

Urban Parks and Open Space

An aerial photograph of a vibrant urban park. In the center, a circular fountain with a glass top sits on a reddish-brown paved plaza. Surrounding the fountain is a large, lush green lawn where many people are sitting, walking, and playing. To the right, a large white metal grid structure, possibly a playground or seating area, is visible. The park is bordered by dense green trees and a brick path.

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The New York Public Library has graced Fifth Avenue since it was built in 1911, serving as a beacon of civility to users and passersby. Directly behind the grand beaux-arts structure is Bryant Park, which by 1980 had become a haven for drug dealers (“Needle Park”) and an area studiously avoided by others. Everything about the design of Bryant Park made it easy for criminals to conduct their business there. Raised above sidewalk level, the park had protective shrubs and a tall iron fence surrounding the outer rim, and could be entered only through a few narrow gateways. Furthermore, the park was subdivided by more shrubs, bushes, and cul-de-sac, creating what should have been intimate, secluded spots

for visitors in search of calm. Instead, drug dealers were delighted at the ease with which they could conduct their business.

But in 1980, a neighborhood and city effort began transforming the park through an innovative private management and financing program and the establishment of a business improvement district (BID). Bryant Park, formerly a dangerous eyesore, eventually became the anchor for a larger effort to revitalize midtown Manhattan, and a model for park management and restoration around the country. Drug dealers and muggers have been replaced by workers from nearby buildings who enjoy lunch in the sun while sipping latté, listening to music, and moving their chairs from time to time to catch the most rays. Located between Fifth and Sixth Avenues and West 42nd and West 40th Streets, this award-winning park is now the venue for outdoor movies, jazz performances, fashion shows, a complex and wonderful urban garden, and restaurants and concessions that help keep Bryant Park the glistening but friendly showcase of Midtown.

The Rise, Fall, and Long Rebirth of a Park

First laid out as a potter's field in 1823, the site that is now Bryant Park was developed as a park in 1847, when it was named Reservoir Square—after the city reservoir that was constructed on the site now occupied by the public library. With the construction of the large reservoir in Central Park, the Bryant Park reservoir became obsolete and was drained in 1899 to make room for construction of the library. In between, from 1853 to 1858, the Crystal Palace stood on the park site. Built for the World's Fair, the palace remained as exhibition space until it burned to the ground in 1858. A new park was then erected in the style of an English square. In the meantime, by 1911, the New York Public Library, designed by Carrère and Hastings, had been built on the east end of the park.

In 1884 Bryant Park was named after poet William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), who was a proponent of parks. As editor of the *New York Post* for 50 years, Bryant pushed hard for the city to create a large urban park, which later became Central Park.

Bryant Park remained as it was until 1934, when Robert Moses took over as head of the parks department in New York City and made the refurbishment of Bryant Park one of his first big efforts.



Olin Partnership



Olin Partnership

Before the restoration, Bryant Park was poorly maintained, and shrubs grew up against the iron fence surrounding the park, making it relatively easy to hide “Needle Park’s” flourishing drug trade.

Moses held a design competition and chose the design submitted by Lusby Simpson, an out-of-work draftsman. The parks department built the project using labor from one of its make-work programs. Gilmore Clark, the architect of record, did the final construction documents and ultimately won an award from the American Society of Landscape Architects for the six-acre park.

Until the 1930s redesign, the park was on grade with the sidewalk, but Moses took material from the construction of the Sixth Avenue subway and used it for fill, raising the level of the park. Some would argue that the raised level of the park was the first element that contributed to the park’s decline.

Problems with the park began as early as the 1930s, but the park began its dramatic decline in the late 1960s, and for the next 20 years, Bryant Park was relatively ignored by leisure-time users, even though efforts were made to bring music and other activities into the park to encourage lunchtime visitors.

The park might have continued to decline, and concerned citizens and park officials might have continued to wring their hands indefinitely, had it not been for a comparable decline in the structure that housed the library. Years of deferred maintenance had left their mark, and in the late seventies, when the Rockefeller Brothers Fund began to consider contributing money to renovate the library, the fund concluded that the library renovations should proceed only if the park’s problems and derelict condition were dealt with.

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund turned to William “Holly” Whyte, the eminent author of *The Organization Man* and several books on urban life. Whyte’s observation of people’s behavior in cities had led him to conclude that “success or failure of open space depends on its relationship to the street. In other words, welcome

the street, bring it in. We had done exactly the opposite in Bryant Park by raising it and sticking a rail around it.”

Whyte, with the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), wrote a report outlining his observations about the park and his recommendations for its improvement. Ultimately, many of those suggestions were followed in the restoration process, but Whyte’s main point was that the problem with Bryant Park was not the drug dealers per se; it was underuse. “Access is the nub of the matter,” he wrote. “Psychologically, as well as physically, Bryant Park is a hidden place. . . . The best way to meet the problem is to promote the widest possible use and enjoyment by people.”

