

PROJECT DATA

Project Name: Columbus Circle

Location: New York, New York

Owner: City of New York

Project Use(s): Traffic circle and public plaza

Project Size: The inner circle measures approximately 36,000 square feet. The outer circle is approximately 148,000 square feet.

Total Development Cost: \$24 million

Annual Operating Budget: Approximately \$250,000 - \$500,000 (The operating budget is being determined now)

Date Initiated: October 2001

Percent Completed by December 1, 2006: 100%

Project Completion Date (if appropriate): September 19, 2005

Application submitted by:

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Key Participants:

Public Agencies: New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, New York City Department of City Planning, New York City Department of Design and Construction, Central Park Conservancy

Architect/Designer: Olin Partnership (landscape architect)

Developer: Related Properties

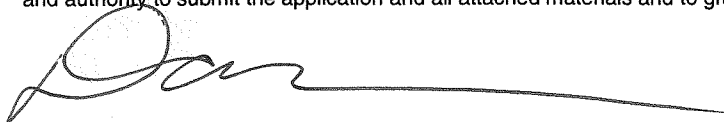
Professional Consultants: WET Design (fountain design), L'Observatoire International (lighting design), Lynch & Associates (irrigation), Vollmer Associates (civil, structural, transportation), Consentini Associates (mechanical, electrical and plumbing)

Community Group: Lincoln Square Business Improvement District

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ABSTRACT

Project Name: Columbus Circle

Address: Intersection of Broadway, Eighth Avenue and 59th Street

City/State/ZIP: New York, New York 10019

1. Give a brief overview of the project, including major project goals.

Columbus Circle, born from Frederick Law Olmsted's design concept for Central Park, has been rethought and redesigned many times since its erection in 1905. Located at one of the principal entrances to the Park, this tribute to Christopher Columbus had fallen into general disuse and was often described as a "mess" for its failure to serve as a functional, safe and inviting public space, as well as its inability to foster real estate development in the surrounding area. (Our initial study of 1989 for the Central Park Conservancy led to subsequent traffic studies that returned the space to a circular traffic pattern.)

In conjunction with the development of the Time Warner Center, the City of New York commissioned a redesign of the historic circle in 1997. In 2001, the landscape architecture team and collaborating engineers developed a design that would transform the site into a powerful urban space attracting New York City residents and visitors with its vibrant planting, a series of fountains, striking benches, paving and lighting, all working together to accentuate the uniqueness and vitality of the Circle and the city as a whole.

The goal of the design was to return the historic monument to public access and appreciation, fostering a safe and interactive environment not present for a generation. The landscape design was conceived to secure the site as an attractive addition to the public realm of New York City at one of the principal entries to Central Park and the intersection of three significant streets: Broadway, Eighth Avenue and 59th Street. All of the features of the redesign reinforce the simple idea that Columbus Circle is unique in the City and the world. The design is based on concentric rings of movement and light, to illicit the feeling that the Circle is not only the center of New York City, but also the center of the universe.

The complexity of the project required close collaboration between the landscape architect, civil and structural engineers, fountain and lighting designers, as well as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the developers of Time Warner Center and the City of New York, represented by the City Planning Office, the Department of Design Construction, the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Central Park Conservancy. The landscape design team worked with other organizations during the redesign of the project, including the Art Commission of the City of New York, the Landmarks and Preservation Commission and neighborhood community boards.

2. Why does the project merit the *Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence*? (You may wish to consider such factors as: effect on the urban environment; innovative or unique approaches to any aspect of project development; new and creative approaches to urban issues; design quality.)

Between World War I and the last quarter of the 20th century, Columbus Circle, a key space at the south west corner of Central Park that was originally intended by Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux and The City Beautiful Planners to be an important civic space that accepted traffic from different quarters of the City, degenerated into a traffic bottleneck, a parking lot and an unapproachable island with a neglected monument.

This project, as the final steps of the rescue of Columbus Circle, concludes its successful transformation into a lively, attractive civic space with smooth flowing traffic, dignity, beauty, use and meaning. Today, in the middle of streams of vehicles, one can find large numbers of people at all hours of the day and throughout the seasons, socializing and taking pleasure in the city. Considering that Central Park is right across the street, it is remarkable how many people both choose to walk out to the monument circle, pass through or stop and sit, meet friends, relax, eat, and watch each other. This is a result of the profoundly simple, practical and attractive design.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Describe the underlying values of the project. What, if any, significant trade-offs were required to implement the project?

The underlying values of the design were that people love to be in a handsome, safe, well-built place, where they can step out of their daily routine into an attractive haven to see each other and the city clearly. The designers believe that generosity of spirit is required in civic design and that design must be optimistic about people's nature. Therefore, fountains are important to the site to create pleasant noise to take people's attention away from traffic sounds, and ample well-built seating and plants, although simple, are sensuous.

A beautiful set of new highway lights were prevented from occurring by the municipal highway department. Two other losses were the designer and New York City Department of City Planning's desire to use stone paving throughout the Circle, including the roadways, as well as a proposal to have skylights that opened up views to and from the subway station below. Both were prevented by city agencies. Having these elements would have made the space more memorable as a physical and visual experience – one that would have been unique in the city.

2. How has the project impacted the local community? Please include relevant information on urban context.

The local community has been enthusiastic in its response by voting with its feet and using the space heavily. Desire for a successful transformation was shared by local community groups, adjacent property owners, and public agencies alike, all playing key roles to bring the project to fruition. Just as the redesign of Bryant Park transformed a derelict park into a social center that has had a beneficial impact upon its surrounding, this space has become a new social center and public plaza that did not exist before – even in its original form when only trolleys and traffic moved around the memorial.

In the evening, one can find young people sitting and chatting about the column and fountains. During the day it is busy with pedestrian traffic, children, dog walkers and office workers, meeting and relaxing. The social mix and activity has been extraordinary and has exceeded even the designer's hopes.

3. Describe the key elements of the development process, including community participation where appropriate.

The first step was in the mid-1980s. The landscape architecture firm of Hanna/Olin prepared a proposal for the Central Park Conservancy to return the traffic and center island to a circle, with rings of trees defining the space and roadway, new improved plaza at the monument and restored entryways into Central Park. Subsequently, landscape architect Patricia McCobb developed and executed the Central Park entry and main monument plaza for the Conservancy and Philip Habib, a transportation and traffic engineer, worked with city agencies to restore the traffic movement and revise the intersection of 59th Street, 8th Avenue (Central Park West) and Broadway.

Next, The Municipal Art Society of New York sponsored an ideas competition to produce examples of how the Circle, and especially the center island, could be transformed for social use with a higher artistic level than had existed before.

Vollmer Associates were commissioned to rebuild the roadways and work on the renovations of the subway stations, which are below the Circle. Patricia McCobb was hired to develop a final design of the inner circle, but after too many changes, modifications and responses to various groups and agencies, the scheme was abandoned.

Joseph Rose, City Planning Commissioner, asked landscape architecture firm Olin Partnership to develop a scheme that would successfully respond to the many desires and constraints placed upon the Circle. The Related Company, developer of the new Time Warner Center, agreed to pay for the fee of this new, and final, redesign.

The designers worked with New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, New York City Department of City Planning, The Central Park Conservancy, and the community board, and the New York City Department of Design and Construction acted as the client and project manager. Vollmer Associates continued as prime consultant, while Olin Partnership developed the entire surface of the Circle, roadway, sidewalks, etc, with their consultants.

4. Describe the financing of the project. Please include all funding sources and square foot costs where applicable.

The \$23 million reconstruction was funded by \$21.3 million from the City, with \$1.2 million from the Transit Authority and \$500,000 for the fountain equipment from Related Companies, L.P. and Apollo Real Estate. Prior to construction, the design was partially supported by \$500,000 from the Related Companies and Apollo Real Estate.

5. Is the project unique and/or does it address significant urban issues? Is the model adaptable to other urban settings?

In New York City, it is rather unique – a civic plaza in the middle of a roundabout of several roadways. Many people including members of the Fine Art Commission questioned the validity of the project when it was presented for approval – one stated “no one will go there.” Olin Partnership, however, argued that it was an experiment similar to Bryant Park. It is based upon clear sight lines and lanes of movement that connect well to pedestrian flow in the adjacent blocks. It presents handsome generous furnishings that are comfortable and pleasing to the eye and touch. It has a great amount of omni-directional seating and is lighted for comfort of the human eye. It utilizes water and stone in generous quantities and voluptuous forms.

Circles are very difficult, bossy forms and are hard to develop in a manner that it not stiff. One should notice how that is overcome here with the composition. As Dan Kiley once remarked, “Proportion is everything. “

Finally, at no time did the designers make a decision about how to limit the use of the space by homeless and poor people, on the simple premise that it must be designed to be safe and attractive for everyone. The design of Columbus Circle did not rely on any rules or formulas, but worked through each problem specifically for its place in the city.

ARCHITECT OR DESIGNER PERSPECTIVE

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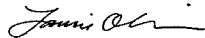
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1. Describe the design concept of this project, including urban design considerations, choice of materials, scale, etc.

First, it is a circle with a monument to Christopher Columbus atop a column in its center surrounded by four to five lanes of traffic (depending where you are) and three major urban arterials: 8th Avenue, 59th Street and Broadway. A successful design had to not only acknowledge the circle, but celebrate it.

Second, pedestrian access needed to be made smooth, easy, safe, obvious and desirable. This was resolved by connecting three entries to the five streets radiating out from it and by introducing islands that parted the traffic and simplified the access to the three radial points. This allowed movement to and across the Circle, turning it into a shortcut for pedestrians so they would not have to walk around to get across.

Third, the former fountain basin, hopelessly too small in scale, isolated the monument and its tiered base, with sculpture and explanatory plaques, from pedestrians. It was decided to take the water and move it out away from the monument, allowing pedestrians to approach and sit all around the base of it. The water then was used to make an island for the people and monument.

Fourth, to make the space comfortable for people to inhabit, a low mound or berm was used to encircle the island, partially screening the traffic, its headlights and roadway noise. The inside of the berm was then tiered in steps of stone with fountain jets directed into the circle to create life, sound and movement.

All of these devices plus a circular motif to the sidewalk paving outside the island and rings of light, reinforce Columbus Circle's special anomalous nature in Manhattan's grid.

Trees were placed upon the berm to form what will eventually become a great aerial frame in the air, further providing a "room" for people to be in. Colorful plants in circular bands further reinforce its character and give added quality.

Finally, two key elements – the stone paving and walls and great broad curving wood benches – were made to give a sense of high-quality and craft, as well as physical comfort and visual light. The granite copings of the basins rise up in a curving gesture and become walls that slice through the berms and die back down as they move out toward the roadway and curve back down becoming the exterior curbs. The energy, strength and sweeping curves of these elements give Columbus Circle a timeless quality. It is solid, well-made and welcoming. These apertures in the berm draw people in, the benches beckon them to sit, and the water,

plants and sculpture offer elements to examine. As in most successful spaces, people in the space are both comfortable spectators and actors for each other. The space is an urban theater, which all truly successful spaces have been for centuries.

