

PARISIAN ACCENTS

IN THE RAPIDLY CHANGING FRENCH CAPITAL, THREE BIG NEW PARKS ARE EXPANDING THE EDGES.

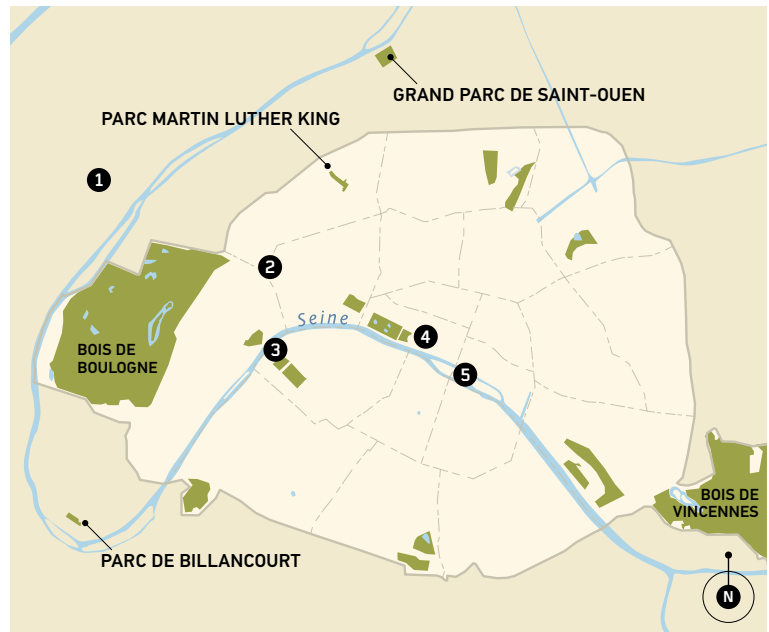
BY DANIEL ELSEA

PARIS "IS STILL A CRUCIBLE, STILL A FOCAL POINT." These are words written by Henri Lefebvre, the philosopher and sociologist best known for his insights regarding urban development, power, and the organization of space in cities. He wrote these words in his seminal work *The Production of Space* as the dust was still settling from the trauma of the 1968 revolts that rocked the city. His words previewed a French modern tradition meant to inject gusto in the city—the *grand projet*. In the 1970s and 1980s came a string of *grands projets*: from great new cultural institutions with muscular buildings to match (Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay) to a corporatist paradise for French multinationals (the La Défense business district). The inauguration of *grands projets* continued apace through the 1990s with loud echoes of France's global reach (Jean Nouvel's Institut du Monde Arabe and Musée du Quai Branly) and a rather large park by Bernard Tschumi (Parc de la Villette). With their strong design pedigree and a dose of radicalism, these seductive projects are a bursting of the French id, and they've been good to French designers.



PARC MARTIN LUTHER KING
A park named in honor of the American civil rights hero caters to an increasingly diverse Paris.

ATELIER-JACQUELINE OSTY & ASSOCIÉS



PARIS

- 1 LA GRANDE ARCHE DE LA DÉFENSE
- 2 ARC DE TRIOMPHE
- 3 LA TOUR EIFFEL
- 4 LE MUSÉE DU LOUVRE
- 5 CATHÉDRALE NOTRE-DAME DE PARIS

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE

Three Parisian parks: Parc Martin Luther King lies within the city's boundaries; Parc de Billancourt and Grand Parc de Saint-Ouen are located in inner-ring suburbs, now part of the larger Paris *Métropole*—an official designation for a Greater Paris city region.



PARC DE BILLANCOURT

DOLLY HOLMES, MAP. © YANG CHEN FOR AGENCY TER, LEFT; © AGENCY TER, BOTTOM

ATELIER JACQUELINE OSTY & ASSOCIÉS



PARC MARTIN LUTHER KING



GRAND PARC DE SAINT-OUEN

Crucially, *grands projets* involve heavy public sector backing. It is in this tradition that Paris has embarked on major regeneration projects around the *Périphérique*, the ring road around the edge of Paris proper. Three significant new neighborhoods are being built at the moment, and each of them features a large public park at its heart, the Grand Parc de Saint-Ouen, the Parc Martin Luther King, and Parc de Billancourt, designed by either Agence Ter or Atelier Jacqueline Osty, Parisian landscape architects known for their large-scale civic projects with a growing international profile. Ter recently won the competition to overhaul Ricardo Legorreta's Pershing Square in Los Angeles.

