

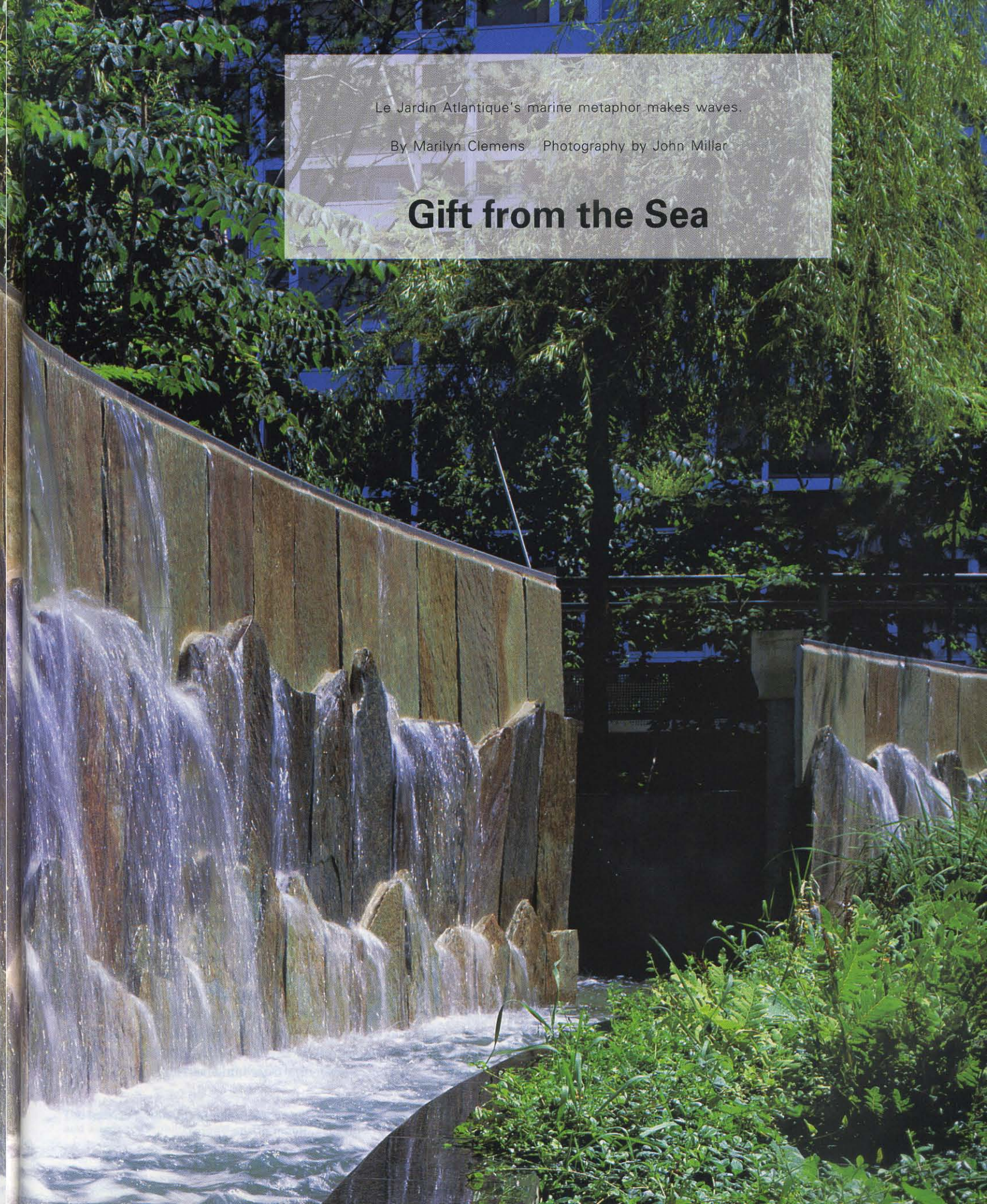
US \$7/CAN \$9

OCTOBER 1995

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



**A NEW
EUROPE**



Le Jardin Atlantique's marine metaphor makes waves.

By Marilyn Clemens Photography by John Millar

Gift from the Sea



In 1985 Francois Brun and Michel Pena were named the finalists in the competition for the Parc Citroen on Paris's Left Bank. Both only thirty years of age at the time, they were then invited by the Office of the Mayor of Paris to participate in a design competition for a long-awaited park to be built above the Pasteur-Montparnasse train station. The four other teams consisted of well-known landscape architects, several of whom had institutional backing from such prestigious patrons as the national landscape architecture school in Versailles. When Brun and Pena were declared the winners in December of 1987 some of the other competitors and supporters expressed surprise and dismay that such young outsiders could effect such a coup.