2. Describe the most important social and programmatic functions of the design.

It is a public space – open, ambiguous, welcoming. It functions as both a passageway and a destination. It is conceived as an urban piazza that promotes a form of public theater, in that everyone who enters is both an actor and part of the audience.

The curved benches offer a concave or convex side, one of which promotes conversation, eye contact and voyeurism, and the other promotes privacy and quiet contemplation. There is a middle seating area comprised of tiered steps. Some who enter want to be in the middle, some want to be on the side. Some want to lie down, some sit up. The benches are conceived to be ambiguous and open to interpretation. They are generous that people can be close or space themselves out. They can also sit back-to-back without infringing on each other.

What is it all for? For pleasure. It is for people to step out of their routine into a special place and to look around and change their focal length, be stimulated and refreshed, and to take the pleasure of company of others and the city.

3. Describe the major challenges of designing this project and any design trade-offs or compromises required to complete the project.

The project is built over the intersection of two subways and is surrounded by heavy traffic. It is literally the roof of the Broadway/7th Avenue line. Where to place a pump room for the major fountains was one problem. In addition, the New York City Department of Transportation possessed outdated standards for paving and lighting, and their desire to place large highway signs which were inappropriate to the site was a significant challenge. As in every project in a major American City today, budgets and fighting for the highest standards in materials and design was also a factor.

4. Describe the ways in which the project relates to its urban context.

It is designed to be seen and used in several ways: as an urban maker giving location and orientation; as a place to be seen from vehicles moving about – first toward it, then around it, and finally moving away; and for pedestrians walking through as a shortcut across the large urban space; and finally as seen looking down from any of the surrounding tall buildings.

As a circle, it is unusual and unique in the rectangular grid of Manhattan streets. The Roman column, with its classical ships (or beaks) and statue of Columbus, by day (and as lit by night) functions as a marker and landmark for orientation in the city.

Columbus Circle has now taken its place as a destination, not just as a through place. It gathers energy and holds it. Vehicles here behave centrifugally and pedestrians centripetally, an interesting phenomenon, which may explain why it is so popular and well-attended.

PUBLIC AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

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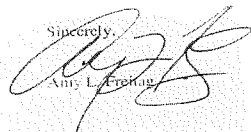
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Sincerely,

Amy L. Freitag

Signature _____

1. What role did your agency play in the development of this project? Describe any requirements made of this project by your agency (e.g., zoning, public participation, public benefits, impact statements).

In the initial stages of this project in the late 1990s, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation played a key role in implementing an interim test park area in the circle to gauge its potential as a public park space. This demonstrated that the landscape in the center of the circle could reinvigorate the space, and at the same time, it enabled us to test plant material that would succeed in this setting. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the Central Park Conservancy, who would assume maintenance responsibility for the site, participated in regular coordination meetings with New York City Department of Design and Construction, New York City Department of Transportation and the designers throughout construction, specifically for quality control on conservation of the monument.

2. How was this project intended to benefit your city? What trade-offs and compromises were required to implement the project? How did your agency participate in making them?

During the design process there were concerns about redesigning the historic fountain works adjacent to the monument and removing the historic fence, but the benefit of making it a more accessible, usable space for the 21st century involved rethinking the design in this highly trafficked circle. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation staff was involved throughout the design process, which was a collaborative effort that included all agencies.

3. Describe the project's impact on your city. Please be as specific as possible.

The new Columbus Circle provides a revitalized gateway to Broadway and the Upper West Side, and it offers a beautifully designed park amenity to visitors, neighborhood residents and office workers. Vehicular traffic and pedestrian safety have been much improved by the reconfiguration of the Circle, and WET Design's innovative fountain brought life to the plaza, drowning out the city noise and creating an urban oasis for people sitting within the fountain's planted border. The excellence of this design demonstrates the Mayor's vision for improved design quality, which has been a primary initiative throughout this administration

4. Did this project result in new models of public/private partnerships? Are there aspects of this project that would be instructive to agencies like yours in other cities?

For more than two decades, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the Central Park Conservancy have developed a model partnership for revitalizing public open space. To date, the Central Park Conservancy has raised in excess of \$300 million to restore and maintain Central Park. In recent years, the Conservancy has extended their stewardship to include spaces like Columbus Circle, demonstrating the flexibility and value of this long standing City public-private partnership.

The Columbus Circle project also benefited from the partnership and leadership of the developers of the Time Warner Center who provided critical funding for the Olin Partnership design.

5. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

This project demonstrated the complex but successful integration of major waterline and street work, combined with an elegant and well-designed park area.

The success of the Columbus Circle project is best demonstrated by its extraordinary popularity. The Circle is crowded morning, noon and night, becoming a place for impromptu weddings, photos and gatherings. This popularity will also present the greatest challenge of maintaining this innovative design.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play?

The Lincoln Square Business Improvement District, formed approximately ten years ago by property owners, business leaders and other stakeholders in this upper west side neighborhood to make the neighborhood cleaner, safer and more beautiful and to promote the neighborhood's many assets, has always had an interest in improving Columbus Circle and making this truly the gateway to the Upper West Side. When we first began our cleaning and beautification efforts, Columbus Circle was a relatively unattractive, unworkable space. We participated in the early planning process, attended community meetings, and were not thrilled with the design that preceded the Olin design. As an important community organization that has worked assiduously to address the beautification of the 10 Broadway Malls and the two small parks in our district, we had a strong interest in insuring that whatever was done in the Circle would be beautiful, eye-catching from many vantage points, and could be properly maintained. We attended many community meetings and made our concerns known to those involved in the redesign. We were thrilled when Olin Partnership made a presentation of the redesign at our Annual Meeting in 2004, attended by over 200 people.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

I recall that the community was particularly concerned about access to the Circle, traffic safety issues, mitigating noise from traffic and access to Central Park. Our issues were more about views from the newly constructed Time Warner Center, ease of pedestrian access, and the ability to keep the area clean and well-maintained.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them?

I don't recall the exact nature of the compromises, but clearly the landscape version and plantings designed by the Olin Partnership were not fully implemented much to our dismay. Unfortunately, although the Circle looks lovely at night, with the interesting lighting, during the day, there is not much contrast in the plantings, and they are not being as well maintained as we would like. Furthermore, the splash of color that would be so dramatic to those passing in vehicles, in buses and looking down from the surrounding buildings is absent. Regrettably, as is so often the case, sufficient funds appear not to have been earmarked for ongoing maintenance, and the installation plant budget may not have been calculated properly. I also think that there is insufficient power washing around the trash receptacles, and the benches, while lovely and comfortable, are showing wear and tear, particularly with grease stains from lunchtime crowds. I don't know

if there were compromises on access, but the access from 59th Street is still somewhat confusing with lack of coordination of lights, presumably to accommodate vehicular traffic.

4. Has this project made the community a better place to live or work? If so, how?

The project has clearly improved the community. During warm months, the benches are filled with lunchtime crowds and although prohibited, people are using the water element to dangle feet and let children run around. This does raise some safety concerns, but it is really a festive gathering place. For our major holiday festival Winter's Eve at Lincoln Square, we have received permits from the Parks Department to do some small performances which were very successful, and we use the Circle as a the meeting place for our free weekly summer/fall walking tours. It is easily identifiable, and works well as a gathering spot. Tourists and visitors can often be seen inside the Circle – in part to figure out where they will go. Perhaps the most important benefit has been significantly improved traffic flow in a heavily congested city. The challenge to make this work as both a Park and a traffic circle was successfully met with the Olin Partnership redesign.

5. Would you change anything about this project or the development process you went through?

I think in general the process was very consultative, and quite successful. The Olin Partnership was very accessible and paid close attention to detail. Community concerns were heard, and to the extent possible were addressed although there were some who felt that the Circle should have been connected to Central Park. We did not take that position. Of paramount concern was improved vehicular traffic flow, and there is no doubt that it has improved considerably as a result of the redesign. In a city where traffic congestion has become a really hot topic, from our point of view (when there is not other construction taking place as now with the subway reconstruction) traffic flows very well.

I would have insured that there were sufficient funds allocated at the outset to insure ongoing dedicated maintenance of the entire Circle: plant materials including funds for replacement shrubs, sufficient funds to insure visually eye-catching annuals, and proper horticultural maintenance including weed removal. Furthermore, I would have included sufficient funds for very frequent power washing, particularly around trash receptacles where stains from soft drinks are visible. While the Business Improvement District does not have any formal responsibility for sanitation and maintenance of the interior of the Circle, we do maintain several of the properties around the Circle including Time Warner Center (in conjunction with the property owner) and the Trump International Hotel and Tower (again in conjunction with the property owner) and routinely send our cleaning staff into the circle to insure that receptacles are not overflowing and there is no litter. Finally, the only other thing I would have changed is to have better coordination with other construction project, including the current subway reconstruction, so as to minimize the continued impact on the residential and business community.

PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE

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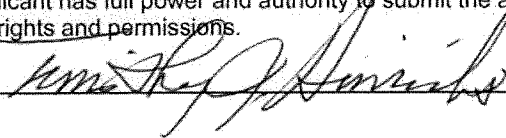
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1. What role did you or your organization play in the development of this project?

Vollmer Associates provided traffic analyses and modeling and prepared plans, specifications and cost estimates for the reconstruction of the streets, storm sewers, water mains, traffic signals and Transit facility roof modifications required for an ADA elevator and for the fountain, retaining walls and site amenities. Additionally, Vollmer coordinated an outreach program and presented the project designs to involved parties.

2. Describe the project's impact on its community. Please be as specific as possible.

The reconstruction of Columbus Circle has returned this premier public urban space to the grandeur that was envisioned for it in Olmsted's 1868 plan for Manhattan's Central Park. At one of the principal entries to Central Park and at the intersection of four significant streets, Broadway, Eighth Avenue, Central Park South and Central Park West, Columbus Circle is now a safe and attractive pedestrian destination with improved traffic and pedestrian circulation and access to mass transit.

Resolution of transportation issues was tremendously important to involved agencies. The project objectives required improved traffic flow around the Circle; redefined pedestrian access to the Monument Circle via a new entry to the eastern portion of the Circle and improved access from Broadway and Eighth Avenue; maintained bus operations and curbside drop-off areas for adjacent properties; and consideration of new opportunities for improved pedestrian circulation to the 59th Street Columbus Circle station.