The parks anchor massive regeneration projects delivered via public-private partnerships, or P3s, in which private developers collaborate with the state to deliver whole new neighborhoods and a significant expansion to Greater Paris's housing supply. But these are not the P3s you might know. The public sector retains a majority share of ownership in the delivery vehicles set up for each. In France, one P is more important than the other two.

GRAND PARC DE SAINT-OUEN

PLAN

- 1 CHÂTEAU DE SAINT-OUEN
- 2 AGRICULTURAL ALLOTMENTS
- 3 COOKING SCHOOL
- 4 PUBLIC BELVEDERE

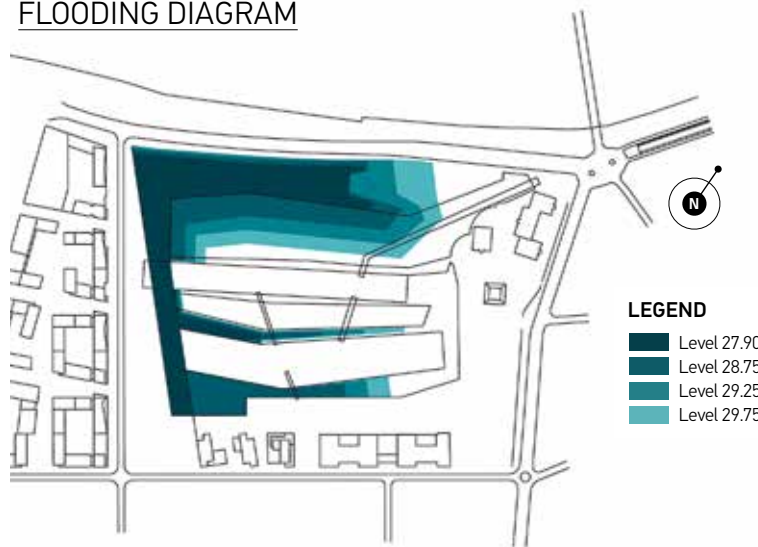


“THE

HE MAYOR AND THE CITY [have] the power to do what they want to do,” says Olivier Philippe, a partner at Ter. Philippe and his team are responsible for two of these parks, the latest of which won the 2017 Landezine International Landscape Award (LILA) in the Project category—the Grand Parc de Saint-Ouen, the heart of the ongoing 100-hectare ZAC des

Docks regeneration project to the northwest of Paris. Saint-Ouen is one of the poorest suburbs of Paris, a very mixed area with people from approximately 140 countries who call it home. It is part of a northern belt of suburbs that in the mid-20th

FLOODING DIAGRAM



- LEGEND**
- Level 27.90
 - Level 28.75
 - Level 29.25
 - Level 29.75

FLOODPLAIN



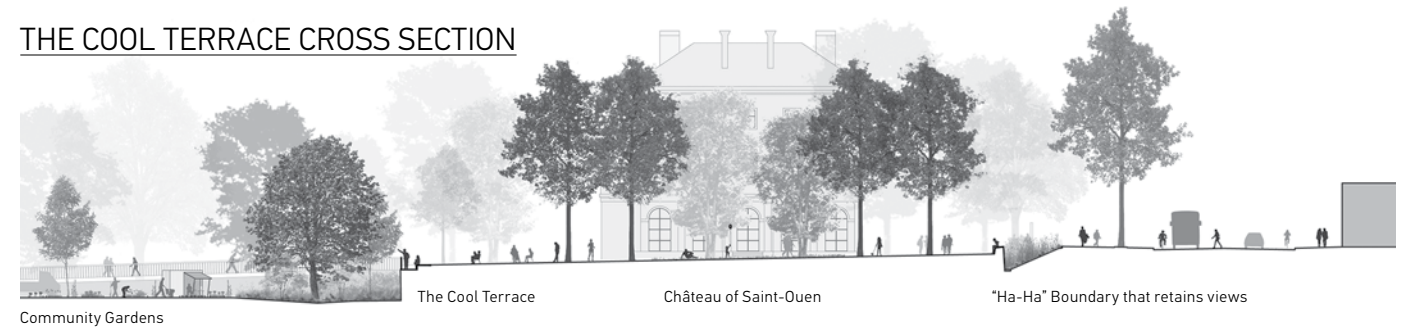
century were largely industrial. By the 1980s, their industrial base had collapsed, and many of these northern suburbs were rocked by social unrest, most recently in 2017. In response, a P3, Séquano, was set up with the Seine-Saint-Denis local government as the majority shareholder (the *département*, or administrative region, bordering northern Paris proper and within the Grand Paris region). Séquano took over the Docks site and embarked on a major development project that is delivering more than 5,000 new housing units and 400,000 square meters of new office, public, and educational buildings along the northern bend of the Seine River.

