

TONGVA PARK

A Site Study Through Graphics

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Design Graphics III

Spring 2025





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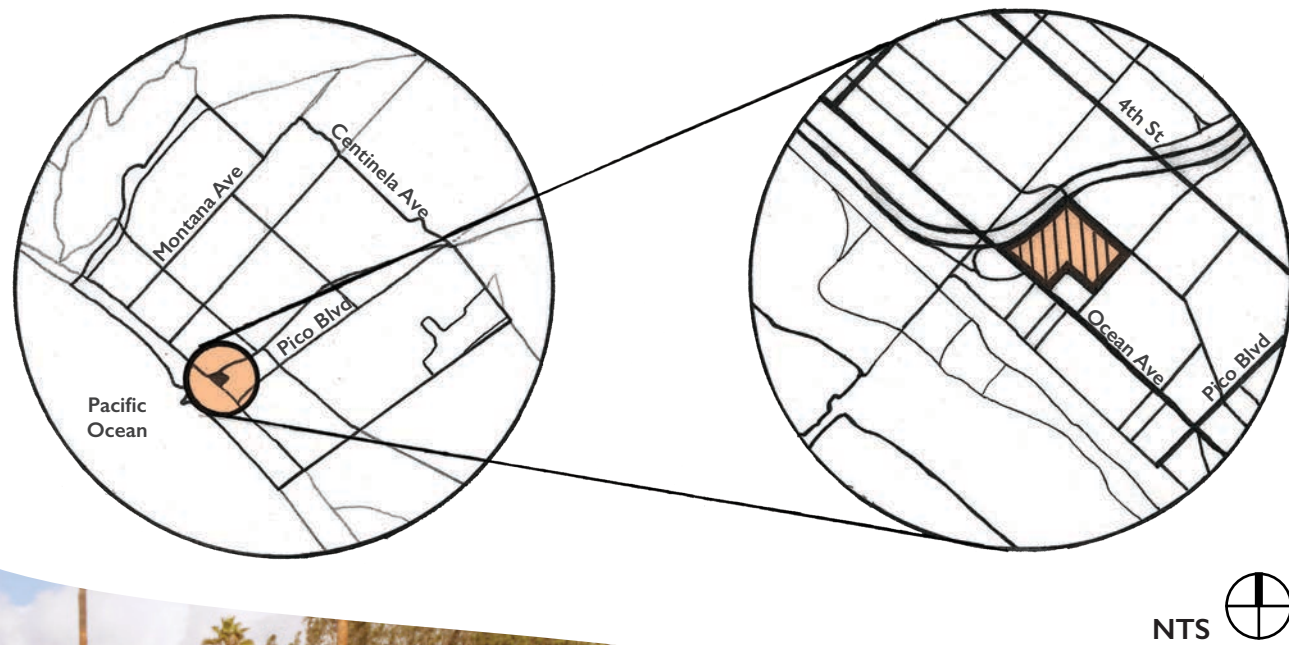
Introduction



Tongva Park became the subject of my studies about nine months ago when I enrolled in Design Graphics I. I didn't know the first thing about design, and graphic communication was a foreign language. I didn't think I was capable of drawing. Now, I'm compiling a booklet full of my own drawings and diagrams that I rendered digitally using programs I had never touched until three months ago. Here, I hope to highlight some elements of the park's design I found interesting. But more importantly, I'd like to illustrate my own development in design and graphic communication and the evolution of my understanding of landscape architecture.

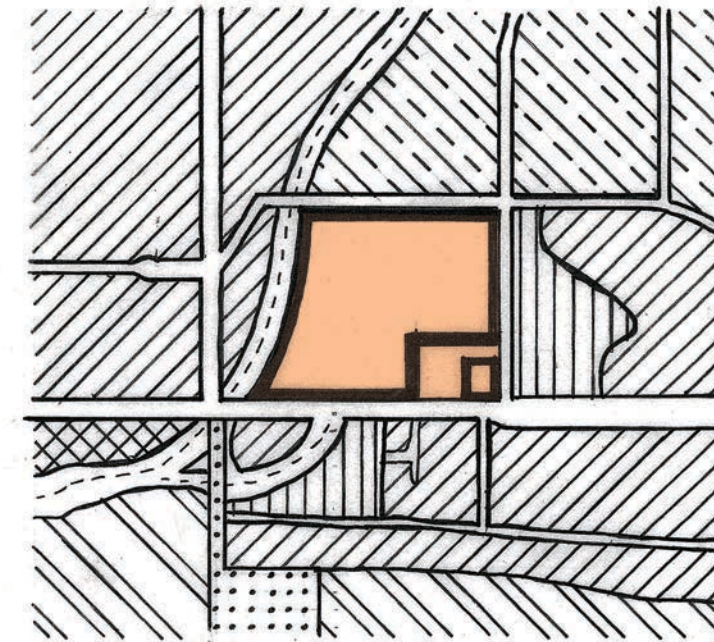
Location

Tongva Park is located in Santa Monica about two blocks from the ocean. Before the city purchased the land to convert into a park, the site was a parking lot for the RAND Corporation. The park opened in 2013 after an extensive collaborative process between James Corner Field Operations, the City of Santa Monica, and its community members and stakeholders.



Site Context

The site's context played a crucial role in the development of the park's design. The park is situated snugly between City Hall and the beach, while the 10-Freeway forms the northern boundary and multi-unit housing hugs the park's south side. This is also a heavily commercial area. The site really does feel like a central point where many different people and uses converge.

