



**Great City Parks** Alan Tate  
Second Edition with Marcella Eaton

# Great City Parks

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*Great City Parks* is a celebration of some of the finest achievements of landscape architecture in the public realm. It is a comparative study of thirty significant public parks in major cities across western Europe and North America. Collectively, they give a clear picture of why parks have been created, how they have been designed, how they are managed, and what plans are being made for them at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Based on unique research including extensive site visits and interviews with the managing organizations, this book is illustrated throughout with clear plans and photographs – with this new edition featuring full colour throughout. Tate updates his seminal 2001 work with ten additional parks including: the High Line in NYC, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam. All the previous city parks have also been updated and revised to reflect current usage and management.

This book reflects a belief that well-planned, well-designed and well-managed parks and park systems will continue to make major contributions to the quality of life in an increasingly urbanized world.

**Alan Tate** has a degree in Town and Country Planning, an accredited Diploma in Landscape Design from the University of Manchester, and a PhD in Architecture from Edinburgh College of Art. He has over twenty years' professional experience and is a Fellow and Past President of the United Kingdom Landscape Institute. He has been teaching at the University of Manitoba since 1998 where he was promoted to the position of Professor in 2007 and was Head of Department from 2000 to 2005 and from 2011.

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# Great City Parks

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Second Edition

**Alan Tate**

*with*

**Marcella Eaton**

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# Acknowledgements

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I thank Ralph Stern, Dean of Architecture at the University of Manitoba for his support – both financially towards the extensive travel that the project required and in terms of the time that it took me away from my other duties at the university. I am also grateful to colleagues Dietmar Straub, for arranging meetings in Germany, and in the Architecture and Fine Arts Library who have been an invaluable resource. I also thank my cousin, Richard Tate, a long-time Paris resident, for arranging and acting as interpreter during meetings with park managers and designers there; Peter Neal for providing introductions to designers and managers in Britain; Mireia Fernandez for setting up meetings in Barcelona; Iñigo Seguro and Juan Iriarte for introducing us to Sonsoles Peña Iriarte and in turn, the *Ayuntamiento de Sevilla*.

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# Preface

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This book is intended for designers, administrators, planners and politicians with current and future responsibilities for city parks. It should also be valuable for students and teachers of landscape architecture, for other academics and for park users. The idea of writing ‘a book about parks’ arose in the early 1980s when the firm that I was running with Brian Clouston in Hong Kong was commissioned to design the town park for Sha Tin New Town. Brian and I recognized that, at the time, there was limited literature to inform the understanding and design of urban parks. When I discussed this study with Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe in 1986, he suggested, with characteristic acuity, that the continuing purpose of public parks ‘should be to lift people out of their everyday lives’ and told me that it took him and Susan Jellicoe seventeen years to complete their research for the first edition of *The Landscape of Man*. A mere twelve years later – following further work on parks in Hong Kong and London, and a term as president of the United Kingdom Landscape Institute that included a proactive campaign to promote government concern for the plight of urban parks in Britain – I became an academic at the University of Manitoba and wrote up my investigations.

The first edition of *Great City Parks* was published in 2001. It presented case studies of twenty significant parks of varying ages and sizes in western Europe and North America. It sold well enough for the publishers to invite me, in 2011, to prepare this expanded and updated second edition. I agreed for three reasons. First, there have been major initiatives in existing and new city parks; second, space limitations restricted the first edition to presenting twenty case studies – causing the omission of five that are included here; third, the production standard of the print-on-demand paperback copies that followed sell-out of the initial print run.

Also there have been numerous publications bringing new perspectives on the subject – including Setha Low, Dana Taplin and Suzanne Scheld’s *Rethinking Urban Parks* (2005); Karen Jones and John Wills’ *The Invention of the Park* (2005); Julia Czerniak and George Hargreaves’ *Large Parks* (2007); Peter Harnik’s *Urban Green* (2010); Alexander Garvin’s *Public Parks* (2011); Clemens Steenbergen and Wouter Reh’s *Metropolitan Landscape Architecture* (2011); and Catie Marron’s *City Parks* (2013). There have also been some excellent books on the individual parks, particularly Sara Cedar Miller’s *Central Park, An American Masterpiece* (2003); Olaf Koekebakker’s *Westergasfabriek Culture Park* (2003); David C. Smith’s *City of Parks – The Story of Minneapolis Parks* (2008); Joshua David and Robert Hammond’s *High Line – The Inside Story of New York City’s Park in the Sky* (2011); John Hopkins and Peter Neal’s *The Making of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park* (2013); David P. Colley’s *Prospect Park – Olmsted and Vaux’s Brooklyn Masterpiece* (2013); Paul Rabbitts’ *Regent’s Park* (2013), and monographs on the work of park designers Allain Provost (Racine 2004), Kathryn Gustafson (Amidon 2005), Joseph Paxton (Colquhoun 2006) and Peter Latz (Weilacher 2008).