Whyte suggested that if you wanted to apply the principal findings of research in reverse and create a park that few people used, you would do exactly what had been done in Bryant Park—elevate it above street level, put a wall around it, put a spiked iron fence atop the wall, and line the fence with thick shrubbery. Even Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1800s had warned against that type of design.

One of Whyte’s theses regarding park use is that a park’s success can be measured in part by the percentage of female users. When women feel safe in a space, they are likely to use it more frequently. The 1979 PPS report noted that use by females had fallen from 42 percent in the early seventies to 29 percent. By 1995, after its successful renovation, Bryant Park reported an average of 43 percent female users.

In addition, the average number of people using the park at lunchtime in the late 1970s was 1,000, with occasional peaks of 1,400. According to Whyte’s work, the bottom end of the scale for little-used places was about five people per 1,000 square feet—which, in Bryant Park’s 237,000 square feet, would be about

1,000 people a day. He estimated that during peak hours on summer days Bryant Park should have at least 2,500 people.

When everyone involved agreed that Bryant Park could and should be saved, a young MBA named Dan Biederman was hired, and in January 1980, Biederman and Andrew Heiskell—chairman of the board of the public library and a New Yorker of substantial cultural and political clout—formed the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation (BPRC), which was charged with developing a plan for the park. As Biederman described it, he sat alone in an office in an abandoned building, trying to come up with a viable method for restoring and maintaining the park, to prevent yet another expensive restoration from falling quickly into disrepair.

Biederman's approach was to interview as many experts as he could—from managers of vest-pocket parks, to managers of Rouse festival marketplace facilities, to people at Rockefeller Center, another model of effective open-space management. He talked to crime-control experts, library staff, and former parks commissioners, and he spent time with Holly Whyte, talking with him about people's behavior in urban spaces.

About the time that Biederman was beginning his effort to come up with a plan for the park, the architecture firm of Davis Brody was beginning work on the interior restoration of the library, and the firm brought in landscape architect Laurie Olin, then of Hanna/Olin, to resuscitate the front terrace of the library. Sealed off by privet hedges in front of unused floodlights, half of the upper terrace lay unused, a dark and functionless space. Even on Fifth Avenue, drug deals were taking

place on the front terrace, people were getting mugged, and homeless people had set up encampments. So Olin began the process of "opening the space," making it more inviting both to passersby and to library users.

While Biederman was looking at ways of generating revenue for the park, several things were happening that influenced the final shape of the park and its financial structure. For one, Biederman and the nonprofit Parks Council had been experimenting with efforts to bring people back into the park—refreshment kiosks, book-stalls, etc.—with a fair amount of success.

At about the same time, in recognition of its centennial, the New York-based Architectural League sponsored an artist/architect collaboration. The league was originally founded in 1881 with the aim of encouraging architects to work closely with sculptors and painters. To revisit that concept, the league invited 11 prominent architects to team up with artists and create proposals for projects that were to be visionary yet remotely possible. Architect Hugh Hardy, of Hardy, Holzman, Pfeiffer & Associates, joined with artists Jack Beal and Sondra Freckleton and proposed the creation of two pavilions designed for dining. And the site they chose was Bryant Park because, according to Hardy, this prominent Midtown site had become "a disgrace and a degrading experience and it was time to try something new." Their fanciful design was never to be built, but it succeeded in spurring interest in the idea of having a noteworthy restaurant in the park. Their design called for the pavilions to be built around Lowell Fountain, but when the idea of a restaurant was looked at seriously, the terrace along the back wall of the library was designated as

With Bryant Park's successful renovation, women felt comfortable enough in the park to bring children—one indication of the public's perception that Bryant Park had become a safe place.



Grand Central Partnership

the likely location. Considered by many to be the most dangerous part of the park, that section was most in need of restoration. Biederman himself was mugged there in 1980.

When the BPRC issued a request for proposals, four of the best-known restaurateurs in New York responded. The restaurateur chosen developed a grand plan for a 1,000-seat, two-story, steel-and-glass restaurant, designed by Hugh Hardy, to run the entire length of the back wall of the library. His showy vision also involved changes to the park, including the addition of flowers and a fountain. Plans included moving the beloved statue of William Cullen Bryant housed on the terrace. The team working on the restaurant decided a landscape architect was needed, and Laurie Olin also began work on the park.

Of course, objections came from many sources when it was announced that a two-story restaurant running the length of the library was going to be erected in Bryant Park. Besides being outraged at the scale, preservationists objected to obscuring the library's back wall, which the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission had designated a landmark.

The original plans were overreaching, and it was inevitable that the restaurant would be scaled back. Knowing that, the original restaurateur withdrew from the project, but the idea of a restaurant didn't die. Because it would be a fairly large source of revenue for park maintenance and would also be a key source of off-peak activity, the restaurant was critical to the overall park plan. When it became unclear when and how much income a restaurant would contribute to the park's upkeep and management, BPRC formed a business improvement district, which generates about \$.14 per square foot from commercial property owners and now totals \$950,000 annually for Bryant Park (see feature box).

