

Alumnae Valley

Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts



When Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. surveyed Wellesley College in 1902, he encountered a landscape of glacial landforms, valley meadows, and native communities—site elements he emphatically encouraged the college to preserve in the development of the campus. However, in the ensuing decades the area now known as Alumnae Valley instead became the site for the college's physical plant, industrialized natural gas pumping, and ultimately, a 175-car parking lot over a toxic brownfield. MVVA's design of the Alumnae Valley Landscape Restoration confronts a history of contamination on this 13.5 acre site and results in a new landscape center for the campus that addresses large-scale issues of the relationship between the built environment and the ecology of the site.

The restored Alumnae Valley again becomes part of the natural valley hydrological system that structures the form of the Wellesley campus. Not merely a restoration, the reconceptualization of the site included an understanding of its historical function: from glacial valley to industrial dumping ground to parking lot to a valley restored yet informed by its previous incarnations. Its use of topography as both a means of design solution and experiential enhancement underscores a landscape that is at once willfully artificial and unabashedly picturesque.

Alumnae Valley Landscape Restoration received the 2006 ASLA Design Award of Excellence.

Tahari Courtyards
Millburn, New Jersey



The Tahari Office and Warehouse Complex is a renovated storage facility in suburban New Jersey consisting of a 20,000 square foot office facility and a 200,000 square foot warehouse annex. Two new courtyard spaces were created by cutting into the continuous roof structure of the office facility, removing the steel supports and saw-cutting the concrete slab below. The courtyard design is a modern adaptation of an ancient form, the Roman impluvium. The courtyards invite light and weather from the greater landscape into the interior. The edges of the gardens are left largely transparent so that people can experience the natural elements from deep within the office space. As one stands within the building, looking through the multiple layers of interior and exterior space, the play of light on the glass walls recombines the spatial elements, creating an artful blurring of building and garden.

Although the two courtyard spaces are separate, they are conceived as one continuous landscape. Our design visually connects these spaces through circulation, sight lines, and planting strategy. A miniature forest of river birch is distributed throughout the courtyards and helps to create the synergy between the gardens. Bamboo groves, the only evergreen element, are reserved for the opposing ends of the courtyards and help lend a sense of unity. The garden, with its robust textures, inserts a natural irregularity into an otherwise austere modern interior. The courtyards use two materials innovatively: black locust for the walkway and woodsy mnium moss for the groundcover.

The Tahari Courtyards won a 2006 ASLA Design Honor Award.

Brooklyn Bridge Park
Brooklyn, New York



Currently under construction, Brooklyn Bridge Park will eventually encompass approximately 85 acres and 1.3 miles of waterfront, running from just north of the Manhattan Bridge to the foot of Atlantic Avenue. The park will be a highly dynamic threshold where two different but codependent ecosystems—river and city—meet. The park's goals are ambitious and yet fairly straightforward: to preserve the dramatic experience and monumental character of the industrial waterfront while reintroducing self-sustaining ecosystems to the site and investing it with new social and recreational possibilities.

One of the biggest design challenges was improving public access to the long, narrow site—something that is possible in just three locations. The new park will make these key points into “urban junctions,” nexuses of program and landscape that serve as a lifeline to the surrounding neighborhoods. Each of these entrances is marked by a new neighborhood park that will act as transitional space between the main park and the surrounding community. The constant influx of visitors will foster a sense of liveliness, cultural relevance, and safety.

The Brooklyn Bridge Park 2005 Master Plan received a 2009 Waterfront Center “Excellence on the Waterfront” Award, a 2009 ASLA Analysis and Planning honor Award, and a 2007 New York ASLA Design Honor Award.

Lower Don Lands

Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Major world cities such as Toronto are in transition and many need to integrate post-industrial landscapes while also radically reframing their interactions with the natural environment. The Lower Don Lands project is unique among these efforts by virtue of its size, scope, and complexity. In the MVVA team's design, the engine of transformative urbanism is a dramatic repositioning of natural systems, landscape systems, transportation systems, and architectural environments. A renewed recognition of the functional and experiential benefits of river ecology allows a sustainable approach to flood control and river hydrology to become the symbolic and literal center around which a new neighborhood can be constructed.

This master plan unites transformative landscape methodologies with innovative scientific approaches to natural reclamation and makes them operational at the scale of the city and the regional ecology. Within its plan to recycle 280 acres of Toronto's waterfront, the Port Lands Estuary project unites the client's major programmatic initiatives into a single framework for the study area that will simultaneously make the site more natural (with the potential for new site ecologies based on the size and complexity of the river mouth landscape) and more urban (with the development of a green residential district and its integration into an ever-expanding network of infrastructure and use). Both the urban and the natural elements of the landscape are seen as having the potential to introduce complex new systems to the site that will evolve over the course of many years, creating interim conditions, each interesting in its own right, and giving form, focus, and character to the development of the neighborhood.

