Ken Smith on the Rails in Santa Fe

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THE RAIL WORLD: SANTA FE

Ken Smith reassembles pieces of several pasts in a park where trains crossing the West once met.

By Alex Ulam

Railyard Park + Plaza

is arguably the most significant urban park built in Santa Fe since the Spanish governor Don Pedro de Peralta established the historic Plaza at the center of the city in 1610.
On a blustery December afternoon at Santa Fe’s Railyard Park + Plaza, the landscape architect Ken Smith, ASLA, cuts a striking figure against the reddish earth underfoot and the unobstructed views of the snow-covered Sangre de Cristo mountains on the horizon. The New York City-based landscape architect is attired head to toe in black, wears thick black-rimmed glasses, and has jet-black hair. Walking briskly and speaking fast in a soft voice, he explains how his design for the park relates to Santa Fe’s high-desert environment as well as to the city’s complex cultural heritage: Native American, Spanish Colonial, and Anglo-American.

Smith pauses in front of an agricultural garden in the park and describes the ways it relates to Native American traditions. The garden is called a waffle garden because of its shape, which is formed by raised-up sections of earth that help both to protect underlying amended soil and to retain water, a critical issue in this arid environment. This garden grows traditional Native American crops such as sunflowers, squash, and corn and is fed by the Acequia Madre (Mother Ditch), a 400-year-old irrigation ditch that brings water from the Santa Fe river system via a new ditch that was built for the park called the Acequia Niña. Smith says it is the oldest continually used piece of infrastructure in North America.
Smith is talking about how the garden is used to educate schoolchildren when, almost on cue, a young man named Paul Navort, dressed in a hooded sweatshirt and a bulky jacket, rides up on a BMX bicycle. Navort, it turns out, is a volunteer for the Railyard Stewards, the local friends group for the park. Navort is one of the people who lectures to groups of schoolchildren at the park about environmental issues and New Mexico's agricultural traditions. "We are looking at two pieces of history," says Navort. "An acequia system that comes from the Iberian Peninsula, and that is merged seamlessly with the waffle garden, which is a Zuni [Indian] system."

The waffle gardens and the two acequias are just a few of the unusual landforms you find at Railyard Park + Plaza, which opened in September 2008. Although it is next to a new district of warehouses recently redeveloped as art galleries and stores, and a 15-minute walk from downtown Santa Fe, many people are likely to catch their first glimpse of this park through a car windshield. And certainly, if you didn't know what it was, you could drive by the place without knowing that you were passing what is arguably the most significant park built in Santa Fe since the Spanish governor Don Pedro de Peralta established the historic Plaza at the center of the city in 1610.

The new plaza is a stark-looking paved square, with benches and a few rows of London plane trees, located in the redeveloped warehouse district. Next to the plaza is an active rail track that runs the entire length of the 13-acre park. The track continues across a city street where the main section of the park begins.

This polygonal parcel is flanked on its southeastern edge by Cerrillos Road, a busy four-lane highway that leads from the sprawling outskirts of Santa Fe into the city's historic center. In fact, the sprawl that has overtaken much of Santa Fe begins across Cerrillos Road, where there is an enormous Whole Foods next to a motel.

Santa Fe's new urban oasis announces itself with features that one does not typically find in city parks. Marking several of its boundaries are gabion walls, rocks encased in a wire mesh that are used to control erosion along roadways. This place was once a busy rail yard crisscrossed with the tracks of three major railroads that converged here, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad, the New Mexico Central, and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway. Several tracks remain today, serving both a new commuter train and the Santa Fe Southern Railway, a venture started in the early 1990s that caters mainly to
The pathways through this polygon-shaped site, above, retrace the routes of the former rail tracks. A bosque of cottonwoods planted alongside the Acequia Madre, opposite bottom, shields park visitors from Cerrillos Road, a busy four-lane highway that runs alongside the park. Gabion walls, rocks encased in wire mesh, below, define the borders of the park.

Tourists. But Smith's design commemorates the presence of the many missing rail lines with pathways lined by rows of elm trees and Apache plume trees that retrace their routes. "The by-product of the geometry of this site is that it produces a very untypical circulation system in the park," Smith says. "When you move through the park, it takes you places you don't anticipate going—and you end up discovering things you don't expect."