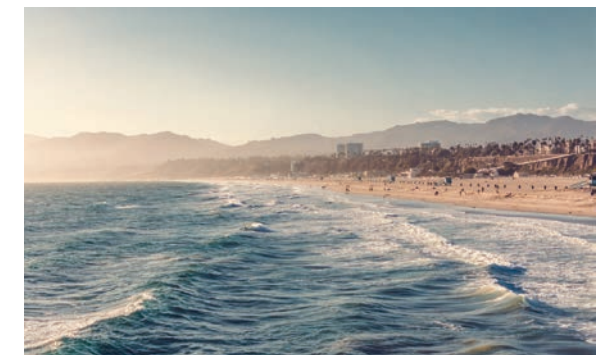


- Commercial
- Residential
- Municipal
- Park
- Beach
- Pier

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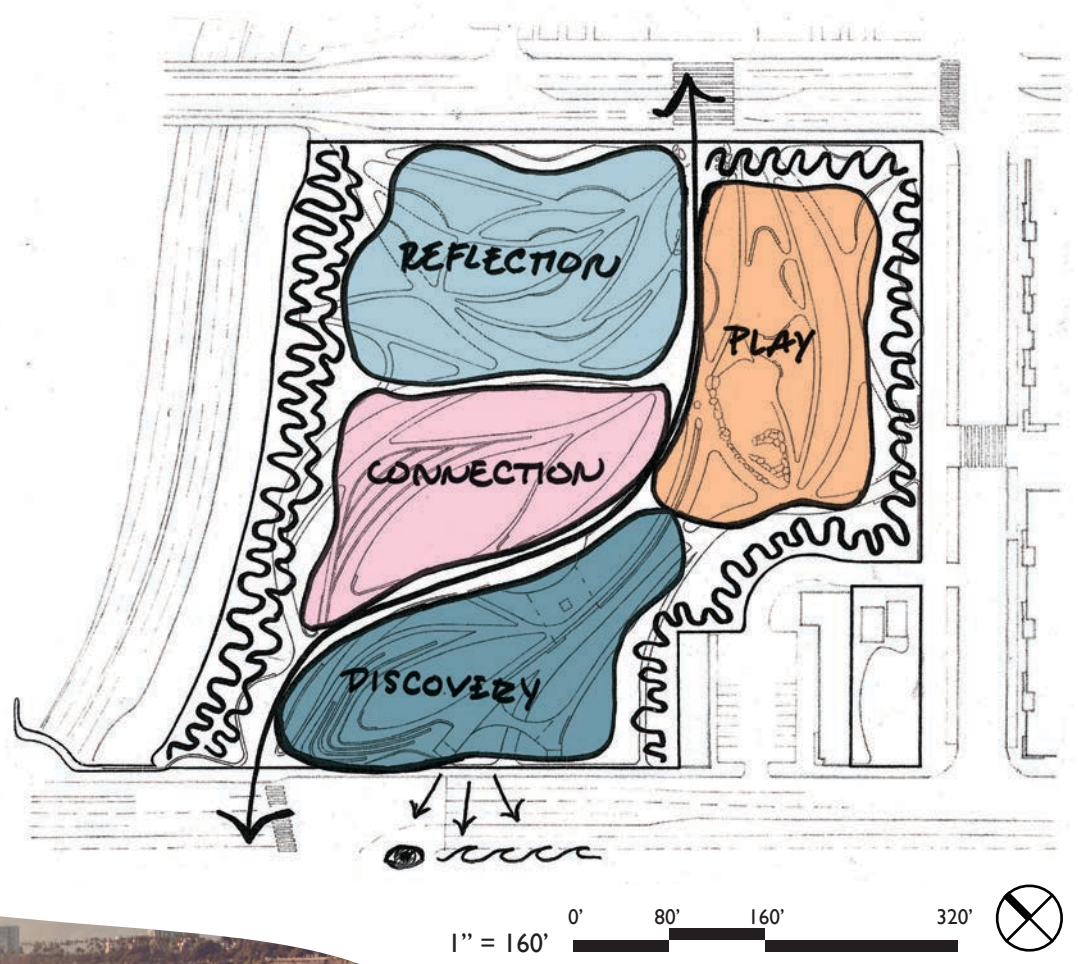


Analysis



Concept

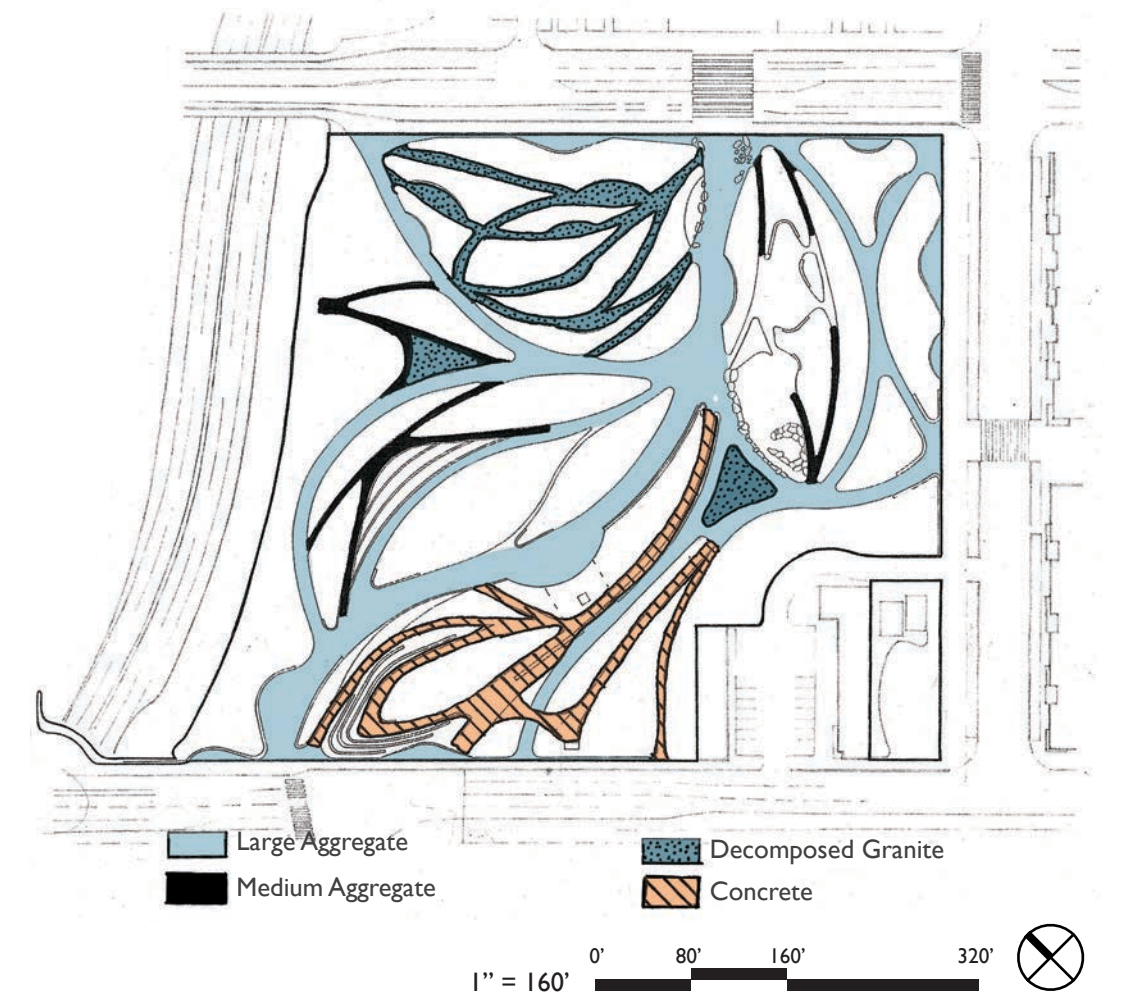
The park's design concept aims to connect two significant parts of Santa Monica—its City Hall, and its beach—and uses the movement and flow of water to inform how that connection is forged. It's along this connection Corner organizes the park's varied intended uses. Strategically placed plantings create buffer and sanctuary, while graded paths and rolling hills create picturesque views toward the ocean.



Movement, flow, circulation, and connection between people, reinforced and inspired by the flow of water—this is the spirit of the park's design.

Paving Types

The park uses a variety of different paving types to help reinforce this concept of connection, circulation and flow. Large aggregate emphasizes the main arterial pathways, whereas medium aggregate suggests the scenic route to get you where you're going. Decomposed granite quite literally takes you off the beaten path to wander through scenic gardens.