The Lower Don Lands Master Plan was selected as one of 16 founding projects for the Climate Positive Development Program, a project of former U.S. President Bill Clinton's Climate Initiative and the U.S. Green Building Council. The Lower Don Lands plan also received the 2010 Institute of Transportation Engineers Transportation Achievement Award, the 2009 BEX International Award for Best Futuristic Design, the 2008 Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) Special Jury Award for Sustainable Development, a 2008 ASLA Analysis and Planning Award, and a 2007 Toronto Urban Design Award.

Teardrop Park
New York, New York



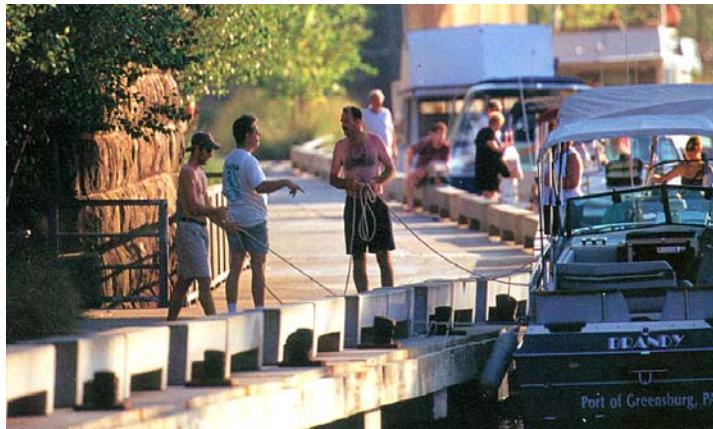
Teardrop Park is a 1.8-acre public park in lower Manhattan that transcends its small size, shady environment, and mid-block location through bold topography, complex irregular space, and robust plantings. Teardrop's design and construction were coordinated with the development of four surrounding apartment buildings, each ranging from 210 feet to 235 feet in height.

In the development of Teardrop Park, sustainability was not merely a goal, but rather an organizing principle that influenced everything from material selection to contractor practices. Based on decades-long research into urban soils and non-toxic plant maintenance, environmental aspects of the park's design include fully organic soils and maintenance regimes that don't rely on pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides. Treated and recycled graywater from the adjacent LEED Gold-rated Solaire Building and stormwater runoff from the site are captured in an underground storage pipe, supplying all of the park's irrigation needs.

As children are considered Teardrop's most important users, the park is designed to address the urban child's lack of natural experience, offering adventure and sanctuary while also engaging mind and body. Site topography, water features, natural stone, and lush plantings contribute to an exciting world of natural textures, dramatic changes in scale, and intricately choreographed views.

Teardrop Park received a 2009 ASLA Design Honor Award.

Allegheny Riverfront Park
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



The proposed park is a linear band of open space along the Allegheny River within the downtown cultural district of Pittsburgh. The design relocates pre-existing roadways and creates an open promenade space at the edge of the river. This walk blends fragments of Pittsburgh's industrial heritage with vegetation associated with local riparian greenways.

In addition to the riverfront walk, the park includes a series of upper-level open spaces, separated from the river by a four-lane highway and a thirty-foot retaining wall. The upper park 'plazas' use continuous benches, rows of broad spreading deciduous shade trees, and earth forms to create new perspectives on the Allegheny River while diminishing the presence of the surrounding roadways.

On the lower level promenade visitors pass beneath three magnificent steel suspension bridges, explore new boulder fields planted with River Birch and Red Maple, and experience a pair of steel and concrete ramps, ascending gradually from the river park to the bridge decks and the upper park. The design is meant to reflect the structural and material boldness of the site as well as the fragile and living riparian edge. The design was completed in 1998 in collaboration with artist Ann Hamilton.

Allegheny Riverfront Park received a 2002 EDRA/Places Place-Making Award, a 2002 ASLA Design Honor Award, and a 1997 Progressive Architecture Awards Citation.

