

January 2011
Volume 27 Number 01

www.landscapeonline.com

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

AND SPECIFIER NEWS

THE INDUSTRY TRADE MAGAZINE FOR COMMERCIAL LANDSCAPE SPECIFIERS NATIONWIDE!

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Left to right: "Keeley's Garden, Labyrinth 1" by Lynn Goodpasture is a new art installation at the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools on the former site of the Ambassador Hotel. The designs for the custom French encaustic tiles derived from the classic decorative tiles that used to be found throughout the hotel. • The labyrinth has 11 large basalt slabs to allow students to express themselves in chalk. • A close up of the flower motif of the labyrinth.

Former Ambassador Hotel Site Houses Schools, Art and a Park

The Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles opened in 1921. Back in the day the Ambassador hosted six Academy Awards ceremonies (in the Cocoanut Grove), and was Howard Hughes' personal headquarters. When the iconic hotel closed its doors in 1989, the Los Angeles Unified School District gained ownership of the property, with plans to build schools. The Los Angeles Conservancy and seven other plaintiffs fought to save the hotel from demolition, but surrendered the fight in 2005. The first school completed on the old Ambassador site in the Pico-Union/Korea Town neighborhood of Los Angeles, was a K-5 charter school for more

than 800 students, which opened Sept. 9, 2009. By September 13, 2010, six pilot schools were built and instructing students in grades kindergarten through 12. The schools, in toto, are referred to as the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools.

The schools feature two pieces of public art. A 2004 environmental impact report mandated all public artwork at the site relate to the hotel or its history. The 3-D mural photo collage by artist Gale McCall has images of the old hotel.

The second artwork, just recently installed at the base of an amphitheater, is "Keeley's Garden, Labyrinth 1" by Lynn

Goodpasture. This 690 sq. ft. work is paved with custom French encaustic tiles with designs derived from the classic decorative tiles that used to be found throughout the Ambassador Hotel.



Northerly Island, situated just east of Chicago's Soldier Field and in close proximity to the Convention Center and Alder Planetarium, is a landfill (based on Daniel Burnham's and Edward Bennett's 1909 Plan of Chicago) that accommodated the single-strip Meigs Field Airport from 1948 to 2003. A dense woodland on the west of the island "will transition to an open savannah, grassland prairie, emergent marsh, to lagoon and open lake water to the east," according to the plan of the Chicago Park District, Jeanne Gang of Studio/Gang/Architects and JJR.

filtered rainwater will replenish the island's landscape and wetland elements.

The island's ecological spaces will align with Field Museum and the Shedd Aquarium programs. An Environmental Education Center will accommodate classes, meetings and excursions. There will be a space for outdoor summer concerts on the north end of the island, balanced by a prairie and wetland that will support migratory birds. The wetland and a fish-spawning area will become a research site for students and professionals studying the near-shore environments of the Great Lakes.

The northwest part of the island, closest to the city, will have a harbor walk with restaurants and summer music events. The northeast beach gives access for swimming. The southwest sector will have woodlands to buffer the views of the Convention Center.

As the seasons change and the natural habitats mature, visitors will discover a new island each time they arrive. For a bird watcher, this may be spotting a great blue heron, a bird attracted to the wet marsh. For hikers, this may be discovering a challenging trail that rewards them with views of the city and lake.

For several years the Chicago Park District (CPD) and the city of Chicago have been collecting ideas and comments from the public on appropriate uses for the 91-acre Northerly Island Park (see "Plans for 'Burnham's Island' Presented"

www.landscapeonline.com/research/article/12838). The overwhelming consensus for the island was an ecologically diverse park to explore nature and experience peaceful solitude without leaving the city.

The CPD, along with Jeanne Gang of Studio/Gang/Architects and the landscape architects of JJR, have just unveiled a framework plan for the island. Prominent among the community responses were requests for ponds, meadows, forests, educational activities, integration with the museum campus, diverse water activities, links to the mainland and environmentally-sustainable design.

Emerging technology that harnesses the energy of waves will contribute to powering facilities on the island. Heating and cooling for Northerly Island buildings will be supplemented by geothermal exchange with the lake water. Collected and



Above: In front of the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools at street level is the "Robert F. Kennedy Inspiration Park," which just opened to the public in Sept. 2010. The walls of this 6-by-24-foot stainless steel entryway, by Gonzalez Goodale Architects, are engraved with passages from Robert Kennedy's speeches.

Below: The former site of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles now accommodates six pilot schools, K-12. The guest list of the historic hotel reads like a Who's Who reference, including a number of U.S. presidents and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Sen. Robert Kennedy, of course, was assassinated in the pantry of the hotel in 1968 during his presidential bid. On a lighter note, the Ambassador lobby was the setting in the Graduate where Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) first rendezvoused with Mrs. Robinson (Ann Bancroft).