The jurors represented the city's urban-design department,

the Park and Garden Administration, the Youth Sports Administration, and the National Railroad Administration. Chirac's formidable environmental and open-space deputy, Jacqueline Nabour, who has maintained a strong presence in Paris's open-space projects, also served as a juror. And because the Pasteur-Montparnasse station straddles the fourteenth and fifteenth districts of Paris, the mayors of these districts were included on the panel. It was not a group readily accepting of unconventional design.

The design proposed by Brun and Pena was not so much unconventional as it was a departure from the design approach that was being advocated by the city's powerful design department, the Agence Parisienne d'Urbanisme—an approach that

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dictated that the park be designed around the 130-odd utility vents, vaults, wells, shafts, doors, and fire lanes—not to mention the five tennis courts that would be lined up across the north half of the site. It was Brun and Pena's position, however, that the site's constraints must not determine the design of the park; rather, the design must address the space as an entity into which these quotidian elements would be incorporated thematically. So impressed were the jurors with Brun and Pena's serious analysis of the site's considerable technical constraints and with their inventive design program that they awarded them the commission.

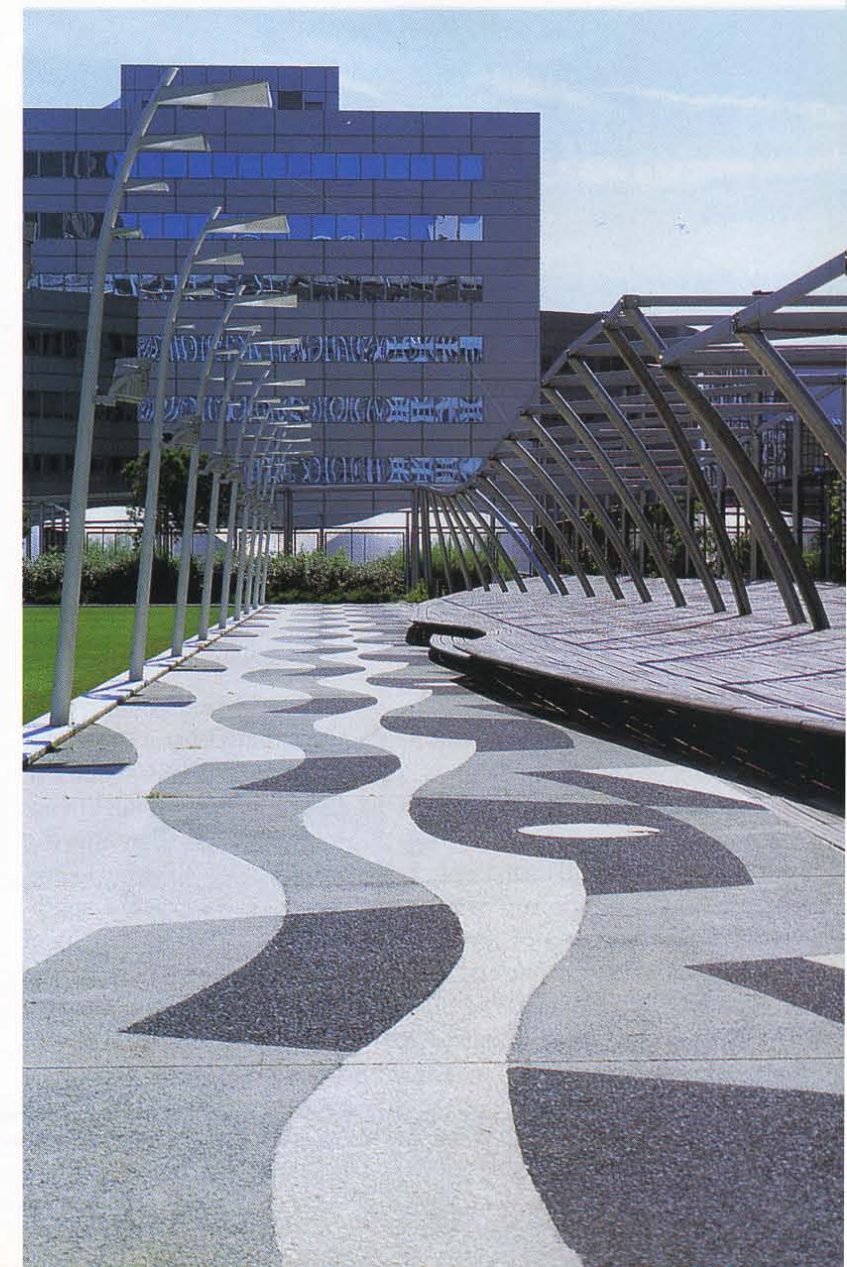
In fact, the park was not an entirely new planning project; it had been promised for thirty years. And it was not one of Francois Mitterand's *Grands Travaux*, but one of former Mayor Jaques Chirac's efforts to make good on his promise to "green" Paris's less affluent neighborhoods. Only through the concurrence of the building boom of the 1980s, a vigorous policy of upgrading Paris's train stations, and the formation of public-private zones of concentrated development did the twenty-three million francs (\$22.6 million) become available with which to build the park.