TOP
The public belvedere along the northwestern edge of Grand Parc de Saint-Ouen.

LEFT
Generously planted floodplains within the park will help to mitigate major inundation events.

© YANG CHEN FOR AGENCIE TER, TOP; © AGENCIE TER, CENTER AND BOTTOM

THE COOL TERRACE CROSS SECTION



GRAND PARC DE SAINT-OUEN



© AGENCE TER

© YANG CHEN FOR AGENCE TER, TOP; © AGENCE TER, BOTTOM



LEFT
One-meter-square agricultural allotments have proven to be very popular.

Ter's plan for the park is delightfully simple. It embraces the riverine location and is composed of different "stripes" parallel to the river. Each stripe has a different texture, which changes in character as you move from the river toward the city. A flood basin melds into a great lawn, which meets a civic pedestrian boulevard that divides it from a prairie, more naturalistic in character than the lawn, which then ambles upon a thick layer of agricultural land, which you can meander through quite easily before reaching a smaller linear lawn and a transition hardscape into the neighborhood. Alongside the park's eastern edge is an update of the classical French garden that radiates from the small Château de Saint-Ouen, which is tucked into the park's northeast corner. It provides a lookout point onto the unfolding bands of landscape. Despite the grand name, the château is more petite sideshow than *grand palais*. It is the ribbon of scraggly agriculture running down the middle of the park, east to west, which is the star attraction.

Friendly, casual, and unassuming, this patchwork of allotments sets the tone for a landscape that is informal and approachable even as it is civic. Picnic tables, designed by Ter, sit amid brushy lawns that punctuate small outdoor rooms for farming right in the middle of the city. A large, industrial-



scale pavilion, competently designed by Ter's in-house architects, sits adjacent to the allotments. Fitted out with a generous kitchen—the kind you see in cooking shows—it is home to a cooking school and has an ongoing program to promote healthy eating and a relationship with the land.

A motley collection of furnishings, seemingly strewn across the park as if lawn chairs in a suburban backyard, fits nicely with the casual tone set by the allotments, all creating a bit of unorganized design. There's a waiting list for the farming plots, which measure a square meter each. They're remarkably popular, Philippe notes, sounding pleasantly surprised. "Very few of the vegetables are stolen," he assures.

"The gardening that is going on here is not only about gardening. It's about meeting people, learning cooking, sharing experiences with people from other countries, and learning to live together. We need to emphasize the idea of living together especially in a city like this, like in many places in France," Philippe says. In many French urban neighborhoods, some in the indigenous French population have grown uneasy with large numbers of newcomers, so spaces like these that enable discovery and sharing are increasingly useful.

TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM
The park is designed as a series of ribbons, each different in character.

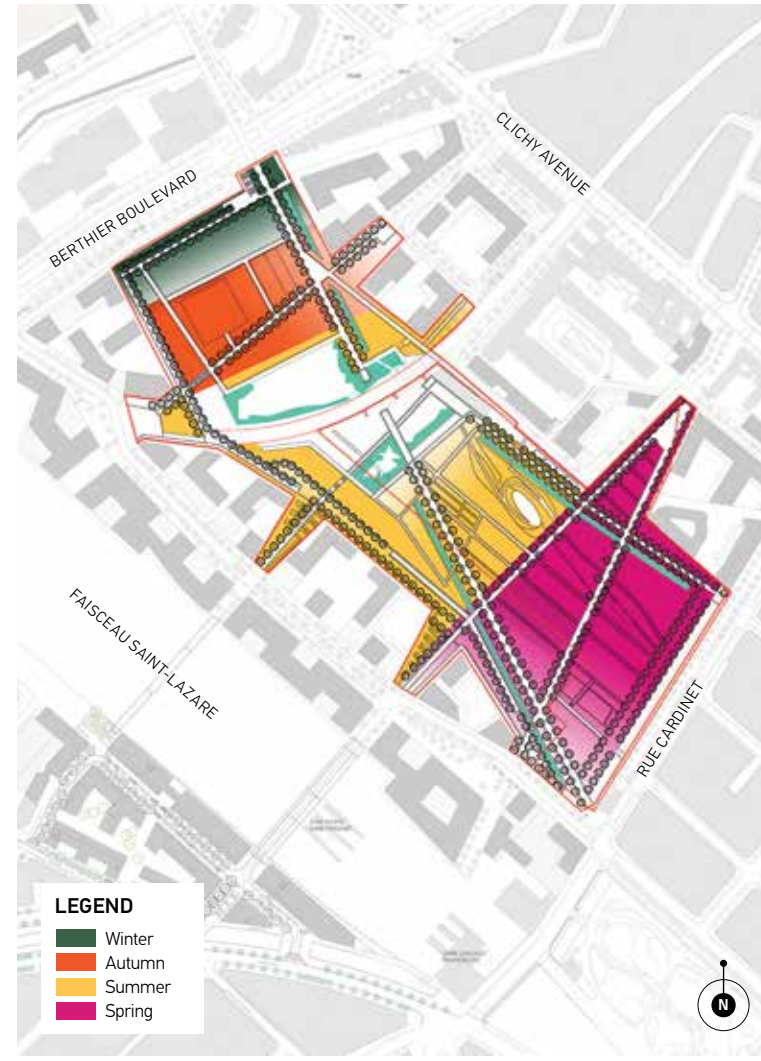
TOP RIGHT
Playscapes animate the park, which sits within one of the most multicultural communities in Paris.