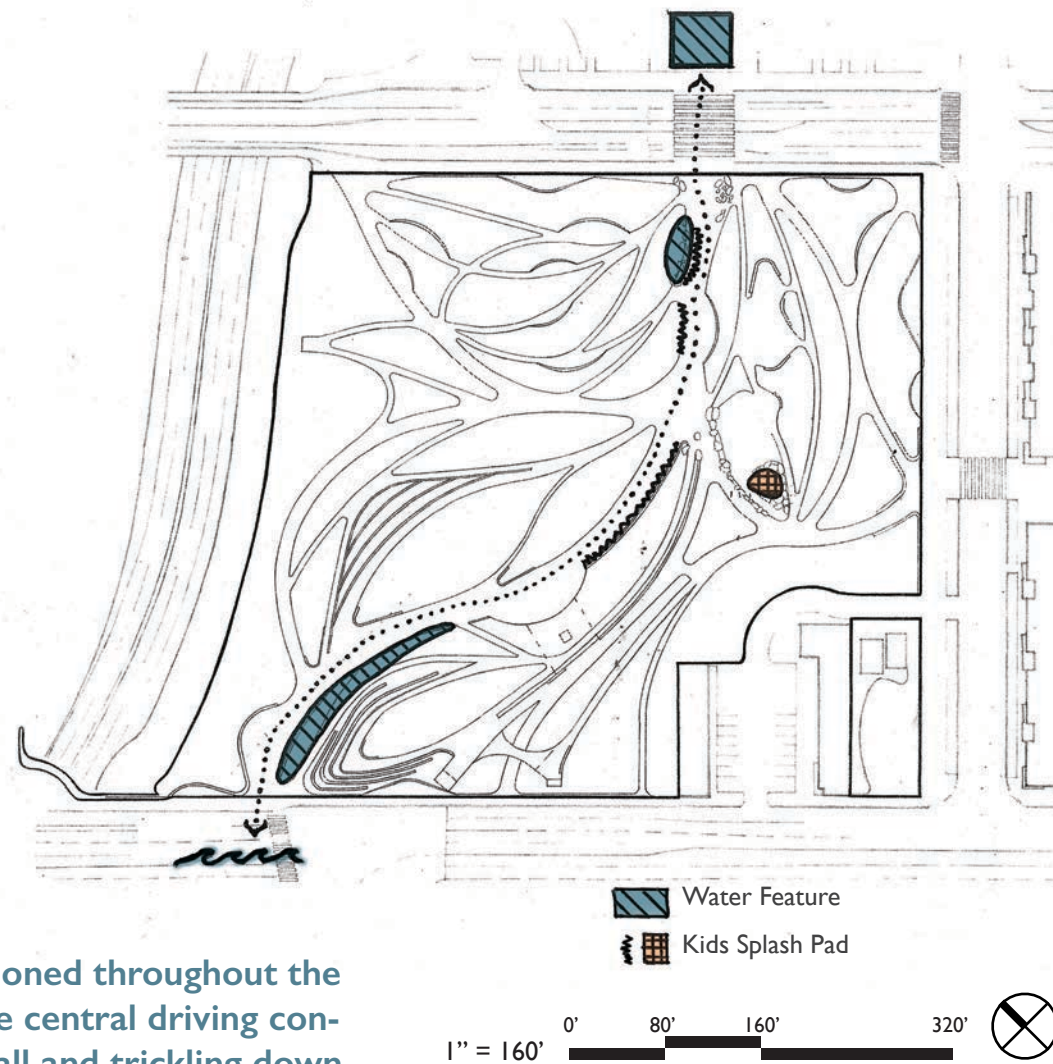


Paving transitions listed from top to bottom: Medium aggregate and large aggregate, fall surface and medium aggregate, decomposed granite and mulch, concrete and large aggregate.

Photo Credit: Brian Bautista



Water Features



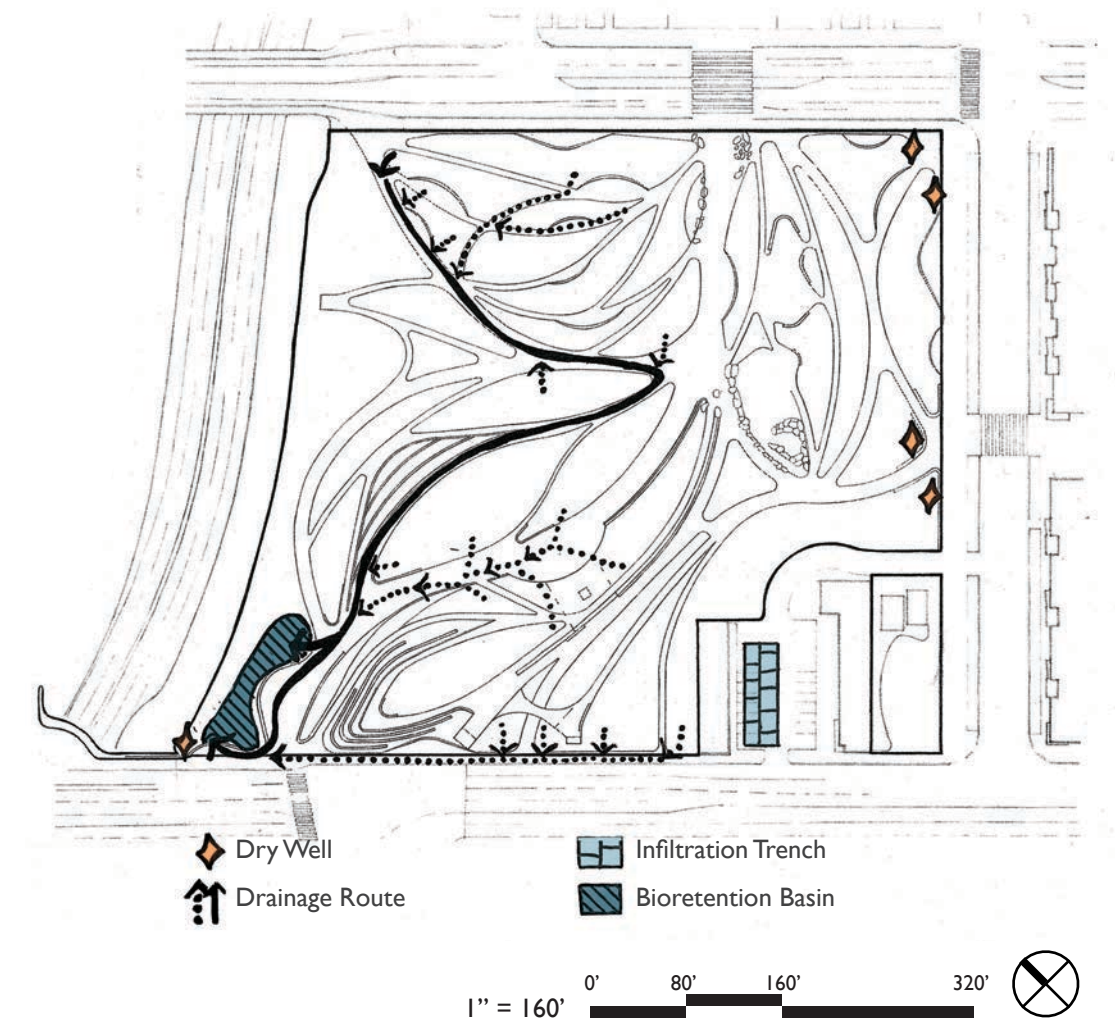
The water features positioned throughout the site further emphasize the central driving concept, beginning at City Hall and trickling down through the park's central path until you're let out to Ocean Avenue with the beach just beyond. The jets of the last water feature even point you toward the ocean.

Water Retention

Seventy percent of the park is made up of permeable surface, and the natural movement of water is harnessed for stormwater retention through the use of bioswales. These swales collect run-off and move it toward a retention basin that sits at the northwest corner of the park. The flatter section of the park toward the south utilizes dry wells and an infiltration trench to keep water onsite.



A local bird enjoying a bath in the park's Ocean Avenue water feature.



ADA Ramps

The park is known for its rolling hills, elevated walkways, and overlooks. These elevated areas are ADA accessible, as they should be, but something less common is the ramps and sloping walks are integrated into the primary circulation of the site.

