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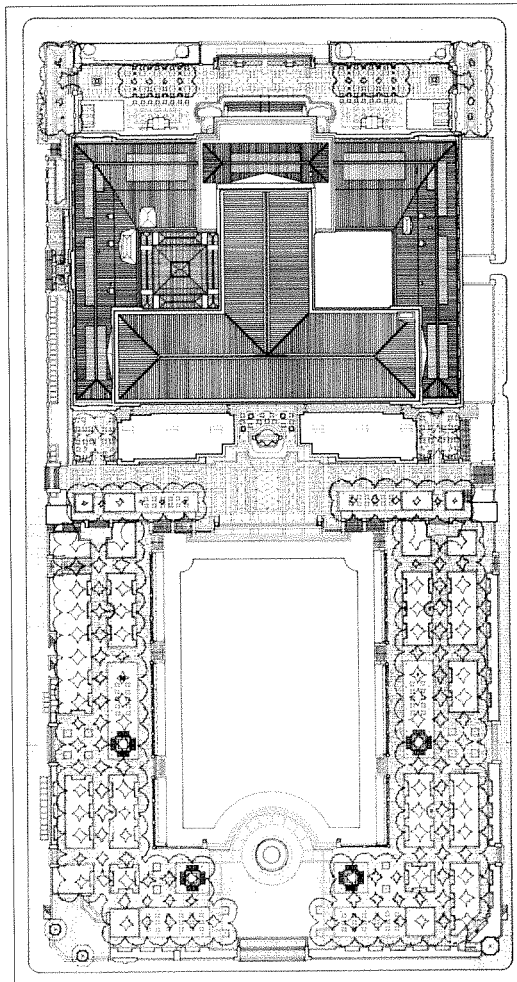
Submitted by Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, New York



Bryant Park's restoration is one of the most dramatic and best-known transformations of an American public space in this decade. The project, first dreamed of nearly twenty years ago, involved the redesign of the park, the restoration of amenities like fountains and rest rooms, the addition of new restaurants and food kiosks and the addition of two underground levels of stack space for the adjacent New York Public Library. What it amounted to was something more: the civic reoccupation of a crime-ridden, largely abandoned, yet historic park; a vivid statement that public space can continue to play a vital role in urban communities.

The basic goal of the \$18 million project was to make the five-acre park accessible and inviting to the millions of people who visit and work in midtown New York. That meant increasing visibility and access into the park, and improving and clarifying circulation within it. It meant adding amenities, from rest rooms to restaurants to 2,000 movable chairs. Many of the design decisions were based on research into user behavior in the park or on the accumulated experience about how people use public spaces in New York City in general — much of it generated by William H. Whyte and his successors.

In the decades before work began, the park had deteriorated into a haven for drug dealers and vagrants and was, therefore, underutilized by the general public. Despite its prominent midtown location, its proximity to many offices and attractions, and its elegant 1934 design, it fostered poor circulation and provided hidden areas conducive to criminal activity.



facing page: **Bryant Park on a sunny day.**

Photo: Paul Warchol

left: **Bryant Park after it reopened in 1992.**

Photo: F. Charles

right: **Historic view of Bryant Park**

right bottom: **Bryant Park master plan**

The park's restoration reinforces the basic elements of its 1934 design (the original park, designed in 1871, followed Victorian conventions; Robert Moses' 1934 redesign reached to the Beaux Arts tradition) — raised terraces, paved with bluestone and planted with bosques of trees, surrounding a great lawn. Adjustments to the composition included creating greater access (increasing the number of entrances from six to ten), providing ramps that provide access to all areas of the Park and offering six new informal seating areas. (Early plans for the restoration had proposed building steps all around the edge of the park, letting it meld with the street, but various groups objected.)



The Bryant Park Grill, a restaurant constructed along the west facade of the New York Public Library as part of the park renovation.

Photos: Elliot Kaugman, Paul Warchol



The redevelopment is anchored by two symmetrical 5,250 square-foot restaurant pavilions (one has already been built and the other is planned for future development) on the west terrace of the New York Public Library, and by four food kiosks at the edges of the park.

The new buildings were conceived in the decorative tradition of Parisian parks, a tradition to which the Moses redesign of Bryant Park belongs. These elegant, small-scale structures nestle in the trees, creating intimate pedestrian nodes within the larger park and helping to insure the park's active and safe year-round use. Outdoor seating for the restaurants overlooks the street beside both restaurant pavilions. Public seating in the park has been increased, with new seating added across from the restaurants and near the kiosks.