In the meantime, work had to continue on the restoration of the park. In New York, citizens and the public sector take the built environment very seriously and are known for their vociferous objections to most plans. Not surprisingly, the first plan that Olin proposed for the park was very different from the final design. For example, Olin originally proposed taking down the iron fence (which Holly Whyte had also recommended) and building steps all around the park to render it accessible at

Business Improvement Districts

Business improvement districts (BIDs) are a relatively new form of partnership designed to help the private sector supplement services typically offered by the public sector. BIDs are popping up in cities all over America; some estimates put over 1,000 BIDs in existence. Essentially, BIDs are self-financed legal entities that allow local property owners and business leaders in downtowns and other commercial areas to provide common services beyond those that the city can provide. The designated city blocks form a partnership financed by a tax on the property owners (and sometimes tenants) located within the district. The money from the tax is used to augment specific elements of municipal services within the area. Typically, the services include sanitation, maintenance, and security, and may also include street improvements, sidewalks, signage, lighting, trash receptacles, and landscaping. Some BIDs undertake nongovernmental services such as planning and executing marketing and other programs aimed to improve business retention or to attract businesses, residents, and tourists into the district. In addition, the money supports a BID staff and overhead.

While the initiative for a BID comes from a group of property and business owners seeking common

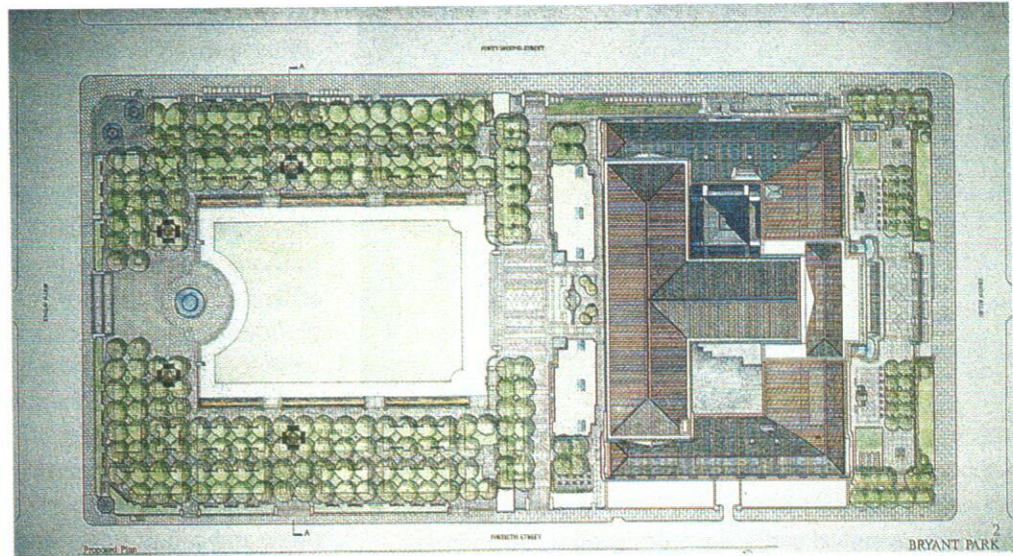
services, the city (on the basis of state enabling legislation) must approve the BID's boundaries, the annual budget and financing strategy, and the services to be provided by the BID. Generally, for the plan to be approved by the city, a prospective BID must demonstrate the support of a majority of the property owners in the district.

Establishing a BID in New York City involves approval from the city council as well as from the majority of the property owners or owners of taxable real estate in the designated BID area. Assessments are levied by formula and type of property.

While BIDs like the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation have effected noticeable changes, their emergence as a leading force in cities like New York has opened them up to criticism—notably, that they are not accountable to voters or to the public at large. In addition, because they are dependent on residents who can afford an additional tax burden, they are less likely to be found in the poorest districts of cities, which may need additional services the most.

In New York City, BIDs provide a range of services, including daily street sweeping, daily security patrols, the removal of graffiti and bills from street furniture, and improved signage.

Bryant Park before the most recent renovation had fewer and narrower access points. The designers kept all the access points, widened some of them, and added four new entrances. In addition, the removal of the shrubbery from around the fence increased the feeling of openness and connected the park to the street.



any point. The goal was to pry open the park, letting it spill into the street, and thereby make it more attractive and less forbidding to potential users. The plan also called for adding basins of water around the sides, ripping out shrubs, cutting a main cross-axis through the park, and moving the fountain.

When the designer and the development team went public with the plans, various groups immediately stepped in to block certain elements of the proposal. The Friends of Cast Iron Architecture objected to taking down the iron fence, which dated from 1934 and was of historic value. A council member insisted that the water feature should not be built because of liability issues.