The unusual objects on display here include many relics left over from the rail yard's heyday as a transportation hub, such as rusting old rail axles and wheels. Some of the park's contemporary furnishings also pay homage to the site's industrial history, such as the benches made of thick wood blocks that look like rail ties with gray metal-mesh seats affixed on top. The signature structure at the park's plazas is a 3,500-gallon working wood-barrel water tower, which collects rainwater to irrigate the park. Underneath the barrel is a map of Santa Fe's watershed etched into the paving. Although it is a new structure, the water barrel was built to the dimensions of a former one that was located in the rail yard.

In keeping with the strict conservation ethos of the design, most of the plants here are xeric or drought tolerant with the subtle hues and the relatively small flowers typically found in the high desert environment, such as New Mexico privet and chamisa. In several strategically located places, there are flowers from more lush environs, including the roses and irises that have become part of Santa Fe's horticultural traditions. Turfgrass, which also consumes too much water for such an arid climate, is found only in several small picnic areas and on a slope toward the center of the park that serves as an amphitheater.

Although here, too, designers have worked to achieve further reductions in water usage through the use of Albuquerque Park Turf Blend, a special mix developed for the northern part of the state. Most of the ground is covered with even more sustainable material such as crusher fines, a small-grained form of crushed stone, or the striking reddish brown soil that predominates throughout this region.

Railyard Park + Plaza, which Smith designed in conjunction with the architect Frederic Schwartz and the artist Mary Miss, both of whom also hail from New York City, challenges Santa Fe residents
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The Railyard Park gives Santa Fe a new way to see its history and its environment.

and visitors to look at the city's history and its environment in new ways. This park stands in marked contrast to Santa Fe's historic Plaza, with its manicured lawns, wrought-iron benches in a Victorian style, and 19th-century representational statuary that commemorates Anglo pioneer trails and victories over Native Americans and the Confederacy. And although Railyard Park features walls and planters in the typical natural adobe color found throughout Santa Fe, it represents a major break from the Pueblo-Spanish Revival style that has been strangling the local architectural scene for the past century. History is not gussied up here; artifacts from the past are showcased, but the design is firmly grounded in a contemporary idiom of landscape architecture. Smith and his team have developed a wide variety of innovative water harvesting systems to make this park more sustainable, but most significant, they actually made this infrastructure into compelling aesthetic elements of their design.

Until the redevelopment of the rail yard, Santa Fe's cityscape, for the most part, was oriented toward a past that never was. In the 19th century, prominent architecture in the city's downtown emulated classical European styles even though it was built out of adobe, the mud-based building material that Native Americans of the Southwest used to construct their dwellings. But in the 1920s, as is recounted in the Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition by Chris Wilson, when the city's fortunes were on the wane, some prominent citizens, mostly immigrant Anglos, sought to repurpose Santa Fe as a tourist destination. Part of this campaign involved the development of the Territorial Revival style, a western interpretation of the Greek Revival style, and Pueblo-Spanish Revival style, a mishmash of Native American, Spanish Colonial, and Mission features.

Many of the custom-made fixtures throughout the park are made from glue-laminated wood, a material that was economical to use and that also provided the park with a modern aspect. The epicenter of this historicist whitewashing was Santa Fe's historic Plaza, which was a dusty expanse until it was planted in the middle of the 19th century. Buildings around the Plaza were scraped clean of any architectural details that did not conform to the new historicist fantasy vision and replaced with natural-colored adobe walls, casement windows, and exposed nonstructural vigas (heavy log rafters).

The makeover of Santa Fe was more successful than anyone could have imagined. Tourists and romantics from the East Coast and the West Coast flocked here. The historicist revisions continued through the latter part of the 20th century, and in the 1950s, the Santa Fe style, which encompassed both the Territorial Revival and the Pueblo-Spanish Revival, was written into town ordinances. Later, in the 1980s, officials with the Santa Fe Historic Design Review Board became concerned that the city's downtown might be in danger of losing its National Historic Landmark status because such a large number of buildings
Ken Smith designed the spaces for multiple rather than singular uses.

"And this is where the idea for a second plaza comes in."

After several delays, a new master plan was finally completed for the rail yard by the landscape architecture firm Design Workshop in 2002. That plan, which became the template for Smith's work, called for splitting up the 50-acre rail yard into a 37-acre mixed-use site and a separate 13-acre area set aside for open space. TPL was put in charge of designing, planning, and funding the park.