3. How might this project be instructive to others in your profession?

The design includes innovative use of paving treatments, landscape berms and architectural features to enhance pedestrian safety and circulation through Columbus Circle. Entrances to the Monument Circle located at Central Park South, Eighth Avenue and Broadway are defined by decorative pavers, walls, lighting and site amenities. Raised planters, berms and grade-separated areas around the perimeter of the Circle and between the entrances discourage mid-block pedestrian crossings, which previously resulted in pedestrian/vehicular conflicts. These same planted berms, along with the relocated fountain and the new plaza design, make pedestrians feel isolated and protected from the adjacent streets by providing screening and noise attenuation of traffic.

Architectural treatments are also used creatively in the roadbed to define and/or separate traffic and pedestrian areas. Cobblestones bands are provided adjacent to roadway areas and flush curbs are provided to define crosswalks. ADA surface treatments are provided at pedestrian ramps, and integrally

colored concrete is used in the roadbed to provide visual separation between vehicular and pedestrian areas.

4. What do you consider to be the most and least successful aspects of this project?

Successful completion of this project could not have been achieved without extensive collaboration of city agencies and public utility groups. Commissioners of each stakeholder/agency were involved throughout the design. Numerous information exchanges and meetings were held with public interest groups, community boards and adjacent property owners as the project progressed through design and into construction.

The client's needs were met and exceeded, as the design achieves the project goals of maintaining the Circle as a transportation resource, providing for pedestrian circulation and establishing the Monument Circle as a significant addition to the public realm of New York City. The project reestablishes the importance of this civic space and monument and returns it to the citizens and visitors of New York City. Columbus Circle today is a fitting foyer to Central Park and a place for those who live, work and visit this great city to pause and refresh themselves in the midst of one of the City's busiest intersections.

OTHER PERSPECTIVE

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Signature Richard Barth

1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

The New York City Department of City Planning has had a central and long role in thinking about and planning for the reconfiguration of Columbus Circle beginning with the initial redevelopment proposals for the Coliseum site in the 1980s. The planning and redesign of the Circle was given added impetus in 1995 with new plans by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for disposition and redevelopment of the Coliseum Site. City Planning realized that the previous configuration created unnecessary traffic congestion and pedestrian conflicts even while it consumed more area for roadway and even parking. It also believed that the Circle should serve as a gateway to the Upper West Side (going north) and Midtown (going south) while providing a grand entrance to the southwest corner of Central Park.

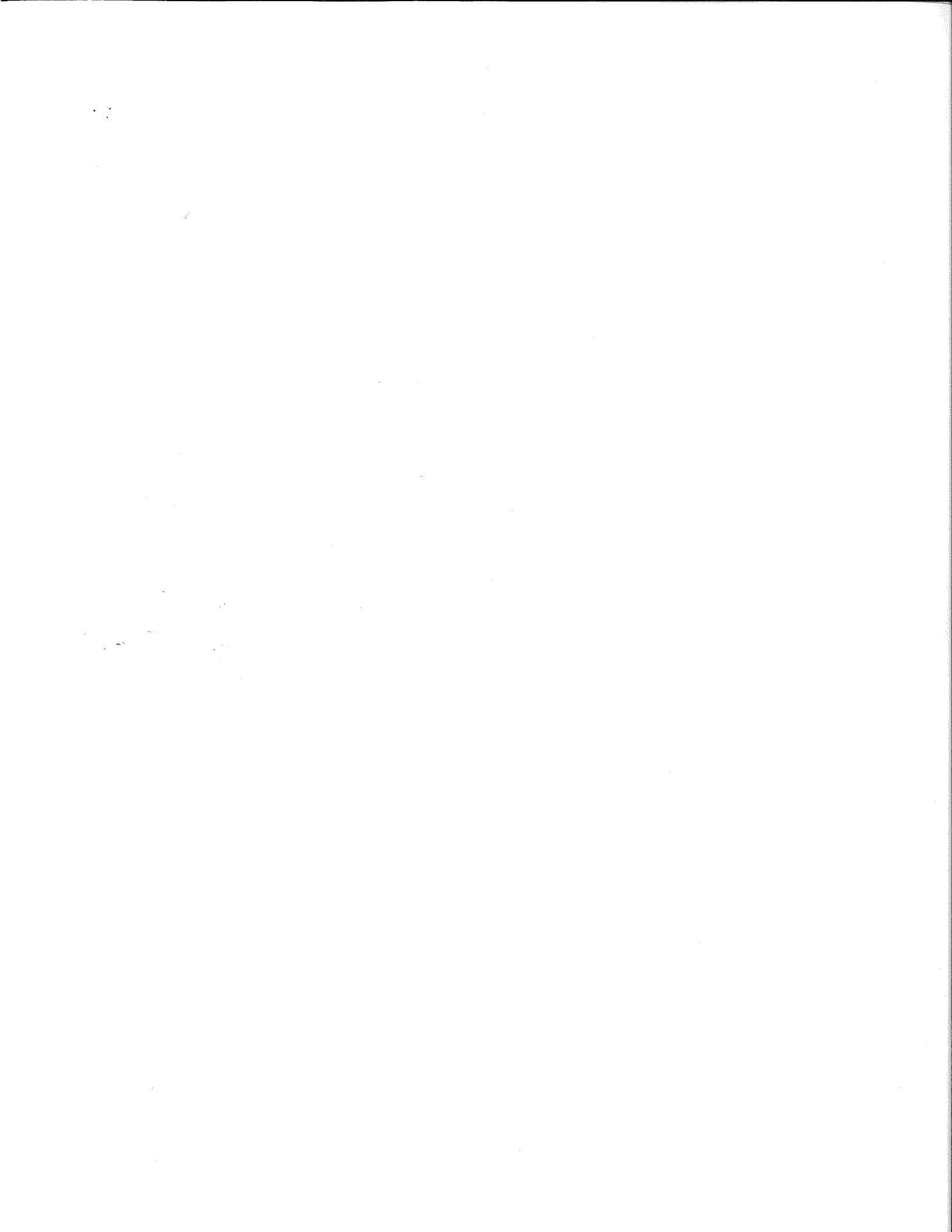
City Planning analyzed in detail the traffic patterns and flow resulting from converting the previous configuration into the true Circle configuration with various sizes for the central portions of the Circle. City Planning persuaded other involved agencies (New York City Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation) that a traffic circle would allow a reduced number of traffic lanes to handle the existing and projected traffic (including that from the redevelopment of the Coliseum site), while freeing up space for an important new civic space.

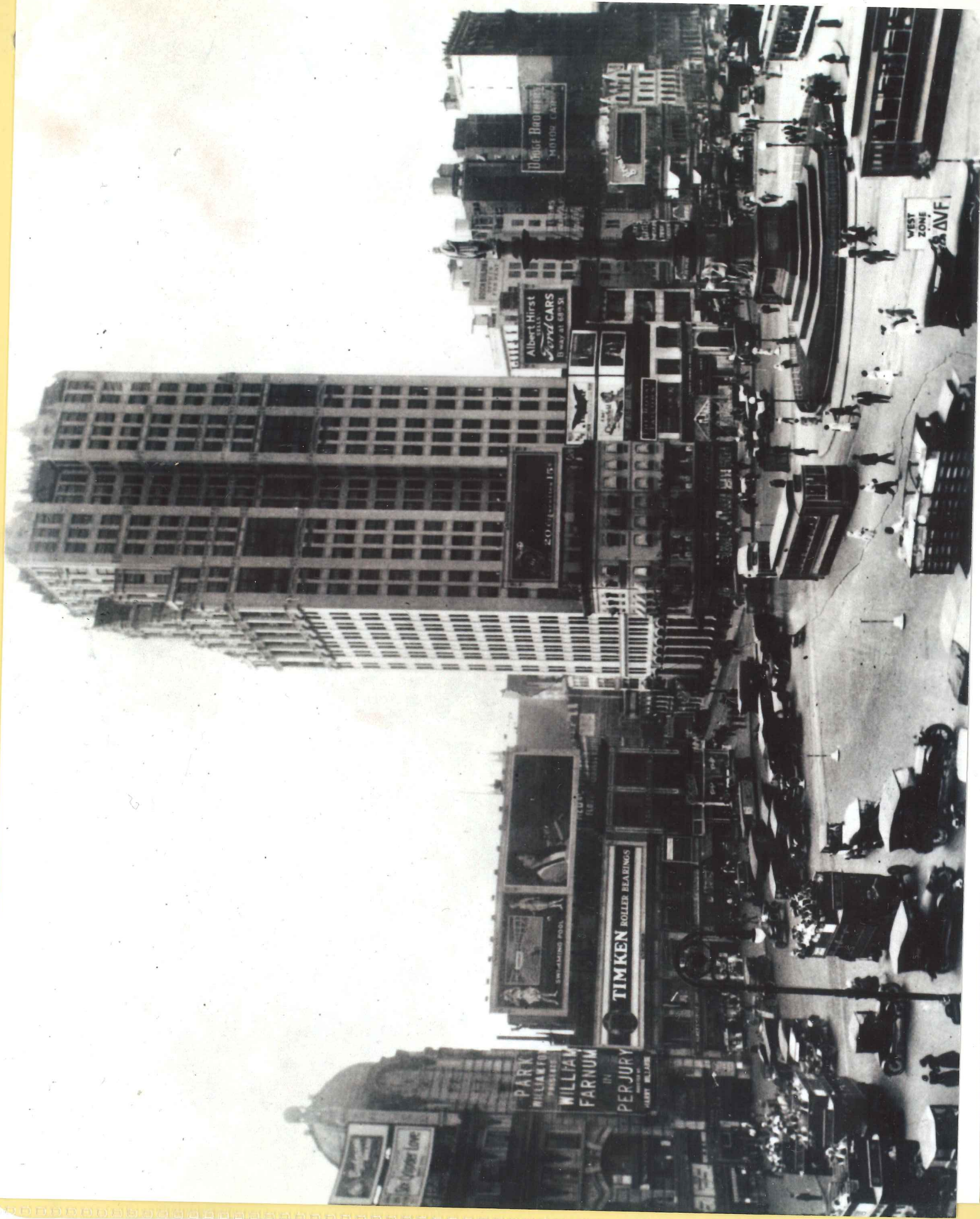
Working closely with New York City Department of Transportation, a trial run of the reconfigured circle was organized with temporary civic space in the interior, and traffic and pedestrian movements were closely monitored with substantial opportunity for public input. As a result of this successful test, a decision was made to move forward with the project.

City Planning then worked collaboratively with New York City Department of Design and Construction, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and New York City Department of Transportation on the redesign of the Circle, with New York City Department of Design and Construction having the lead role in the design and construction contract. During this period, there were ongoing discussions with the community on alternative design concepts, and ultimately the final design.

