

# Putting Arts in the Park

AN ARCHITECT TAKES HOLLYWOOD MODERN BY ROB JORDAN



**A**s you cross three lanes of traffic on U.S. 1 toward Young Circle in downtown Hollywood, your destination reaches you before you reach it. It's the sound of a harp—actually several harps, glissandos pouring from silvery posts outfitted with speakers and arrayed around a hulking baobab tree on the western edge of the circle.

The installation, which the Japanese artist Ritsuko Taho says represents the tree's "life wave patterns," might seem a little Enya-New Agey. But it's an apt introduction to the thor-

oughly engaging new ArtsPark in Young Circle.

Young Circle (originally Harding Circle) was part of the first master plan of Hollywood, a city near Fort Lauderdale incorporated in 1925. In the 1960s, the city added an amphitheater, but for decades Young Circle, named for Hollywood's founder, Joseph W. Young, was a neglected 10-acre hole in the middle of a sleepy city. "When you walked in the park, you were already on the other side visually," said Margi Nothard, the architect who designed the new ArtsPark.

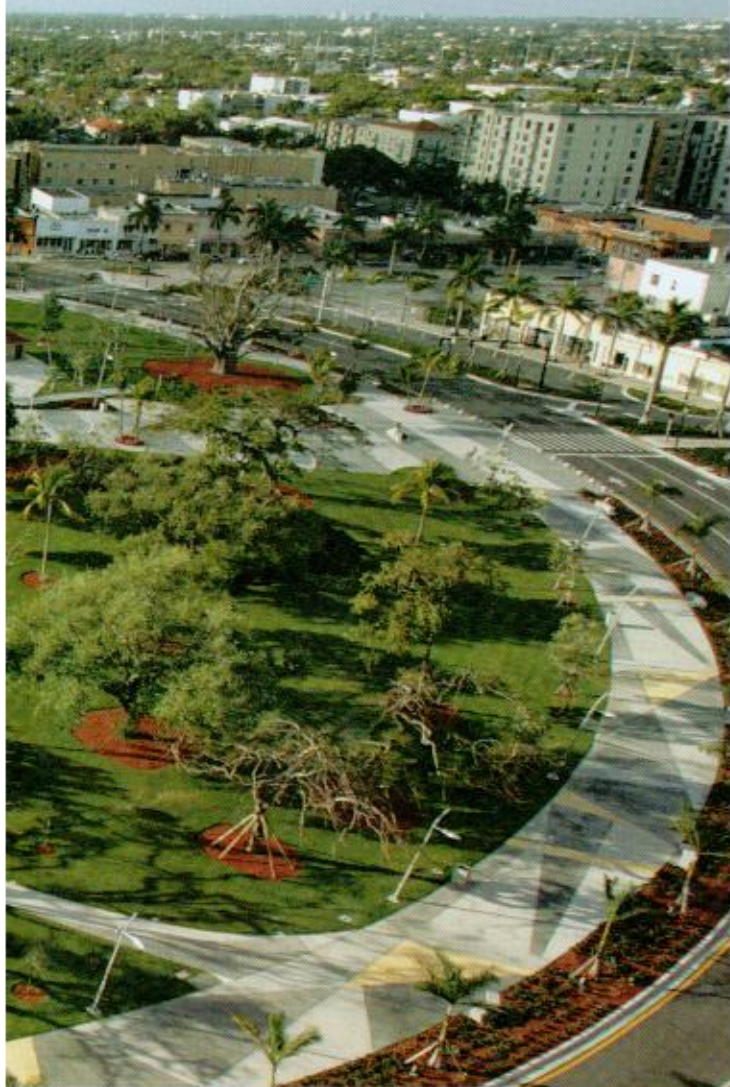
Like a mandala at the intersection of

Hollywood Boulevard and U.S. 1, the carefully programmed new landscape is a symbol of what Hollywood intends to be, a vital center for shopping and luxury housing.

"I'm hoping that the park sparks a kind of curiosity," Nothard said. Even if people don't completely understand it, as long as they are using it, she said, "that's a connection."

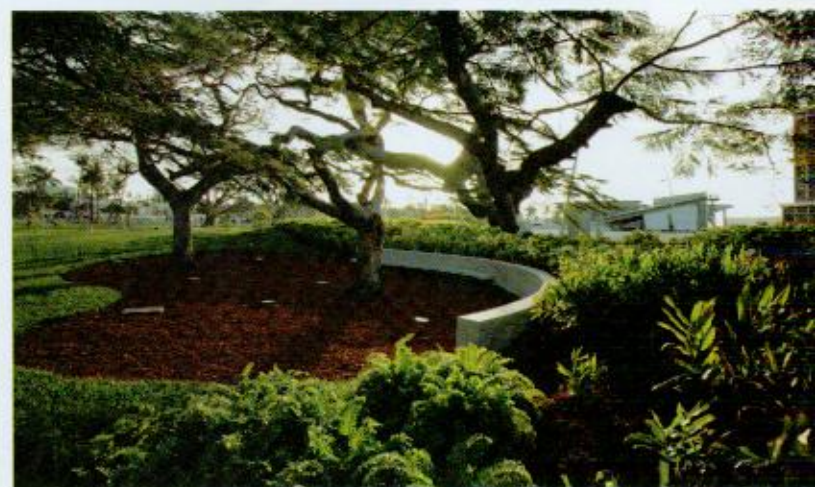
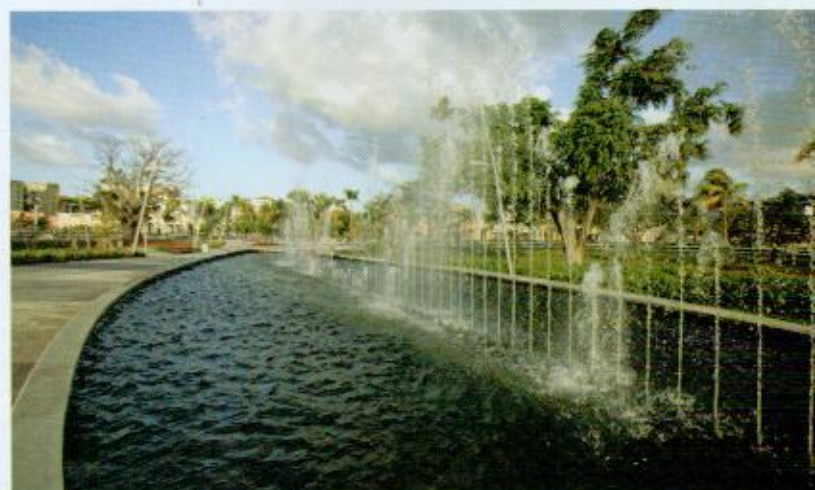
Envisioned as a journey through a series of "rooms," ArtsPark takes visitors through quiet, meditative nooks—in an area Nothard refers to as "the reading room"—to concrete planters