Brun and Pena called their concept for the park Le Jardin Atlantique—the Atlantic Garden—taking their inspiration not just from the seacoast-bound trains that would depart from below but also from the properties that have drawn mankind to the sea through time: its promise of adventure and travel to places unknown, its beauty, its mystery. And they applied the marine metaphor to the engineering and construction of the park as well. The Atlantic Garden is constructed like an offshore oil platform—its massive paved and planted plaza "floating" sixty feet above street level—supported by a series of twelve subterranean concrete arches.

Opened in October of last year the Atlantic Garden, Paris's newest public park, differs from many Parisian parks built within the last decade in that it is not constructed on abandoned industrial land but above an actively used site. The 8.5-acre park is, in effect, an immense "lid" that now encloses the station and its attendant 700-car garage. Accessible at grade at only one point, the park is also unusual in that it is not visible from the street. The street entrance to the park is via an arcade in a new building that forms the park's south end.

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intensity of urban life, and thus the design vocabulary they employed in its design is more romantic than avant-garde. At the heart of the park is the Island of Hesperides, which is named for the mythic garden of sea voyagers' dreams and dominated by a large fountain. The "island" consists of a stainless-steel plate surrounding a granite platform that supports tall weather instruments. Water surges through holes in the steel and recedes, fizzles, and foams like the tide. Suspended among the meteorological equipment is a mirror angled to reflect light onto a fountain located in the darkest corner of the park.



The park's undulating paving design underscores the marine theme and suggests mobility, right.

Previous page: Le Jardin Atlantique's celebration of water manifests itself in myriad fountains and pools. Pena and Brun—left and right, respectively—survey their completed park design from a model boat, above, in the garden's Salle des Rivages (Room of the Shores).



The Allée des Metamorphoses, or walkway of transformations, is what they named the central path that bisects the park—a reference to the separate evolution of species on either side of the Atlantic that is physically expressed in the paired specimen trees lining the allée: an American live oak on the west, for example, faces a European live oak on the east. This twenty-foot allée is one of several required fire lanes, and to overcome the effect of an artery bisecting the park Brun and Pena randomly crisscrossed the porphyry-and-quartz-covered path with turf to visually unify the central plane.

West of the central path are white grates that cover a long series of garage vents lined up longitudinally across the undulations of the lawn, the low wave form of which responds to load limits by increasing in size to the right of a support beam in order to distribute load or achieve balance, then curving back—diminished—to the left. Sunbathers seem to enjoy lounging on the gentle roll of the lawn as well as on the the sculpted sundeck to the west. The wide wooden sundeck is inclined as a ship's deck might be at sea and is separated from the lawn by a promenade of modular gray and white pavers also laid out in a wave pattern. As well as providing seating and

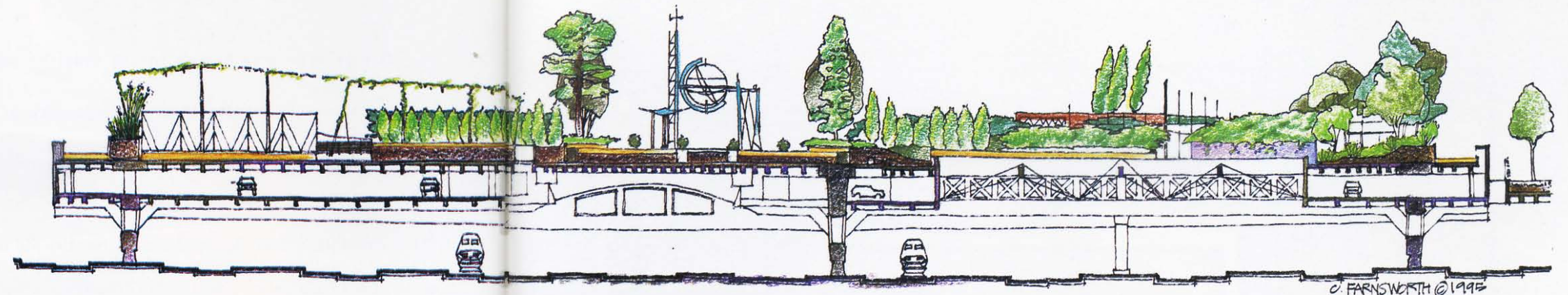
lounging areas, the broad sundeck disguises another set of utility vaults and garage vents and provides those exercising nearby with a place where they can take a break. The sports area and sundeck are covered by steel “pergolas” positioned at angles that balance weight, support vines, and provide shelter.