The title *Great City Parks* is enigmatic. Does *Great* refer to the parks? Or to the cities? Or both? The book certainly examines important parks in major cities and reflects a belief that well-planned, well-designed, properly funded and well-managed parks are invaluable components of liveable and hospitable cities. But what might constitute a *great* park? There is no easy answer. Well, there is. It is like being in love. You know when you’re in it. And that gels with Burke’s definition of beauty as

‘that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love [“that satisfaction which arises the mind upon contemplating any thing beautiful, of whatsoever nature it may be, from desire or lust or some passion similar to it’ (Burke 1757: 83). Hargreaves, lead-designer of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, talked about great parks having ‘long-lived identities’ that ‘accrue over time’ (in magazine/journal, *Landscape Architecture*, September 2009: 63). That’s true. But it is more than a question of non-sensory attributes such as longevity. It is a question of something closer to a total sensory experience. Or, as hermeneuticist Hans-Georg Gadamer put it, ‘a work of art does not satisfy in a “purely aesthetic” way, in the same sense as a flower or perhaps an ornament does’ but that products of human expression say ‘something to each person as if it were said especially to him [sic]’ (Gadamer 1964: 97, 100). This applies to the sensory attributes of the examples in *Great City Parks*.

But why do the case studies address these particular city parks? And why are they confined to North America and western Europe? Taking the second question first, the more economically developed countries are going through a post-industrial transition that is having similar impacts on their cities and parks. Inner cities in developed countries are experiencing population growth; distinctions between time allocated to *otium* (leisure) and to *negotium* are decreasing, and demands on parks to provide escape, exercise and entertainment are growing. So these parks are prescient examples for less developed countries. And as James Corner, designer of the park on the High Line noted, parks are playing ‘new roles as essential infrastructure renewal, colonizing no-man’s-land, healing abused sites and overcoming barriers connecting communities’ (in *Landscape Architecture*, September 2009: 58). But why these parks? The original criteria for inclusion were that they had to be significant examples of park planning and design; they had to be specifically designed – or substantially redesigned – for public use, and they had to allow free admission. The selected parks deliberately represent a broad cross-section from different ages and places, and are of vastly differing size. This range helps to highlight similarities and differences – one fundamental basis of all human comprehension.

The twenty parks that were included in the first edition are re-examined and updated here, together with five parks that were written up but excluded from that edition – Park Güell in Barcelona, James’s Park in London, Luisenpark in Mannheim, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, and the Emerald Necklace in Boston. A further five have been added – The High Line in New York, Westergasfabriek and the Vondelpark in Amsterdam, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London and Forest Park in St Louis. This is inevitably an eclectic selection. Other commentators would almost certainly suggest other personal favourites. Richard Haag, for instance, suggested his own excellent groundbreaking Gas Works Park in Seattle – opened in 1975 and now on the National Register of Historic Places. The Olympic Sculpture Park, also in Seattle, Crissy Fields in San Francisco, the now yet-completed Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York, the Englischer Garten in Munich, and the *Miroir d’Eau* in Bordeaux are other examples that might also have been instructive.

And why are the parks presented in size order? One reviewer of the first edition suggested that this was as random as lining up their designers by height and ordering the parks accordingly. But size is measurable, current and specific, whereas date, for instance, is dependent on variable criteria – date of designation or date of design or date of opening or date of redesign? And although the history of each park is examined, this is not a historical study. It is suggested that the character and function of a park is heavily influenced by its size – and that size, in turn, is heavily influenced by age and by location. This means that the parks are presented in an approximate chronology from more recent to older, with a few anachronisms.