**ARTSPARK AT YOUNG CIRCLE**  
Looking south toward Miami. At 3 o'clock is an old baobab tree; the new children's playground is at 7 o'clock; a visual arts building, under construction, is at 9 o'clock.



that double as benches. The planters are perfect for people-watching, as is an open meadow that welcomes Frisbee players. A visual arts building on the east side of the park with spaces for glassmaking, metalworking and fine arts will be completed later this year. A performing arts center, yet to be funded, will provide an elaborate stage. (The old amphitheater was torn down, but ArtsPark is already designed to hold 2,000 people for a concert.)

Nothard worked with the landscape architect Jim Santiago on leaving plenty of space for



**MAKING A MOLE HILL OUT OF A FLAT CIRCLE**  
From the top: Nothard designed all of the colored concrete pavement, as in this section of the children's playground; center, the main fountain sits about five feet up the incline; at bottom, plants, trees and planters give definition to the new landscape. Scharf and Associates was the architect of record.

## GREEN MATTERS

strolling, and an energetic fountain in the central plaza. Now, instead of seeing Walgreens on the far side of the circle, visitors coming from the west are greeted with a gently inclined landscape—eight feet high at the park's axis—that creates a sense of expansiveness and leaves room to explore. (Not for skateboarders, however, who are banned from the park.)

As if trying to keep pace with the construction of ArtsPark, which, with the visual arts building, will cost \$13.5 million, crews are rushing to finish high-rise condos on the northern edge of Young Circle. The cacophony of drills and cranes is something of a recent phenomenon for residents

### DESIGN STAR

Margi Nothard  
trained at SCI-Arc  
in Los Angeles.



### A GENTLE INCLINE

A walkway climbs eight feet to the center of the circle. Nothard designed the colored concrete pavement.

of this evolving neighborhood.

Families planning to move into the new buildings can look forward to using ArtsPark's intriguing new playground. On an overcast morning, toddlers romped around the padded area. They spun on "satellite dishes," a cross between a merry-go-round and a tilted metal mushroom, and children jumped on a kind of rooted pogo stick called a "cattail." A few adults looked on. One grinning, bearded man tried out the equipment. "We're so proud of our new park," a young woman said.

The playground's popularity belies the struggle Nothard faced in getting it, and the rest of the park, built. An urban design professor at Florida Atlantic University in nearby Fort Lauderdale,

Nothard got her masters degree from the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc) in Los Angeles. For a time she was in charge of the West Coast offices of Smith-Miller +Hawkinson Architects.

She moved to Florida in 1996 and opened Glavovic Studio, her architecture and urban design practice. In 2001, she was asked to design a gazebo for the circle. "They wanted to put a wrought-iron fence around a very traditional, nineteenth-century Parisian park," she said.

In the years that followed, Nothard, who was born in Zimbabwe, fought to win converts to her vision of a modern park and cultural destination. At community meetings, her ideas were criticized as being too avant-garde, and she probably lost a few locals with her description of "dynamic movement and interaction" when she was talking about children playing. Nothard recalls one woman at a meeting saying that she "clearly didn't understand children and obviously wasn't a mother."

Nothard, 43, is indeed a mother, of two boys, ages 9 and 11. She recently had the double pleasure (as mother *and* landscape architect) of watching her sons frolic on a playground she designed. Nothard's children aren't the only ones playing in the park. Thousands showed up in March for the official opening with musicians, dancers, mimes, hot dog vendors and a theater troupe. Nothard was elated by the turnout and unfazed by the trampled flowerbeds.

In fact, she was already looking ahead, trying to figure out how to make up for the loss of old-growth trees in the park after Hurricane Wilma in 2005. She would like to install several cutting-edge shade structures around the playground, but expects to meet resistance once again.

"I'm going to have to go to war," she said, with a laugh. ■

*'They wanted to put a wrought-iron fence around a very traditional, nineteenth-century Parisian park.'*

### BY NIGHT

ArtsPark is still welcoming after dark. Nothard designed the European-looking light fixtures in the center of the park with Sandy Langner of Lighting Dynamics of Virginia.