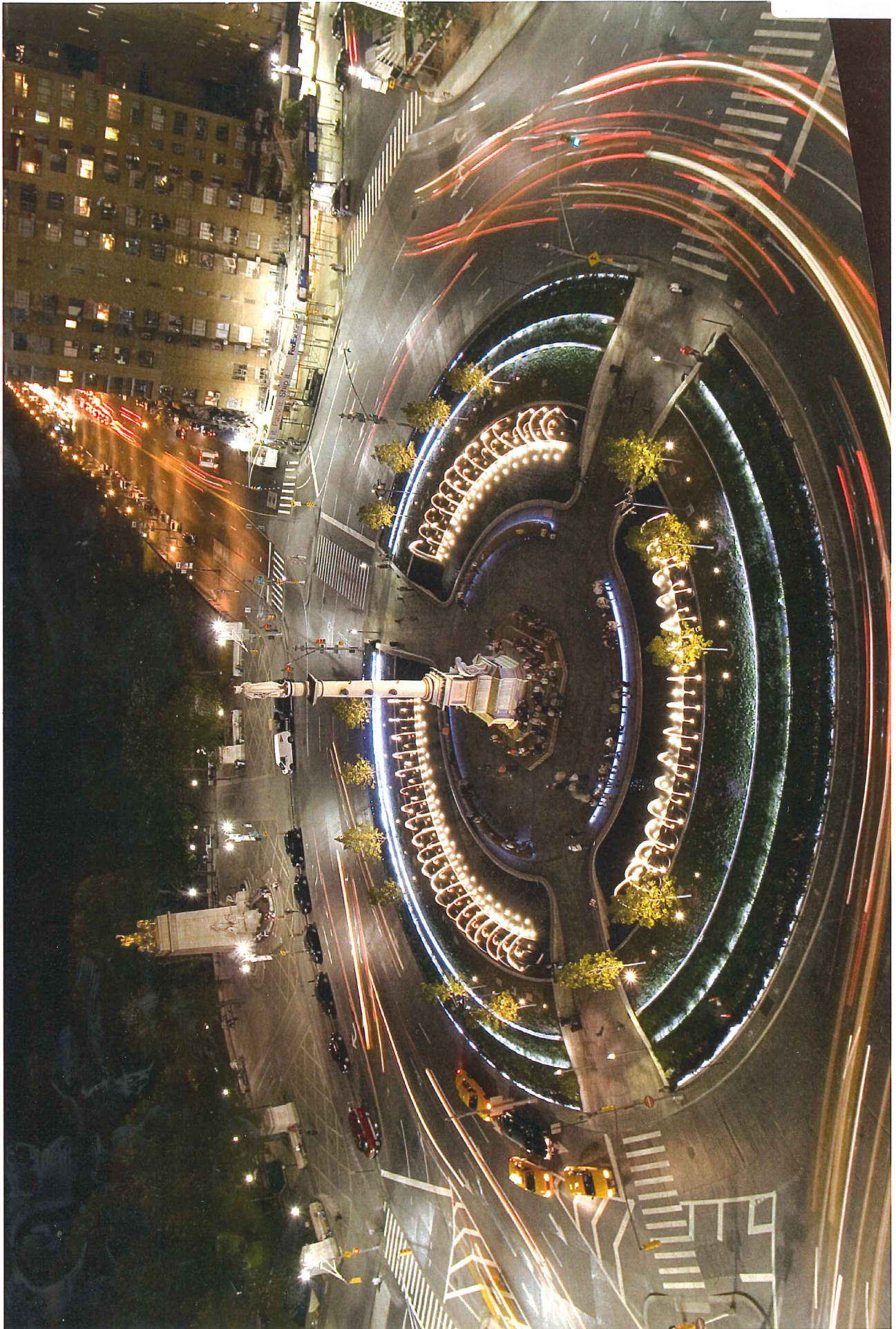
2. Describe the impact that this project has had on your community. Please be as specific as possible.

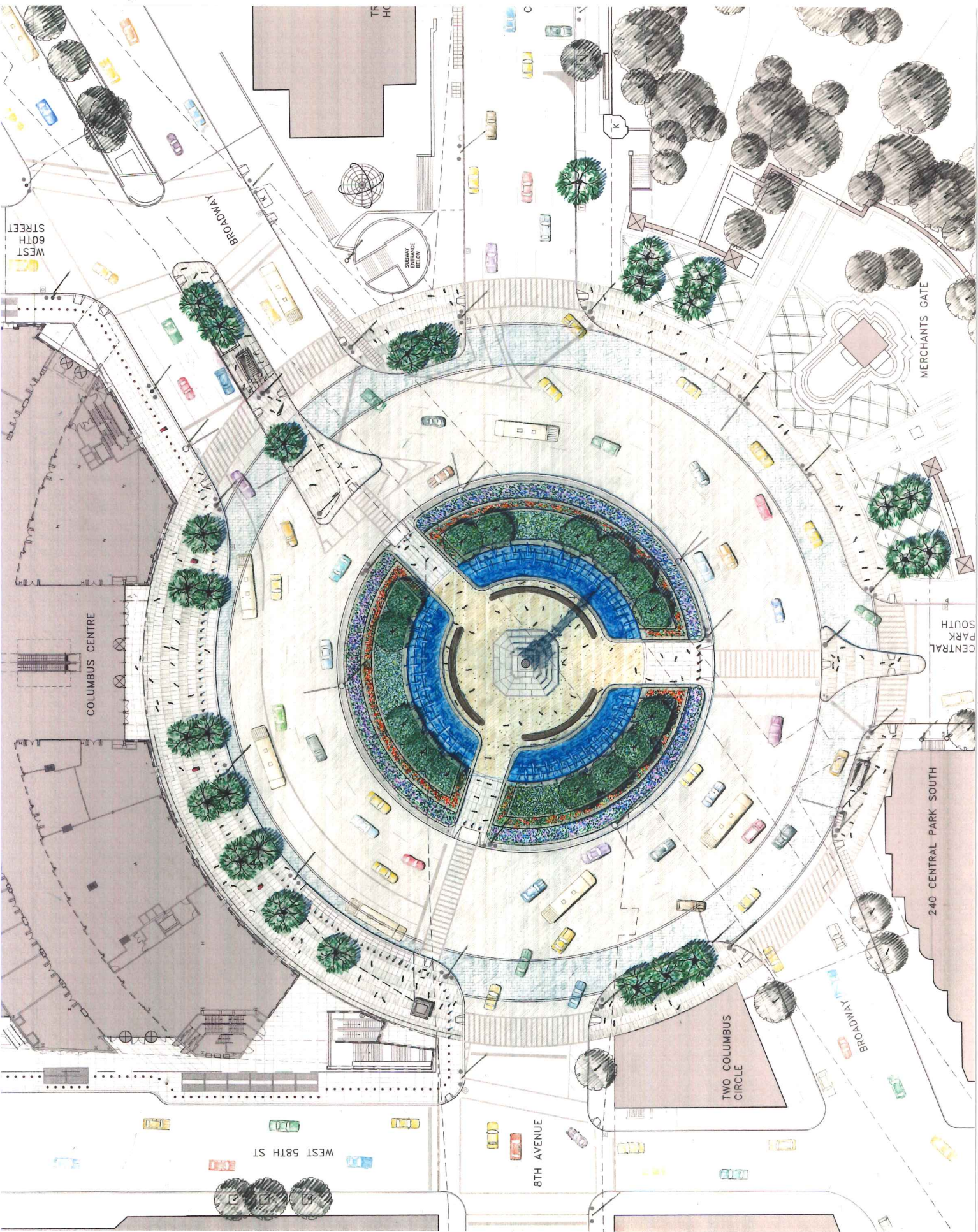
A major new civic space was created by providing a front door to both this corner of Central Park and to the new Time-Warner Center. It recaptured roadway for pedestrians and the community, and reconnected the public with the Columbus monument for which the Circle is named, and provided improved pedestrian safety and access around and through the Circle.