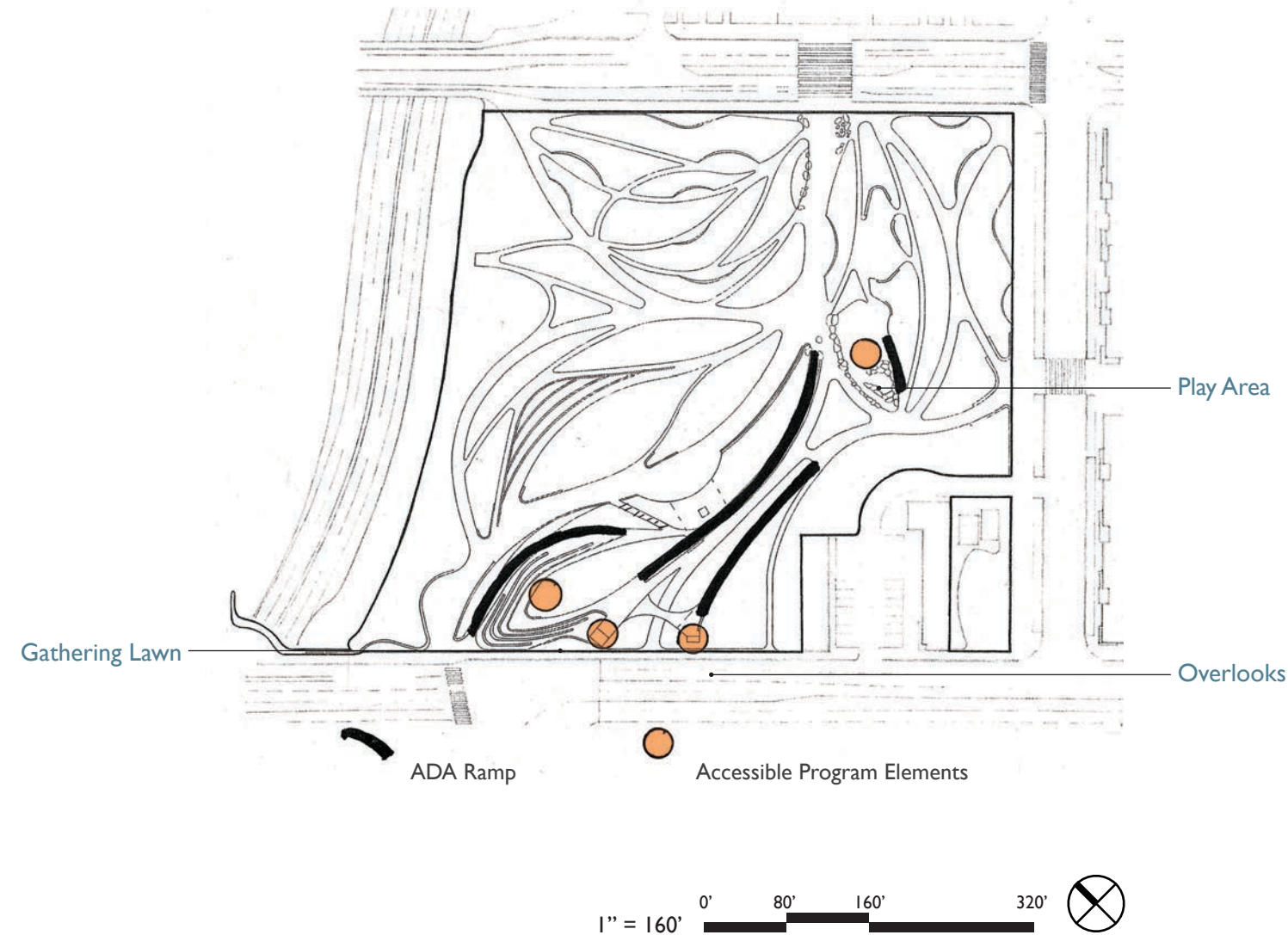
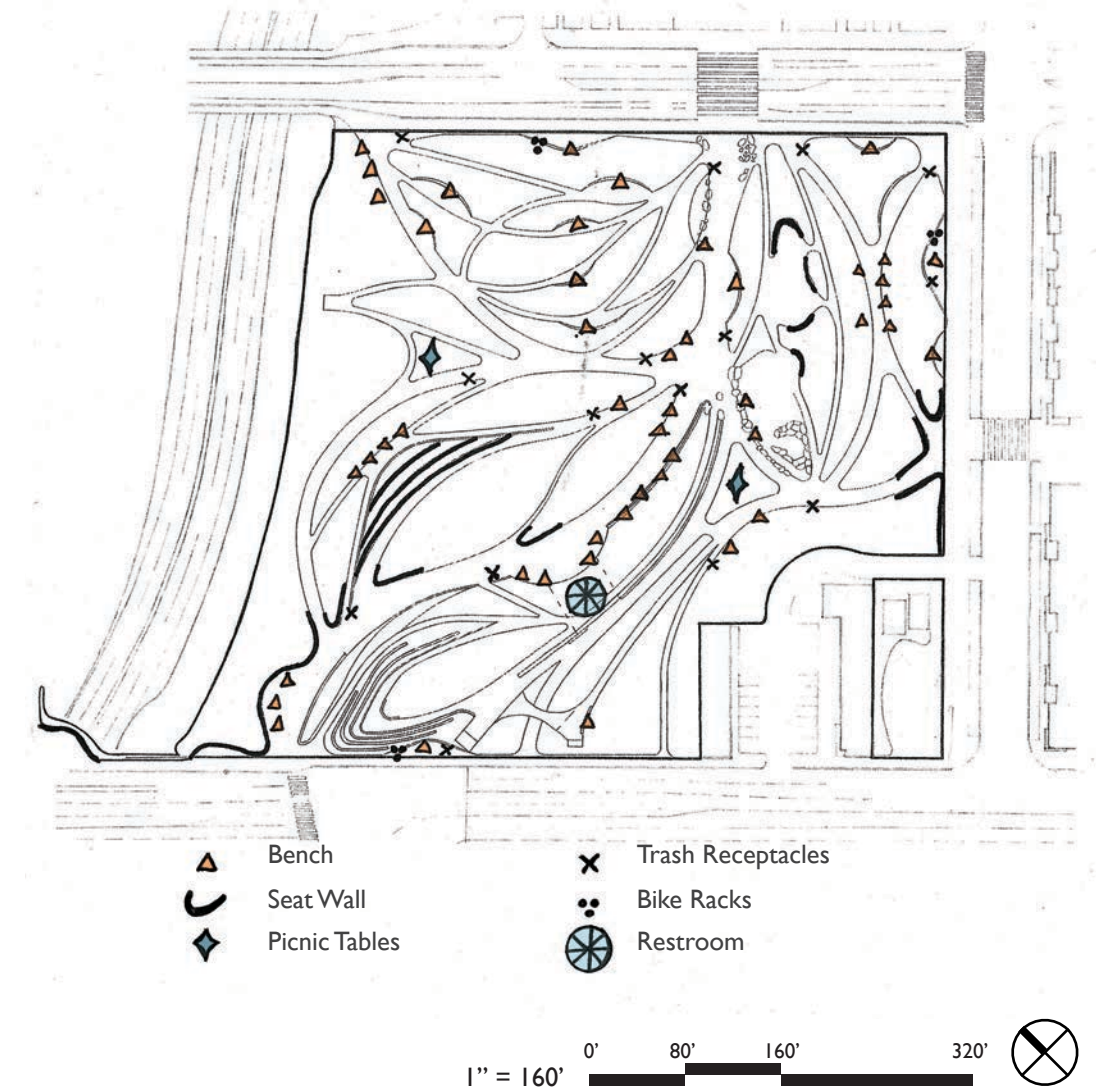
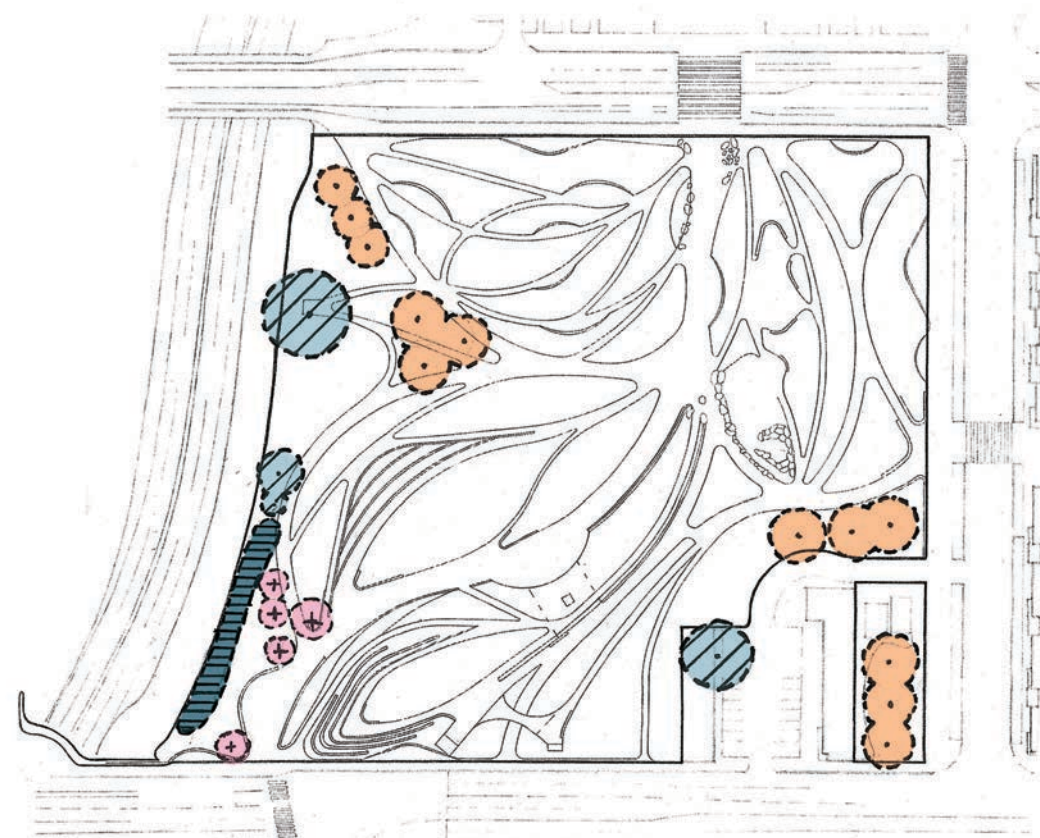


