

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.