Two-and-a-half years of hearings with citizens, community boards, and public officials brought suggestions, objections, and ultimately many changes. “Our original plan was too ambitious. We were changing too much,” said Olin. “Instead it became a fine editing process. We took things that were there and renegotiated them so that they physically and optically looked different. For example, I took several flights of stairs and pulled them out like a chest of drawers and added landings to make a gentler entry. We cut new big openings in midblock. Since we were forced to keep the iron fence, I ripped out the shrubs around the fence to give it an openness.”

In addition to many design elements that enhanced the safety and appearance of the park, Biederman came up with several revenue-generating mechanisms that would be used to sustain a high level of maintenance and security, including concession stands, two restaurants, and rental of the park for special events; smaller revenue-generating ideas, such as sponsorship opportunities, were also added.

While the end result has been a successful park, getting approvals was, according to Biederman, “nine years

of frustration.” Among the government reviewers were the landmarks group, the arts commission, the community board, the city planning department, and the department of transportation (which provided some lights); in addition, an environmental impact review had to be undertaken for the restaurant.

To facilitate the cumbersome review process, Arthur Rosenblatt was brought in as associate director of BPRC. Rosenblatt’s knowledge of New York and his range of professional experience—fellow of The American Institute of Architects, former first deputy commissioner of the New York City Parks Department, former director of capital projects for the New York Public Library, former vice president of architecture and planning for the Metropolitan Museum of Art—made him an invaluable asset for completing the park in a reasonable amount of time.

One of the primary objections, which is still of concern to some, was the idea of raising money from several private sources to pay for what should be a public function: maintenance of city parks. The city was accused of abdicating its responsibility. Others feared that if the city became dependent on private involvement, it would not be able to sustain parks in neighborhoods where there are fewer financial resources or less leadership capacity. Biederman claims that in the 1980s, some critics pointed to him as the person who would bring an end to parks in New York City because he was bringing the private sector into the park business. It became clear, however, that unless much private money was involved in the process, the park was not going to have the kind of overall restoration it needed to survive.

In the end, the approvals were granted, and the city agreed to contract with the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation to manage the park. As part of the agree-



Jake Wyman

Although the flower gardens require full-time attention, they are among the most popular and beloved elements of the park. The perennial gardens are designed to bloom from April through October.

ment, the city turned over to BPRC the \$250,000 allocated annually for park maintenance. Those funds, in addition to funds BPRC had accumulated through revenues and grants, were to be applied to park management and maintenance expenses.

The entire process took well over ten years, and there were fits and starts and many surprises along the way, but none matched the bomb that the library dropped about midway through the project. When all the sign-offs had finally been obtained but construction had not yet started, the library board announced at a meeting that the building on Fifth Avenue was no longer adequate for the library's needs. The stacks were full, and as the main reference library for the whole system, the building had to be large enough to house the collection.

The library board did not want to leave the building, but it had considered every possibility for staying and could not find a solution. The board had seen how difficult it was for the BPRC to get permission to put a restaurant on the back of the building, so the board members knew that adding on to it would be well nigh impossible. They had considered building under the terrace, but the building's foundation made that impossible. They had considered a satellite location but couldn't make it work financially or practically.

Laurie Olin said he sat at that meeting stunned. Unless this problem could be solved, all their work in Bryant Park might be lost. But then Marshall Rose, chair of the library's building committee, came up with the idea of constructing a tunnel under the terrace leading to the area under the great lawn and building the stacks there. Everyone agreed in principle that it was a good solution and left it to the architects and engineers to decide if it were possible. Olin's one stipulation was that there be

no vertical expression of the stacks in the lawn itself—which proved to be a challenge when it came to constructing emergency exits and smoke purges.

The stacks needed two emergency exits. After several iterations, the plan called for one emergency exit to go back into the library and for the other to lead to the opposite end of the park. The only evidence of the outdoor exit is in the lawn, at the west end of the park, where a pop-up lid for the exit has been disguised as a plaque for park restoration donors. The smoke purges were located in the flower beds.

And the library was able to add two floors of underground stacks housing 84 miles of library shelves. The addition of the underground stacks added some construction time. The park restoration effort took some three-and-a-half years and cost approximately \$18 million. The city funded two-thirds of the effort, the private sector the remaining third. Currently, maintaining and operating the park costs about \$2 million a year. The money comes from the city's contribution of \$250,000; the BID money; donations; and revenues generated by the coffeehouse, the kiosks, the restaurants, and special events rentals and programming.

Design and Construction: A Touch of the Tuileries

In discussing the design of Bryant Park, Dan Biederman, Laurie Olin, and others involved in the redevelopment always refer to the standards set by the great parks of Paris—Monceau, the Luxembourg Gardens, and in particular the Jardin des Tuileries, the half-mile-long series of neoclassically inspired gardens between the Louvre and the Place de la Concorde. Their love of those gardens is evident in the care they took to create a feeling of Paris in the park. The space is at once understandable and defined, yet inviting and elegant. Underlying the discernible order of Parisian parks is an undeniable feeling of comfort and safety, also evident in Bryant Park.