In order to present the parks as a series of comparable case studies, the same template has been used for each one, adapted where necessary. This template was also used for the first edition. For both

editions it was sent to the managers of each park before meeting with them. The questions are set out in the Introduction. The template is used for each chapter and for the closing reflections. In addition to being based on the cited literature, each case study is based on at least one follow-up site visit between July 2012 and December 2013 including meetings with the current managers and, where available, designers of the parks. The plans of the parks are presented in a consistent style and to standard scale – subject to their relative size – in order to aid comparison, and the date of each image is given as an aid to comprehension of each park’s development over time.

Dimensions for parks in the United States are given in Imperial measurements (with SI equivalents in parentheses). Dimensions for parks in Canada and Europe are given in SI Units. References to work on historic landscapes are based on the United States Secretary of the Interior’s *Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (1996), which adopted the standard words ‘Preservation’, ‘Rehabilitation’, ‘Restoration’ and ‘Reconstruction’ to define different types of intervention. ‘Restoration’ means maintaining a property as it was at a particular point in time, and ‘rehabilitation’ means to ‘convey historical values’. Otherwise the word ‘renovation’ is used. Citations use the (publisher’s preferred) Harvard referencing system. References are provided at the end of the book with general references – referred to in more than one chapter – first, and then chapter-specific references. Notes are provided at the end of each chapter.

# Introduction

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Rapid population growth in European and North American cities in the nineteenth century made the provision of public parks a primary concern for national, state and city governments. In the United States, land allocation was based on the principle of private ownership. The idea of public land was generally an alien concept and the role of government was seen – and to some extent, still is seen – as being to protect private property rather than to provide universally accessible public services. The principle of land held in common was more familiar in Europe – and European cities had the benefit of royal parks that could be made available for public use.

This study examines and celebrates city parks as a principal product of the profession of landscape architecture. It has been suggested that the title landscape architect was first used with respect to the work of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) and Calvert Bowyer Vaux (1824–95) on Central Park, New York.<sup>1</sup> The development of new city parks began in the mid-nineteenth century and led to the growth of the profession in Europe and North America. The development of parks presaged two major changes in the character of western cities. First, it led to the allocation for public use of large tracts of land in or close to rapidly growing cities – and, in Europe, also to the transfer of areas of royal land to public use. Second, it led to the creation of non-productive, vegetated scenery for purely recreational purposes in urban areas. Urban parks of different shape, size, type and purpose can now be found in cities and towns throughout the world. This study adopts the view that the underlying theoretical approach of ‘consulting the genius of the place’ – which prompts landscape architects to ‘think first of *what is there*, rather than what one can *put there*’ (Greenbie 1986: 56) – makes them uniquely suited to design urban parks.

J. B. Jackson noted that ‘the picturesque park, open to the public ... came to represent the impact of three distinct social forces: the urge to improve the living conditions of factory workers ... the urge to bring all classes in close contact with ... “natural” environment, and the urge to improve the real estate value of areas surrounding the new parks’ (Jackson 1994: 114). This was summarized in a letter from Olmsted published in the *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin* on 4 August 1865 (Young 2000: 46). It presented what Young listed as four virtues – increased real estate values promoting local prosperity, better public health, an amicable public gathering place, and promotion of safety and social order – although it is difficult to see a significant difference between the last two.

Olmsted’s real estate argument was based on early evidence from Central Park. This has recently been investigated by the Land Restoration Trust (latterly the Land Trust) in Britain – an organization charged with establishing public–private partnerships to oversee public open space resulting from brownfield reclamation ([www.landrestorationtrust](http://www.landrestorationtrust)) – and by John Crompton, a specialist in park financing at Texas A&M University. The Restoration Trust avers that green space can increase adjacent property values by 6 to 35 per cent. Crompton, terming this the ‘proximate principle’, suggested that ‘a positive impact of 20% on property values abutting or fronting a passive park area is a reasonable starting point’ (Crompton 2000: 3). He recorded that ‘approximately 20 studies investigating the issue have appeared in the past two or three decades’ and have ‘overwhelmingly verified the legitimacy’ of the principle (Crompton 2007).