The irregularly sized tennis courts, which all boast a highly unconventional blue surface, proved predictably controversial. The blue surface, in fact, outraged the staff of the Parks and Gardens Administration, but Brun and Pena argued that the courts could be surfaced and maintained with natural, biodegradable products and convinced Parks and Gardens officials that the blue surface is a critical component of the nautical theme. And they won approval from the French Tennis Federation for the irregular size of the courts.

The east side of the park affords the shelter of luxuriant plantings and a series of both unusual and traditional spaces. Near the central lawn two curious structures of upended blue and rose granite resemble stage sets on dollies and are topped by a metal staircase. These are the blue wave and rock pavilions, which incorporate vantage points and noise walls in which are concealed gardeners' quarters and rest rooms. Between the pavilions, guardrails surrounding light wells provide places to pause and listen to the rumbling of the trains below and the broadcasts of Atlantic-port destinations.

Lending organization to the park is the retaining wall that changes shape and material as it winds from sector to sector. Although its primary function is to retain soil, the wall serves as an important design element that underscores the nautical theme through its transformations.

In addition to the pavilions the park includes a number of garden rooms (see plan on Page 70). A footbridge winds its way through or over each of these spaces, all of which enjoy the afternoon sun. Among the more popular of these spaces is the Salle des Rivages (Room of the Shores), which is backed by a curved blue ceramic wall pierced by portholes. This is the park's main play area and features large model boats that are very popular among the children who visit the park. A



The cross section of the Atlantic Garden, *above right*, reveals the shallowness of the terrace plantings; immediately below are garages and the main train station lobby. Within the Pavillon des Bleus Vagues (Blue Wave Pavilion) a shaded tower overlooks the central lawn, *above left*.

wide variety of fragrant maritime plants and perennials surround the sand basins of the boats, providing a diversity of fragrance and color year-round.

The park's plantings include 300 trees, 5,000 shrubs, and 70,000 other plantings. Attention to detail is evident throughout the garden—in the deep blue seat backs that become wave-shaped guardrails, for example, or in the seventy-eight-foot-high metal masts that serve as lampposts.

In an effort to increase public awareness of the park the city recently installed large trellislike elevators on the sidewalks of the surrounding boulevards. And the fiber-optic announcement system that electronically flashes events and their locations in many Metro stations is being used at the Pasteur-Montparnasse station to promote the park.

As do many landscape architects in France Brun and Pena are managing large projects as sole practitioners. (Following a fire that destroyed the studio they shared each began practicing out of his own home studio.) Pena, whose undergraduate studies were concentrated in architecture, is at work on a 150-acre Mercedes factory site in Lorraine; seventy-five acres of the site will be devoted to plantings. Among Pena's other projects are the renovation of high-density housing sites in Paris and a forest-management plan in Cevennes.

Brun, whose studies prior to those undertaken at the school of landscape architecture in Versailles were in biology, is working on several squares and gardens for a city housing organization. His greatest challenge at present is the renovation of a large housing development in Paris's eighteenth district—a commission he won with architect Muriel Pages through a competition. The housing development is home to 13,000 people and is plagued with urban social problems. Nine million dollars worth of private gardens and public spaces will be provided for the project by the City of Paris, the metropolitan region, and the national government. Brun will also be completing a redesign of the Bocce quarter in Cannes over the course of the next two years.