Photo Credit: Brian Bautista


Site Amenities



Trees + Other Plant Material



-  Existing Tree
-  Relocated Tree
-  Existing Palms
-  Relocated Palm

1" = 160' 0' 80' 160' 320' 

While the park's design proposed the planting of hundreds of new trees, it also incorporated existing trees on that site that would be relocated, creating a foundation for new plant material. Ficus trees and palms make up the trees that were preserved.

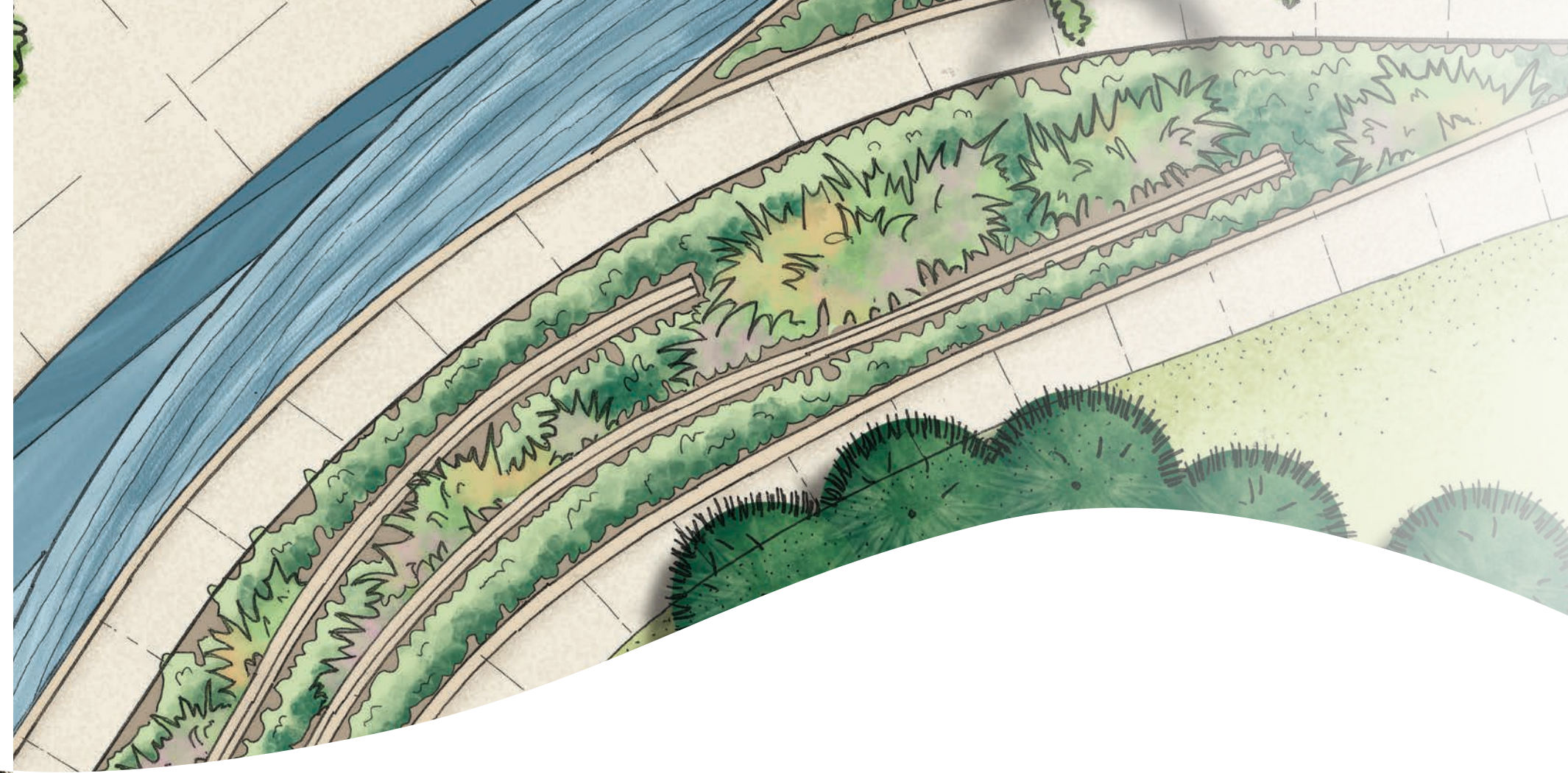


The park's plant palette aims to create an ecologically diverse site that utilizes naturally-occurring microclimates. Plant choices were allegedly inspired by the Coastal Scrub, Chaparral and Riparian plant communities. Western sycamores frame walkways, while groves of olive trees and Torrey pines shade play and picnic areas.