WEST 60TH STREET

BROADWAY

SUBWAY ENTRANCE BELOW

COLUMBUS CENTRE

WEST 58TH ST

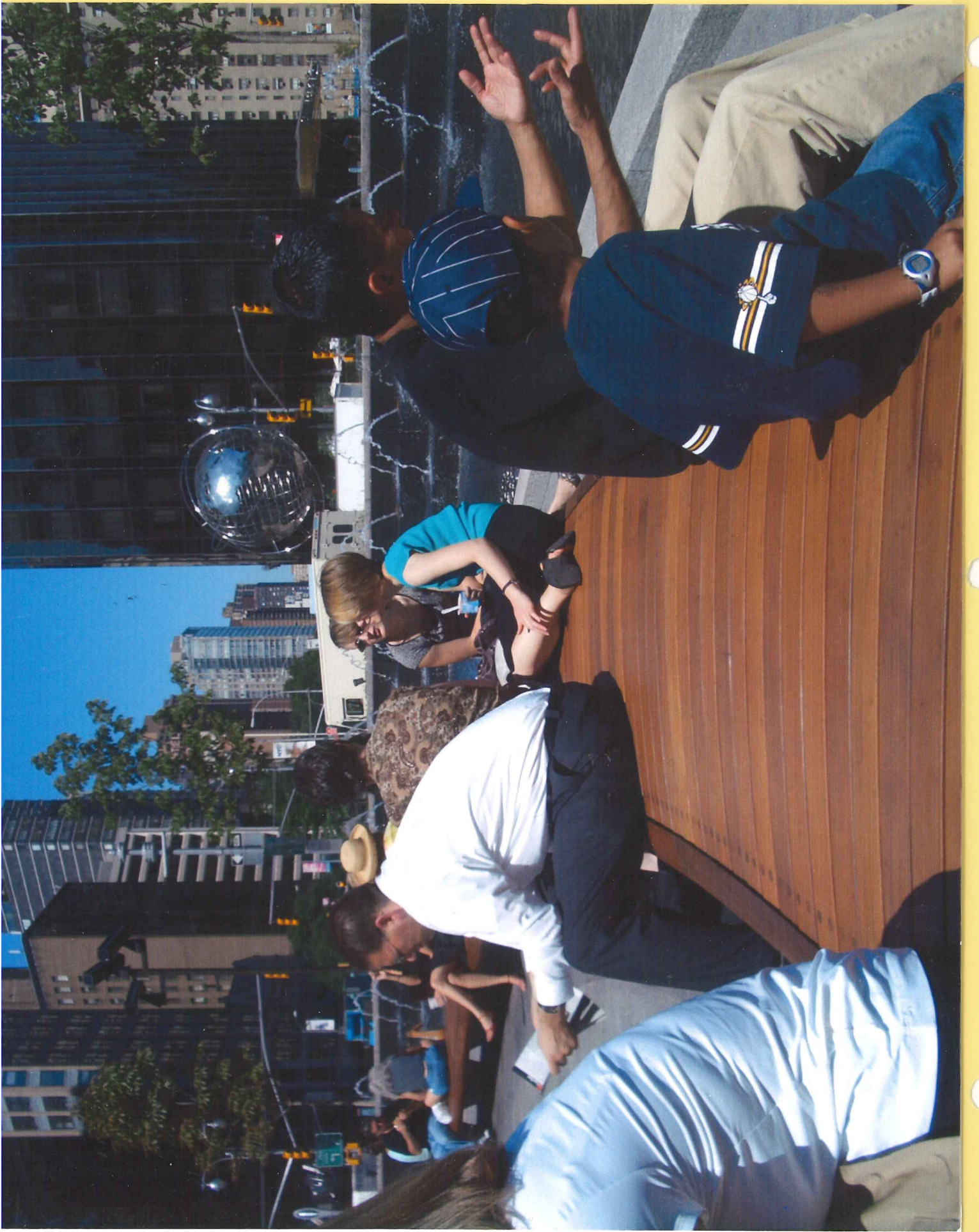
8TH AVENUE

TWO COLUMBUS CIRCLE

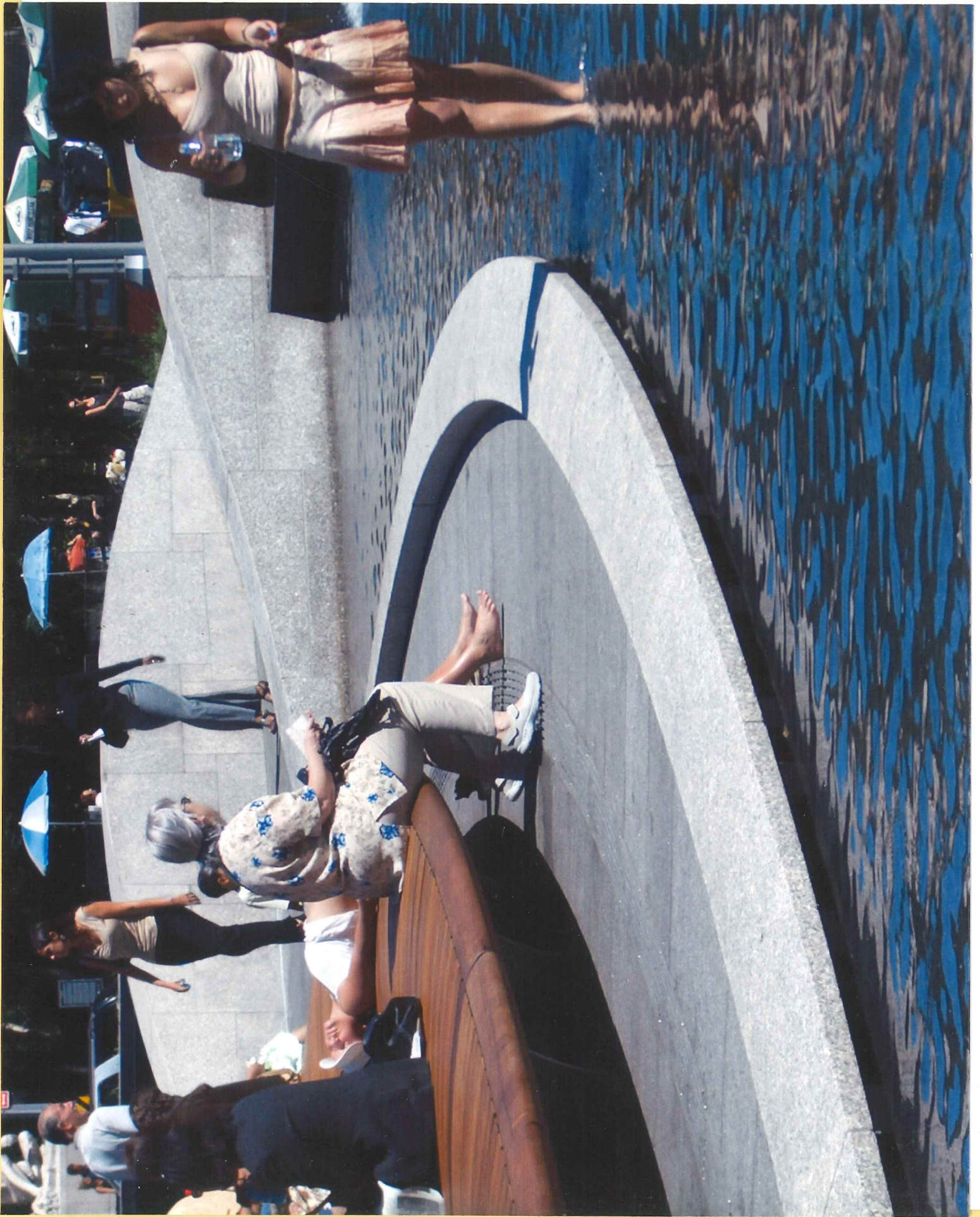
240 CENTRAL PARK SOUTH

CENTRAL PARK SOUTH

MERCHANTS GATE

















August 4, 2005

An Island of Sanctuary in the Traffic Stream

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

AT last, the circle has a center.

Columbus Circle was once one of the least approachable of New York's great public intersections. The architecture critic Paul Goldberger described it in 1979 as "a chaotic jumble of streets that can be crossed in about 50 different ways - all of them wrong."

Today, there are three different ways to cross Columbus Circle. And they are leading a growing number of pedestrians to a surprisingly generous sanctuary at the heart of a busy traffic rotary, cocooned inside a wrap-around fountain with 99 jets whose arcs suggest the circle itself and whose changing sound masks the surrounding hubbub.

"Even incomplete, you see the potential for a glorious public space," said Amanda M. Burden, the director of the City Planning Department, which has worked for nearly two decades to put the fragmented circle back together.

The new Columbus Circle has not yet officially opened. (Monday, Oct. 10, suggests itself as a possibility for that ceremony.) But New Yorkers have already arrived. Forgoing the air-conditioned Time Warner Center a few yards away and unfazed by the lack of benches - they are due any day from Milwaukee - people hang out on the tiered, octagonal base of the Columbus Monument as if it were a front stoop, with a view of Broadway, Central Park West, Central Park South and Eighth Avenue.

"We've actually opened it up ahead of having benches," said David J. Burney, the commissioner of the city's Department of Design and Construction. "Every time I was there, there were people at the barriers to the entrances saying: 'I want to get in. I want to get through.' There are quite strong desire lines for pedestrian traffic."

Around 9 o'clock on Tuesday night, three dozen people were gathered around the monument, eating, drinking, smoking, reading the paper, playing games on a cellphone, nestling affectionately, staring into space. Others sprawled languorously on the granite edges of the fountain, where a terrier chased water spouts and a little boy dipped his hand into the spray. An ill-kempt man bathed his feet furtively - but, it seemed, gratefully.

"The good thing is being able to get to the center," said Ethel Sheffer of Community Board 7 on the Upper West Side, who was the chairwoman of a Columbus Circle task force that also included Boards 4 and 5. "We all wanted New Yorkers to be able to go there."

In the decades after the Columbus Monument was dedicated in 1892, the Grand Circle (as it was once called) was exactly that, a broad rotary for vehicles and streetcars with a circular public space at its center not much larger than the monument's base.

Things were never the same after 1929, when Police Commissioner Grover Whalen ordered an end to the circular traffic flow. By the 1960's, despite the installation of a fountain around the monument, the central area had become an unwelcoming and amorphous archipelago where motorcycles parked but pedestrians crossed at some peril.

COLUMBUS CIRCLE is like a black hole," Ms. Sheffer said in 1987. "Cars go in, cars go out, but you never know what's going on inside." That year, in a report to the planning department, the architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill proposed a larger, more circular island.

As finally realized under a \$20 million city contract, Columbus Circle was redesigned by the Olin Partnership, working with Vollmer Associates. The fountain is by Wet Design. Tully Construction Company is the contractor.

The new Columbus Circle gives New Yorkers the chance to understand a critical element of the future World Trade Center memorial: how the sound of water can muffle distracting urban noise.

Almost inaudible outside the four-foot-high landscaped mound surrounding the circle, the fountain dominates the experience within. "It gives you that sense of being in the heart of the city with a sense of insulation from traffic," said Joseph B. Rose, who worked on the project when he was Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's planning director.

Depending on the force and size of the fountain jets, which alternate, the sound can evoke a swollen river, a rushing brook, a driving rain or a gentle shower.

At the trade center memorial, cascading water walls will surround each of the voids that are to mark the absence of the twin towers. The Columbus Circle fountain begins to suggest how important sound will be. "I've always tried to impress upon people that it's a sensory experience," said the architect Michael Arad, who won the memorial design competition in 2004 with Peter Walker & Partners.

Anna Hayes Levin, the chairwoman of the Clinton-Hell's Kitchen land-use committee of Community Board 4, said she was discouraged by the extent of hard, unshaded space within Columbus Circle. But she praised the restoration of the circular traffic flow, the creation of clear pedestrian access and the limited disruption caused by construction.

And she said, "I'm glad they finally have the fountain on, because for the last couple of months, it has been a skateboard park."

Mr. Burney said that would soon end with the installation of small stainless-steel clips on the sloping surfaces around the fountain "that spoilsports like me put on skateboarding walls."

So what about all those children wading in the fountain? Are they allowed to do that? "No, they're not," Mr. Burney answered. "But it was so hot last week, one could hardly blame them. I felt like jumping in there myself."

JULY 2006



GENERAL DESIGN

INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AWARDS OF HONOR

Columbus Circle, *New York City*

OLIG PARTNERSHIP, *Philadelphia*

BORN IN 1905 from Frederick Law Olmsted's design for Central Park, the oft-redesigned circle (including an inner circle of about 36,000 square feet and an outer circle of about 148,000 square feet) is at one of the principal entrances to the park, but had fallen into general disuse. Issues related to functionality, safety, and nearby real estate development led to the most recent redesign, which the landscape architecture team undertook with collaborating engineers in 2001, envisioning new plantings, fountains, benches, paving, and lighting. For the first time in a generation, the circle's historic monument, a tribute to Christopher Columbus, has been returned to public access and appreciation in an interactive environment that highlights the site as the center of the city. The work included freeing the inner pedestrian area from the clutter of street lighting, signals, signage, and other distractions, and replacing the central fountain with three new basins. "Finally, a traffic island worth the effort!" the jurors said. "It makes a real difference."



CLOSE WINDOW

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
PR- 357-05
September 19, 2005

MAYOR BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES THE REOPENING OF COLUMBUS CIRCLE

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg today joined Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe, Department of Design and Construction (DDC) Commissioner David J. Burney, Department of Transportation (DOT) Commissioner Iris Weinshall and Department of City Planning Director Amanda M. Burden to announce the completion of Columbus Circle in midtown Manhattan. The \$23 million project included a new streetscape design, granite curbs and sidewalks, distinctive wooden benches, a breathtaking central fountain, and new landscaping as well as the restoration of underground and above ground utilities, water mains, and the roadway.

