The first quarter mile of the Rail Park meets grade at Broad Street and rises 25' in the air at Callowhill Street. Programmatically, it is simple: a neighborhood park for strolling, walking dogs, watching people, lounging, and viewing the city.
Phase 1 of the Rail Park is half an acre – about the size of the center of Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. The entire Viaduct is 7 acres, the size of one of William Penn’s original 5 public squares.
In the mid-to-late 19th century, the neighborhoods around the Rail Park were the Workshop of the World, an industrial and economic powerhouse. Today, 14 of these blocks are a nationally-listed industrial historic district. The drawing above is dated 1893.
The material character of the Rail Park comes from both its industrial past and from the unruly, overgrown state of the viaduct before work on Phase 1 began.
At the highest point of the Rail Park, six massive, civic-scaled porch swings are a place for watching the sunset over the city or catching a breeze in the summer.
The park offers neighborhood residents a place to stroll, walk dogs, people-watch, and just lounge about.
A weathering-steel map and seating platform where the park meets Noble Street. This map locates the industries and goods produced in this area in its manufacturing heyday.
A second platform on the bridge spanning 13th Street acts as a front stoop and a place for picnics.
As the Rail Park rises on a stone viaduct, the planting transitions from more park-like London Planes and flowering trees to a thicket of perennials. Extra-large timbers form varied seating that winds its way through the park.

MID-BLOCK ELEVATED PARK
At its highest point, the park is supported on an elevated steel trestle. The weathering-steel fence and gate that divides Phase 1 from the continuation of the Rail Park is visible in the background.

THE TRESTLE
Although only 30 feet wide, the linear park is wide enough for a parade. This year, a local CDC and the friends group hosted a celebration on the Rail Park to welcome in the Year of the Pig.
Beautiful and informative, this weathering steel wall tells the story of the neighborhood during its heyday. The wall serves also screens an adjacent property while its connected platform provides a space for gathering or waiting for friends to arrive.
BENCH DETAIL

Reflecting the industrial heritage of the neighborhood, construction materials and details are simple, straight-forward and substantial.
Taking advantage of the inherent shape of the steel structure, this inventive detail limits the range of motion of the swing seats.
Tough grasses that can survive in a restricted soil volume, like Andropogon virginicus, were used on the elevated trestles. The verge planting picks up the character of the rest of the viaduct beyond Phase 1, full of spontaneous urban plants.
The strategic plan, prepared coincidentally with the Phase One plan, ensured that a broader view of the project and the adjacent neighborhoods informed the design of the first phase of the project.
Spontaneous volunteer plants had overtaken the viaduct in the years since it ceased operation. Plants with a similar structure to the volunteer vegetation were chosen for the Phase 1 design but were drawn from a regionally-native plant palette.