

unplugged in the woods

PITCHING THE FOREST AS DIGITAL-FREE REFUGE

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

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

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

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

RIGHT: Billboard from Forest Service media campaign with the Ad Council.
ABOVE: Smokey Bear joins in on the effort, appearing here at a bus stop in downtown Washington, DC.

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

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

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



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

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Unplug.

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portals of ima gination

designing the parks of today . . . and tomorrow

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LEFT AND BELOW © PETER AARON/ESTO





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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

LEFT AND TOP NIC LEHOUX



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

the digital divide consider a physical encounter necessary—or even desirable—given the time investment and the possibility of poor reception.

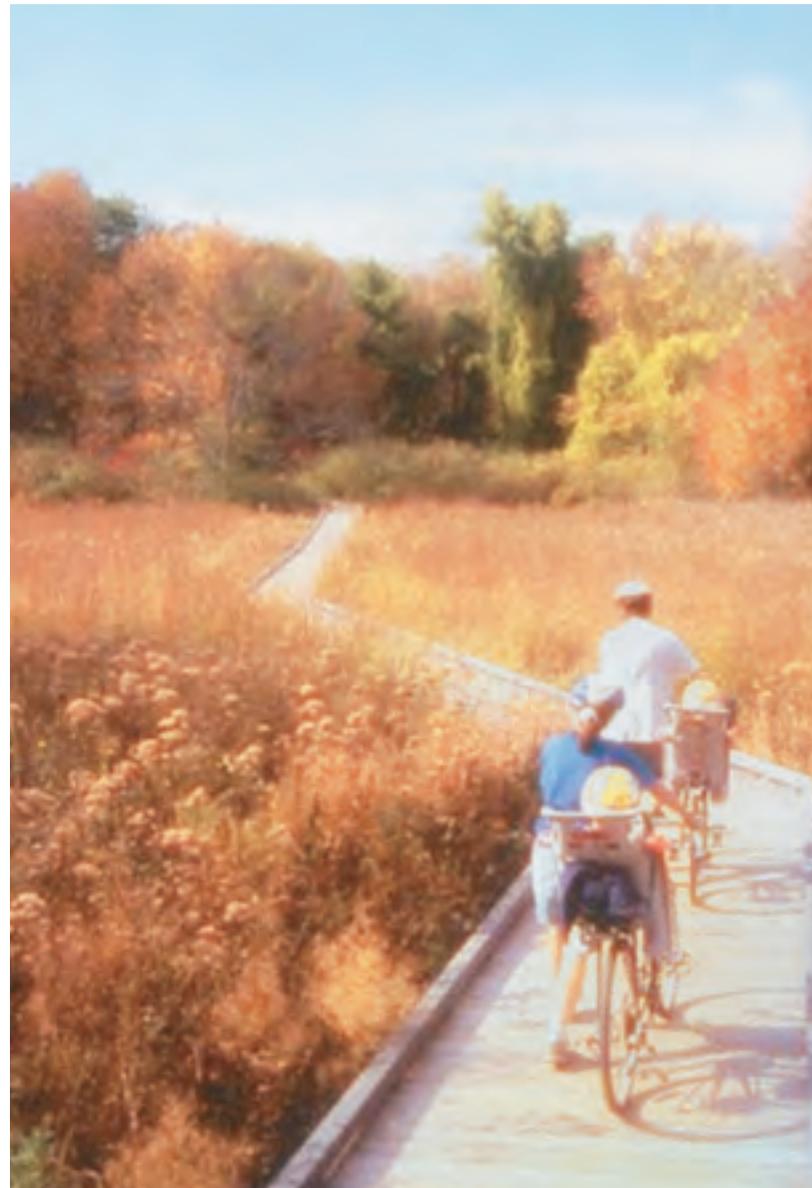
Lawliss: I love that term, “culturally framed.” That's a thing we struggle with in the National Park Service, the cultural frames that come to dominate how people experience the parks. But if we're honest, we can look to other cultures and see different frames we might consider.