As the first of a series of new large urban parks that TPL has undertaken (later projects include the nine-acre Nat Turner Park in Newark, New Jersey, and the four-acre Visitacion Park in San Francisco), Rail Yard Park marked a new direction for the organization, which, until recently, has been mostly focused on wilderness areas and community gardens. "This was an underserved area," says Jenny Park, the former director of TPL's New Mexico office, which raised most of the funds to build the park.

Its cost, $14 million, makes it the most expensive project that the organization has ever built. "There is really no one else who can go in and help a community raise money and build parks," Parks says. "It really feeds right into our mission."

For many contemporary public-private partnerships that undertake urban revitalization projects, the same entity develops both the parkland and the commercial areas. Such arrangements often compromise the quality of the public spaces, given that the same organization controlling the park is also acting as a development agency. However, at the rail yard, TPL oversaw the design process in the area designated for park development, and another nonprofit, the Santa Fe Rail Yard Community Corporation, oversaw a separate design process for the area slated to become commercial development.

Smith's team was chosen from a group of four finalists in a two-stage competition for the park, which included other prominent firms such as Margie Rudnick Landscape, Tom Leiders Studio, and Site Environmental Design. Padilla, who also served on the competition jury, says that Smith's team won by presenting a design grounded in the modern era that was also sensitive to Santa Fe's history. "It is very easy for people to come in here and say, 'I am sick of adobe and brown,'" she says. "And to Ken and Fred's credit, I think they understood that people's interest in history is real, not hokey, and they took that and respected it."

Although there is not much landscape architecture in the mixed-use commercial area that was developed by the Santa Fe Rail Yard Community Corporation, one can see the different approach that prevailed there. In that area, the historicist lamp poles are similar in style to the ones that have been approved by city authorities for use in the city's historic district. The fixation on retro-style street furnishings in the mixed-use area is all the more incongruous against the architecture of
Aside from the site's geographical peculiarities, the biggest challenge the designers faced with Railyard Park Plaza was building an environmentally sustainable park in a high desert area. That issue was particularly critical in Santa Fe, where there is a powerful community of environmentalists who critiqued many aspects of the design.

There was even a vocal constituency that passionately advocated on behalf of the hundreds of prairie dogs that inhabited the railroad. To make way for the construction of the park, 367 of these rodents were removed from the railroad yards using humane flushing and live trapping methods and relocated to Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge in central New Mexico.

But Santa Fe's arid climate was the main environmental issue. "In 2002 there was a severe drought and people were pretty freaked out about opening a park with lots of plants and trees," says Carmella Padilla, a board member for the Railyard Stewards, who adds that the potential stresses that building the park would place on Santa Fe's water supply led to some soul-searching on her part. When the day actually approached to plant the trees, Padilla told her father: "I don't know whether we made the right decision—there are a lot of trees," she recalls. Today, Padilla says she is fielding complaints that there are not enough trees in the park.

To reduce water consumption, Ken Smith's team introduced contemporary landscape forms such as rain gardens and contemporary materials such as porous pavement—only the second time the product has been used in Santa Fe. They also revived centuries-old techniques that people in the Southwest have used to adapt to their arid environment. Many of these methods were learned by studying the ways local gardeners coped with water scarcity.

"If you go to people's homes, you'll see that they create depressions in their gardens and little swales," says Smith. "They will use rocks and shrubs as ground cover and they have rain barrels hooked up to gutters in their garages—so we were basically taking very local and traditional practices and using them on a larger scale."

The most traditional practice that the design team used was the acequia system of irrigation ditches that provides a portion of the water used by the park. The original Spanish settlers who came to this area built the ditch that brings water from the Santa Fe River system. Throughout the years, acequias played a significant role in New Mexican cultural life. The associations of parciantes (holders of water rights) that maintain the acequias are entitled to the water that comes out of them. For example, as one of the 43 parciantes for the Acequia Madre, Railyard Park is entitled to about a tenth of an acre's worth of water rights from the ditch. The acequia associations have political standing and function like mini-utilities headed by commissions that are elected by the parciantes, who hold one vote per acre of irrigated land that they own.