The public health issue has also retained its currency – in terms of both psychological and physical

health. Environmental psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan found that ‘peace, quiet, fascination the chance to share with others and to do what one wishes are deeply important to human beings. The natural setting makes these satisfactions more available. Even the view of trees can lead to psychological gains’ and that ‘the immediate outcomes of contacts with nearby nature include enjoyment, relaxation, and lowered stress levels ... well-being is affected by such contacts. People with access to nearby natural settings have been found to be physically healthier than other individuals’ (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989: 172–3). Multiple subsequent studies have supported these findings (see, for instance, Kellert et al. 2008). Equally, Schama argued that ‘one of our most powerful yearnings’ is ‘the craving to find in nature a consolation for our mortality’ and that ‘all our landscapes, from the city park to the mountain hike, are imprinted with our tenacious, inescapable obsessions’ (Schama 1995: 15, 18). Schama’s argument is supported by an account from Neill Friedman, director of the Arnold Arboretum, of Bostonians seeking solace in the arboretum after the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.<sup>2</sup>

The third issue – amicable public gatherings and social order is more contentious. Ward Thompson has argued that ‘In today’s multicultural society, just as in Olmsted’s time, the urban park is one of the few places where strangers come together regardless of economic, ethnic, or social status’ and that it ‘continues to be the place where the democratic process is worked out on the ground’ (Ward Thompson 1998: 19, 21). Rosenzweig and Blackmar noted, with respect to Central Park, that even towards the end of the nineteenth century ‘self-segregation had a temporal as well as a spatial dimension’ (Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1992: 334). Similarly, Elijah Anderson noted that the ‘public spaces of the city are more racially, ethnically, and socially diverse than ever’ but that in ‘many impersonal spaces, social distance and tension as expressed by a wariness of strangers appear to be the order of the day’ (Anderson 2011: xvii). One positive observation that can be made in this connection is that, despite varying degrees of private funding and events, and despite some parks charging entrance fees to non-citizens, the parks in this study remain freely accessible to their citizens.

The design of nineteenth-century parks in most Western cities was based on primarily pastoral models developed first in Germany and England. Danish-born Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld (1744–1819), professor of philosophy and aesthetics at Kiel University, wrote about the provision of public parks in 1785. His doctrines were adopted by Peter Joseph Lenné (1789–1866), principal designer of the Tiergarten in Berlin, and Lenné’s pupil, Gustav Meyer (1816–77). The work of Humphry Repton (1752–1818) on English country estates was interpreted by John Nash (1752–1835) in picturesque designs for Regent’s and St James’s Parks in London and adapted by Joseph Paxton (1803–65) at Birkenhead to create the proto-typical pastoral English urban park. The model was further adapted and applied by practitioners such as Olmsted, Vaux and H. W. S. (Horace William Shaler) Cleveland (1814–1900) to the specific conditions of the rapidly expanding cities of the United States – referred to here as ‘American Pastoral’ – and by Jean-Charles Adolphe Alphand (1817–91) and his team of municipal designers in Paris. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the pastoral model for the public park gave way to symmetrical, geometric layouts, typified by the Beaux-Arts Grant Park in Chicago and the axial Stadtpark in Hamburg, forerunner of the modernist *Volkspark*.

Cranz identified four eras in the design and management of urban parks in the United States – the Pleasure Ground, 1850–1900; the Reform Park, 1900–30; the Recreation Facility, 1930–65; and the Open-Space System, 1965 and after (Cranz 1982). She and her student, Michael Boland, subsequently identified a fifth era – the Sustainable Park – running from 1990 (Cranz and Boland 2004). Young, in his study of parks in San Francisco, concluded that there were only two eras in their development – the romantic era up to the 1920s, after which ‘urban parks were no longer the promoters of moral order

and ‘changed little’, and the rationalistic era whose ‘vision continues to dominate it today’ (Young 2004: 13). As we will see from the case studies, both of these categorizations reflect a transition from nineteenth-century romantic paradigms to twentieth-century functionalist paradigms. But neither categorization is entirely satisfactory.