All the elements of the park revolve around the great lawn, which takes up 18 percent of the total six acres. While the great lawn existed in the park's earlier form, it was completely excavated during the renovation in order to build the underground library shelves and is now slightly crowned to encourage better drainage. Running the length of the great lawn are side promenades of London plane trees planted in 1934. Tightly packed gravel paths line the lawn. The carefully restored cast-iron fence encloses the park, and a limestone balustrade surrounds the lawn.

The 1930s park design had beds of clipped shrubs with long-neglected annuals. Although everything else included in the 1990s restoration was designed for a

relatively simple maintenance program—trees, gravel, ivy, and grass—the designers decided to revive a variation of the flower beds, which require an intensive maintenance program and commitment.

As it turns out, the gardens, designed to be interesting and active year round, are among the most popular and beloved elements of the park. Garden designer Lynden B. Miller, who was well known for restoring the Conservatory Gardens in Central Park, was brought in to work with the landscape architect to create the gardens, which consist of six beds, including two mixed herbaceous borders paralleling the lawn. Year round, the 300-foot borders have several thousand plants—some 360 shrubs (evergreen and deciduous) and 2,500 perennials, which bloom continuously from April to October. In the summer, about 1,000 annuals add bright colors, and 5,000 bulbs herald the arrival of spring. The beds are backed by tall, dark green yew trees. Because the north border is mainly sunny and the south border is in the shade of the nearby office towers, the borders have different characters.

The gardens require a full-time gardener and several part-time assistants, but Miller said, “Bryant Park Restoration Corporation has a great commitment to the horticulture in the park because we all know that’s one of the things that separates this park from other spaces.” The designers placed benches right within the lush beds, and users are very respectful of the plantings (the biggest problem is people placing briefcases on plantings). Pigeons and English sparrows, also a problem, require the use of netting in the spring. “My gardener used to say working in Bryant Park was like being in a receiv-

ing line in a wedding because everyone always has something nice to say,” laughed Miller. “The horticultural aspect makes it very alive and personal. People can relate to it and stand around and discuss it.”

Another very important element of the restoration, and one that gets much attention, was the introduction of movable chairs. “One of the most important features of the park that I recommended was to give people a place to sit,” said Whyte. “The movable chairs were very hard to sell. I can’t tell you how many people snickered and said they’d all be stolen. But we’ve proven them wrong.”

The idea for the movable chairs came from the experience at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1969, Arthur Rosenblatt put out some 200 chairs in front of the museum. Despite everyone’s skepticism, the chairs proved to be an immediate success, enlivening an area that had much less foot traffic than Bryant Park. Although the chairs at the Met were eventually replaced by benches, Whyte, Olin, and Biederman were encouraged by the way users had responded at the Met and felt that movable chairs would be a critical addition to the new Bryant Park.

According to Whyte, “The folding chairs are very important for several reasons. They make the user of the park sort of a planner because the user has to decide where to sit. It’s interesting to see the way people move the chairs. Most of the time they don’t move them more than a few feet, but somehow it’s a declaration of independence.”

The green chairs are metal and wood and come from France. In the early stages of the park, BPRC ex-

The green metal and wood chairs give the park a comfortable, at-home feeling and are an easy, flexible means of increasing the capacity of the park.



Jake Wyman



The goal at Bryant Park is to pick up paper almost as soon as it hits the ground.

perimented with different types of chairs. They tried plastic chairs, which were functional but not the right look. Eventually they settled on the European café chairs, which are inexpensive, relatively durable, and light enough for people of all sizes and strengths to move.

Many people assumed that the chairs would quickly end up in New Yorkers' apartments or in homeless dwellings, but in fact, few of them have been lost to theft. Most are removed because they need repair from overuse. BPRC initially brought in some 1,200 chairs and has since purchased additional chairs annually, bringing the seasonal total up to 2,000. With 2,000 people on the chairs, 1,000 people in the restaurant and on the café terraces, and some 2,000 people on benches and on the lawn, the park can easily hold 5,000 at lunchtime on any given day. The chairs provide an easy, flexible way to increase the capacity of the park.

Safety and security issues were a critical element of the planning process. Besides the fact that in 1979, an average of 150 robberies per year occurred in Bryant Park, the public's perception was that it was an unsafe environment and should be avoided. Biederman's goal was to get the incidence of robbery down to zero. "We've had one robbery in the park since 1991 and it was in the middle of the night against one of our employees," said Biederman. "Now people are thrilled to be there because of attractive plants, events, chairs, monuments, clean rest rooms. They feel safe there and when they feel safe, thousands of them come in. It's harder to commit a crime because criminals feel conspicuous. Even though we have our own security force, which is unarmed, a lot of our security is what I would call 'self-enforcing.'"