However, as a result of several dams built over the past century and the conversion of agricultural land to suburban sprawl development, the role of these associations in
had been so completely altered to conform to the Old Santa Fe style. The view that Santa Fe’s cityscape has lost connection with its actual history continues today, and it was a significant influence on the designers of Rail Yard Park. “There is a feeling that downtown Santa Fe had almost become a caricature of itself,” says Schwartz, who designed most of the park’s structures.

However, in spite of questions about its “authenticity,” the city did not lose its allure for many visitors as a cultural touchstone of the Old West. In 1980, Esquire put Santa Fe on its cover, spurring a new wave of well-heeled immigrants and tourists.

By the 1980s, Hispanics, who had constituted a majority since the days when the conquistadors built the city, were actually on their way to minority status, which they obtained in the early 1990s. The downtown was taken over by shops and restaurants that catered to tourists. The social hub for many people moved to the rail yard, a place where locals have memories of picking wild lettuce and swimming in the acequia. But as the city started experiencing growing pains, the city’s power brokers set their sights on the rail yard, which was the last large undeveloped property near the center of the city.

In 1987, the New Mexico office of Trust for Public Land (TPL), a conservation group, approached Sam Pick, then mayor of Santa Fe, to encourage the mayor to buy the rail yard with the objective of setting aside part of the site as open space. However, Pick had a different agenda, and he commissioned a master plan with the objective of redeveloping the rail yard site as a convention center. Several years later, the Catellus Development Corporation, the development arm of the railroad that owned the yard, came out with its own plan, which called for hotels, office buildings, and tourist-oriented facilities. Some of the buildings would have been six stories, which would have qualified them as skyscrapers in this tightly regulated town. The neighboring communities, which included the Guadalupe District, one of the oldest Hispanic neighborhoods in the city, went into an uproar over the proposed projects and filed lawsuits to stop the proposed developments.

However, it was not until almost a decade later, in 1995, when Debbie Jaramillo, one of the original community activists who fought the Catellus plan, became mayor, that the city, in partnership with TPL, finally purchased the rail yard for $21 million. In the following years, the largest community design process in Santa Fe’s history was launched by local groups in conjunction with TPL and the American Institute of Architects’ Regional Urban Design Assistance Team program. Seven hundred residents showed up at an initial meeting to hammer out a vision for the rail yard’s future. The themes that emerged from the public outreach sessions were the community’s desire for an arts and culture district, protection for local businesses, and preservation of the gritty atmosphere of the rail yards. Many residents also expressed a desire for a new plaza. “People felt that the old plaza wasn’t for locals anymore,” says Carmella Padilla, who is on the Rail Yard Stewards board of directors.

the community has diminished. Today, the Acequia Madre reportedly is one of only four acequias in Santa Fe that remain in operation.

To restore the acequia and incorporate it into the design, Smith’s team reinforced its edges with stones, built bridges across it, and removed the culvert that had covered a section of it. Along the acequia, cottonwoods planted by Smith’s team provide the ditch with a bucolic atmosphere. And it is something of an escape from the city—were it not for the noise of the traffic on the nearby Cerillos Road.

The designers also obtained water rights from the owners of the various art galleries and stores abutting the park and built an elaborate water-harvesting system to collect rainwater from the large roofs of the enormous warehouse-style buildings. On a rainy day, or when the snow is melting, you can see and hear this system in operation. Underneath the ramada next to the rail tracks, water flows through metal drainage pipes that descend from the roofs of warehouses and gushes down into stainless steel metal gates. On the other side of the covered walkway, gutters extend out with little spigots, from which water falls several dozen feet to ground-level drains. Much of this water ends up in underground storage tanks situated at the northern end of the park, where it is used to irrigate the park. Brian Drypochter, TPL’s former project director for Rail Yard Park, jokes that the park has turned into its own self-contained utility; the water harvesting system could potentially supply a third of the park’s water budget, once the various new plants reach maturity and the water usage can be reduced.

More than 400 trees have been planted throughout the park, including xeric plants such as junipers and Ponderosa pine. However, the Southwest’s harsh climate can be unforgiving even for drought-tolerant trees. One of the major impediments to building a park at the rail yard was the layer of lime called caliche, which often is situated several feet underground and forms a rock-hard subsoil that makes drainage nearly impossible. To fix this problem, 400 holes with a one-foot diameter were drilled, making the site into what is, in effect, a giant colander. Amended soil was added into the six-foot-deep holes to create a more hospitable environment for plants.