Lachmund noted that ‘the city witnessed various attempts to approximate it to nature’ – the first ‘led to the creation of parks and greeneries [*rus in urbe*], the second to the creation of garden cities and suburbs that located the city in existing natures [*urbs in rus*]’ (Lachmund 2013: 223). This prompted an argument that there have been three major eras in the design and management of urban parks reflecting – among other things – three distinct approaches to the design of cities:

- the era of the industrial city before 1940, divisible into two parts of around forty years each – the romantic part until around 1900, typified by bucolic pastoral parks or ‘pleasure grounds’ for passive recreation, and the post-Nietzschean, modernist / functionalist part until World War II, typified by axial, neo-Baroque / City Beautiful parks designed for primarily active recreation;
- the era from World War II to 1980, an era of rapid suburbanization, new town building, major highway construction and ‘white flight’, leading to declining tax bases and severely reduced park budgets. This pattern of de-centred expansion of cities was reinforced by developments in remote communication, promoting what Webber termed the ‘non-place urban realm’ (Webber 1964). The expansion of regional highway systems and spread of suburbs was followed by the development of places of commerce and employment at nodes on regional transport systems, creating what Garreau called ‘Edge’ or ‘Node Cities’, primarily in North America (Garreau 1991);<sup>3</sup>
- the post-industrial era, after about 1980 – the beginning of the politics of Reagan and Thatcher and what Soja termed, in urban development terms, ‘Postmetropolis’ (Soja 2000) – with ‘white flight’ reversed and lower income groups being pushed to the edges of cities. This period coincides with the establishment of the Central Park Conservancy and appointment of the Prospect Park Administrator in 1980, reflecting the beginning of an era of return to central-city living and returning prosperity for many traditional city parks – largely through public–private partnerships in the United States and through significant state-sponsored public investment in Europe. This era has seen the establishment of parks such as Parc de la Villette in Paris, Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam and Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London on former industrial land – all with state funding – and, latterly, the High Line in New York. This era has certainly displayed both the Cranz- and the Boland-identified propensity for greater ecological awareness. But it has also demonstrated a propensity for subdivision of parks into smaller garden areas – as in Parc de Bercy, Parc André-Citroën and Village of Yorkville Park, and a huge increase in herbaceous planting – as in the Luisenpark in Mannheim, Bryant Park, the High Line, the Lurie Garden in Grant Park, the Westergasfabriek and Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. This study was conducted from the perspective that we are still in this post-industrial era. It is becoming apparent, however, that the centres of major cities are increasingly the preserve of the rich, the poor, the old, the young – and tourists – while ever-expanding suburbs remain the habitat of people raising families and increasingly, lower income groups.

The template for the questionnaire and for meetings with park designers and/or administrators comprised:



## ***History / publications***

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- Can you recommend publication(s) which detail the history of the development of the park?
- Which person and/or organization was responsible for the decision to build the park?
- What was the condition of the site when the park was designated?
- What was the original land area of the park and what is it now?

## ***Plans of the park***

- Can you provide a scale plan (in whatever format) of the park including landform, vegetated areas, entrances, roadways, pathways and principal facilities?
- Do you have current or recent plans indicating the areas of the park under different types of land cover (vegetation types / water bodies / recreation areas / hard surfaces etc.)?

## ***Management and usage***

- What organization manages the park; what is its legal / political status; how does the public represent their views to it and are there any factors which may change this?
- What are the current sources of funding for the park?
- What is the current annual budget for recurrent maintenance of the park?
- How has this changed (in real terms) over the last twenty years?
- How many full-time staff are engaged in the maintenance of the park?
- Do you have recent user surveys indicating numbers of visitors to the park and the purposes of the visits?
- Do you have a record of crimes committed in the park over the last ten years?

## ***Plans for the future of the park***

- Is there a current physical master plan guiding works in the park – including the redesign of certain areas or the provision of new facilities – and if so, is it possible to obtain a copy?
- Is there a current plan guiding the management of the park – and if so, is it possible to obtain a copy?

The same format and range of issues was addressed in each of the case studies and is used as the template for each chapter in the body of the book. To all intents and purposes, this format matches the one outlined by Mark Francis in *Landscape Journal* (Francis 2001). The same format is used for the presentation of the closing Reflections.

## **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Vaux-biographer William Alex suggested that the New York State Legislature used the title when referring to them in April 1865 (Alex 1994: 10); Witold Rybczynski suggested that Vaux used the title first in correspondence with Olmsted in 1865 (Rybczynski 1999: 261), whereas John Claudius Loudon published the book *The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Land*

*Humphry Repton Esq.* in 1840.

