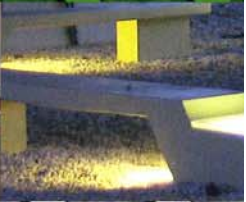


67
2009

Materials and Details

SLA URBAN GARDEN IN NØRRESUNDBY, DENMARK • **HERZOG & DE MEURON** PLAZA DE ESPAÑA, TENERIFE • **MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH ASSOCIATES** TEARDROP PARK, NEW YORK • **D.I.R.T. STUDIO** URBAN OUTFITTERS HEADQUARTERS, PHILADELPHIA • **CMG** MINT PLAZA, SAN FRANCISCO • **AGENCE TER VACHE NOIRE** ROUNDABOUT, FRANCE • **MAYSLITS KASSIF** TEL AVIV PORT, ISRAEL • **HASSEL** NICHOLSON STREET MALL, MELBOURNE • **LA DALLMANN** CROSSROADS PROJECT, MILWAUKEE • **MCGREGOR+COXALL** WINNER OF THE TOPOS LANDSCAPE AWARD 2009



Julie Bargmann, David Hill

Urban Outfitters' Headquarters

Philadelphia Navy Yard Pennsylvania, USA

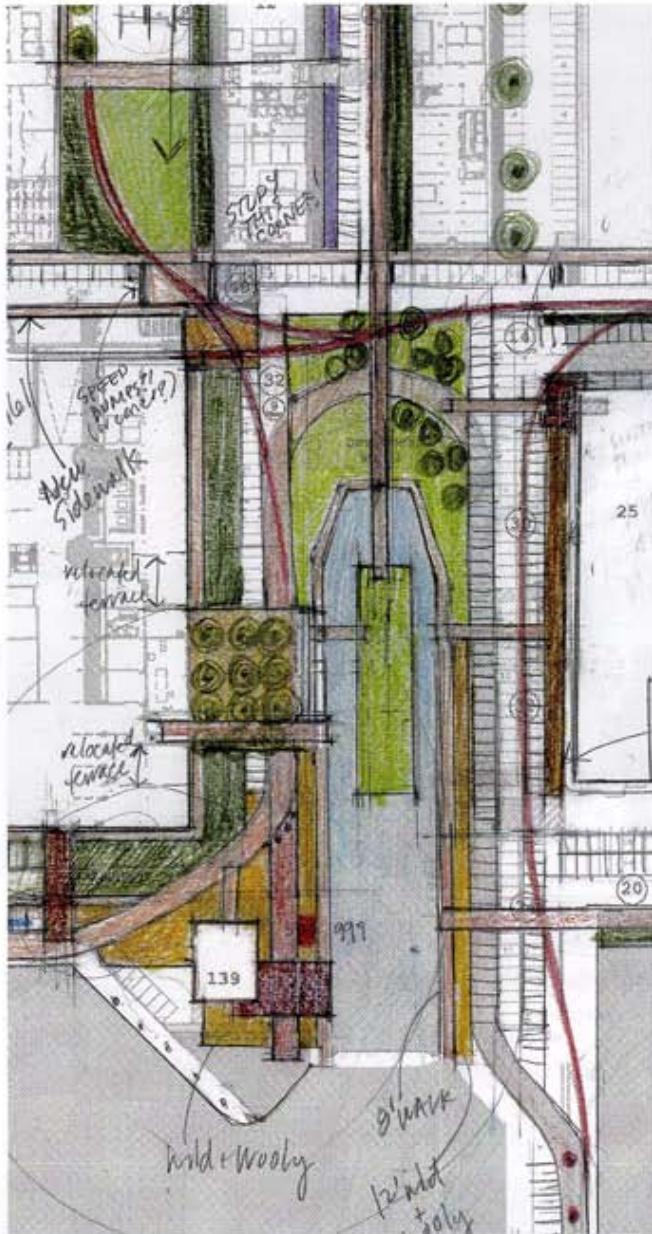
Respecting the history of the former shipyard was the aim of the new landscape design for the headquarters of the retail enterprise Urban Outfitters; the existing materials were unearthed and refashioned with an artistic vengeance.





For more than a century, Navy men and women labored on thick slabs of concrete crafting huge ships. That historic surface was salvaged and reconfigured as a terrace at Urban Outfitter's headquarters.





The nine acres of the Navy Yard's historic core provided plenty of material to reprocess. The step-by-step method is recorded by images to the right and accompanied by statistics resulting from the salvaging strategy.

Construction materials that appear inert can, upon closer inspection, reveal a heartbeat. Do we suffocate the stuff we build with by detailing it to death? "Life cycle assessment" projects a hopeful flow for future products while fruits of past production get dumped in a landfill. Shouldn't we insist that the materials that first made the site remain on site? Constructed material is not anonymous. Can we identify methods of making that allow materials to give our work the character it needs? The "embodied energy" of a product evaluates sustainability by numbers. Couldn't we value the human agency of that energy, give it a name and a place.