To keep water from running off into the surrounding streets, the entire park was graded to create depressions that serve as rain gardens during storms. “If you drive by after a big rain, you will see standing water out in this open field,” Drypochter says. “I am sure that there are people who go by and say, ‘I am sure they didn’t get that right—look at all of those icky puddles.’ Of course, these are gone after a couple of days, and meanwhile, they have hydrated our grove of pine trees and our cottonwoods.”
contemporary-styled warehouse buildings that have been renovated into art galleries and stores, with industrial corrugated steel and large, unarticulated expanses of glass.

It is interesting that the Railyard Corporation attempted to get Smith’s team to use the retro light pole fixtures. “They actually tried to convince us that we should use their fixtures,” says Smith. “But we didn’t want to,” he says, adding that “they had to pick a light pole, and I think it is kind of symptomatic of how a lot of agencies work—they wanted something that fit the historic district.”

In contrast to the section of the rail yard developed by the Railyard Corporation, the lamp poles in Smith’s section of the park are made of laminated wood and tapered at the top with lamps that provide dark-sky-compliant lighting. As with the park’s other furnishings, these lamp poles speak to the rail yard’s history, but not in a literal way. They have a warehouse-industrial look, but they also have a contemporary architectural quality to them. The design philosophy was to “do things that look like they fit into a working rail yard,” says Brian Drypolcher, who served as TPL’s project director for Railyard Park. “But that doesn’t mean that all of the bridges have to look like rail yard trestles.”

However, respecting the city’s history while introducing a new aesthetic was a delicate balancing act. And with its industrial overtones, Railyard Park presented a big departure from what many people in Santa Fe were used to. “Ken Smith designs this park with linear features, and a lot of people in town freak out,” Drypolcher says. Another paradigm shift for some people was the gabion walls. “It is something that engineers use to fix something that is
The Santa Fe Rail Trail is a pedestrian and cycling path that runs through the park, connecting it to the rest of the city.

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the remaining train tracks and several side streets that run through Railyard Park and don’t get much foot traffic. If a stalled multiplex theater project directly across the train tracks gets off the ground, that might improve prospects somewhat for enlivening the plaza and creating a more viable competitor to the historic Plaza downtown.

However, overall, Railyard Park is stitching the city back together. Even on a chilly winter’s day, you can see some people walking along the pathways on excursions to and from the neighborhoods located to the east and west. And along Guadalupe Street, which abuts the park, there are many more shops and restaurants than was the case when Smith’s team began work here eight years ago. In the years to come, with the increasing density of businesses growing up in and around Railyard Park, many more people who once drove past the park to get from one side of town to the other undoubtedly will be leaving their cars at home, using the park as a crossroads, and discovering new ways to connect with both their future and their past.

It may take a while for some Santa Fe residents to get used to it, but Railyard Park + Plaza certainly hits most of the right notes for a 21st-century urban open space. The design is sensitive to Santa Fe’s history and to the region’s ecology. In this park there is no doubt about which elements are from the past and which ones are from the present. The various water-saving technologies are exposed and serve as inspiring design elements. Most important, the designers have created a park with a real “sense of place” in a city where much of the downtown has been Disneyfied and much of the rest of the city has been overtaken by suburban sprawl.

There are indications that many Santa Fe residents are already reexamining their history as a result of the design of the park. Smith recounts the public debate during the design process over the walkway system that was designed for the park based on the routes of the original rail tracks. Many people were opposed to the extreme linearity of the walkways, preferring instead the winding lanes emphasized in the Old Santa Fe style. But Smith was reassured about the direction of his design after he read “A Brief History of Lines,” an essay about the use of wiggly lines and straight lines in New Mexico cultural traditions. He also had several illuminating conversations with the essay’s author, Stanley Crawford, who is one of the founders of the farmers’ market at the park. “People were saying that straight lines were not very northern New Mexican, and Stanley said they [the straight lines] were just fine,” says Smith, adding, “We were trying to make the point that the cultural history of the railroad was in those lines, and that to actually erase that structure would be to erase the history of the site and to impose some other history on it.”

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bad," he says. "I like it. But I can understand why some people wouldn't."

Indeed, some of the very people who were instrumental in getting the rail yard set aside for the creation of the park are ambivalent about the design. "It is a nice enough park," says Jaramillo. "But it is not utilized by, for lack of a better term, the old-timer local families. My initial reaction to it was like, wow, this is different... It is just not the warm feel that I would have expected, and yet they did leave some historical amenities in it, like keeping the acequia alive. And they didn't trash it with artificial turfgrass or something like that—it is a very natural-looking park."