2 Noted from Friedman's address to Annual Meeting of Emerald Necklace Conservancy on 12 November 2013 that the arboretum received 'huge numbers of visitors after the bombing'.

3 In fact Clark, well ahead of Webber and Garreau, recognized that motor vehicle-based urban expansion could be virtually endless – with employers moving places of work closer to places of residence in periods of boom, and employees being prepared to travel further to work in economic downturns. His (somewhat premature) conclusion was that transport had 'done its work all too well' and would lead to the 'complete disintegration of the city' (Clark 1958: 250).



#### *Location of New York Parks*

- 1 New Jersey
- 2 Central Park
- 3 Paley Park
- 4 Bryant Park
- 5 The High Line
- 6 Manhattan
- 7 Long Island
- 8 Prospect Park

# 1 Paley Park, New York

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*(4,200 square feet / 390 square metres)*

## INTRODUCTION

Paley Park was completed in 1967 and completely rebuilt to the same design in 1999. Private owned, privately built and privately run for free public use, it is the model ‘vest pocket park’. Located on the north side of East 53rd Street in midtown Manhattan, between Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue, Paley Park is the product of a concept promoted by landscape architect Robert Zion (1921–2000) and taken up by William S. Paley (1901–90). Paley, founder and Chairman of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), established the park as a memorial to his father, Samuel Paley (1875–1963). It was not a result of ‘Incentive Zoning’, a policy commenced in 1961 that permitted developers ‘to install paving around their buildings, call them plazas, and collect their 10:1 or 6:1 floor area bonus as of right’ (Kayden 2000: 18). Paley Park was a philanthropic donation to the people of New York. Few human-made places provoke such unequivocal praise – ‘one of Manhattan’s treasures, a masterpiece of urbanity and grace ... memorable because it makes no effort to be special’ (Johnson 1991: 191, 194); ‘visiting Paley Park affects me as much as going to Yosemite’ (Kim 1999: 88); and again, ‘a restrained and effective multisensory experience’ (Kim 2013: 79).

## HISTORY

### *Date and reason for designation as a park*

The concept of the pocket park was demonstrated by Zion in May 1963 at an exhibition, *New York Parks for New York*, organized by the Park Association of New York and staged at the Architectural League of New York. He showed prototypical designs for parks ‘as small as 50 by 100 feet [15 by 30 metres] between buildings where workers and shoppers could sit and find a moment’s respite’ (Tamulevich 1991: 7). The sites that Zion used were vacant lots on 40th, 52nd and 56th Streets. Such proposals caused controversy between their advocates, Mayor John Lindsay (1921–2000 – Mayor 1966–73) and his Park Commissioners Thomas Hoving and August Heckscher, on the one hand, and Robert Moses, New York park commissioner from 1934 to 1960, on the other. Moses argued that open spaces of less than 3 acres (1.2 hectares) would be ‘very expensive and impossible to administer’ (Seymour 1969: 5).

Paley would have been aware of the exhibition and of the controversy surrounding pocket parks. In a statement issued shortly after the opening of the park in May 1967, he stated that ‘as a New Yorker I have long been convinced that, in the midst of all this building, we ought to set aside occasional spots of open space where our residents and visitors can sit and enjoy themselves as they pause their day’s activities. When I was casting about for an appropriate way to create a memorial to my father ... it occurred to me that to provide one such area in the very center of our greatest city would

be the kind of memorial that would have pleased him most' (Paley – undated). Paley formed the Greenpark Foundation in 1965 to acquire a site close to CBS headquarters and build the park. Construction began on 1 February 1966. The park opened on 23 May 1967.

### *Size and condition of site at time of designation*

The site had been occupied from 1929 to 1965 by the Stork Club – 'one of New York's most legendary nightspots' (Lynn and Morrone 2013: 241). It is 42 feet wide by 100 feet deep (12.8 by 30.5 metres). In line with the Manhattan street grid, it is oriented to the southwest – optimal for sun pocket. Although the sidewalk in front of the park belongs to the City of New York, it is a visual extension of the park.