Night lighting was an integral part of the design; it helps recognize aspects of the park's formal French design while paying homage to its rich history of ornamental perimeter street lighting. The return to white light from the formerly all-pervasive yellow glow of standard city street lights created a special library-park precinct and contributed to park safety and neighborhood renewal. New fixtures were fabricated according to historic designs (the original fixtures had been created specifically for Bryant Park by Carrere and Hastings, architects for the library) and existing fixtures were restored.

Significant architectural details (such as the balustrade surrounding the green, the Lowell Fountains and the Bryant Monument) are softly accentuated with light. The west facade of the library is also gently washed with light to enhance its sculptural mass and distinguish its basic composition. The restaurant and kiosks are lit from within so that their layered qualities are maintained and they appear inviting and active when seen from the street.

A remarkable aspect of the redesign was the deployment of some 2,000 movable chairs that "turn the

lawn, a more contained and elegant version of Central Park's Great Lawn, into a theater of shifting stage sets," observer Gianni Longo has written. This step, recommended by Whyte, had been tried in other New York City public spaces with great success. "They make the user sort of a park planner because the user has to decide where to sit. Most of the time [people] don't move them more than a few feet, but somehow it's a declaration of independence," Whyte has said. The green chairs have become a familiar icon of the park, perhaps the most familiar.

A critical element of the restoration was the creation of the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, a business improvement district funded through extra tax assessments on nearby landowners, to oversee the construction and the management of the restored park. Although the role of the private sector in raising funds for rebuilding and operating the park has been controversial — viewed alternately as an abdication of public responsibility or a model that offers little to areas of the city that lack a strong economic base — BPRC has been critical in focusing and sustaining attention on the park.

The primary testament to the success of the restoration of Bryant Park is the number of people who now visit this urban space. Just as significantly, in 1979, the percentage of users that were female had fallen to less than a third, according to a study by Project for Public Spaces. In 1995, after the renovation, forty-three percent of the users were women. Crime has dropped dramatically, from some 170 robberies a year in the 1970s to just a handful since the park was reopened.

The park's success has also spawned a host of new events that demonstrate it is being integrated into the civic life of the city. The Bryant Park Movie Series, held on Monday nights throughout the summer months, regularly attracts crowds of more than 15,000 people. For several years, the fashion industry (based in the nearby Garment District) staged spring and fall fashion shows, and the park is sometimes a locale for "First Night" events on New Year's Eve.

Also, the park has spurred New York to greater challenges in revitalizing its public landscape. Shortly after it reopened, philanthropist challenged BPRC to add public toilets and pledged funds to make it happen. The success of Bryant Park's restored restrooms, in turn, encouraged the city to seek contracts for placing public toilets on streets throughout the city.



Jury Comments:

Donlyn Lyndon: This is an example of a great public space, the design of which was informed by a lot of research about how people use public spaces. The project was to take this important place in the city and transform it — in some ways big, in some ways small, to make it much more usable and accessible by the city.

One of the things that's interesting is the addition of uses and of structures to support those uses. Instead of being timid and afraid and taking the position that to create something other than the park would be bad, they have added new forms. Whether or not one likes the specific forms that have been taken, which is a very difficult problem, the fact that those forms have been made, and have been made as things which support the use of the place, seems to me very good.

Samina Quraeshi: The balance of programming, design, lighting and research, which is difficult to achieve, because there is always one taking the primary place, contributes to the success of the endeavor; that balance is something important to inform other work that might happen. The amount of energy that was put into programming beyond the design is a very important balancing device. This supports what Donlyn was saying about how the creation of non-timid structures supports the programming.

Gary Hack: The fundamental idea that the designers of this project took from William H. Whyte, that is,

turning the Olmstead Park inside out, putting the visible activity in the perimeter and programmed activity in the center, this is the tangible example of how public spaces in today's cities have to be thought about. This project has informed dozens of parks throughout the country.

Lawrence Halprin: Commenting as a former New Yorker, I am in agreement with everything the jury is saying. At one time Fifth Avenue was the most elegant boulevard in our country; it no longer is. When I was there, Fifth Avenue was the front, and this was the backyard. It did not mean anything to anybody. Now all of a sudden, they've made this a front yard. The front yard — back yard dynamic has shifted. That is what is important about it.

Mark Francis: An important thing about recognizing Bryant Park is to give credit to the research that's been done. I was teaching across the street [at the City University of New York Graduate Center] when they did the research. There were two doctoral students in environmental psychology, Wally Wentworth and Nita Nager, who did a study of Bryant Park in 1974. Their major finding was that the problem with the park was that there was this edge, and this fence, and this screen of vegetation that created the environment for drug-dealing; and they said remove that. And that's essentially what has been done.

Kiosks constructed in the west end of the park.

Photo: Chris Lovi