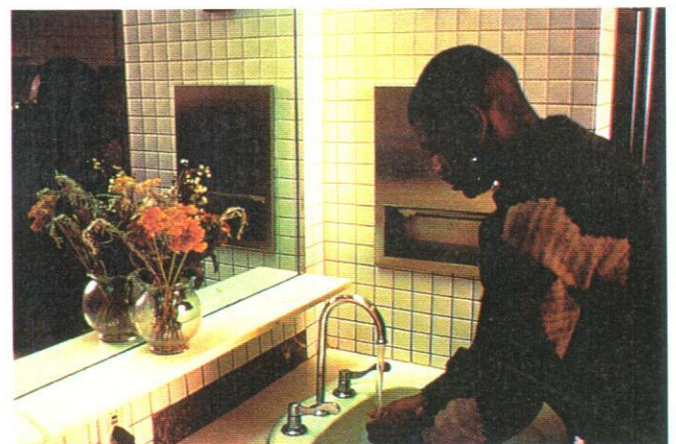
BPRC has two to three security officers on patrol during park operating hours and two after hours. In addition, the New York City Police Department initially assigned a complement of four police officers to the park

and its neighborhood. Those officers proved unnecessary over time and were moved elsewhere in Midtown.

To open up the park and increase the sense of safety, the designer removed the shrubbery around the fence and added four new entrances, making a total of 11. Some of the existing entrances were also widened, in particular the one at 42nd Street, where the subway entrance is located.

In addition, lighting was carefully planned. The park has four different types of lighting. Lining the promenades are standard light fixtures restored and recast, respecting the original beaux-arts style from the 1934 park redesign. Framing the entrances to the park are ornate pedestals and globes in the style of those of the public library, some 20 of which were added with money from Enid Haupt, a private donor. In addition, the park's sidewalks have modified "teardrop" fixtures with double-headed luminaires. The lighting designers urged the BPRC to use metal halide lighting, which casts a white light that is more pleasant to the eye than the yellow-orange light cast by the standard, high-pressure sodium lighting typically found in urban areas. However, more metal halide lights are needed to achieve the same effect as the high-pressure sodium lighting. In addition to the lighting around the park, 11 1,000-watt floodlights have been placed atop the New York Telephone building and aimed at the park, casting a soft, moonlightlike glow.

The park also has several monuments of note—in particular, two monuments to women. Eighty years after it was built and after years of disuse, the Josephine Shaw Lowell fountain is once again functioning. A second sculpture, a 1923 bust of Gertrude Stein, was contributed to the park.



Fresh flower displays and baby-changing stations are found in the women's and men's rest rooms. One employee is assigned exclusively to keeping the rest room facilities clean and safe. The rest rooms are open to the public whenever the park is open.

In addition, the bust of Goethe has been restored, as have the bronzes of William Earl Dodge and José Bonifacio de Andrada e Silva. The William Cullen Bryant sculpture, which is housed in a niche on the terrace at the east end of the park, has been carefully restored with \$369,000 of public and private funds.

Cleanliness Equals Respectfulness

Dan Biederman is executive director and president of the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation and the Bryant Park Management Corporation, the two groups that manage the park in cooperation with the city. A coordinating supervisor is in the park daily. Because Biederman also runs two other private downtown redevelopment efforts (the Grand Central Partnership, Inc., and the 34th Street Partnership, Inc.), he can combine some functions; for example, one head of security serves all three partnerships. In Bryant Park, at its summer peak, there are some 55 employees working in security, sanitation, gardening, and special events. Except for the few occasions when some work is outsourced to the private sector, all park employees work for the private nonprofit corporations that manage the park.

Biederman says his goal is to pick up paper almost as soon as it hits the ground. Although most of the users are very respectful of the space, heavy use inevitably creates litter: when 5,000 people are eating lunch, napkins are dropped or blown away by the wind. The park remains generally clean, however, because of high staffing at lunchtime hours.

Clean, safe, and free public rest rooms are almost nonexistent in New York City, so the accessible, well-maintained rest rooms at Bryant Park are a welcome anomaly. Originally the park contained two separate comfort stations, one for men and one for women. This time around, only one of the 1911 landmark structures, located at the 42nd Street park entrance, was refurbished as a rest room. The structure, serving both men and women, was renovated at a cost of about \$160,000. (The other rest room, located at the 40th Street entrance, was converted to park office space.) Bryant Park's rest rooms are open whenever the park is open and available to all—with some rules of conduct, however. For example, no bathing is allowed in the rest rooms. One employee is assigned only to the rest rooms, so they are cleaned every few minutes and consistently attended. Fresh flower displays can be found in both rest rooms, and the women's has full-length mirrors as a result of feedback BPRC got from users. Both of the well-lit, remarkably clean rest rooms include baby-changing stations.

Not only the rest rooms have strict rules about use. Throughout the park, clearly posted rules for behavior



The Monday night movies shown in the summer are among the most popular events at the park. The movies are projected from a 4,000-watt projector in the back of a trailer onto a 20-by-40-foot screen that is set up in front of the fountain.

indicate that alcohol and drugs are prohibited, as are dogs on the lawn; pigeon-feeding; panhandling; organized ball games; and loud, amplified music. Smoking is limited to identified smoking sections. Although the park has defined opening and closing hours, there are no gates to shut off access. Instead, BPRC simply puts up chains or blocks entrances with stanchions (known as Belgian Barriers), neither of which would physically keep people out of the park at night. However, because the rules are clearly posted, the security force can ask late users to leave.