"Columbus Circle has always been one of New York City's most beloved historic spaces, and it is now even more pedestrian-friendly," said Mayor Bloomberg. "With lush plantings and a beautiful water fountain that screens the area from the passing traffic, one can sit at the heart of one of the busiest intersections in our City and still find the tranquility to relax and read a good book. The multi-agency effort not only transformed the circle into a beautiful public space for New Yorkers and visitors, it also greatly improved traffic conditions making the area safer for pedestrians."

"For much of its history Columbus Circle was neither a circle nor a good public space," said Commissioner Benepe. "A multi-agency effort has created one of New York's great new public plazas, with a glorious new fountain, lush plantings, and a place of respite for residents, workers, and visitors."

"Columbus Circle is one of New York's great public spaces and DDC is proud to have managed this major reconstruction project," said Commissioner Burney. "The new central pedestrian and seating area, screened from traffic by trees and fountains, will provide a tranquil plaza that all can enjoy."

The design was based on an interim space created in 1999 that combined segmented traffic islands, which at that time, made up Columbus Circle. Construction began in July 2003 and was a multi-agency effort. DDC oversaw the final design by Vollmer Consultants and construction by general contractor Tully Construction Company. The Department of City Planning worked closely with Olin Partnership to create the project's overall plan and landscape/urban design features. The \$23 million reconstruction was funded by \$21.3 million from the City, with \$1.2 million from the Transit Authority and \$500,000 for the fountain equipment from Related Companies, L.P. and Apollo Real Estate. Prior to construction, the design was partially supported by \$500,000 from the Related Companies and Apollo Real Estate.

The circle is laid out in a series of concentric rings consisting of a broad, gently raised area of plantings and a ring of fountains in its interior that buffer the traffic noise and provide a serene, pedestrian plaza around the Christopher Columbus Statue. The pedestrian plaza is set inside of the fountain, and includes three new benches made of curved wood, large enough to allow individuals and groups to sit comfortably back to back, facing either the fountain or the monument. The new fountain includes 99 fountain heads and nearly 300 fountain lights, and was designed by WETdesign, who also designed the fountains at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Rockefeller Center Prometheus Fountain.

The Department of Parks & Recreation was responsible for the center public space and provided the scope and funding for the fountain, benches, landscaping and upcoming renovation of Columbus

Statue. DOT provided scope and funding for the improved traffic and pedestrian flow and surrounding roadwork. The DEP provided funding for water main and sewer improvements for the surrounding area. The Central Park Conservancy provided assistance to DDC throughout the project.

"Columbus Circle is now a destination rather than just an intersection," said Commissioner Weinshall. "The redesign allows for a more orderly movement of traffic and most importantly creates a safer route for pedestrians to cross."

"DEP's role was mostly on belowground infrastructure, but we're pleased to be part of this marvelous civic effort that revamped Columbus Circle," said Commissioner Lloyd. "Over \$2 million of new water mains likely won't be noticed by the millions of people who pass through each year, but they will play an important role for many decades to come - particularly, getting water to the new central fountain."

"The renewed Columbus Circle has become a magical and compelling open space marking the location of one of the most important crossroads of the City," said City Planning Director Amanda M. Burden. "The graceful fountains, generous seating, plantings and lighting have transformed a neglected traffic island into a vibrant destination for all New Yorkers. We were pleased and proud to work with Laurie Olin on the design of this splendid new public space."

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January 19, 2003

A Vertical Neighborhood Takes Shape

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

AFTER nearly two decades, almost every piece has been assembled to finish the three-dimensional, 2.8-million-square-foot puzzle on Columbus Circle called AOL Time Warner Center. New Yorkers will begin to find out in a few months how the pieces fit.

The \$1.7 billion project will be the sum of a few contradictory — or at least incongruous — parts: a luxury shopping mall anchored by a grocery store, a private enclave that influences the public realm, a place of stratospheric penthouses and a jazz club where musicians will jam until dawn. The mall and a Mandarin Oriental hotel upstairs are to open in September.

Its twin 750-foot towers already stand like exclamation points on the West Side skyline. But there are question marks, too. What shape will AOL Time Warner be in by the time its 879,000-square-foot space is ready next year? Will apartment buyers be persuaded that views from the north tower — only one-third of which has been sold — are not obstructed by the nearby Trump International Hotel and Tower? Can chefs like Thomas Keller, Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Gray Kunz coax diners into third- and fourth-floor restaurants? And will the center draw neighbors of more modest means along with big spenders from around the world?

One thing is clear: the project will transform Columbus Circle. "It feels like Midtown is creeping uptown, and that's not our neighborhood," said Councilwoman Gale A. Brewer. "Not creeping. Canterng. Galloping."

Simone Sindin, chairwoman of Community Board 4 and president of the board of Coliseum Park Apartments, directly behind AOL Time Warner Center, worries about the implications as her surroundings grow more upscale. "Everyone is saying, 'The value of your apartment will be increased tremendously,'" she said. "Well, that's fine. Did somebody ask me whether I wanted to move?" Having endured two years of demolition and construction noise, Ms. Sindin and her neighbors shudder to contemplate the traffic that will be generated by the complex.

At the same time, however, they will gain a renovated and relandscaped Columbus Circle, under a \$21 million project designed by the Olin Partnership. The architects' fees and other costs, about \$1 million in all, were paid by the Related Companies, headed by Stephen M. Ross, which is developing AOL Time Warner Center along with William L. Mack of Apollo Real Estate Advisors.

"We agreed to fund the cost because at that time — right after 9/11 — the city didn't have the wherewithal," said Bruce L. Warwick, president of Columbus Center L.L.C., the Related subsidiary overseeing the development. It is obviously in the developer's interest to raise Columbus Circle from what the landscape architect Laurie D. Olin described as its malformed current state. "It's the kind of public-private partnership you hope will happen," Mr. Olin said. His design will reinforce the geometry of the circle with a new fountain around the Columbus Monument, an inner ring of yellow buckeye trees, a landscaped berm, an outer ring of honey locusts and concentric decorative paving. The geometry is further underscored by the curving glass and granite facade of the building, designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and the gentle arc of the inner shopping gallery, which runs from 58th to 60th Street.

Ms. Sindin said the new circle will be "very AOL favored and very AOL flavored." But Amanda M. Burden, chairwoman of the City Planning Commission, said at a hearing this month that the "extraordinary design will return public access to an astonishingly generous space."

Drawing the public through the seven-level retail base will be a different challenge. "If you've got them on the top two floors, you've got them," said Kenneth A. Himmel, president and chief executive of Related Urban Development, one of the Related Companies. Upstairs bait includes Jazz at Lincoln Center and restaurants.

It appears that the retail space will be almost 90 percent occupied when the building opens, with a 20,000-square-foot Williams-Sonoma Grande Cuisine store and demonstration kitchen, a 10,000-square-foot Samsung electronics showplace and a 10,000-square-foot branch of a Danish clothing store, 4You. By far the largest retail tenant will be Whole Foods Market, with 58,000 square feet of space. Together with Jazz at Lincoln Center, it may leaven what will otherwise be a rarefied preserve of \$200 shirts, \$300 dinners and \$30 million penthouses.

"I think it's going to be up to us to respond to the challenges having to do with the pricing of the facility," said Hughlyn F. Fierce, president and chief executive of Jazz at Lincoln Center. He mentioned student discounts as one way of broadening the income range of visitors.

The developers recognize the need for stores that cater to neighbors as well as tourists, said Mitchell N. Friedel, senior vice president of Related Urban Development, and expect to sign a more locally oriented tenant, whom he would not identify, for a 30,000-square-foot space.

"The real bread and butter is the neighborhood," said David Lannon, the northeast regional president of Whole Foods Market, a national chain of 140 supermarkets specializing in natural and organic foods. He estimated that the store would see 60,000 to 80,000 transactions a week and that two-thirds of its revenues would come from produce, meat, seafood and other groceries.

Whole Foods will be reached by escalators in a 30-foot-square opening in the atrium. Concerned that luxury-goods shoppers not see tomato cans when they peer into the space, the developers asked Whole Foods to design its store as a kind of food hall, with tables seating 250 and take-out food bars around the entrance.

The restaurants upstairs will be more unabashedly deluxe. Even the floors being installed in the public corridors are extravagant: gray Indian granite bordered in veinous green marble from Australia, cobalt-flecked black granite from Russia and snowy Italian marble. Arrayed along these corridors will be the New York outpost of Mr. Keller's French Laundry in the Napa Valley; a brasserie by Mr. Kunz, formerly of Lespinasse; a steakhouse by Mr. Vongerichten, who has been playing sidewalk superintendent from Jean Georges, across Columbus Circle; a bar by Rande Gerber; and a restaurant by Masa Takayama.

"By far the most important driving factor in the process was to try to create a very consistent and yet diverse group of operators," said Adam D. Tihany of Tihany Design, who has designed Mr. Keller's space. "People are not used to going to restaurants that are not at street level."

That potential liability can also be exploited. Most patrons in Mr. Kunz's restaurant on the third floor will not be seated at the windows but rather look out across the kitchen toward the panorama of Central Park, said David Rockwell of Rockwell Architecture, Planning and Design, "as if the food and the view are shaking hands."

Though the developers have always stressed the views, even they were unprepared for the effect of the 30-degree skew of the residential towers, an angle paralleling Broadway. For instance, an apartment with a west view actually looks southwest, down the Hudson River and out to the Statue of Liberty. "I didn't realize it until I went up there," said Mr. Ross, the chairman and chief executive of Related, "but setting these buildings on the diagonal in a perpendicular city changes the whole dynamic."

Slightly less than half of the 195 apartments have been sold, said Susan M. de França, senior vice president of Related, representing 50 percent of the south tower and 33 percent of the north tower.

IN the retail area, 31 leases for 62 percent of the space have been signed, according to Related. Nine are pending, for another 25 percent of the 330,000 square feet of leasable space. Rents range from \$500 a square foot annually for

ground-floor space to \$100 a square foot for larger spaces on upper levels.

Although overall costs have increased, in part because of added structural reinforcement in the wake of the attack on the World Trade Center, the project remains within its \$1.7 billion budget, which had a contingency allowance, Mr. Warwick said. The GMAC Commercial Mortgage Corporation has lent \$1.3 billion. The balance is equity investments by Related, AOL Time Warner, Apollo and the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, which will occupy 19 floors and 277,000 square feet in the north tower.

AOL Time Warner plans to begin constructing its headquarters and CNN studio space this summer and will move into the building in phases next year. The company will declare its presence graphically through a 150-foot-high steel-frame prow at the 58th Street edge of the building, which is to form a kind of gateway across Eighth Avenue with 2 Columbus Circle, the future home of the Museum of Arts and Design (formerly the American Craft Museum). AOL Time Warner is considering fanlike displays within the prow, which is as tall as the Statue of Liberty, minus the pedestal.