PARC MARTIN LUTHER KING



ATELIER JACQUELINE OSTY & ASSOCIÉS, TOP; VECTUEL-STUDIOSEZ-PBA, BOTTOM

A PARK FOR ALL SEASONS



VECTUEL-STUDIOSEZ-PBA, LEFT; ATELIER JACQUELINE OSTY & ASSOCIÉS, RIGHT TOP AND RIGHT BOTTOM



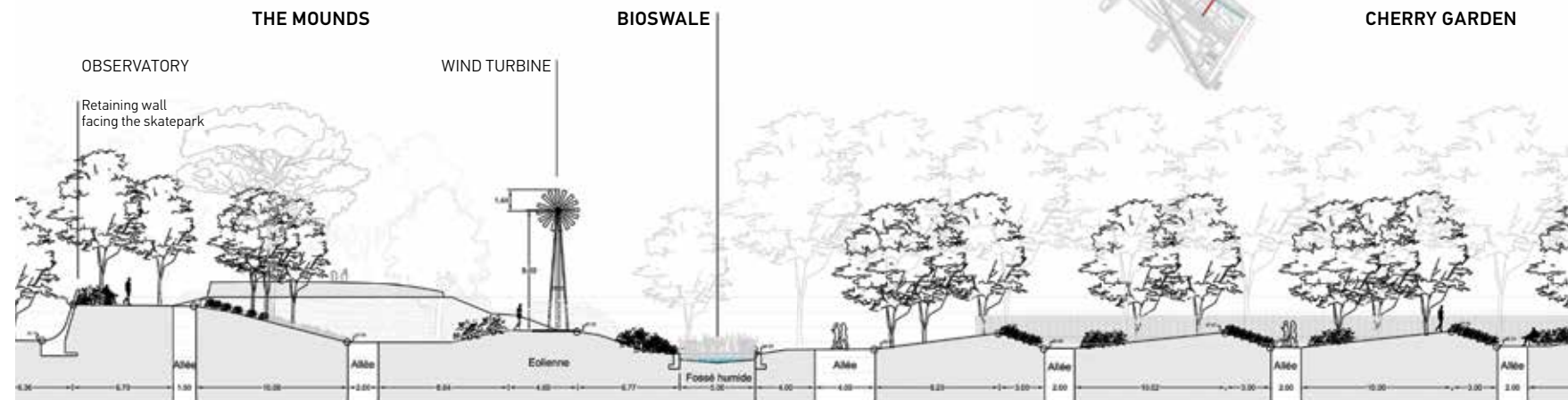
A

SHORT MÉTRO RIDE from ZAC des Docks is further evidence of this cosmopolitanism in the Parc Martin Luther King. The name, of course, instantly resonates to the American ear. Bertrand Delanoë, the Socialist mayor of Paris from 2001 to 2014, selected the name (the full name is Parc Clichy-Batignolles-Martin Luther King) in 2008 to mark the 40th anniversary of King's assassination. Paris's Seventeenth Arrondissement may seem a far cry from Memphis, the site of King's murder, but this is a city used to naming big places after great progressive Americans—one of its busiest Métro stations, a great boulevard, and a roundabout are all named after Franklin D. Roosevelt, after all.

TOP
The park is the anchor in Clichy-Batignolles, a major mixed-use redevelopment site with housing for thousands.