Even though approvals were received before the Americans with Disabilities Act was in place, the park is accessible to handicapped users. The first effort was to put in a handicapped-accessible ramp to the library on 42nd Street, at a cost of about \$900,000. Then Olin designed a ramp for the 40th Street park entrance, which also allows access to the restaurant. The gravel walkways that line the great lawn are not ideal for wheelchairs, but their compacted crushed stone is usable. Only one retrofitting was undertaken after the park was completed: two sloped openings were cut out in the east side to allow access to the lawn from the walkway.

The Value of the Park

Since Bryant Park reopened in 1992, media coverage has been relentlessly positive. One event in particular that drew crowds, including paparazzi, was Bryant Park's successful bid to lure the fashion industry. Beginning in October 1993, the Council of Fashion Designers of America erected enormous white tents in the park for runway shows showcasing almost the entire New York fashion establishment. Previously, designers had shown



Jake Wyman

Over 80 years after the fountain was first built and after years of not being usable, the Josephine Shaw Lowell fountain is once again functioning. The restoration included the addition of underwater lighting and a testimonial to Lowell, a Civil War abolitionist, set in the fountain plaza.

their new lines at less-than-ideal venues—lofts, hotel ballrooms, nightclubs, and auditoriums—scattered throughout the city. For several years, parts of “7th on Sixth,” as the fashion show is known, took place twice yearly at Bryant Park. As time went on, the fashion show in the park was scaled down, and in 1997 it moved to another location, in part because the fashion industry depends on exciting new ideas to keep people’s interest. But Bryant Park benefited from the show’s early presence and the amount of positive attention it brought.

Musical events are now planned regularly at Bryant Park. The annual JVC Jazz Festival, for example, offers some free concerts in Bryant Park. Performers from the Juilliard School give free concerts periodically during lunch hour, when the park is full of brown-baggers and passersby who stop to enjoy the lively scene.

The success of Bryant Park has brought other activities to the park. Among the most popular events are the Monday night movies, which were started by Michael Fuchs, then chief executive of HBO and later chairman of BPRC. Monday night is traditionally a slow night in restaurants and cafés, and during the summer months, the movies succeed in drawing people into the park to use the concessions. The movies are projected from a 4,000-watt projector on the back of a trailer onto a 20-by-40-foot screen that is set up in front of the fountain. The movable chairs are ideal for these events, but thousands of people watch from blankets placed all over the lawn.

After 14 years of effort, the Bryant Park Grill opened in May 1995. The restaurant was originally proposed in 1981 as a source of revenue and activity for the park. When the original restaurateur left the project, BPRC

ultimately decided to build the restaurant first and get the restaurateur later. Eventually, Michael Weinstein, a well-known and successful restaurateur with projects in several cities, took over all the concessions in the park, including the first of the proposed restaurants. The BPRC got a \$4.2 million loan to build the restaurant and paid for \$750,000 worth of tenant improvements.

The grill building was one of two restaurant pavilions designed by Hugh Hardy to complement the glory of the public library building. Instead of the two-story, steel-and-glass structure originally proposed, the restaurant is a pavilionlike structure with walls of windows framed by green steel, wooden trellises, and ivy. Diners look out on a vista of color—the great lawn, the trees, and the flowers. “We wanted to make the pavilions an extension of the landscape instead of something that is an imposition to the landscape. You don’t feel as if you are entering a room; you feel as if you are entering a place in the park,” said Hardy. The interior of the restaurant, designed by Cary Tamarkin and Nancy Mah, feels open and airy, with decor that includes an 86-foot-long mural of birds painted by Hunt Slonem, a New York artist. Bryant Park Grill recorded an \$8.6 million gross in the first operating year and paid a large percentage rent toward amortization of the mortgage. Within the next five to seven years, Biederman expects to pay off the debt and provide the park with an operating endowment that will eliminate any reliance on city funding.

The Bryant Park Café, also run by Weinstein, which opened in 1995 on the deck next to the library, quickly became the place to go on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights in the summer months. This open-air café, featuring casual food and drinks, was started with a modest amount of money (entirely out of Weinstein’s pocket) and little fanfare; it became such a popular after-work spot for young professionals that lines to get into the café became a problem. Simon Sips, Inc., a gourmet coffee stand, the first kiosk concessionaire in the park, was followed by kiosks selling Italian- and French-style sandwiches and salads.

The overall success of the park feeds the success of the neighborhood. Seven million square feet of office and retail space border Bryant Park. Twenty-four months after the newly refurbished park opened, leasing activity on Sixth Avenue had increased 60 percent in the first eight months of 1994, compared with 1993. Leasing agents have reported that the park, which used to be a deterrent to leasing space, is now a marketing tool. Some brokers have referred to the park as the “deal-clincher.”