Photo Credit: Brian Bautista



Illustrations





Play Area

Seat Wall

Splash Pad

Amphitheater

Gathering Lawn

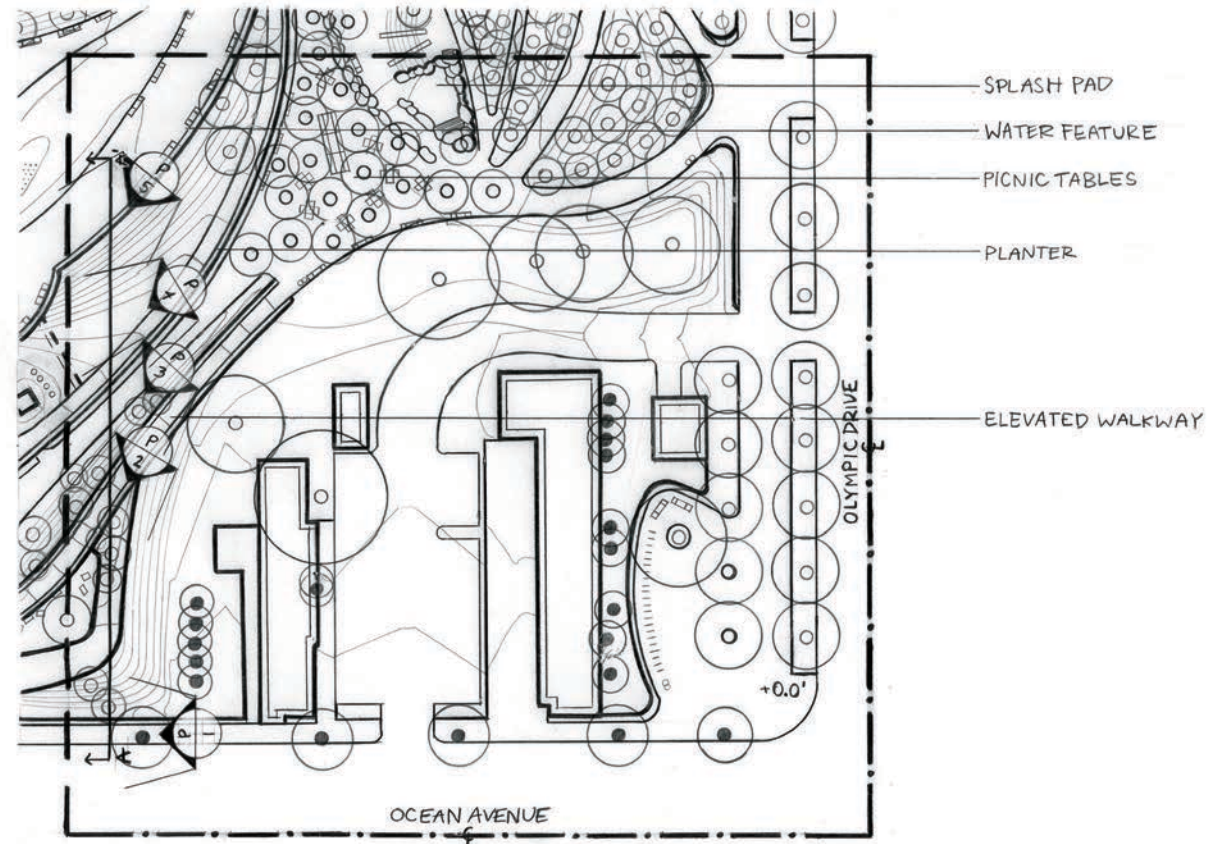
Restroom

Terraced Plantings

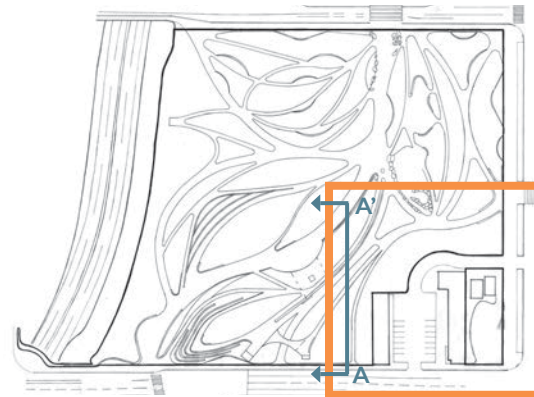
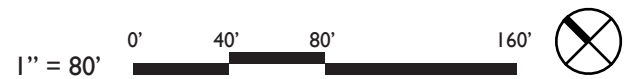
Overlook



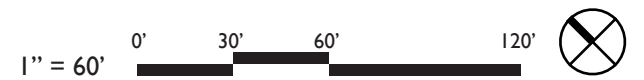
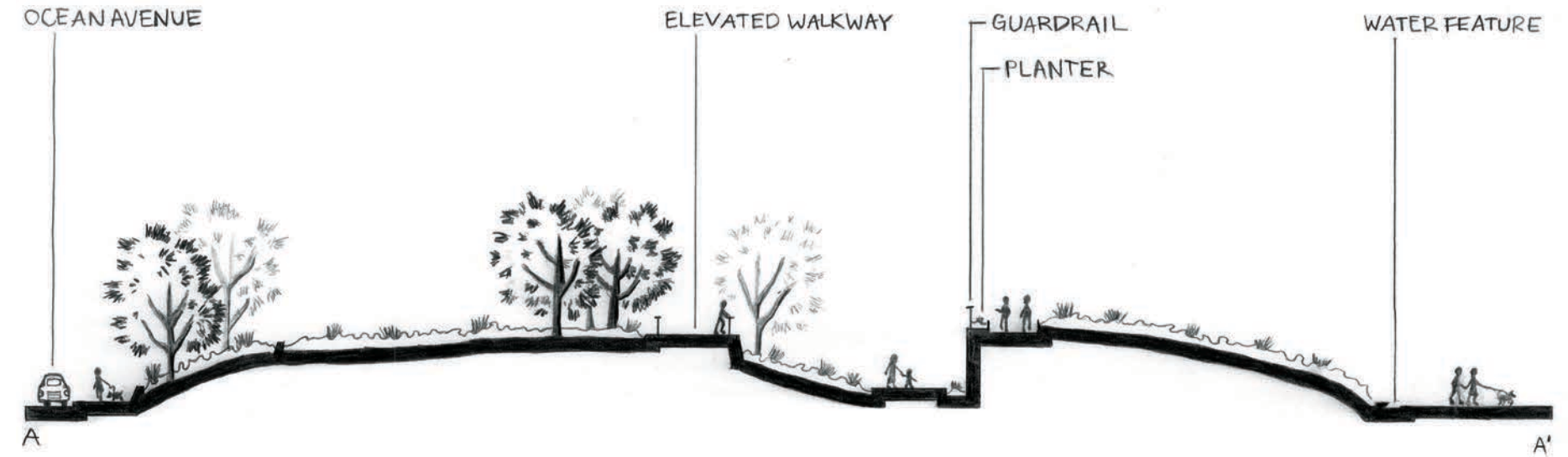
Southwest Quadrant