MLK park's principal landscape architect is Jacqueline Osty, who has led her own studio since 1985 and has taken on a number of large ur-

SECTION



ban commissions. In 2003, Osty was one of 14 landscape architects, architects, and urban planners invited to develop a master plan for Clichy-Batignolles, a major redevelopment project in northwest Paris, also developed by a P3. As Paris was preparing its bid for the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, this site of back-of-house rail yards was selected as the Olympic Village. London ended up winning those games and transformed its own industrial backwater into the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

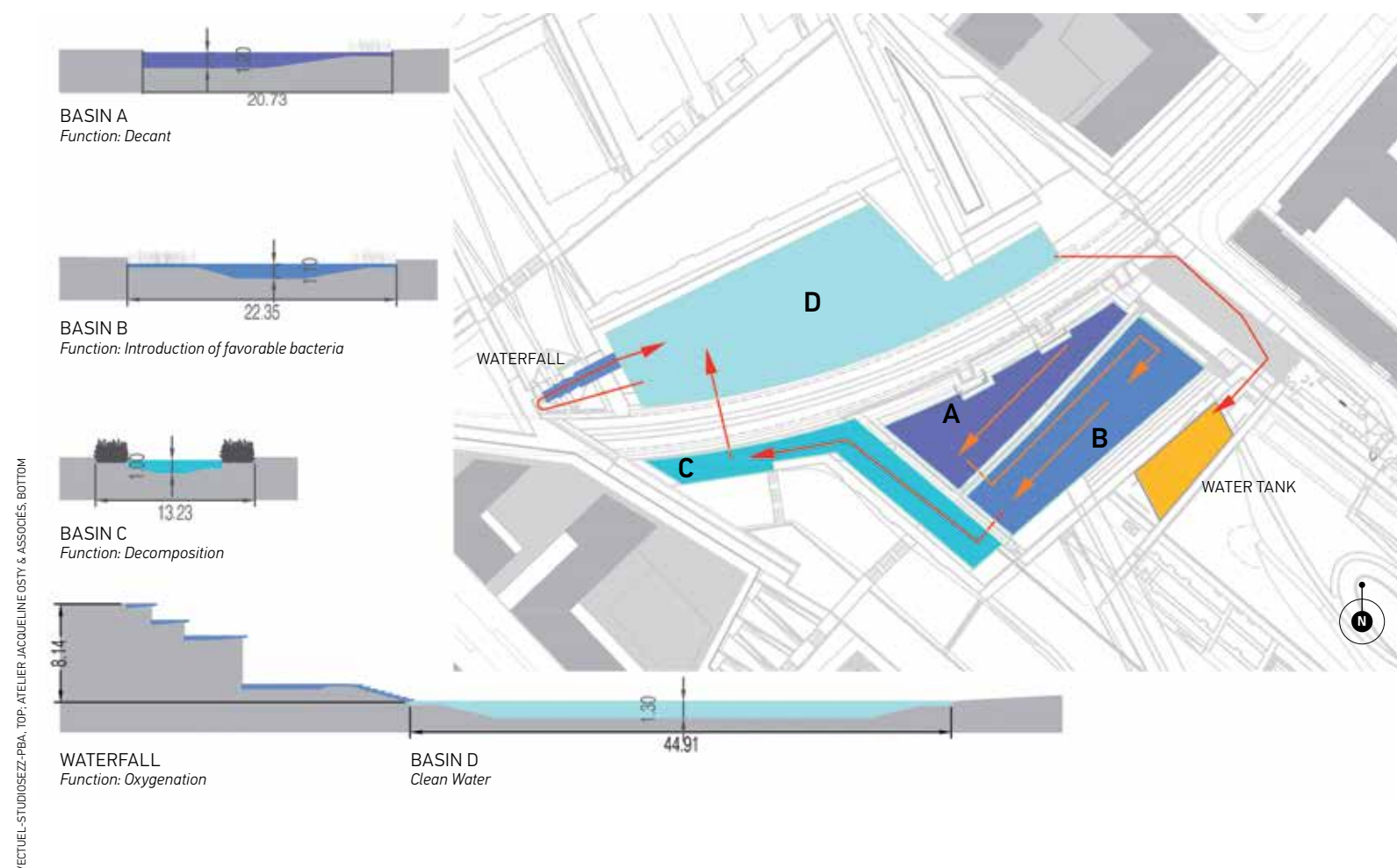
Rather than give up on the ambition, Paris decided to carry on. The plans for the 50-plus-hectare site were redone to create a permanent piece of the city rather than an Olympic Village. It would become a neighborhood of 3,400 homes, many of them subsidized, as well as the location of a new theater complex and Paris's new courthouse, a large, 160-meter-high complex designed by

ABOVE
The park is conceived as a series of smaller outdoor rooms; here, one seen in summer and autumn.



