

BOOKS

Parks, Plants, and People: Beautifying the Urban Landscape, by Lynden B. Miller; New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2009; 206 pages, \$49.95.

Reviewed by Linda McIntyre

URBAN PARKS DO A LOT OF WORK. They serve as de facto backyards for green-starved residents of all ages. They provide space for people to collectively protest, celebrate, or mourn. And they often serve as a barometer of sorts, reflecting a city's overall health.

Parks in New York City serve as shining examples—and cautionary tales. Their fortunes have waxed and waned with the city's. Designed and built at an astonishing rate during Robert Moses's reign, they became poster children for the urban malaise of the 1970s and 1980s. More recently, they have enjoyed a renaissance. New parks along the Hudson River and elsewhere and renovations of older playgrounds and fields have made a big contribution to quality of life in the city—so much so that sidewalks in many formerly edgy neighborhoods are now clogged with strollers and schoolchildren.

How did this happen? And how, in the face of crashes in two of New York's most significant industries—finance and real estate—can these hard-won improvements endure? Though it was likely conceived and written before the economic crises that began in autumn 2008, this book tells the back story, but it also provides insights into the way forward that can be used by cities of almost any size.

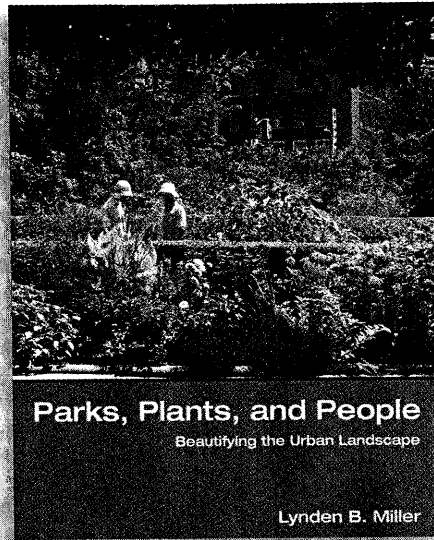
Author Lynden Miller is one of the people who pushed the turnaround in New York from its earliest days, starting with a redesign of the Conservatory Garden in northeast Central Park. This formal garden, once an overgrown magnet for trash and illicit activity, was restored by Miller in the 1980s under the auspices of the Central Park Conservancy and now provides a haven for its East Harlem and Upper East Side neighbors. Miller has worked on many other projects, celebrated and obscure, big and small, in and outside New York, and she readily shares lessons learned along the way.

Among these lessons is the need for a long-term relationship between the designer and the project for a successful design to endure. Miller isn't a landscape architect; her background is in fine art and horticulture. Her eye for color and winning plant combinations, however, is readily apparent to anyone who has visited her projects, and there is some discussion of these issues (but no detailed plans) here.

But other lessons, such as effective ways to cultivate volunteers and advocates and persuade nearby businesses to contribute manpower (and, crucially, money) to the ongoing maintenance of neighborhood parks, go far beyond design and make this a unique

and valuable book. New York City park advocates, including Miller, were in the vanguard of public-private partnerships as a means of keeping parks vibrant, but the phenomenon has spread far and wide, and Miller highlights other examples. In the book she discusses different forms such ventures can take as well as some of the trade-offs.

Miller's prose style is conversational, and this is reflected in the organization of the book—it reads like a particularly engaging education session or public speech. More subheadings or other ways of pulling out important and useful points might have



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made it easier to retrieve information later. Most of the photographs are very small, which diminishes their impact. Often one wishes for more detail about

individual projects mentioned in passing (a resource directory does help guide the curious). But anyone who cares about urban parks—as a designer or a user—will want to read this book.

Riprap Editor Linda McIntyre is a former Landscape Architecture staff writer with a strong interest in urban parks.

Green Roof Construction and Maintenance, by Kelly Lockett; New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009; 208 pages, \$60.

Reviewed by Virginia L. Russell, FASLA

GIVEN KELLY LOCKETT'S BUSINESS—he is president of Green Roof Blocks from Saint Louis Metalworks—one would hope to see an outright declaration that this book is about modular green roof systems. Lockett does not declare this intention, and although the book's photographs are mostly of installations of his modular system, we are still waiting for the book that illuminates the considerations unique to this green roof option.

Unlike green roof publications to date, this book was not written by a trained designer, so the practicalities of green roof construction and maintenance take center stage here. This is an important niche in the literature: the viewpoint of the installer. The book begins with a rarely discussed distinction, the difference between a roof garden and a green roof. Lockett makes it clear that



the planning, design, and maintenance issues associated with each are different, primarily because of human access and use. The book begins with design issues for roof gardens and green roofs listed separately and bypasses the introductory material about the benefits and the types of green roof systems. Lockett covers these adequately, but a subsequent edition of the book should begin with them, to make a foundation for understanding design issues that are based on knowledge of the peculiarities of green roof vocabulary.