Master Plan for the Landscape of Harvard Yard

Cambridge, Massachusetts

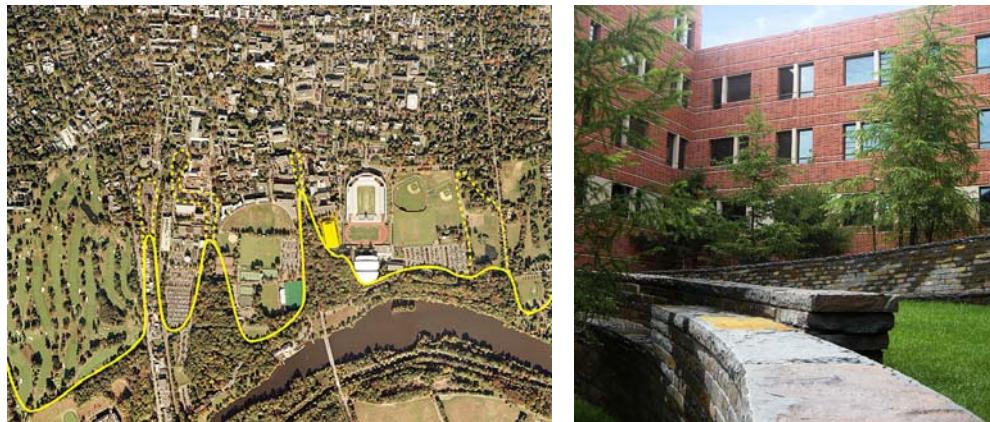


Harvard Yard is one of the oldest continually used built landscapes in the United States. By the late 1990s, however, the Yard's original American Elm canopy had been largely eroded, despite multiple efforts to replant trees over the years. Addressing the need to reinvigorate the Yard, the MVVA master plan interpreted the existing landscape of Harvard Yard in relation to its cherished history, the evolution of the site to date, the University's contemporary and anticipated programmatic needs, and the imperatives of landscape durability and longevity. The master plan recommended replanting the canopy of the Yard with more than twenty species with careful attention to site-wide microclimates, preserving the character of the space without perpetuating the inherent vulnerability of a monoculture. Other master plan initiatives included a revision of circulation systems based on current demands and anticipated building use, and a simplification of the volumetric space defined by the grass floor, tall trunk columns, and the tree canopy "roof".

The renovation scheme is sensitive to history while boldly achieving the environmental goals of the university. Working closely with the University and specialist consultants ranging from historians to arborists, the plan's recommendations were organized as an accessible workbook of planning ideas, design projects, and maintenance recommendations. MVVA worked with Harvard over the course of a decade to implement the plan. Michael Van Valkenburgh continues to be involved with the future of this landscape through his participation in the Harvard Yard Soils Restoration Project, an ongoing effort to implement a biological soils program at Harvard.

The Harvard Yard Restoration received a 1994 Honor Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation from the National Trust, a 1993 ASLA Planning and Urban Design Merit Award, and a 1993 Boston Society of Landscape Architects Honor Award.

Princeton University Landscape Master Plan
Princeton, New Jersey

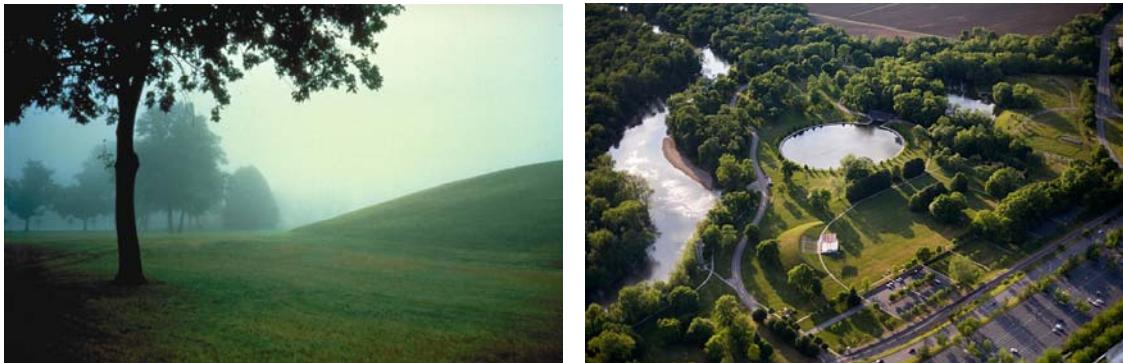


Over the next ten years, Princeton University will transform nearly forty percent of its campus in an attempt to create a setting amenable to more intensive academic, cultural and recreational use. To control the inevitable impact that such rapid growth will have on the campus, as well as addressing longstanding concerns about the health of the landscape, the university has hired Michael Van Valkenburgh as a landscape architectural advisor.

The recent Landscape Master Plan, developed by MVVA as part of a larger master planning vision overseen by Beyer Blinder Belle, envisions a campus landscape that will be experientially rich and simultaneously more sustainable, versatile and functional. The landscape plans for Core Campus, for instance, which contains one of the most significant collections of historic architecture and landscape in the United States, emphasize stewardship of Princeton's design legacies through an integrative strategy that includes extensive replanting and soil restoration, the renovation of historic gardens, and improvements to grand processional spaces such as historic McCosh Walk. The result will be historic landscapes that are ecologically stable and require less maintenance, even with the stresses of increased use.