PARC MARTIN LUTHER KING

WATER ECOLOGY



CIRCULATION



ARNAULD DUBOYS FRESNEY, TOP; VECTUEL-STUDIOSEZ-PBA, BOTTOM

Renzo Piano Building Workshop that opens this month. The master plan is rather classical, or, shall we say, Haussmanian. The rectilinear park is at the middle. Blocks of housing, all midrange in height, politely line its western and eastern edges; the theaters and park line its shorter northern edge, and the existing Batignolles neighborhood lies to its south. As massing, the housing blocks are relatively uniform—a 21st-century take on the Haussman block—but their envelopes are decidedly eclectic, with a lot of expression at the hands of many architecture firms—Odile Decq, Aires Mateus, and Baumschlager Eberle, to name a few. Opening in three phases, the first in 2007 (4 hectares), the second in 2013 (2 hectares), and the third in 2020 (4 hectares), it represents 17 years of work for Osty.

“The park came first. It’s been very interesting, because it has shaped the architecture that grew up around it, literally,” says Osty, who notes that Renzo Piano’s office oriented its monumental courthouse to face the park.

Despite the grand gestures and civic plan, the park feels intimate. The existing urban structure of the surrounding street grid is superimposed onto the

TOP
A number of important European architects have designed new buildings lining the park.



park to create a series of small outdoor rooms, which break it up into pieces of smaller parks, as if several variants of the Place des Vosges were transubstantiated into a modern-day Tuileries.

“What we tried to do was to retain the spirit of the little square. We were very interested in creating little parks in Batignolles,” Osty told me, rather than one big park. “You can find interest in different ways, and different people will find their own place.”

The internal paths that continue the street pattern make the park easy to cross. There are some higher belvederes, contrasting with sunken lawns, a hard-edged skatepark, ponds, and soft rectangles of planting. For those seeking the idyllic, there is a field of Japanese cherry trees—Osty’s favorite part of the whole tapestry.

LEFT
Routes across the park follow the existing street patterns of the surrounding neighborhoods.

PARC DE BILLANCOURT



PLAN



LEFT
Agence Ter designed all the furniture in Parc de Billancourt.

OPPOSITE
The park sits within a major brownfield redevelopment of an old Renault industrial site.

A

SIMILAR APPROACH is taken at Parc de Billancourt, where rows of apartment buildings overlook a vast park in an urban assemblage that would also make Haussman proud. Here, set in the southwestern suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt, the site of an old Renault factory has been transformed into a major new community, also backed by a brawny P3. Called Ile Seguin Rives de Seine, it is bringing the creation of a whole new neighborhood (well on its way to completion) on the banks of the River Seine and a major cultural campus on a nearby island. Still

CROSS SECTION



a bit of a construction site, it features the large, bulbous Cité Musicale building by Shigeru Ban and Jean de Gastines, which would not look out of place as an opera house for a third-tier Chinese city. It's a disappointing low point to what is otherwise an impressive architectural ensemble. It includes a sublime assortment of silver towers by Dominique Perrault and adventurous blocks by Foster + Partners and some of France's best emerging architects.

"It's quite a classical master plan, a very Parisian layout," Philippe says. "It's chic and soft."