"Our intent is certainly not a Times Square kind of presentation," said Philip R. Pitruzzello, vice president for real estate projects, but for corporate branding in "some contextually appropriate way."

The City Planning Department will see the prow design this week. "We're hoping that whatever will be in the prow will in some way complement 2 Columbus Circle," said Douglas Woodward, the city planner who oversees Columbus Circle projects.

Another significant issue of public design is street-level security. An informal proposal to ring the building with sidewalk bollards was not well received by city planners, since it would convey an impression of danger. "We prefer trees to bollards, and open pavement as well," Mr. Woodward said. Any security devices, he said, should be aesthetically palatable.

ALTHOUGH neighborhood opponents have dropped their litigation, the construction is still the subject of "many, many, many complaints," Councilwoman Brewer said. The noise begins shortly after daybreak, when hoists start ferrying as many as 1,500 workers into the building, and can sometimes stretch clamorously into nights and weekends. Traffic on sidewalks, streets and driveways has been snarled by trucks. However, both Ms. Brewer and Ms. Sindin of the community board, credited the developers with working to address concerns through monthly meetings, a telephone hot line and e-mail notices about after-hours work.

There have been more serious problems.

On May 22, a forklift operator working for Diamond Installations, whose name has not been released, was killed when his truck overturned. On Sept. 11, a worker for Sorbara Construction, Cedric Hunte, was fatally injured when he was struck by a large piece of plywood blown off the building during a windstorm. In November, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued citations and levied fines totaling \$177,000 against Sorbara, Diamond and Bovis Lend Lease, the construction manager.

Of the three citations against Bovis, with \$55,000 in penalties, two were reduced in severity this week and one was dropped entirely, said Mary Costello, a Bovis vice president. The penalties were reduced to \$10,000. Steven H. Sommer, senior vice president of Bovis and the construction project director for AOL Time Warner Center, said that the Sorbara case had been informally settled with reduced severity and fines and that the Diamond case is pending.

"Given the parameters, it's a pretty good site" from a safety standpoint, said Ilyse Fink, a spokeswoman for the New York City Buildings Department. "That doesn't mean that it's perfect, but it's not overly problematic. You can't excuse any accident but you recognize that, unfortunately, they can be part of the process."

The Buildings Department has in recent months revised a policy under which AOL Time Warner Center was regarded as an alteration — not a new building — because it preserved some of the foundations of the garage that had

previously existed under the New York Coliseum. By filing the project as an alteration, the developers had gone through an easier approval procedure.

But under Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, the city also imposed significant conditions, among them that the developers provide space for a performing arts center.

At a cost of \$60 million, the developers are building the core and shell of the 100,000-square-foot Frederick P. Rose Hall for Jazz at Lincoln Center, including the Rose Theater, the Allen Room and Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, which both commemorates Dizzy Gillespie and acknowledges last week's \$10 million gift from the Coca-Cola Company.

Jazz is still about \$30 million shy of the \$128 million it needs to complete its space, designed by Rafael Viñoly Architects. But the outlines are already clear, from the astonishingly transparent 50-foot glass wall of the Allen Room to the soaring 90-foot backstage fly loft at the Rose Theater.

"I love this part of the project," said James E. Linsley, a vice president of Related, standing on the Rose Theater stage. "It's the one thing we give away for free and yet I love it."

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From the Los Angeles Times

Hello, Columbus: An L.A. Street Looks to a New York Circle

Developer sees the vibrant Manhattan hub as a model for Grand Avenue. Replicating its upscale atmosphere would be a challenge.

By Cara Mia DiMassa
Times Staff Writer

June 19, 2006

NEW YORK — Wedged between Lincoln Center and the theater district, Columbus Circle had long been known as an urban landmark inexplicably lacking the hustle and bustle of the rest of Manhattan.

But two years ago, developer Related Cos. opened the 55-story mega-complex known as Time Warner Center here — and, largely as a result, the area has been transformed. The "mini-city" boasts some of New York's most expensive restaurants as well as luxury condos, a five-star hotel, a Whole Foods Market and, soon, a museum — all within a few blocks.

Related is now preparing to break ground on another mega-complex: the \$1.8-billion, Frank Gehry-designed Grand Avenue project in downtown Los Angeles.

When people ask what Grand Avenue will look and feel like, the developers at Related often point to Columbus Circle. But a visit to Manhattan makes it clear that despite some similarities, replicating the upscale atmosphere and vibrant pedestrian life of Columbus Circle is going to be a challenge.

The circle, though once sleepy, had a large, well-heeled residential population living nearby and is located within a quick walk of Central Park, Fifth Avenue's shopping district and Broadway.

By contrast, Grand Avenue is on Bunker Hill, on the far north side of downtown. The area is home to Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Museum of Contemporary Art, but it is a long uphill walk from other local institutions, including the Central Library, Staples Center and the increasingly trendy South Park district.

Time Warner Center's shops feed off a much denser array of offices and residential buildings than Grand Avenue's shops would. In Columbus Circle, the upscale businesses are sustained both by residents who live nearby and workers at the center's namesake company, media titan Time Warner. Though Grand Avenue will have some office space in its third phase, most of the high-rise units are set aside for hotel rooms, condos and low-income affordable housing.

Related has touted both developments for their village concept, including shopping, homes, businesses and even subway stops in one sprawling development.

But New York Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff is quick to point out the inherent difference in the two cities.

New York "is a walking city. It's a mass transit city.... Creating these hubs of activity built around ease of access has been our time-honored formula for success," he said.

"That's obviously different from what you'll find in Los Angeles."

Architect Jeffrey Inaba, who teaches at both New York's Columbia University and Los Angeles' Southern California Institute of Architecture, says comparing the two projects underscores an inherent contradiction in L.A.'s effort to bring urban vitality to downtown.

Time Warner, he said, "is essentially suburban in its logic. The ironic thing would be that [Los Angeles], a city that is largely suburban, aspiring to have its first urban destination, would be copying an urban city that has a suburban destination."

Still, Related officials remain convinced that Grand Avenue will see the same success as Time Warner Center.

They are banking on Grand Avenue essentially priming the pump in the area, drawing more developers to build office and residential towers nearby. Grand Avenue, as they see it, would become the hub of a much larger development boom.

"During the first six to 12 months [of construction], you announce the tenants, and that builds a level of excitement, and people suddenly become believers," said Kenneth A. Himmel, president and chief executive of Related Urban Development. "What happens to the peripheral area is that anything with momentum, that is already going, accelerates, because of the quality and breadth and depth of the project."

It remains to be seen how much development Grand Avenue will spark. But LA Live, the sports- and entertainment-focused mega-shopping center rising a few miles south near Staples Center, could either complement or compete with Grand Avenue. Though the developers argue that the projects will benefit each other, both must become retail destinations in a region that already has many, including the Grove, Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade and Hollywood & Highland.

On a recent evening, a crowd of people waited out a thunderstorm in the cavernous lobby of Time Warner Center. A boy played at the base of a female Botero sculpture, one of a pair titled "Adam and Eve" who stand guard in front of the building's central escalators.

Businessmen chatted via Blackberries. Out-of-towners, maps in hand, planned their next stops. Above, visible through the building's two-story glass scrim, Columbus Circle, and Central Park beyond, were illuminated by lightning.

When it was built, Time Warner Center was not universally embraced. Some dismissed it as architecturally boring, far too big for the neighborhood and too much like a suburban shopping mall.

But the center has proved more successful than many envisioned.

The central shopping area, with its glass-and-steel elevated walkways, may look like a mall — yet it has attracted super chef Thomas Keller and sushi master Masa Yakayama, who opened restaurants there. "Jazz at Lincoln Center," led by Wynton Marsalis, moved into an airy concert space above.

The developers say that Time Warner reflects the traffic circle's graceful arches.

They plan to play up the inside-outside relationship in Los Angeles as well, using landscaping to blur lines between urban and rural space. Laurie Olin, a landscape designer who redesigned Columbus Circle as part of the Related project, will try his hand at Grand Avenue. Early designs show rooftop pools, garden space and trees planted at angles hanging down from upper stories.

"That's the key," said Himmel, "to look up from Grand Avenue, or down from the buildings, and know you are not looking at a blank rooftop experience."

Gehry's plans for Grand Avenue's first phase call for two bold, glass-sheathed L-shaped towers of 47 and 24 stories, at opposite ends of the block east of Disney Hall. Smaller pavilions will house restaurants, shops and art galleries.

Backers of the Grand Avenue project speak almost poetically in their comparisons between New York and Los Angeles. Eli Broad, chairman of the committee pushing the Grand Avenue project, said that Columbus Circle today is a model for what L.A.'s downtown district could become.

"What they have done there is really incredible," said Broad, who keeps an apartment overlooking the circle. "They've given it light."

Still, the comparison between a busy traffic circle in central Manhattan and a part of downtown long isolated from the rest of the city center — with an 80-foot hill from one end to the other — seems a bit of a stretch to some urbanists.

Inaba said Time Warner Center "is super-successful because you have the subway station there. You have people from all over ... who come to Whole Foods because they can do their grocery shopping there. In L.A., that would never happen. Grand Avenue would never have that kind of centrality."

Grand Avenue has been the focus of civic plans for Bunker Hill over the last 50 years, with little success. In recent years, Broad and others have said that creating a development along Grand Avenue is key to transforming a district known for shutting down after dark into a 24/7 attraction.

Downtown Los Angeles today, said Himmel, represents "the most underserved retail market of any major American city" and can support a project on the scale of Grand Avenue. And Related's work at Time Warner Center can serve as a guide.

"We have spent years perfecting the art of how you move people vertically," he said.

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Columbus Circle Reconstruction

PROJECT OF THE YEAR • *New York Construction News* • 2005

DIAMOND AWARD • *American Council of Engineering Companies of New York* • 2006

The Columbus Circle Reconstruction, in Manhattan, returns a premier urban space to the grandeur originally envisioned in Olmsted's 1868 plan for Central Park. The project, for NYCDDC, reestablishes Columbus Circle as one of the Park's four grand entrances. In addition, the reconstruction improves transportation, traffic movement and pedestrian safety.

The successful efforts of Vollmer's civil engineers and transportation planners in collaboration with Olin Partnership's landscape architects resulted in Columbus Circle's now being a safe and attractive pedestrian destination. The Christopher Columbus monument is at its center, and the Circle now includes a broad area of planting and clearly defined pedestrian access.