*Entrance from 53rd Street (October 1999)*



*Twenty-foot/6-metre-high waterfall (November 2011)*

### *Key figures in the establishment of the park*

Paley's father was a Russian immigrant who became a successful cigar merchant. Paley joined his father's company after graduating from Wharton School of Finance at the University of Pennsylvania. He developed an interest in broadcasting after buying advertising time on a Philadelphia radio station. Described as 'fabulously wealthy and notoriously despotic', Paley had an uncanny ability to succeed with projects that others treated more cautiously. This led him, first, to buy an unprofitable chain of radio stations and, later, to invest in TV broadcasting 'when skeptics were denouncing the new medium'. He was 'an intensely private man with patrician tastes' (*Macleans Magazine* 1990: 58).

Robert Zion obtained masters' degrees in business and in landscape architecture from Harvard. In 1957 he went into business with fellow Harvard-trained landscape architect, Harold Breen. Zion's marketing included writing letters to newspaper and magazine editors about the firm's work and an article in the *AIA Journal* about ways to make New York City more habitable – including galleries, parklets and zoolets – ideas that were eventually presented at the Architectural League exhibition in 1963 (Decker 1991: 22). Zion was, by all accounts, as demanding a person as Paley.

## PLANNING AND DESIGN

### *Location*

Paley Park is located 'in the midst of one of the most congested and frenetic parts of midtown Manhattan' (Lynn and Morrone 2013: 240) – a concentrated area of stores, offices and hotels, just the other side of Fifth Avenue from the perennially popular Museum of Modern Art.

