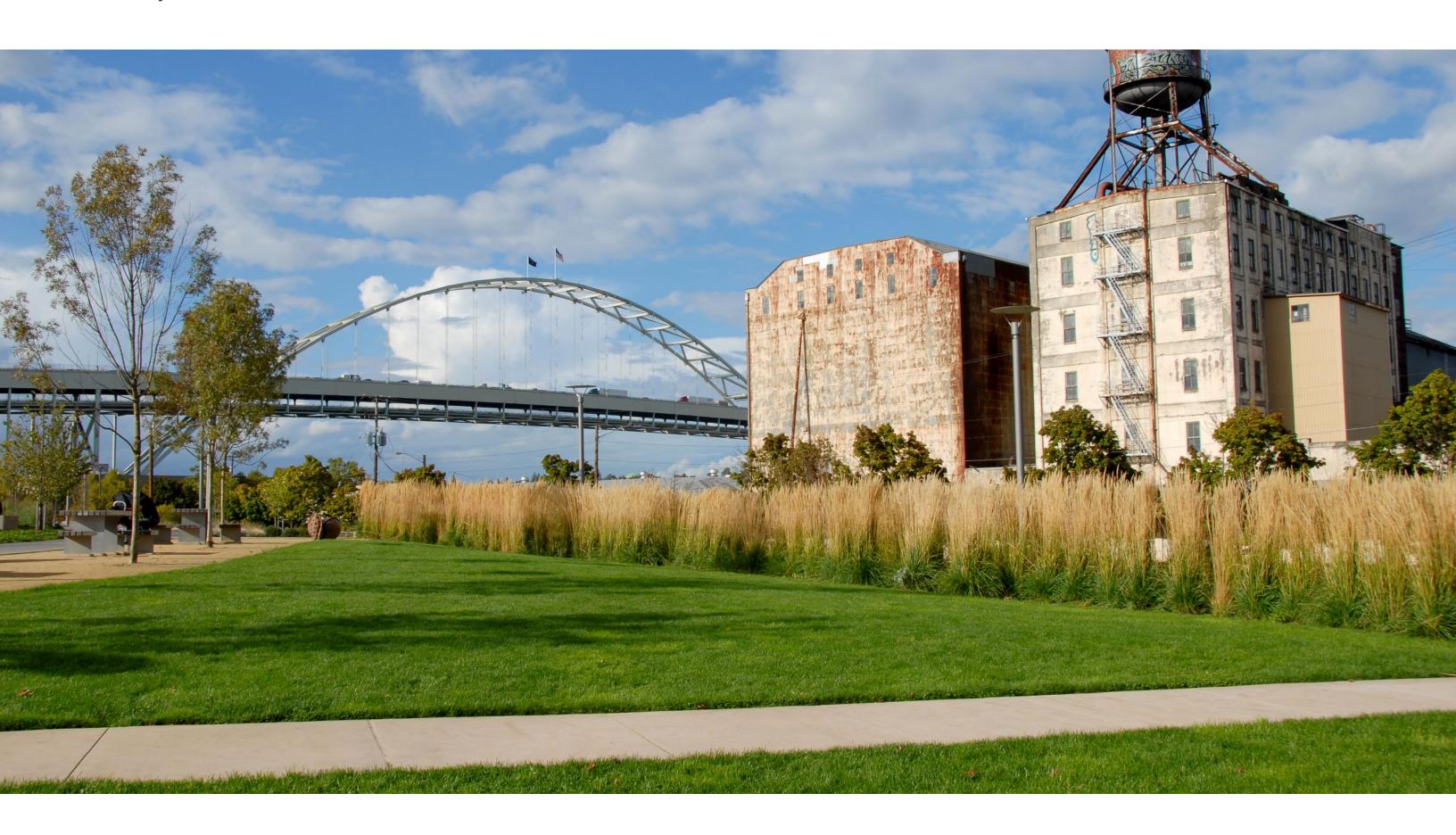


The Fields Park

Office of Cheryl Barton



A pivotal site located in Northwest Portland's River District—and in the heart of the dynamic Pearl Neighborhood—The Fields is a 3.5-acre urban park on a former railyard site. Employing landform as a key element, the design of the park is a large central open space framed by a spiraling earthen berm. The berm creates the elevation change required to provide informal, south-facing amphitheater seating. A 'colonnade' of trees frames the landform within the Park, attenuating the wind and defining several activity zones.

World Landscape Architecture (WLA) was able to have an interview with lead designer Cheryl Barton (CB) about the project.