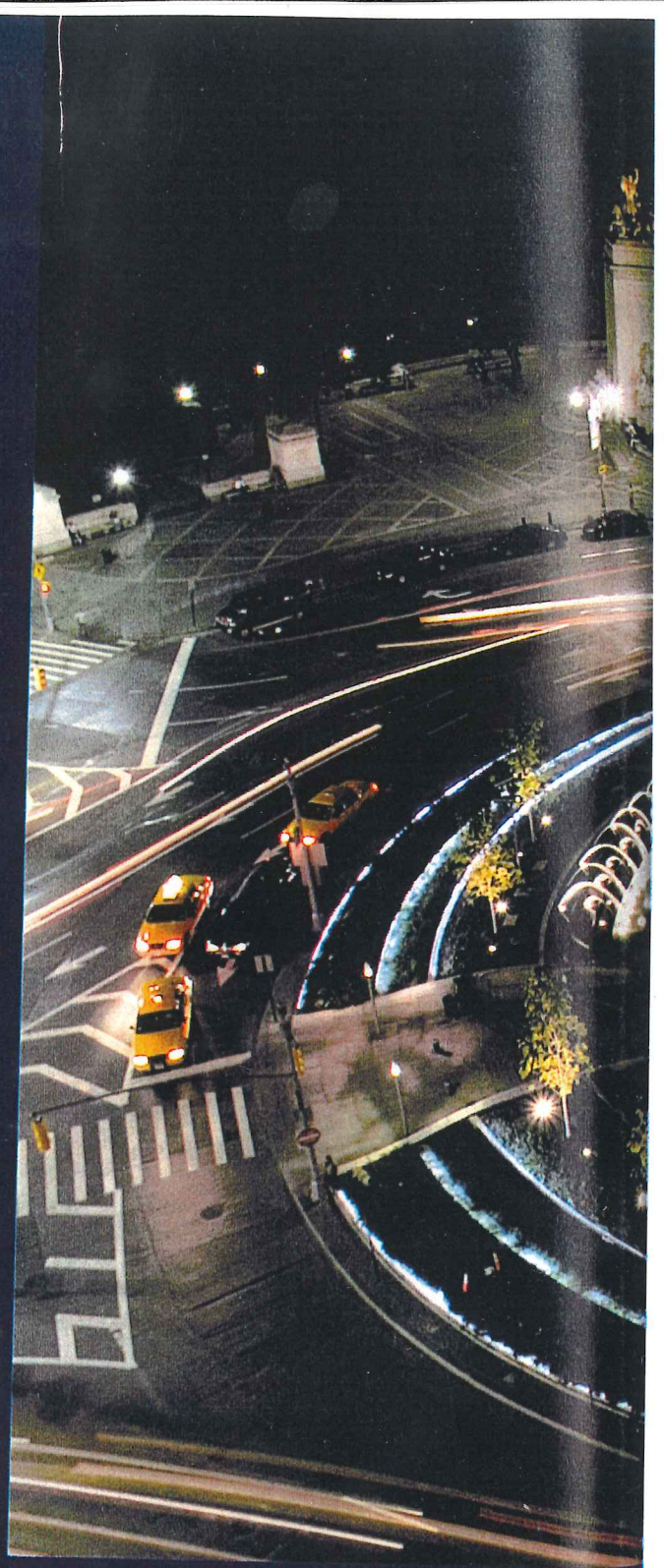
Concentric fountains encircle the central area, reinforcing the circular design and primacy of the monument while masking traffic noise. The stepped design of the fountain serves as seating when it is turned off in the colder months, making the fountain base functional year-round and avoiding the forlorn look of so many empty fountains in the City.

Peter Stegner

In conjunction with the development of the new Time Warner Center the City of New York commissioned the redesign of the open space at Columbus Circle. The layout in concentric rings emphasises on the urban form of the site and creates a diversified environment.

Still, it is no wonder that Columbus Circle is a mess, for it is a meeting point of extraordinary urban pressures: a subway hub; a portal not only to Central Park, but to the Upper West Side; one of Broadway's periodic interruptions of the Manhattan street grid; a transition between the staid residential boulevard of Central Park West and the commercial corridor that extends down Broadway to Times Square", explained renowned architecture critic Herbert Muschamp in 1994 in the New York Times the dysfunction of Columbus Circle both as a public space and major traffic intersection.

Located opposite of the southwest corner entrance, also known as Merchants' Gate, to rectangular shaped Central Park the Circle is surrounded by a rather eclectic array of buildings: the luxurious Trump International Hotel and Tower, the unique 2 Columbus Circle, an example of the so called romantic modernism and its latest addition; the 80-storey high Time Warner Center designed by the New York architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, LLP, which opened in 2004. Partially used as headquarters of the world's biggest media corporation, the glass-glazed Center with its two sharp-edged towers rising above a curved base is the largest commercial building project in Manhattan since the construction of the World Trade Center in the 1970s. It houses an upscale shopping mall with luxurious restaurants, the first concert hall devoted only to Jazz and some of the most



THE NEW COLUMBUS



CIRCLE, NEW YORK CITY

The design of Columbus Circle bases on concentric rings from the Columbus monument in the middle to the defining building line. Benches and a ring of Yellow Buckeyes underline the circular layout of the place.



expensive apartments ever sold in this city. Before, the site was occupied by the infamous and eventually non-viable Coliseum, a huge convention facility built in the 1950s. In the mid 1980s the owner, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), gave the green light to redevelop the site, which ultimately opened doors for a complete redefinition of Columbus Circle.

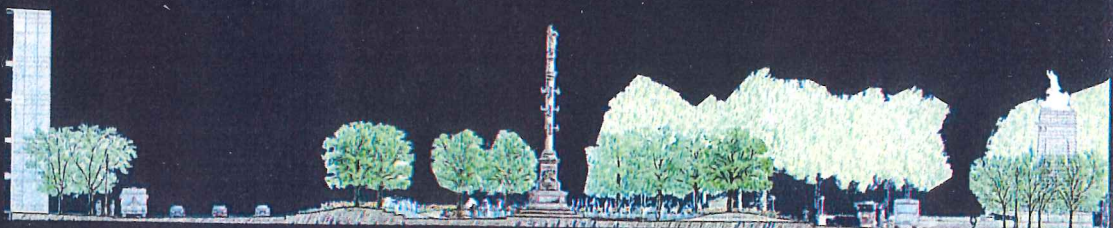
In 1997 the Municipal Art Society, an influential advocate for public space in New York, invited six teams of leading architects and landscape architects for an ideas competition to raise public awareness about the great potential for the public realm. In addition to proposing bold visions above ground almost all the entries exposed the subway system hidden below the Circle, therefore improving ventilation and bringing light down the underground.

With the Time Warner Center construction under way the city hired in 2001 the landscape architecture and urban design firm Olin Partnership of Philadelphia to join the engineers from Vollmer Associates of New York, to develop a design for the public spaces at Columbus Circle. In the early 1990s the firm helped to successfully turn around historic Bryant Park in Midtown Manhattan from a crime ridden, unsafe open space to one of the most popular inner-city parks through a series of multi-layered design interventions.

The firm's first encounter with the Circle goes back to 1988 when the firm, then Hanna/Olin, was asked to rethink the adjacent southwest corner entrance into Central Park. Plan renderings by Hanna/Olin would show already a circular layout for the Circle, which was in line with the original concept developed by Frederick Law Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux in 1868.

In 1997 Olin Partnership, in collaboration with the architecture firm Machado and Silvetti, Boston, was one of the invitees for the MAS competition. The team proposed a giant circular tensile structure, 110 meters in diameter and 42 meters tall, spanning over the Circle. The visionary scheme included generous fountains and skylights, which would open up the hidden subway hub.

The implemented design of concentric rings all the way to the building line is of course much simpler, but still succeeds to reinforce the cir-



cular layout in a powerful way. It improves public access to the inner circle plaza by establishing three pedestrian crossings across the traffic lanes. The inner circle works now both as a destination and transition space. One important design decision made was to remove the fountain pool enclosing the Columbus monument and allow people to get close and sit on the base steps.

Water plays now a much more vital and integral role. The new fountain encircles the granite-paved plaza. It steps up towards the outer perimeter creating a series of bleachers clad in Mesabi Black granite, which provide seating space when the fountain is turned off. The 99 water jets arching towards the monument together with the low reflecting water surface improve the microclimate in hot summer months and help to mask the constant traffic noise. A custom-designed circular bench crafted in Brazilian Ipé wood from sustainable cultivation runs along the fountain edge. The generous layout of the three bench segments with a total length of 58 meters allows back to back seating.

A ring of Yellow Buckeyes (*Aesculus octandra*) underplanted with Vinca encircles the fountain and frames views to the monument, which was dedicated back in 1892. Rings of Liriope, Sporobolus, Cotoneaster and decorative annuals surround the trees. Finally the inner circle is separated by a ring of raised granite cobbles from the traffic lanes, which are paved in tinted concrete. The lighting design by L'Observatoire International, New York, seeks to express the circular layout at night and delivers a striking display in concert with the car traffic in flux.

Laurie Olin, Principal in charge, agrees that an opportunity was missed to integrate and express the hidden subway hub on the surface. There was no support by the MTA for this bigger move at the time.

However for Olin the design accomplishes three things: The strong urban graphic clarifies a former messy situation. The proportions feel right, both when viewed from the surrounding towers and experienced through the human perspective on ground level. Finally the result shows surprisingly how much one is able to achieve in a relatively small space. The new Columbus Circle is for New York standards quite pedestrian friendly and the concept of balancing more the interests of all traffic participants seems promising.

RECONSTRUCTION OF COLUMBUS CIRCLE, NEW YORK

Client: The City of New York

Design team: Vollmer Associates, LLP, New York; Olin Partnership Ltd., Philadelphia

Consultants: Cosentini Associates (MEP), New York; Wet Design, Los Angeles (Fountain);

L'Observatoire International, New York (Lighting)

Area: 20,900 square meters

Costs: 26 million US dollars (including road and utilities work)

Water plays an integral role in the design: 99 water jets enclose the inner circle, a granite-paved plaza. The water improves the microclimate and masks the traffic noise. At night the fountain is brightly illuminated.





December 28, 2004

E. Allan Spulecki
Olin Partnership
Public Ledger Building, Suite 1123
150 South Independence Mall West
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Allan,

On Columbus Day, October 11, it was our great honor to have you talk about your redevelopment of Columbus Circle during our "Doing Art & Architecture Together" 3-day program about water fountains for a group of teenage students who currently live in group foster homes in Queens.

In the lovely letter we received from their Nurse Case Manager, Maria Vanterpool, you will see how important the program was to them. They have already planned to go back to see your completed Columbus Circle in June.

Enclosed are some photos from your talk there, as well as ceramic studio shots and some of the student's completed, gurgling table top fountains.

I thank you so very much for taking the time from your busy schedule to meet with us. I have taken the liberty of adding your name to our Doing Art Together mail list, since we may mention you and Olin Partnership in upcoming publications.

I hope we may have the pleasure of meeting with you again sometime in the future. I send my warmest wishes to you for the New Year and for your completion of Columbus Circle.

Sincerely,

Audrey Irwin

