REVEALING A HIDDEN NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITY
The project is located in Philadelphia's Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. The site is the decommissioned West Basin of the Philadelphia Water Department's Reservoir in East Fairmount Park.
SITE PLAN

1. Visitor Parking Area
2. Secure Fleet Parking
3. Existing Fence and Secure Gate
4. Bicycle Rack (Typ.)
5. Accessible Visitor Walkway with Dark Sky Compliant Lighting
6. Plaza Overlook
7. Challenge Course
8. Challenge Course Prep Area
9. Proposed Perimeter Fence
10. Future Path to Future Audubon Classroom

BALANCING PROGRAMMING NEEDS
The Discovery Center’s design presented complicated challenges which involved balancing programming needs for the two primary organizations who use the site: Audubon Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Outward Bound.
ACCIDENTAL OASIS
Completed in 1889, the reservoir was one of the largest built with artificial banks. It became a recreational destination for the community until it was closed in 1972. Nature has taken over, making it an important stopover for migratory birds.
A LITTLE MUSSEL GOES A LONG WAY

A littoral shelf was designed to alleviate the basin’s steep slope and support aquatic vegetation and freshwater mussels to improve water quality. The shelf was value engineered out of the project; however, our idea of using freshwater mussels was implemented.
ACCOMMODATING NEEDS

We worked closely with Philadelphia Outward Bound and Audubon Pennsylvania to develop the site to accommodate both organizations' programming needs. These included the ropes course, bird viewing areas, outdoor classrooms, kayak and canoe storage, and lake access.
We collaborated with the architect to site the building on the top of the reservoir’s berm. The berm was replanted with a sunny meadow-mix and native trees, strategically placed to eventually obscure parts of the building within the landscape.
DESIGNING DISCOVERY

The design intent was to recreate the initial experience of ascending the berm to discover the lake at the top of the hill. The sloping entry path is lined with native vegetation that attracts abundant butterflies and other wildlife.
A photo from the opening dedication ceremony showing the first view of the lake that visitors experience as they proceed through the building’s gateway.
HABITAT LEARNING

The slope at the lake’s edge is staked with coir logs, seeded and planted with plugs. The dock in the distance provides a space for an outdoor classroom and allows access to the water for programmed kayaking and canoeing.
A NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTION

A trail was extended from the neighborhood linking to the site. The parking lot is located at the bottom of the hill and is the start of the intentionally designed entry sequence.
PERFORMING PLANTS
A robust plant palette enhances the natural food source and provides shelter for birds and other animals. Plants were selected for their ability to attract wildlife, to be drought tolerant, fragrant, deer resistant, and native to Pennsylvania.
When developing the plant palette, we considered the different butterfly and moth species that would be attracted to various plants we specified. Milkweed was selected because it is the only food source Monarch caterpillars eat as they transform into butterflies.
## Canopy Trees
- *Acer Saccharum* ‘Green Mountain’
- *Caryya ovata*
- *Diospyros virginiana*
- *Prunus serotina*
- *Quercus alba*
- *Quercus bicolor*
- *Quercus imbricaria*
- *Quercus phellos* ‘Hightower’
- *Quercus prinus*
- *Sassafras albidum*

## Evergreen Trees
- *Ilex Opaca*
- *Juniperus virginiana*
- *Pinus strobus*

## Ornamental Trees
- *Amelanchier canadensis*
- *Asimina triloba*
- *Betula nigra* ‘Heritage’
- *Cercis canadensis*
- *Cornus florida*
- *Rhus copallinum*
- *Rhus typhina*

## Shrubs
- *Leucothoe axillaris*
- *Sambucus candensis*
- *Vaccinium corymbosum*
- *Ilex glabra* ‘Densa’
- *Hydrangea quercifolia*
- *Hamamelis x intermedia* ‘Pallida’

## Vines
- *Bignonia capreolata*
- *Campsis radicans*
- *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

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## Grasses, Sedges, Rushes
- *Agrostis perennans*
- *Bouteloua gracilis*
- *Carax amphibola*
- *Carax pennsylvanica*
- *Deschampsia cespitosa*
- *Deschampsia flexuosa*
- *Elymus canadensis*
- *Elymus hystrix*
- *Elymus virginicus*
- *Festuca paradoxa*
- *Festuca subverticillata*
- *Koeleria macrantha*
- *Panicum virgatum*
- *Schizachyrium scoparium*
- *Sorghastrum nutans*
- *Sporobolus heterolepis*
- *Tridens flavus*

## Forbs
- *Asclepias purpurascens*
- *Asclepias syriaca*
- *Asclepias tuberosa*
- *Chamaecrista fasciculata*
- *Echinacea purpurea*
- *Eurybia divaricata*
- *Helianthus divaricatus*
- *Helianthus occidentalis*
- *Liatris spicata*
- *Monarda didyma*
- *Monarda fistulosa*
- *Penstemon digitalis*
- *Physostegia virginiana*
- *Pycnanthemum muticum*
- *Rhebeckia hirta*
- *Rhebeckia triolba*
- *Solidago juncea*
- *Solidago nemoralis*
- *Solidago sempervirens*
- *Symphyotrichum cordifolium*
- *Symphyotrichum laeve*

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