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The Universal Magic of New York Harbor

The chosen place, Governors Island, as a granite island in the middle of New York Harbor, has an amazing context. This natural bay where the Hudson and East rivers meet and the moon drives the waters of the Atlantic through the Verrazano Narrows, causing the tides to swirl around the navel of the world, Manhattan, is without compare. Here is where generations came ashore to build America, fusing their collective cultures together to form a peerless metropolis. The water was the center. New York was built on the shores, so that its magnificent silhouette would be reflected by the waves. Tunnels and athletic bridges labor to connect all its boroughs. Like the Bosphorus and the Bay at Rio de Janeiro, New York Harbor has a seemingly universal magic. God created a place, which every civilization would choose for its own. Every morning, Manhattan is born again out of briny fogs. With Ellis Island and Liberty Island, Governors Island has been elected to share this bay. Together they have witnessed an intense history, or have themselves become the symbols of it.

No park would ever choose such a place. But imagine Governors Island in a new form as a park. The transformation of an abandoned military base into a public space with seasons, for contemplation and leisure, seems a dream: to change a bleak, windblown island into an idyllic destination, a green broccoli in the water. Imagine New Yorkers leaving their city for a short boat trip to the island, a boat trip which makes everyone equal. Families, lovers, and lonely hearts will meet each other in the middle of New York Harbor. People will experience the sky and the air, will see the sun sink. They will enjoy nature unfamiliar to them. Where else in Manhattan can you see the sun set? The rhythm of the waves and the slow-moving ships that never tire of sailing will lift the visitors out of their everyday worries. Where else can you come into direct contact with the Manhattan skyline, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty? They will rediscover their city and themselves.

Transformation through Topography

The old island, the rock with Fort Jay, is already a park. It is a romantic campus area with historic buildings and monumental trees that have love letters carved into their bark. The southern part of Governors Island lacks all imagination. Here the island was designed as a landfill area, flat as a pancake, flatter than Holland.

What would be the new allure of Governors Island as a destination? The answer is the place, the cloud-filled skies, the horizon, the views of the city and surroundings. That is why the flat part of the island, ruined by brackish water, should be transformed into an exciting, undulating topography that draws people in—an undulating park where the wide edges of the paths will paint a three-dimensional order that was not there before, which will make people long to walk and to wander.

This topography offers shelter and security and will explore all the views and panoramas of the harbor. New images will be added, the gaze will be manipulated and curved, and a 360-degree panorama will be created from some hilltops. Promenades across and around the island allow the visitors to walk and cycle. The slopes where people picnic or recline in the shade have the park as foreground and the framed image of New York Harbor as decor. From the belly of the park the topography and the play of lines will form a magnetic field that will ultimately bring people together on a narrow plaza space at the western edge of the island, in a sensational confrontation with the Statue of Liberty. That is the place to drink a cup of coffee, where tourists take photos and where boy meets girl.

The topography is the basis for the new park and public space. Lawns, flower beds, wetland gardens, and botanic groves will cover the park. A free wooden bicycle program available to all visitors makes a visit to Governors Island euphoric. Like historic parks, Governors Island's identity will also be defined through its ornamental qualities. Furniture, balustrades, playgrounds, mosaic paving, the finish and texture of concrete edges, kiosks, etc. will delight the eye and strengthen the imagination and park illusion.

People will return again and again.

more information: [Governors Island Park and Public Space Master Plan](#)