At D.I.R.T. studio, we seek to reveal the traces of past production while layering in contemporary spaces of regeneration. We believe that removing the deep evidence of site histories erases imbedded human agency. We insist on applying regenerative systems to rebuild ecological and cultural resources for social benefits, not simply checking off items on a sustainable list. We strive to give voice to the mute materiality of the landscape.

Respect for the Philadelphia Navy Yard's history, and the stuff that came along with it, was at the heart of our approach to fashioning the new headquarters for the retail enterprise Urban Outfitters (URBN). D.I.R.T.'s obsession with reworking the existing was a perfect fit for URBN's sensibility of styling hip patinas. The growing company's creative crew planned to recolonize the historic core of the yard where, for more than a century, hundreds of workers toiled to build huge ships that were launched into the Delaware River.

Navy men and women labored on thick slabs of concrete while crafting giant parts of wartime vessels. Surrounded by massive volumes of brick, they poured their energy into battleships manufactured at a sublime scale. When the Navy sailed away from the Yard, the concrete expanses inlaid with sweeping railroad tracks were coated with a shallow grave of asphalt.

When it came to selecting materials for the URBN headquarters, D.I.R.T.'s site forensics unearthed our "life cycle" palette: appliquéd asphalt, age-old concrete, tired brick, rusted metal grates, peeling surfaces of text and enough residue to reconstruct this industrial strength landscape. Rather than usual "hog and haul" – or excavation and disposal – of a typical demolition plan, we deployed a salvaging strategy, harvesting what most would consider undesirable detritus.

1 COUNT

"X" marks the spot to harvest the embodied energy already on site. Calculations quantified the power expended to produce the existing paving: asphalt 353,180,000 BTUs; concrete 1,034,790,000 BTUs.



2 PROBE

For a full scale mock-up, a baffled contractor was directed to strip off the asphalt veneer and bust up the concrete with care to make "waste" a precious material. Inspecting the big chunks of concrete was like an archeological dig, discovering slabs marked with imprints of century-old labor.



3 PILE

Stacking up material that won't go to a landfill:



= 760 cubic yards



4 PUZZLE

Salvaged concrete chunks were lovingly lifted by a skid steer, manually placed and shimmed level into an imperfect puzzle pattern. Arranging big pieces around tree roots demanded extra attention to taper demolition fines away from trunks.



5 NAME

The former subsurface property of the Navy became novel material for branding Urban Outfitters' new digs at the yard. The old debris reworked as new paving was affectionately nicknamed "Barney Rubble" after the 1960s cartoon character.



6 TRICKLE

Busting up impervious expanses, stormwater now seeps through intentional cracks. The meager 600 square feet of permeable area was increased to 47,100 square feet rendering the site 80 times more porous.



URBAN OUTFITTERS' HEADQUARTERS, PHILADELPHIA NAVY YARD, PENNSYLVANIA, USA

Client: Urban Outfitters Inc.

Landscape architects: D.I.R.T. studio

Architects: Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle

Engineers: Gladnick Wright Salameda

Completion: 2006

Area: 9 acres

Costs: 7.2 million US dollars

When it came to detailing the ground plane for URBN's headquarters at the Navy Yard, the process of reassembling recycled materials was nothing new though unfamiliar to the contractors and the client. The techniques were dumb-as-dirt, yet necessitated teaching old dogs new tricks. The Navy doesn't leave behind as-built drawings, so an exploratory trench had to be dug to assist our best guess of buried materials. We did not draw details until after improvisational directions guided an incredulous contractor toward handling "waste" with care. The resultant full scale mock-up of the concrete chunk paving added up to be cost effective. The crushed left-overs of smaller bits of concrete, asphalt and brick became a calico-colored mulch at the base of the very long hedgerows of native trees. Both versions of the invented ground plane proved as porous as anticipated. Tons of demolition debris did not get trucked off to a landfill. And the client loved the experimental surfaces, affectionately nicknamed "Barney and Betty Rubble," after the 1960s cartoon characters of the "Flintstones."

Crushing the expanses of concrete and asphalt busted through compacted, impervious skin to form a spongy crust. No imported materials were necessary, nor desired. A new paving system entered our details library and the construction technique converted a contractor. Yet the intent was to construct more than a novel surface; the "embodied energy" was cultivated as a narrative of a next evolution of the site. Now, every day, the new fleet of a creative generation works atop material evidence of an industrious past.





Attendant to the life cycle of building a fleet of battleships, D.I.R.T. studio did not grant permission for any material evidence of the Navy's work to leave the Yard. The goal was to refashion the demolition debris, harvest its embodied energy along with intensifying porosity, doubling the life cycle and increasing the urban (and URBAN) habitat.