Whether implemented in conjunction with building development or as stand-alone projects, the master plan's landscape initiatives reflect a comprehensive design approach that integrates land planning, construction techniques and materials, and maintenance. Soon-to-be-completed projects include landscapes for Butler College and Whitman College. Landscapes for a new Chemistry Building and pedestrian bridge connecting the stadium precinct with the Ellipse are in advanced planning stages. Projects that have already been completed include the new Elm Drive plantings, the Prospect/Ivy Lane pathway, and the Whitman College landscape.

Mill Race Park
Columbus, Indiana



Mill Race Park is located at the confluence of two rivers, and much of the parkland is an active floodplain. Prior to the construction of the park, the site was cut off from adjacent business and residential districts by regional railroad tracks. Community members, eager to put the land to public use, had spent many years informally building trails, but the site remained a large swath of feral landscape. Foremost among the constraints of the Mill Race site was the issue of annual flooding. Rather than attempt to prevent or shut out the regular flood waters, MVVA's design explores numerous ways to integrate this natural annual rhythm into the use and experience of the site.

The overall affordability and durability of the site materials reflect an intentional efficiency of means and materials in both the construction and the maintenance of the park. The fill generated in the excavation of Round Lake was used to build an earthen amphitheater as well as the berms around the basketball court. Many of the paved surfaces use reinforce concrete instead of asphalt, which can be peeled up by floods. The steel and glass block restroom walls are raised to allow flood waters to flow through; the playground is elevated on a wide earth platform; the amphitheater stage is nestled into the protected higher ground of the crescent landform. Plantings include mostly hardy native species, including grasses that can weather drought and trees that can withstand saturated soils.

Mill Race Park received a 1994 ASLA Design Merit Award and a 1993 Boston Society of Landscape Architects Honor Award.

Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (Gateway Arch)
St. Louis, Missouri



The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis is the site of a modern icon—the Gateway Arch—and a historic 91-acre Dan Kiley landscape. But the site is throttled on all sides by a maze of infrastructure, turning it into an island that divides downtown St. Louis from the Mississippi River. The City + The Arch + The River international design competition solicited proposals from five finalists, with the stated goals of reconnecting the city to its waterfront, laying the groundwork for regional revitalization, and expanding the park across the river into Illinois.

The MVVA team's winning proposal hews closely to the spirit of the Kiley landscape, but revitalizes it in order to reintroduce ecological diversity and function to the currently inert monoculture of lawn. Three new "gateway" gathering areas serve as focal points for emerging neighborhoods at the edges of the site, and create a host of new ways and reasons for both locals and tourists to explore the entirety of the Arch grounds. On the other side of the river, the JNEM East Wetland Preserve uses stormwater gathered from East St. Louis to create sixty acres of new wildlife habitat, while a system of canopy trails elevates visitors above the Mississippi flood berm, allowing them to appreciate the boundless horizon of the American Midwest.

The Memorial is a pilot project for a new kind of urban National Park, one that is oriented, physically and culturally, toward the life of the city, and one that pioneers new kinds of sustainable urban ecologies. This new role for the Park Service, in turn, serves as a foundation for sustained social and economic vitality on both sides of the Mississippi.

Javits Plaza
New York, New York



Located in the heart of New York City's civic center, the Jacob Javits Plaza (a.k.a. Federal Plaza) is at the intersection of several diverse communities. The one acre plaza of the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building at Foley Square serves both as an open-air entryway to the building and as a public park drawing users from the nearby residential neighborhoods of Tribeca, Chinatown, and Battery Park City. In approaching the redesign of the plaza, MVVA sought to balance its identity as both an intimate public space and a reflection of the larger civic landscape of Foley Square.

MVVA's design uses gestural sweeping landforms to create an inviting framework that seamlessly transitions pedestrians from the external bustle of Foley Square to the intimate organic spaces within the plaza. By smoothly folding the landforms over the plinth upon which the entire block of the Federal Building is constructed, the design creates a landscape extension of the existing building's base, from which emerges a grand stair as an invitation to pedestrians. The paving pattern plays upon the distinctive grid of the Federal Building façade, matching the dimensions and using the traditionally civic materials of marble and granite in order to create a palpable geometric continuity. A ring of magnolia trees will be situated at the northern end of the plaza to shield users from winter winds along Worth Street and provide necessary shade in summer months. A fountain will emerge directly from the paving in a playful choreography that will create an ever-changing experiential element and underpin the plaza's vibrant atmosphere, and free-standing solid marble benches will further animate the space even when it is empty of people.