WLA I Fields Park is a former railyard, what was the starting point of the design process?

CB I Brownfields are extremely evocative sites. Our design thinking for this particular brownfield started by intensive place immersion: walking the site, seeing and listening to the site and its neighbors, scanning satellite images of the region, reviewing historic photos. Next came the Big Questions: what remains of its past? What natural and cultural forces are currently at work here? What user program needs make sense? Are there carrying capacity constraints? What formal potential does this place hold?

For The Fields, the spiraling forms of the railyard and roundhouse—only recently abandoned—and the fluvial geomorphology of the Willamette River became formal design drivers. The vitality and street life culture of the rapidly urbanizing Pearl District surrounding the park were also extremely influential: the need for green infrastructure, contiguous open space, and community connectivity were critical social design factors.











Site Plan

Portland, Oregon, **United States of America**

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WLA I The site is at the heart of the dynamic Pearl Neighborhood. How was the community involved in the design process?

CB I We had the great benefit of a robust collaboration with the neighborhood and the City in the design of The Fields. The dynamic, engaging public process included a start-up use preference survey, regular meetings with an energetic Citizens Advisory Committee, community open houses, and an interactive website for two-way feedback on the park design process. A particular highlight was a well-attended weekend workshop featuring an awareness walk, interactive community preference kiosks and breakout sessions where small teams did 'park visioning' via actual model building and then presented to one another. This solidified a unanimous design direction that clearly supported our proposal for a contiguous, open, flexible 'Yard' in the center of the park that could support very diverse activities.

The Fields Park design was kicked-off in early 2007. By the end of the year, it was clear that the recession would deepen and that actual realization of the park could be many years away. This was a very frustrating message for the neighborhood that had been promised a park for more than seven years. The project was put on hold for an additional three years, during which our design team and Portland Parks and Recreation extended outreach and communication efforts to keep the dream of The Fields Park alive. Fortunately, we were able to

sustain public optimism through a public exhibit of design drawings and special focus groups for three emerging neighborhood demographics: parents, dog owners, and cyclists. These interventions added an important dimension to the vitality of the design, ensuring strong local ownership in the future of the park when it was finally realized—in 2013!

WLA I There are several zones within the park. Explain what these zones are and if there is a unifying element (in physical form such as a path, or a unifying material).

CB I Park zones include:

- The Yard: A central open space framed by trees and a tilted earth berm—a green playroom for all.
- Urbanology Trail: As the parks eastern boundary, the trail frames significant visual moments along the working industrial waterfront. Grain elevators, water towers, cranes, ocean going vessels, a parkway, a railroad and views to Mount Hood are all part of this landscape, offering multiple opportunities for river-viewing and trainspotting.
- Children's Area: A place for children and parents to play and socialize, it formally evokes the flow of historic Tanner Springs Creek which is now contained in a culvert 20 feet below the ground surface.
- Dog Park: An off-leash area for canines, large and smal to socialize.
- River Garden: Flanking the entrance on the park's southwest corner at the lowest elevation of the site, this feature is a biofiltration garden that creates an entry statement and demonstrates the site's performance as green infrastructure.





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The River Spiral is the organization device for The Fields, linking the central Yard to all other zones and to all park entrances. We specified pervious concrete for the core 'ellipse' which also facilitates stormwater collection and distribution. Tangential pathways and entrance walks employ plank pavers to recall the spiral of train tracks and wooden boardwalks to connect with the materials of two other parks in this 'park block' suite. The spiral also sets up a future bridge connection to the river which will span Portland Terminal Railroad and Naito Parkway and engage the future Centennial Mills development site.

WLA I Landform is a key design element of the project; what role does it play in the project and is it functional or aesthetic?

CB I It is both functional and aesthetic. Functionally, it creates the elevation change required to provide informal, south-facing amphitheater seating and, in the future, to launch a pedestrian bridge linking the Park to the Willamette River trail system. The southward slope of the terrain also directs stormwater to the Bio-Filtration Garden. Aesthetically, the tilted green plane creates a visual shift for the eye—beauty and intrigue—in juxtaposition with a relatively flat landscape.

WLA I Sustainable site design principles were used in the design and implementation of the project can you provide more background and information?