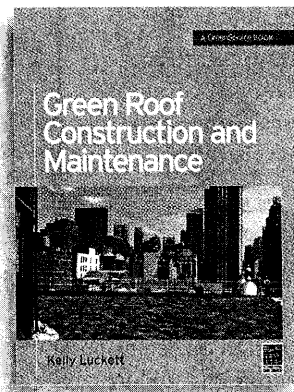
The design section builds on common knowledge with some expansion based on Lockett's practical experience. The remaining coverage of green roof components that stands above other texts is that which describes the mysteries of roof insulation, roofing membranes, and moisture-retention materials. Because of the author's direct involvement with the development of standards for green roof construction, particularly in the subjects of wind uplift and fire rating, I had hoped his book would cover these in

depth, given the general dearth of information in other texts. His coverage is superficial, and these two critical issues are neither defined nor explained.

My litmus test for any green roof book is its coverage of growing media. With all the other complexities of green roof design and maintenance set aside, it is the growing medium, or rather the designer's understanding of it, that makes or breaks a green roof. It is to green roofs what soil is to the at-grade landscape, and its attributes are nearly as complex. Lockett's coverage at least makes a distinction between commercial and custom blends, with some description of issues in sourcing, blending, and installing the growing media, but this does not stand remarkably above or beyond what has been published elsewhere. However, the final chapter in the book nearly redeems this shortcoming. It is a 20-page overview of selected research conducted by the Green Roof Environmental Evaluation Network at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. The name of this chapter, "Quantifying the Benefits of Green Roofs," may be misleading, because it is about scientific quantification, not the economics or life cycle costs of green roofs. Although the research and resources cited are by no means comprehensive or representative of the wide and international spectrum of green roof research, this chapter does serve to emphasize the many variables to be considered in growing medium selection for stormwater management and plant palettes.

The book seems rushed. There are printing errors and the index is not entirely reliable. Citations, noted with asterisks, are incomplete and there is no bibliography. Captions under the photographs do not cite project information, nor is there an index for further information about them. With the exception of four sheets in the center, the book's images are all black and white, which is unfortunate in a publication about vegetated roofs. Despite the disappointing quality of the publishing, the book is a credible contributor to the McGraw-Hill GreenSource library.

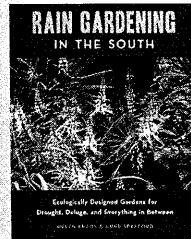
Virginia L. Russell, FASLA, is an associate professor of architecture at the University of Cincinnati and an accredited green roof professional.



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NOTEWORTHY

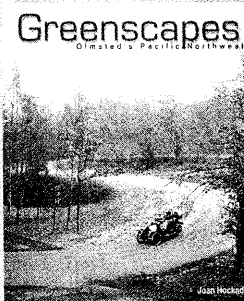
RAIN GARDENING IN THE SOUTH: ECOLOGICALLY DESIGNED GARDENS FOR DROUGHT, DELUGE, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN, by Helen Kraus and Anne Spafford; Hillsborough, North Carolina: Eno Publishers, 2009; 144 pages, \$19.95.



THIS COLORFUL BOOK by two horticulture professors (one with a degree in landscape architecture) is aimed primarily at home owners but would be a good tool for landscape architects who

want to educate their residential clients about rain gardens. Replete with photos, diagrams, and planting plans, the book also features a chart of plants that suit various styles (shade, sun, part shade/part sun) of rain gardens.

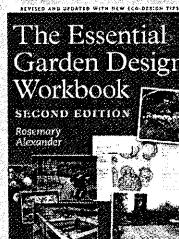
GREENSCAPES: OLMSTED'S PACIFIC NORTHWEST, by Joan Hockaday; Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 2009; 196 pages, \$29.95.



THE OLMSTED HERE is John Charles Olmsted, and this detailed biography focuses on his work in the Pacific Northwest. Included are chapters on John Charles's work on

Seattle parks and boulevards, Oregon college campuses, the Portland Exposition, and the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, among others. Olmsted family scholars and those with an interest in John Charles in particular will want to add this volume to their collection.

THE ESSENTIAL GARDEN DESIGN WORKBOOK, SECOND EDITION, by Rosemary Alexander; Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 2009; 292 pages, \$34.95.



THIS SECOND EDITION of the 2004 book boasts that it is "revised and updated with new ecodesign tips." Also added are U.S. case studies (the author is the founder of the English Gardening School) and new photographs. Aimed at passionate home gardeners, this detailed manual can be useful to residential designers.