As with many former industrial sites that have been made into public parks, a major challenge for TPL and the designers was how to attract visitors. Rail Yard Park is located near the city's downtown, but at the time it was being planned, many of the streets around the park had no retail shops and were more oriented toward accommodating cars than pedestrians. Another geographic challenge was Paseo De Peralta, a major thoroughfare that slices through the site, leaving the northern 10-acre section of the park cut off from the more accessible three-acre section, which abuts the new commercial area. To provide better connectivity, the designers built an alameda (public promenade) that runs alongside the active rail track. In the northern section, the alameda is covered by a shade structure that is built out of the same laminated wood that is used in the park's lampposts and benches.

es, a move meant to unify the park's design vocabulary and also to reinforce its contemporary aspect. The 375-foot-long structure in the northern mixed-use district provides shade for the Santa Fe Farmers' Market. Another striking walkway within the park is covered by a ramada, a traditional shade structure used widely in the Southwest. This 800-foot-long ramada has metal wires running overhead that eventually will be covered with trumpet vines.

TPL also is responsible for enforcing a conservation easement for the area of the rail yard covered by the park. The easement protects the place's natural aspect and keeps it from becoming commercialized with the touristy types of crafts fairs that have overtaken many centrally located urban parks throughout the country. There are limits on how much of the park should be paved, on how much of it can be used for children's play areas, and on the number and types of large activities that can be held there. "People did not want to see it become like the Plaza, where every week there is some kind of crafts fair on it," says Parks. "And it is really challenging, because there is a lot of pressure to move these things into the park."

However, the easement's restrictions also meant that the designers had to come up with innovative ways to make the park hospitable to the types of gatherings that TPL wants to encourage, such as community festivals and popular events like All Species Day, Santa Fe's annual Earth Day celebration.

"The park is really geared toward spaces that serve multiple uses rather than single ones," Smith says. "So we have spaces like the gravel field in the middle of the park that was sized for the All Species Parade, but it also works for small events." Another area that has multiple purposes is the sloping green lawn that serves as an amphitheater. It can hold several thousand people, which makes it one of the two largest outdoor performance venues in the downtown area. At the bottom of the slope, electrical infrastructure enables a temporary stage to be rolled in for a performance.

One of the few areas set aside for a specific use is the children's playground area. Playgrounds often are fenced-off little worlds within public parks that interrupt the larger rhythm of a design. But here, although there is some fencing, the play-
ground's primary boundaries are landscape forms—raised earth and stone embankments, as well as a rounded concrete wall of adobe-colored cement with setbacks for seating. Much of the children's play equipment is literally built into the landscape.

There are a pile of boulders for children to scramble upon and slides made of Corian that are embedded in a hill of artificial stone. A tunnel beneath the hill leads to a rock-climbing wall for older children on the other side. Mary Miss, who developed the design for many of the playground's features, says the idea "was not to put the generic play equipment out there." Rather, she says, "I was trying to engage kids with this place, this landscape."

Although the main section of the park succeeds in serving as a slice of nature in the city, the new plaza at the northern end of the park does not work as well. The objective was to build a new social place that would offer an alternative to the bustling Plaza downtown. There are striking design elements, such as the water tower and the railroad tie benches, but the place lacks the mix of uses and the foot traffic necessary to activate a "plaza." Further, there are not enough trees or shade structures to encourage lingering in the space. Part of the problem is its location in an area dominated by former warehouse buildings with large footprints that discourage the mix of businesses necessary for building a vibrant neighborhood. Traditionally, plazas are surrounded on four sides and are defined by streets and buildings that have a variety of uses. Currently, though, the only operation that provides a steady stream of visitors to Railyard Park's plaza is a very large building that serves as an indoor farmers' market. The plaza's other boundaries face onto

Instead of being a fenced-off little world unto itself, as is the case with so many urban playgrounds, the one at Railyard Park, top, blends with the surrounding landscape. The playground area, above, is designed to engage children with the landscape. In the foreground are a labyrinth, a rockery, and a stepped amphitheater. In the background are an embankment with slides made of Corian and a tunnel that leads to a rock climbing wall.