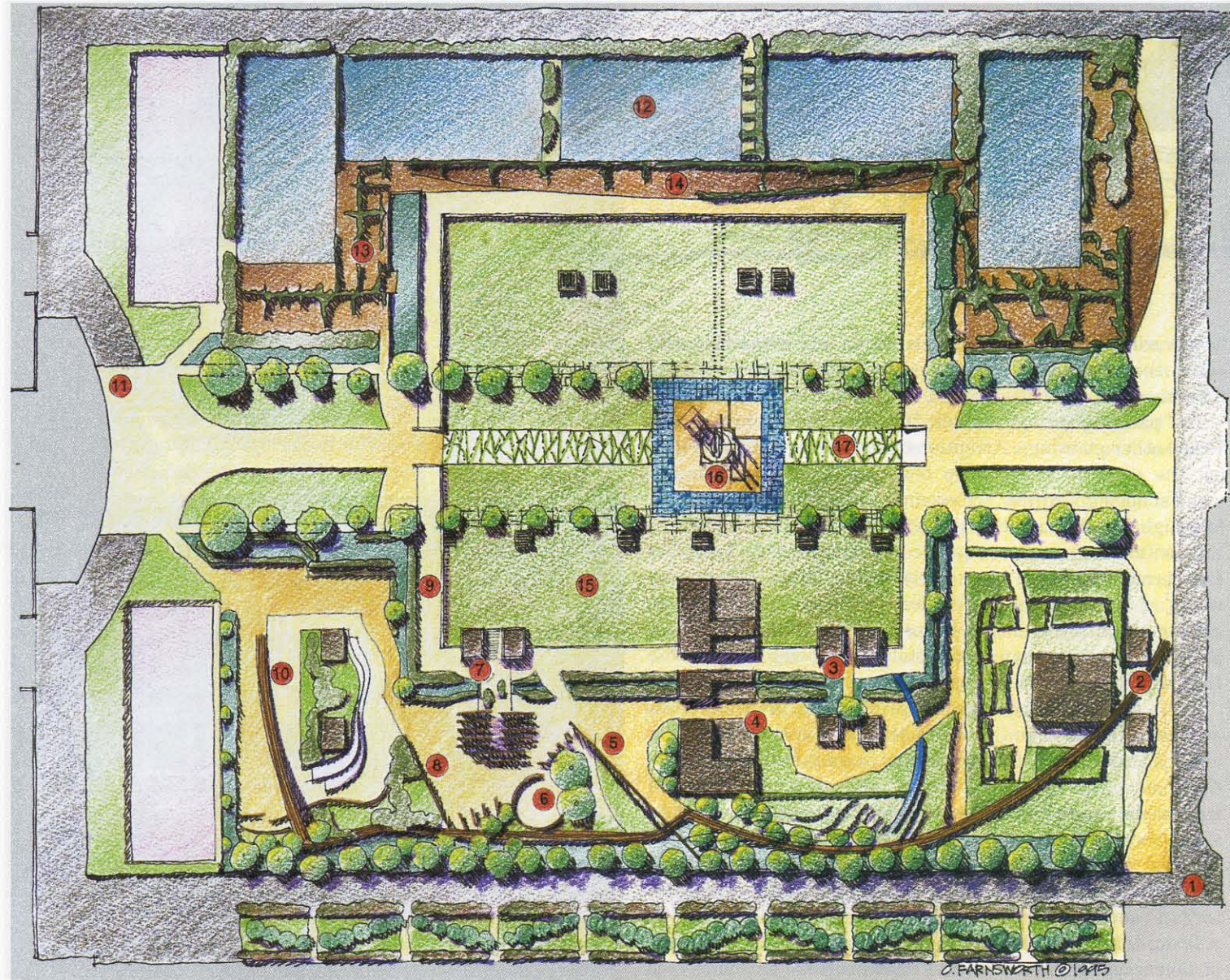
Together, Brun and Pena are in the process of negotiating their contract with the City of Paris to oversee the manage-

ment of the Atlantic Garden to assure the permanence of its unique qualities. ■

Marilyn Clemens is a planner for the Maryland-Capital Parks and Planning Commission in Silver Spring, Maryland.



Sculpted stone “waves” distinguish the Blue Wave Pavilion, *above*, one of the pavilions in the park.



1. Entrance to the Montparnasse Station
2. Footbridge
3. Blue-Wave Pavilion
4. Room of Blue and Mauve Flowers
5. Room of Reflections
6. Room of Silence
7. Pavilion of Rocks
8. Room of Rocks
9. Promenade for Strolling
10. Room of the Shores
11. Entrance to the Pasteur Station
12. Tennis Courts
13. Pergola
14. Sundeck
15. Central Lawn
16. Island of Hesperides
17. Central Walkway



Project credits

Landscape Architects: Francois Brun and Michel Pena

Developer: City of Paris, Department of Parks and Gardens,
National Railroad Administration

Sculpture/Ship-mast luminaires: Bernard Vie

Engineering: Beaulieu Engineering

Fountain Designer: J.M. Llorca

Lighting: Light Cibles; Europhane

Cost: \$22.6 million

In the Salle des Miroitements (Room of Reflections) light dances on the surfaces of water canals and mirrored pergolalike structures, *above*. This sunlit section of the park is designed in deliberate counterpoint to the more intimate, shaded garden rooms.