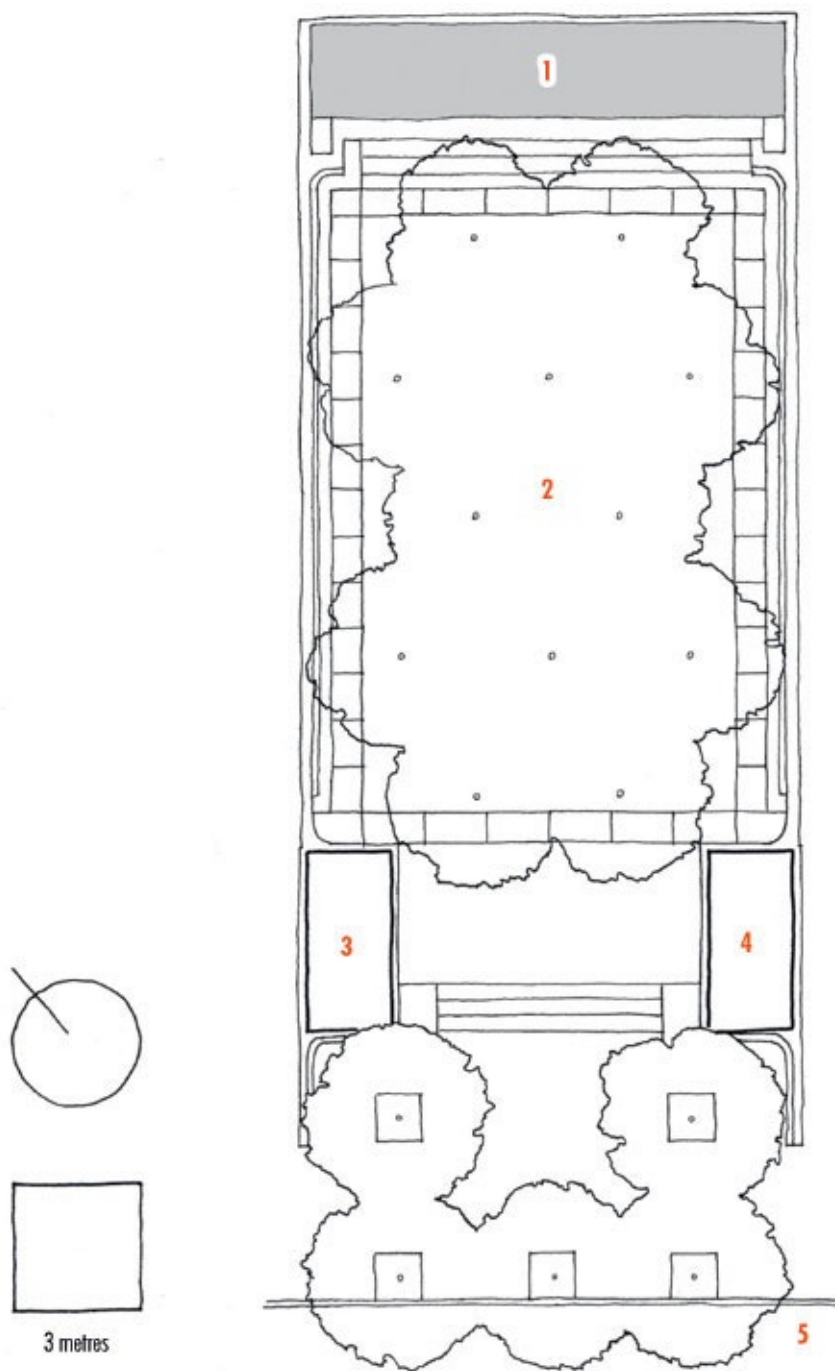
### *Original design concept*

The concept demonstrated at the 1963 exhibition showed a prototype 'based on the concept of a small outdoor room ... with walls, floors and a ceiling' (Zion 1969: 75). It dealt with *size* – as small as 50 by 100 feet; *enclosure* – removed from the flow of traffic and sheltered from noise; *purpose* – for adults to rest; *furniture* – movable, comfortable, individual seats; *materials* – rugged; *walls* – neighbouring buildings, covered with vines; *floor* – with textural interest and pattern; *ceiling* – dense canopy from

trees 12 to 15 feet apart; *waterworks* – bold and simple; *kiosks* – with vending machines or cafés (ibi 76). ‘Food’, as William H. (Holly) Whyte noted, ‘draws people, and they draw more people’ (Whyte 1980: 53).



*Tables and chairs in half of park during building works on other half (May 2013)*



### *Paley Park, New York*

- 1 Waterfall
- 2 Honey Locust Grove
- 3 Gatehouse/Pump Room
- 4 Gatehouse/Kiosk
- 5 East 53rd Street

### *Layout and materials*

The trees in Paley Park – honey locusts – were planted in a 12-foot (3.6 metre) quincunx rather than the square grid shown in the 1963 exhibition. This looser layout, their continuation onto the sidewalk and the long, low steps at the entrance all contribute to the ordered casualness in the park. The shelter from surrounding buildings and the orientation create a comfortable micro-climate, allowing sunshine at lunchtime from spring to fall.<sup>1</sup> But the single most alluring feature in Paley Park is the 20-foot-high (6 metre) waterfall that thunders down the full width of the back wall at the rate of 1,800 gallons (6,800 litres) a minute. The loud but somehow soothing roar dulls the sounds of the surrounding city.

The steps, outer paving and planter walls are stippled pink granite – smooth but not too slick. The central paving is 4-inch (100 millimetre) red-brown granite setts in a square grid – controlled but not too stiff. The sixty movable, white Bertoia-designed wire chairs and twenty white marble-topped tables add to the sense of informality. The mono-specific tree planting and ivy on the walls complement the almost Zen-like restraint of the hard materials. The year-round cycle of herbaceous plants includes yellow tulips each spring.<sup>2</sup>

The renovation in 1999 included replacement of the waterfall pumps and of the underground irrigation system; replacement of all soils and planting (apart from the three honey locusts in the City-owned sidewalk); lifting, cleaning and reinstallation of all hard materials, and replacement of all site furniture. The granite setts were re-used, bedded on concrete and grouted-in, incorporating grilles around the trees.<sup>3</sup> The original cost of the park, including land acquisition, was around \$1 million. The renovation cost around \$700,000.



*Paley Park and 53rd Street from above (October 1999)*

## MANAGEMENT AND USAGE

Paley Park is owned by the Greenpark Foundation and funded by an endowment established under Paley's will. In 2013 the park had three on-site staff. There is virtually no vandalism beyond the occasional theft of flowers. In its early years it was noted that 'since its opening, between 2,000 and 3,000' people visited the park 'every sunny day' (Birnie 1969: 173). Whyte recorded in 1980 that 'the two places people cite as the most pleasing, least crowded in New York – Paley Park and Greenacre Park – are by far and away the most heavily used per square foot' (Whyte 1980: 73). He recorded thirty-five people per 1,000 square feet in Paley Park and concluded that sensitive design increases the carrying capacity of small urban spaces. The current capacity is set at 200 people at any one time. The heaviest use is between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. The park is open twelve hours a day seven days a week but closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Independence Day, and for the month of February.



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