Bryant Park’s biggest problems are now those of success. BPRC has had to turn down proposals for special events that may be good for the promoter, but bad for the park. While special events may be excellent at gen-

The green of the great lawn comes from aerating, feeding, mulching, weeding, and trimming on a regular schedule. Rents for offices around Bryant Park have gone up as much as 40 percent since the renovation.



erating revenue and publicity, everyday public use is the priority, and BPRC aims to protect that. According to Biederman, promoters tend to care about events first and venues second, and are often less respectful of the park than its regular users.

Everyone who has worked on the park is proud of the final result and the way that people have embraced the park. Laurie Olin says he gets puffed up with pride every time he sees it.

William Whyte declared that one of the reasons the park has been so successful is that “the park is a statement of faith in the city. It’s a celebration of the city. People enjoy watching other people enjoy the city. By and large, Bryant Park is weatherproof in a way. People

use it all year round. I’m very very happy at how it’s worked out.”

Garden designer Lynden Miller said, “We sent an important message in treating this open space—we have fixed this space up for you and you’re worth it—so people rise to the occasion and they love it. This kind of effort doesn’t come cheap, but the value of restored parks is beyond measure to a city. It must be the cheapest way a city can fix itself up. What it does for the morale of the city is immeasurable.” Architect Hugh Hardy believes that even though the park itself “feels splendid, the best thing about it is the diversity of people who use it.”

Now Bryant Park is looked upon as a model by park designers around the world. Its beauty and success are of great interest at a time when safety and security are primary on people’s minds. Some critics say that the park has no sense of intimacy and does not allow people the seclusion and peace that other designs do, but Laurie Olin believes that intimate spaces at this point in history, in the middle of Manhattan, “would be difficult and imprudent.” He says he’s been attacked by academics for the design: they’ve claimed it’s exclusionary; it’s “yuppification”; it’s no longer democratic space because it is designed against one of the original user groups of the park—homeless people. But Olin points out that “there are still homeless people there, but they’re so much a minority that they behave in a different way than if there weren’t so many middle-class, scrubbed working people around. If you have a successful space that looks healthy, people go into it. It’s like the stock market. It’s kind of a confidence game. We create a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in how we treat our environment.”



The outdoor café was popular as soon as it opened. Café-goers enjoy looking at the great lawn and the beautiful flowers that line it. People-watching is also a popular side dish.

Bryant Park Restoration Corporation

Project Data • Bryant Park

Development Schedule

Initial site acquired	Remains New York City park
Planning started	January 1980
Design competition conducted	NA ¹
Master plan approved	1980
Construction started	1988
Construction completed	1991
Park opened	In phases—1991, 40%; 1992, 50%; 1995, 10%
Project completed	May 1995

Construction Financing Information

Source	Amount (in millions)
Private	
Grants and donations	\$3.2
Bank loans	4.2
Business improvement district assessments	1.0
Private venture capital	4.0
State	
Environmental quality bonds	.125
Local	
NYC capital funds	5.7
Total construction financing	\$18.225

Development Cost Information

Site acquisition costs	None; lease for "negative rent" from New York City Parks Department
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Construction Costs

Basic park rehabilitation	
Excavation/demolition	\$320,000
Foundation/slab/stairs/walls	573,000
Entrances/ramps	1,470,000
Paving/curbs/cobbles	1,324,000
Utilities	278,000
Irrigation	83,000
Electrical	170,000
Lawn	152,000
Planting	216,000
Maintenance of existing plants	55,000
Site furnishings	172,000
Monuments	83,000
Miscellaneous	350,000
General conditions	702,000
Total rehabilitation costs	\$5,948,000

Concessions, monuments, horticulture

Restaurant—core and shell	\$2,405,000
Restaurant interiors—tenant allowance	750,000
Restaurant interiors—investment by tenant	2,500,000
Café installation—investment by tenant	1,000,000
Upper terrace restoration	316,000
Upper terrace electrical	98,000
Fountain restoration	160,000
Park houses restoration	230,000
Gatehouse/in-park kiosks	465,000
W.C. Bryant monument	369,000
Miscellaneous monuments	23,000
Fence restoration	150,000
Perennial gardens	225,000
Signage/graphics	75,000
Lighting (ornamental, moon, street)	996,000
Total costs for concessions, monuments, and horticulture	\$9,762,000
Total construction costs	\$15,710,000

Soft Costs/Fees

Contractor	\$193,000
Landscape architects	691,000
Surveyor/engineering	100,000
Building/restoration architects	405,000
Lighting consultant	50,000
Permits	6,000
Financing fees	24,000
Legal fees	147,400
Construction interest	365,100
Total soft costs/fees	\$1,981,500
Total hard and soft construction costs	\$17,691,500

Note

1. Not applicable.