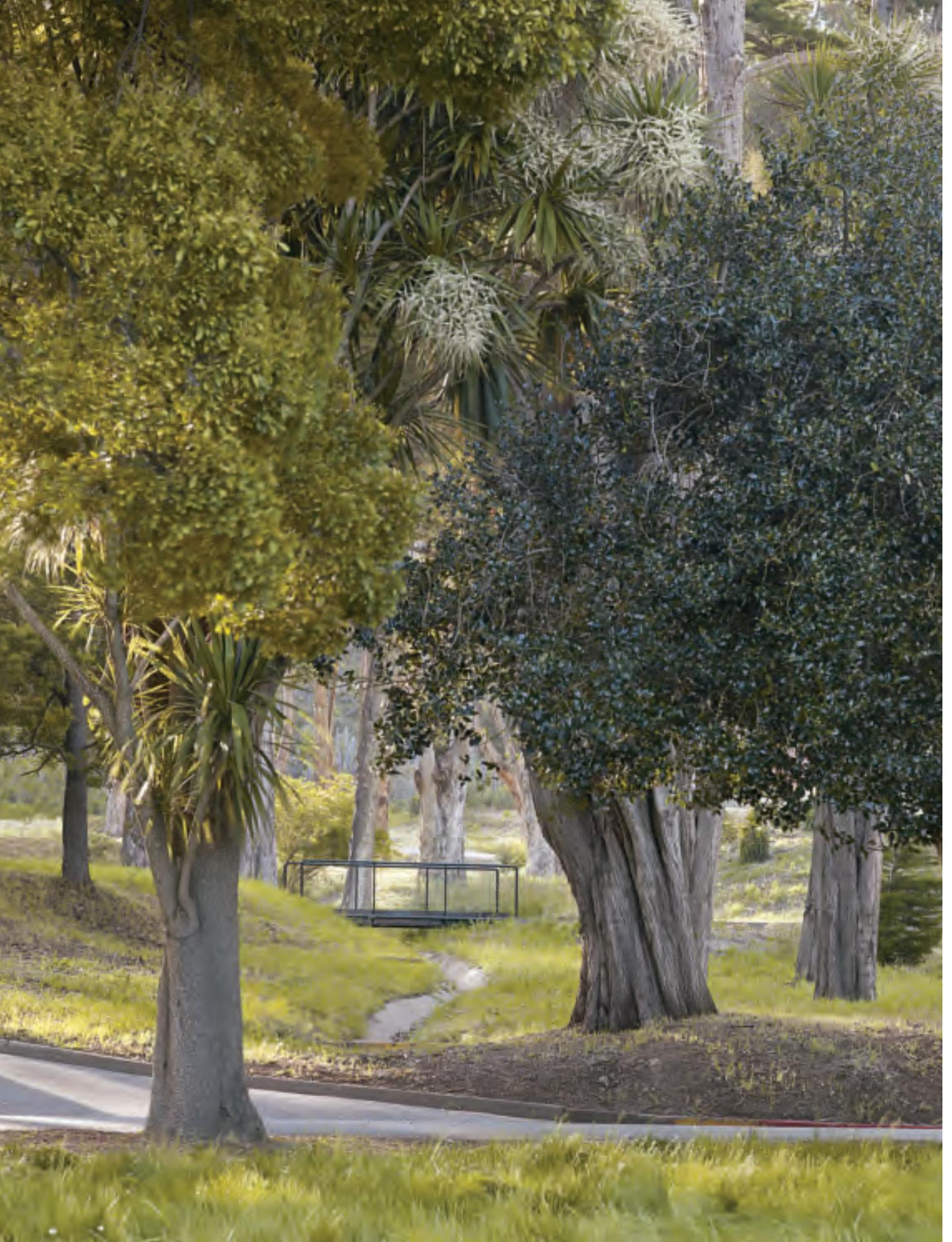
Davis: I wonder if we're seeing the end of Mom, Dad, Biff, and Sis taking the two-week trip to the national park. If gas prices continue to soar, will we see the mass disappearing of the middle class? Will the crown jewels once again become elite retreats?

Lawliss: The demographics already show it happening. Maybe it's no longer one trip to a distant park but experiences sequenced using GPS, like those in a national heritage area. Independence, Valley Forge, and Hopewell Furnace are all accessible along the Schuylkill River Trail.

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

BELOW CAROL R. JOHNSON ASSOCIATES INC.





LEFT MARION BRENNER, RIGHT KODIAK GREENWOOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lawliss: Does NPS face similar challenges pursuing design excellence?

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



MICHAL VENERA

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

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

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

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

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

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

Above: Award winner Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

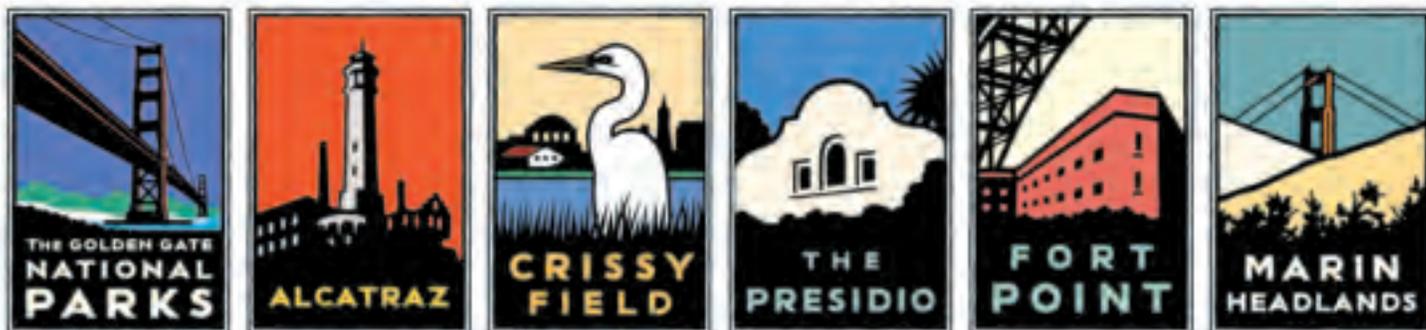
Take part in the ongoing discourse at the upcoming conference, **Greater & Greener: Re-Imagining Parks for 21st Century Cities, July 14-17 in New York City**. Go to www.urbanparks2012.org for information.

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romancing the parks

RECALLING A GOLDEN AGE AT GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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