CB I Our studio was founded over 20 years ago on principles that are now codified in the Sustainable Sites Initiative; these performative principles are embedded in the design of The

Fields Park. Specifically, as a former railyard, the site is a rehabilitated brownfield which required extensive additional remediation and soil building after prior mandated efforts failed to make the site suitable for public use. Over 6,000 tons of petroleum-impacted soils were removed and safely disposed of during construction. Stormwater collection and filtration were key drivers in the park's design; this function occupies highly visible place at the park's main entrance. This Bio-filtration Garden also enhances the habitat value of the park and adds to its air quality improvement capability. Eighty percent of the park is dedicated to restoring ecological communities native to the region through careful plant selection. The majority of the site's hardscape and furnishings materials were sourced locally; sixty percent of hardscape areas were designed to specifically reduce heat island effect: and seamless, intuitive universal access was provided throughout the park. As with many parks, The Fields provides daily aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual respite in a dense urban area and sustains natural beauty for all to appreciate.

The Fields is a catalyst for community connectivity: it provides another important link in Portland's green streets network, connecting people and adjacent neighborhoods to each other, to the waterfront trail system, and to key transit corridors, while safely crossing a railroad and parkway. It is an event venue for both city and neighborhood. The park completes the City's River District Open Space Plan and forges a strong relationship with other urban park spaces in the center of Portland. Urbanistically, this neighborhood park serves a larger civic purpose: it 're-weaves' a highly disturbed but critically important piece of land back into the matrix of Portland.

Our design process for The Fields was social equity driven. A robust and engaging public process unified distinct stakeholder groups over a four-year community outreach effort. To resolve conflicting program demands we developed a bold, straightforward design framework that simultaneously accommodates multiple user aspirations for the park. The minimalist park design was also fiscally responsible to its ever-tightening recessionary budget, with the added benefit of more efficient maintenance and operations expenditures in the future.

WLA I What are the key ideas of Fields Park?
CB I

Civic Purpose: The Park is an important addition to Portland's significant parks legacy. It fulfills the requirements of the neighborhood and contributes to a higher civic purpose for the City—a place for the visual and performing arts, community-building activities, and visual and physical access to the Willamette River.

Connectivity: The Fields is a pivotal site in a rapidly evolving district. Connections to and through the Park and to the River are critically important to reweaving this site into the fabric of the City.

Spatial Counterpoint: Fields Park is a spatial counterpoint to the dense urban landscape surrounding it. The predominance of unstructured open space provides opportunities for playing, socializing and performing for a broad spectrum of users.

History Revealed: The park design expresses the natural and cultural histories of the site. River geomorphology, stream hydrology, forest canopy, river edge industry and railyard geometries informed the design and established an authentic sense of place —being where you are

Design Simplicity: The site is a relatively small space in an urban context; its design was intentionally simple to retain an open character. This minimalist approach resulted in a flexible space that now accommodates a rich diversity of program uses and urban rituals that celebrate the day-to-day as well as special events.

Resilient Urbanism: Green infrastructure is the soul of a healthy city. The Fields Park completes a significant link in Portland's green infrastructure network and establishes a metric for the realization and ongoing stewardship of sustainable, resilient urban open space in the Pacific Northwest.

WLA I What have you learned through the design process and now during the community use of the park?

CB I We learned never to waste a good recession! It gave us the opportunity to inspire bureaucratic courage, integrate squeaky wheels, educate developers and parks commissioners, and update low-bid procurement procedures.

Initially approved in 2007, at the brink of the recession, The Fields Park overcame years of funding cuts and delays in land acquisition before opening to public acclaim in the Spring of 2013. This park space stands as a testament

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to the dedication of the local community and a collaborative team of agencies, developers, and designers committed to realizing a collective vision for the Pearl District's capstone park. Success is evident in the pride of the neighborhood residents and from the thousands of visitors the park sees annually. From Cider Summits, to Yoga Fests, to Movie Nights, the park unifies a diverse and rapidly evolving population with a wide range of programs. It is now considered a "Downtown Destination Park" by Portland Parks & Recreation, where single events draw crowds of 8,000 or more and generate over \$50,000 annually in revenue from event fees throughout the year. As a catalyst for urban evolution, this new piece of the public realm and its associated green infrastructure have spurred new development and enhanced property values in an area that was once abandoned railyards and warehouses at the edge of downtown Portland's commercial center.









The Fields Park

Location | Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.

Landscape Architect | Office of Cheryl Barton O|CB Local Landscape Architect | Koch Landscape Architecture Architect | Opsis Architecture Engineers | KPFF Engineering, Geo Design, PAE Engineers Artists | Christine Bourdette

Photography | Todd Trigsted; Randy Kashka; O|CB

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