



Profile

Flower Power

Peter Schaudt, Chicago's premier landscape architect, is giving the city a green makeover—one lawn at a time

"THIS IS MORE ABOUT bold, gutsy design than gardening," says landscape architect Peter Schaudt of his latest—and largest—creation, the new 17-acre park that surrounds the recently transformed Soldier Field. The park, one part of the \$632-million project that seems to have escaped controversy, is a vast improvement by any measure over what was there previously—mainly endless acres of concrete parking lots.

It also consolidates Schaudt's position as Chicago's premier landscape architect. Starting with his well-received renovation of Daley Plaza in the late 1990s, Schaudt has been on a roll. Among his recent projects were supervising the plantings around Rem Koolhaas's and Helmut Jahn's new buildings at the Illinois Institute of Technology; consulting on the master plan for Wrigley Field's bleacher expansion; and designing a 200-foot-long bamboo garden for the striking new Hyatt Center currently under construction in the Loop.

But even in the midst of all this activity, the Soldier Field park stands out. "To be able to work on [Daniel] Burnham and [Frederick Law] Olmsted's legacy and make a contribution to that legacy is a huge thing," Schaudt says.

Still, don't expect a continuation of Grant Park's Beaux Arts formality or the more naturalistic layout of Burnham Park, just to the south. The Soldier Field park (technically, part of Burnham Park) takes off in a different direction. "Historically, this was a dune landscape," says Schaudt, 45. "We wanted to abstract that with very soft, sinuous folding landforms."

(Actually, there was no landscape of any kind in the area until the early 1900s when debris from the excavation for the downtown freight tunnel project was dumped in the lake. But let that pass.)

The new park encompasses a series of hills and ridges—the topography varies by as much as 49 feet—that wrap around the stadium like a velvety green scarf.



Highlights include a 33-foot sledding hill, a children's garden, and several rolling lawns suitable for strolling and picnicking.

Schaudt, of the firm Peter Lindsay Schaudt Landscape Architecture, particularly likes the Children's Garden, located at the corner of McFetridge Drive and Museum Campus Drive, a new street that winds through the park. "The park district made it clear that they didn't want swings and monkey bars," he says. Instead, there are six globes that represent different aspects of Earth, including a rope climbing structure in the shape of a half-sphere. On a recent visit, Schaudt, who grew up in Villa Park and still lives there with his wife and two kids, sat entranced on a bench watching several small children clamber up the climbing structure.

Schaudt and his team also planted 1,400 trees, 12,000 shrubs, and 144,000 vines, grasses, annuals, and bulbs. The new trees range from Midwest staples such as oaks, maples, and ashes to ginkgoes and bald cypresses. And the new park, unlike Grant Park and the rest of Burnham Park, is totally "sprinkled," meaning that a network of underground pipes and sprinklers will keep it lush and green throughout the season.

Landscape architects traditionally take the long view, and Schaudt is no exception. "There are areas that look great now," he says, "but it's going to be really wonderful in 20 years."

—ROBERT SHAROFF