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## Places

### Title

Riverfront Redevelopment [Thread]

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1n06f99t>

### Journal

Places, 19(3)

### ISSN

0731-0455

### Author

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### Publication Date

2007-10-15

Peer reviewed

# Riverfront Redevelopment

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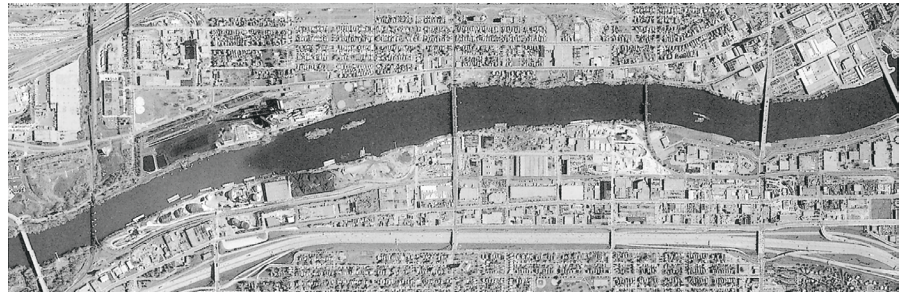
“Understanding how environments inhabit people, rather than the other way around, remains a difficult subject.... Rivers in particular enter deeply into our minds and lives, making our depictions of them impossible to fully rationalize.”

So writes Jamie Horwitz in a review of *Mississippi Floods: Designing a Shifting Landscape*, a book by Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha that received an EDRA/*Places* award for research in 2001. A collection of *Places* articles on riverfront redevelopment not only informs efforts to revive the urban waterfront, it also demonstrates the value of dissimilar perspectives and approaches.

A good place to begin is Ken Greenberg’s article in the Summer 2007 issue, which presents the riverfront redevelopment of Saint Paul, Minnesota, as evidence that this is “A Good Time for Cities.” One reason may be that cities from Chattanooga to Kalamazoo are attending to their riverfronts with fresh eyes, discovering the particularities that lend themselves to distinctive place-making. To make such places requires thinking along several lines at once: geological, technical, historical, economic, and (not least) institutional. Greenberg describes, for example, the role of the Saint Paul Design Center, as a place where city staff could discuss design issues outside formal channels.

Likewise, of the Minneapolis plan “Above the Falls,” winner of a 2001 EDRA/*Places* planning award, an article observes how “the path to implementation...has allowed for quick, opportunistic actions, mostly initiated by the private sector, while longer-term, public arrangements for infrastructure and regulatory frameworks are still falling into place.”

In describing a 2002 EDRA/*Places* design award winner, Pittsburgh’s



Allegheny Riverfront Park, David Moffat explains how technical expertise was harnessed in the service of poetic experience. About the project, designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, the juror Louise Mozingo marvels, “Talk about making a silk purse out of a sow’s ear. There are two tiers of roadway with 250 feet to the edge of the water, an enormous grade change, all concrete; no remnant habitat that you can work from.... This is significant place-making in an incredibly difficult urban condition.”

In almost all American river cities, the riverfront has long been a sequestered industrial zone. How to transform a degraded working landscape into a meaningful civic one? We might look to a riverfront historically devoted to culture, like that of Agra, traced in Terence Harkness and Amita Sinha’s “Taj Heritage Corridor: Intersections between History and Culture on the Yamuna Riverfront.”

A different sort of thought exercise is provided by Mark Anderson’s review of *Delta Primer: A Field Guide to the California Delta*, Jane Wolff’s book and deck of playing cards crafted to explain the intricate contradictions of California’s Sacramento and San Joaquin River Delta. As Anderson observes, “The systems here are so complex, the knowledge so incomplete, and the players often so disconnected from the big picture that the chance readings and incomplete

vignettes dealt out in a game of cards are perhaps more effective than any comprehensive explanatory text.”

*Places*’ editor, Donlyn Lyndon, has written, “The most pressing challenge for designers is to learn to see and think with appropriate complexity.” *Places* on the riverfront offers access to that complexity.

## Articles

Ken Greenberg, “A Good Time for Cities,” *Places*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 4–11.

Jamie Horwitz, review of award to *Mississippi Floods: Designing a Shifting Landscape*, *Places*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall 2002), pp. 42–45.

David Moffat, review of award to Allegheny Riverfront Park, Pittsburgh, *Places*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall 2002), pp. 10–13.

“Above the Falls, Minneapolis, Minnesota,” *Places*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall 2002), pp. 26–29.

Terence Harkness and Amita Sinha, “Taj Heritage Corridor: Intersections between History and Culture on the Yamuna Riverfront,” *Places*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 62–69.

Mark Anderson, review of *Delta Primer: A Field Guide to the California Delta*, *Places*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 54–61.

Written in conjunction with the AIA Committee on Design Minneapolis conference, this thread discusses articles available from the *Places* online archive at [www.places-journal.org](http://www.places-journal.org)

**Above:** Aerial view of “Above the Falls” planning area in Minneapolis. Photo courtesy of URS/BRW, Wallace, Roberts & Todd.