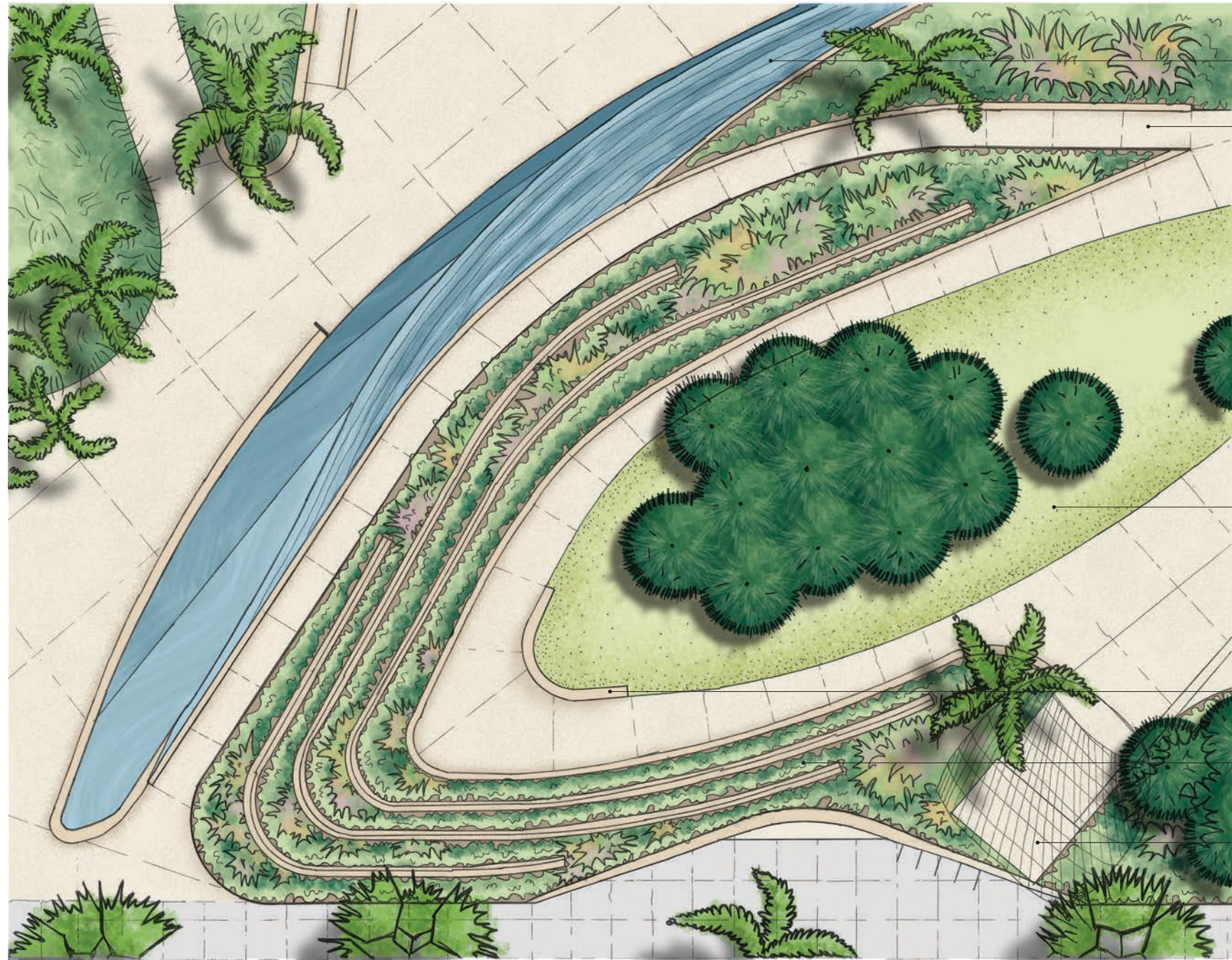


- STUDY BOUNDARY
 - MATCHLINE
 - PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION
 - VEHICULAR CIRCULATION
 - BUILDING
 - RETAINING WALL
 - FENCE
- TREE
 - PALM TREE
 - CONTOUR INTERVAL = 1'



