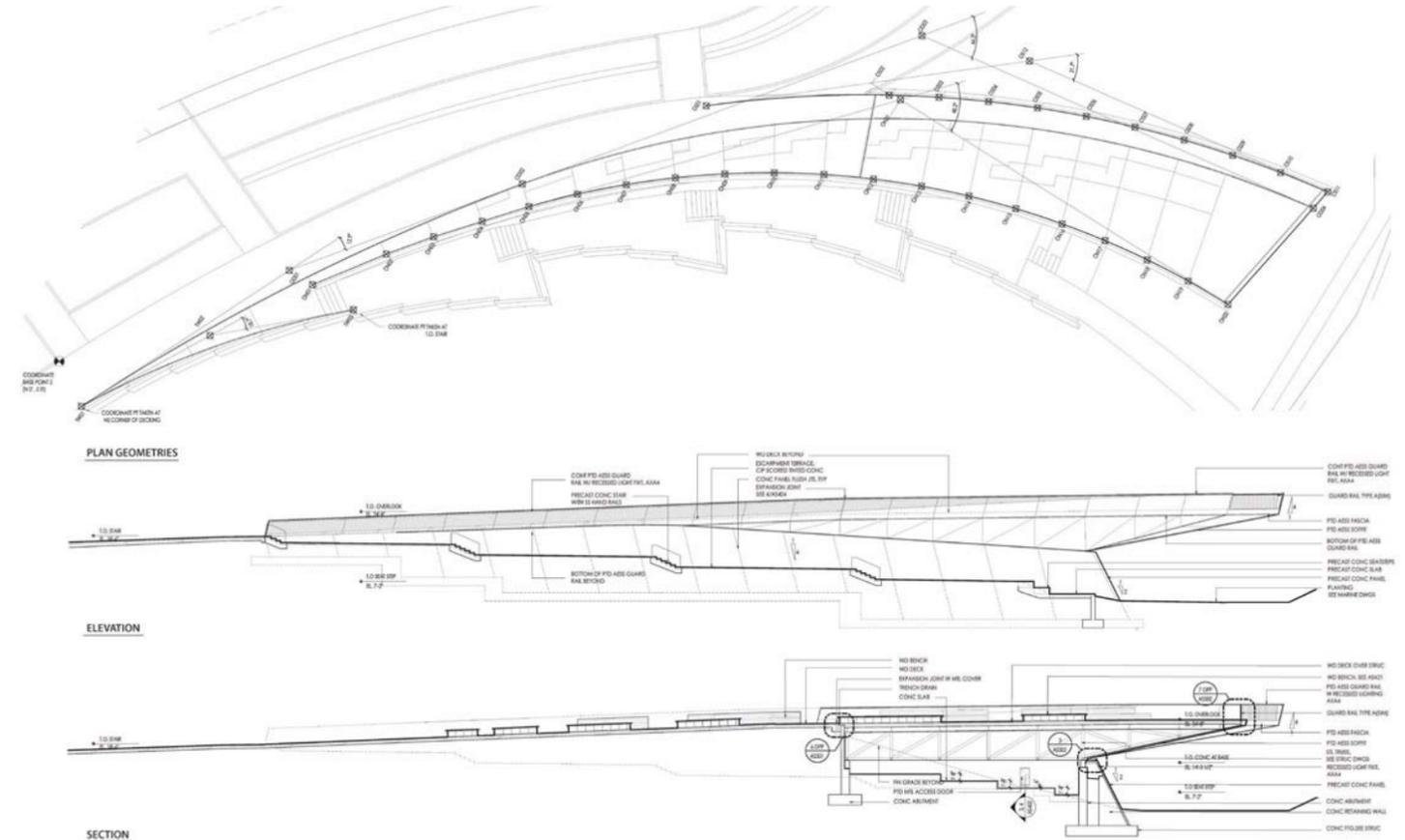




phot: Lloyd / SWA



phot: Vesperka / Est



phot: Lloyd / SWA

phot: Robert DiMaio



touching people's lives

At the underpinnings of the design team's work in the public realm lies a shared respect for the public process and its influence on planning and design decisions. The team had already built a high level of community trust (as evidenced by the "Friends of Gantry Plaza State Park") which was at the core of the broad community outreach and dialogue. The resulting consensus program and design reflects the team's commitment for this park to be shared ground for an existing and growing community of all ages and culture; with a balance of active and passive recreational opportunities found within an environmentally enriched riverain setting...like no other.

Who are these stakeholders? Where do they come from? Many are upland; the blue collar and young urban pioneer residents and workers, even the grandparents who worked on the site as rail workers or bottlers at the Pepsi-Cola plant. Across the street are the 7,500 new units of affordable housing as well as three new schools. Upriver, the new mixed-income market rentals and condos have added a gentrified population. Reverse commuters and Manhattan's east-siders looking for views and recreation stream across on a 5-minute water taxi ride. Visitors from Queens and Manhattan that walk 5 minutes from the Metro stop and cyclists from most boroughs have made the park a "must" on the circuits.

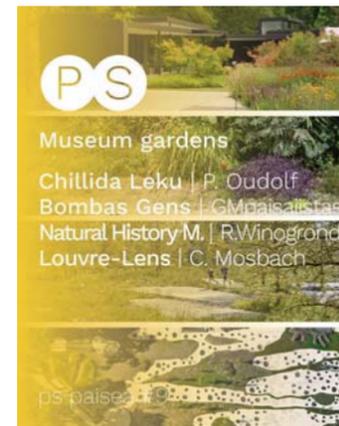
The park reaches out and resonates with all of them, no matter what walk of life or home country. They meet each other on the water taxi, dog run, marsh trail, or up on the promontory. It is no accident that this people-centric park touches so many daily lives and in so many ways. Perhaps this model of resilience and social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability will convince them to stay, rather than flee to the alternative suburban model. Perhaps it's no surprise that this model, where one can be a part of or apart from, is sustainable even through the worst pandemic. No matter, they welcome everyone to embrace the park as theirs and enlist thousands as members of the Hunters Point Parks Conservancy to volunteer with maintenance, events, and stewards of the parks.



phot: Vecerka / Esto

technical data

project	HUNTER'S POINT SOUTH WATERFRONT PARK
location	Long Island City, Queens, NY, USA
clients	NYC Economic Development Corporation and NYC Department of Parks and Recreation
authors	
park designers	SWA/BALSLEY and WEISS/MANFREDI with ARUP
collaborators	Halcrow & CH2M Hill, Marine Engineering E-Design Dynamics & Great Ecology, Ecological Systems and Restoration Ecologist SiteWorks, Landscape Construction Administration Nobuho Nagasawa, Public Art Suzanne Randolph Fine Arts, Artist Consultant A.G. Consulting Engineering, P.C., MEPFP Engineering Yu & Associates, Environmental Engineer VJ Associates, Cost Estimator Naik Consulting Group, Survey and Utilities AKRF, Historical Researcher
project management	SWA/BALSLEY : Chistian Gabriel, Brian Staesnick and Jacob Glazer WEISS/MANFREDI : Lee Lim and Michael Blasberg ARUP : Tim Kaiser, Matt Best, Michael Newey and James DeMarco
construction management	The Liro Group
date of project	2008 - 2018
construction date	2011 - 2018
surface area	11 acres
cost	\$100.7 million
photography	Barrett Doherty David Lloyd Nobuho Nagasawa Jonnu Singleton Bill Tatham Albert Vecerka / Esto Wade Zimmerman Betsy Pinover Schiff Robert DiMaio



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