PARC DE BILLANCOURT



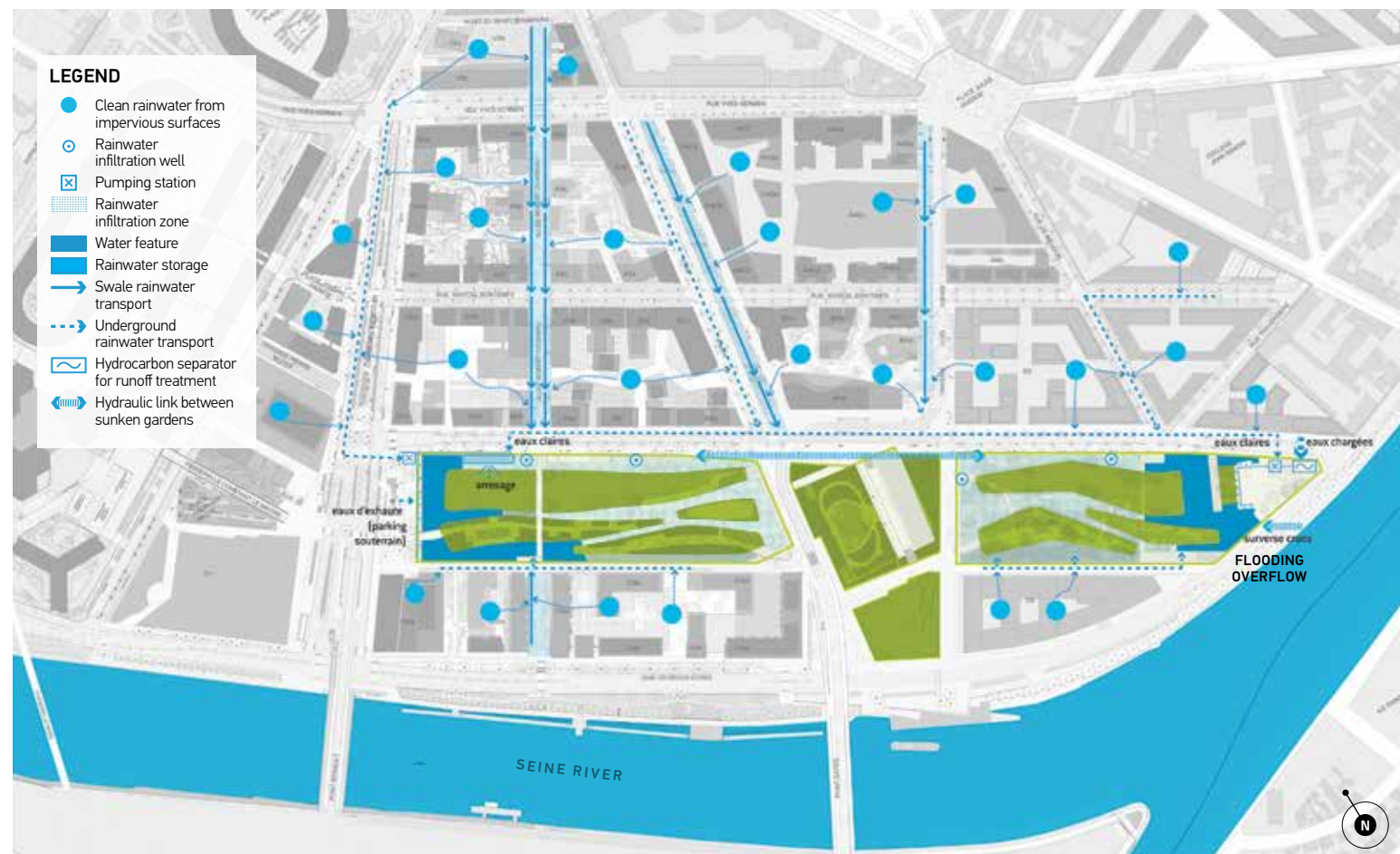
RIGHT

Parc de Billancourt anchors a major new development reimagining old industrial land as a neighborhood for families needing proximity to central Paris.