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Water Feature

ADA Ramp

Gathering Lawn

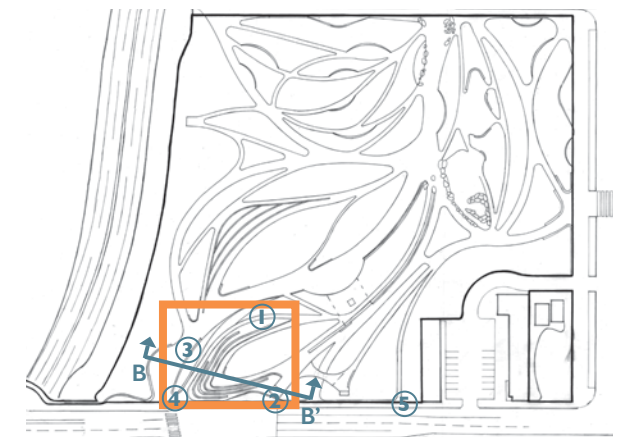
Seat Wall

Terraced Plantings

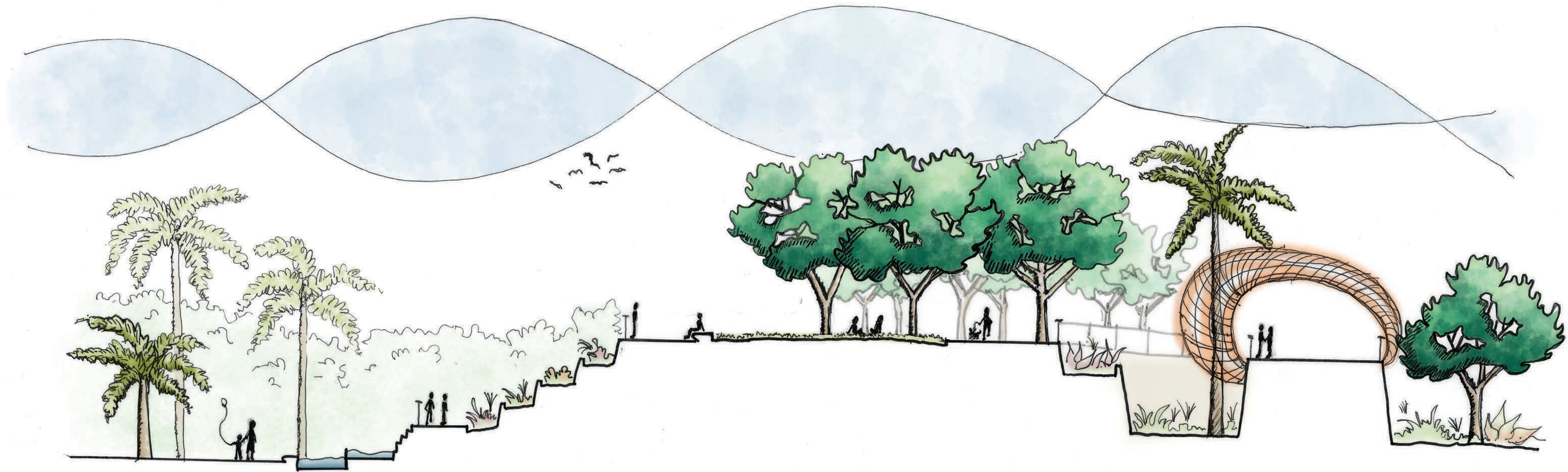
Overlook



Ocean Avenue entrance and Discovery Hill



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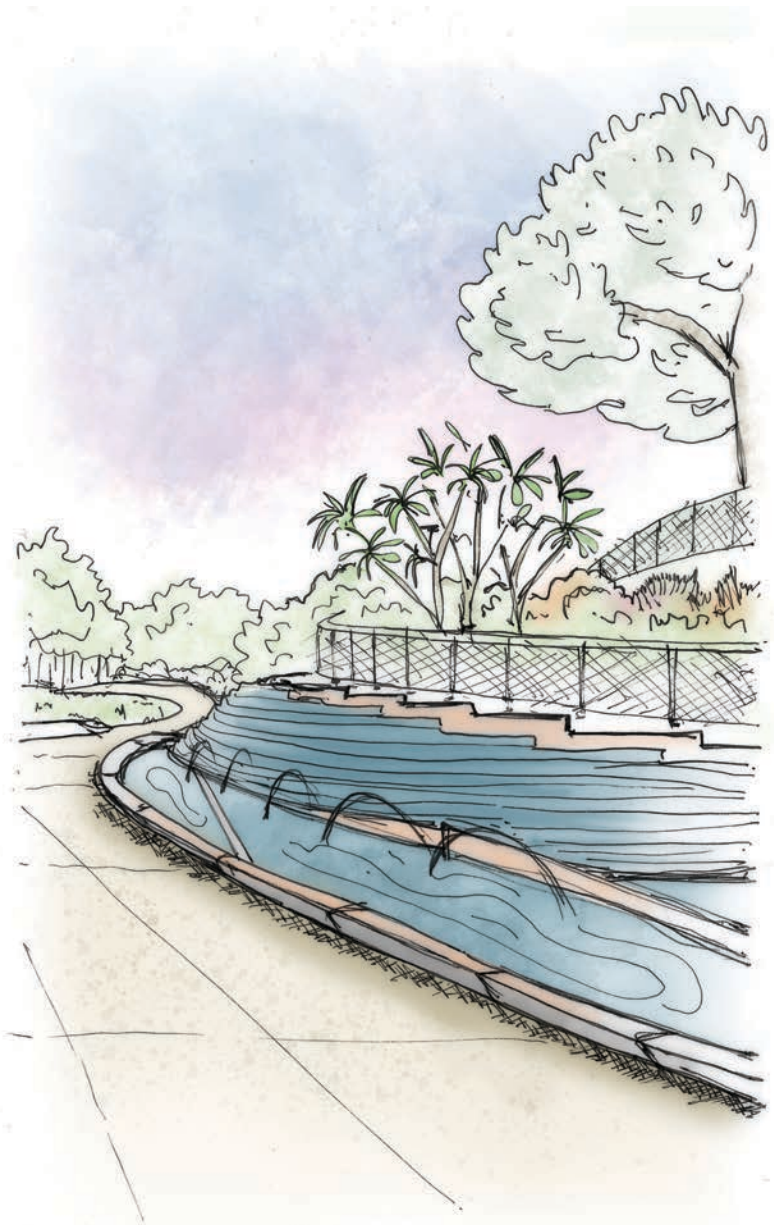


B

B'

1" = 10' 0' 10' 20' 40'

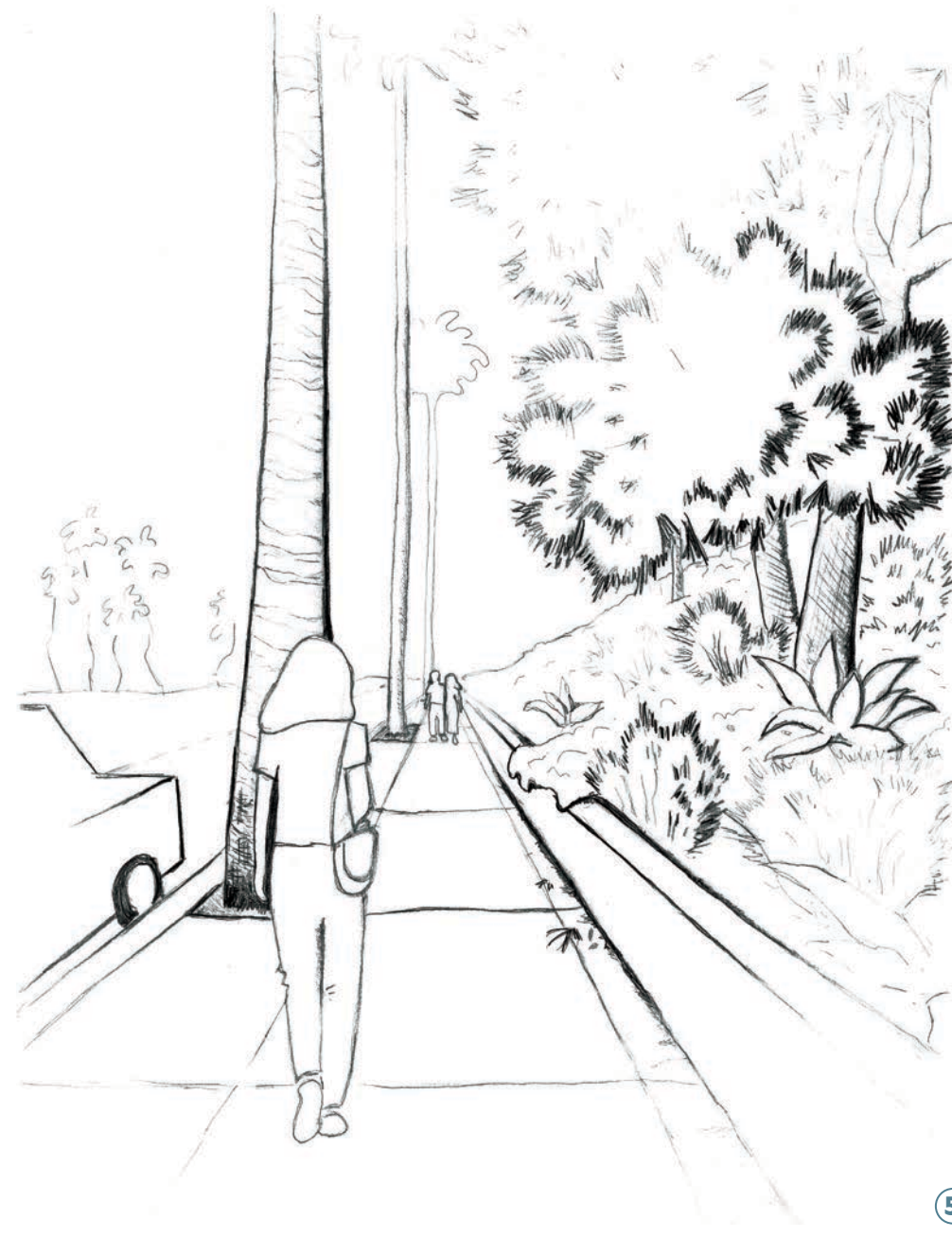




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Summary



Final Thoughts

When reflecting on this process and the past three classes, I'm in awe of how much I've learned since the beginning of Design Graphics I, and how my mind works completely differently than it did before. In all three classes, I've learned so much so quickly that it actually hurt.

From David, I learned precision, accuracy, rigor. Rebecca taught me how to make choices in how I graphically represent ideas, and how my choices change the message I'm communicating. Laura helped me to drastically expand my toolset beyond F Pencils and Chartpak AD Markers.

And in studying the park at large, I grew so much in my understanding of design concept and how different elements from paving types to storm-water management can (and should) reinforce a central concept.



Franny helping with my DG2 Sheet 5 layout

About Me

Hi, I'm Laura! I grew up in Orange County (for easy reference: about 35 miles from Tongva Park) and studied History and French at DePaul University in Chicago.

I currently live in Silver Lake, Los Angeles, where I make and teach pottery. There are fewer things that bring me more comfort than a coffee and a pastry. I have two very soft cats, Franny and Dewey.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to David Squires, Rebecca Schwaner and Laura Razo for your support, knowledge, and patience. You've made a profound impact on how I understand design.

Thank you to Brian Bautista for sharing photos of the park with me that were featured in this booklet.

And thank you to Franny and Dewey for keeping me company through the hundreds of hours of drawing.

Citations

"Tongva Park and Ken Genser Square." 2018 ASLA Professional Awards. American Society of Landscape Architects. Accessed June 9, 2025. https://www.asla.org/2018awards/455654-Tongva_Park_And_Ken_Genser.html

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Photography by Brian Bautista, Tim Street Porter, Steve Proehl, and Joakim Lloyd Raboff. Other photos taken by me.