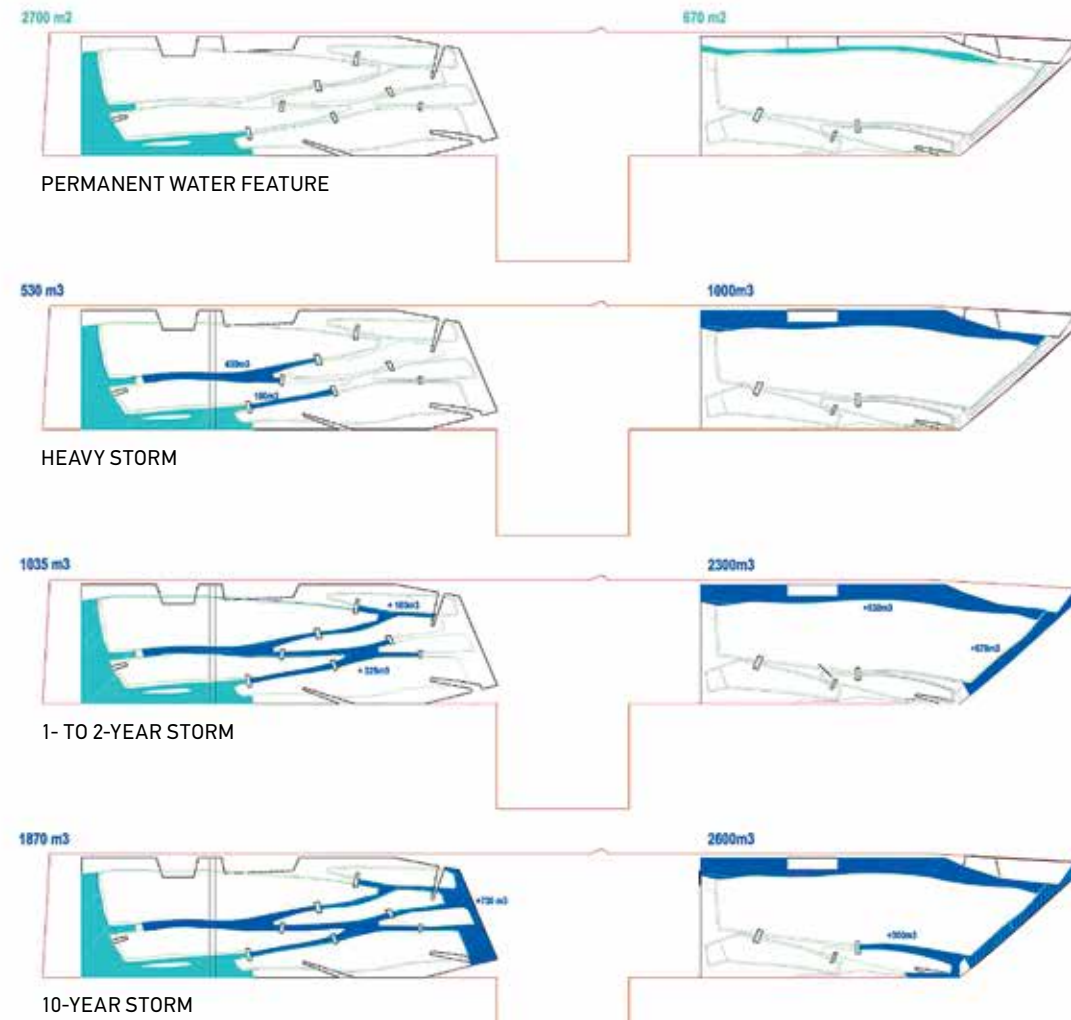
BELOW

The park sits within a wider landscape and water filtration system for the whole neighborhood.

WATER MANAGEMENT DIAGRAM



STORM AND FLOODWATER LEVELS



LEFT AND BELOW
The park serves an important function in Paris's flood defenses, able to absorb water generated during heavy flooding.

FLOODING



The park itself is a sunken plane, one that, if needed, could absorb 20,000 cubic meters of water in the event of a major flood. It is divided into three different "islands," each with a slightly different character to break up the rigidity expected at such a scale. Its northern edge, closer to the magnetism of the Perrault towers, has fewer trees; the southern riverside edge, which includes the retained Renault factory relic, has more trees. The effect is the creation of two microclimates, which further accentuates the park's intimacy. There is no artificial lighting in the parkland itself, which has helped to attract a remarkable amount of biodiversity with ducks, herons, and hedgehogs returning and making their habitat. And like Osty's MLK park, it has cherry trees.

“P

ARISIAN PARKS are traditionally along the Seine,” says Henri Bava, Philippe’s partner at Ter, who had just flown back from Los Angeles when I interviewed him. “As the city has created new districts—Bercy, La Villette, Saint-Ouen—it puts parks along the river, and around them blocks with new housing.”

This French urban system has proved a remarkably effective model, expanding the city’s housing supply and gently expanding one’s understanding of what Paris is. With these developments, the Périphérique, the long-standing edge of the city of Paris’s limits, is no longer a barrier in the minds of people. With the creation of a Grand Paris regional *Métropole*, which incorporates neighboring suburbs such as Boulogne-Billancourt, Paris’s very boundaries may one day be expanded—and these parks are an important salvo in this expansion.

These parks anchor new pieces of a modern France, multihued, a bit more multi-culti. More Turenscape than gentle European pocket park, this is the landscape architecture of big government. With the Olympics now just around the corner—the city finally won them for 2024—perhaps it’s time to remember that we’ll always have Paris. ●

DANIEL ELSEA, A DIRECTOR AT ALLIES AND MORRISON IN LONDON, WRITES ON ARCHITECTURE, LANDSCAPE, AND CONTEMPORARY ART.



PARC DE BILLANCOURT
The park is part of a major 74-hectare development that will deliver housing for 12,000 people when complete.

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