



SWIRE SIEGEL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

# MAYORS' DISCOVERY PARK

NATIVE PLANT GUIDE



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# OVERVIEW

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The City of La Canada Flintridge purchased an abandoned parking lot on the west side of the 2 freeway on ramp from Caltrans with the goal of creating a useful public space for its residents. A committee composed of La Canada Flintridge Parks and Recreation Commissioners, City Council members, and involved residents explored many options and ultimately determined that the space should be transformed into a public park catering to residents of all ages. The site however presented extreme design challenges being both of small usable space and surrounded on three sides by vehicular traffic. In order to transform the site into one having both aesthetic value and reasonable noise level, the views and the sounds of the surrounding roadways needed to be heavily screened. Considering both the site and the history of the park, formerly a Caltrans park and ride lot, the city agreed to explore a transportation theme, with numerous design and practical site improving features that would turn this small noisy corner of La Canada Flintridge into a space that not only all could enjoy, but that stimulated thought and exploration related to the park's past, and southern California's historic focus on transportation. All of the design and structural elements on the site conform to these themes both in a practical sense by creating a space conducive for passive recreation and by promoting creative play for children using elements of transportation in an abstract and a fully participatory vein. The layout and choice of recreational activities was critical in being able to attract people to this less-than-ideal location adjacent to the freeway and busy commercial street. Traditional picnic and children's play equipment was not considered a sufficient draw, as there are several larger parks in quieter locations that meet these city needs. Rather a more unconventional approach was taken to provide a more unique type of "discovery" play for children and an entertaining and educational aspect for adults as they watch and participate with their children in exploring the many hidden details of Mayor's Discovery Park.



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The overall structure of the park was modeled on an Italian piazza where narrow streets lead to a large vibrant open space filled with perimeter activities including a fountain all facing an open center. In this park, the narrow entrance path and looming arbor lead to a large open space at the terminus, a great central lawn which can be used for frisbee, croquet, lawn bowling, badminton, or volleyball with provisions for storage of nets and equipment in the nearby community room. Plenty of places to sit, picnic, people watch and especially participate in discovery play are here for the enjoyment of all ages around the central lawn.



As one enters the parking lot by car, bicycle or on foot, the main gates are always in view. The entry gates boldly reverberate the theme of transportation hosting a wide assortment of wheels collected from antique tricycles, modern bicycles, wagon wheels from antique tractors and carts, motorcycles, cars, roller coasters, and factory machinery, all frozen in motion as they roll down the top rail of the gate. Twisted fence pickets evoke suspension bridge cables and chrome car door handles on the gates complete the collage of imagery in support of the theme.



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Entering through the gate, we begin our walk along a large concrete wall that both mitigates the sounds of the freeway as it curves its way along the west side of the park both obscuring views of the traffic and substituting snatched views of an off-site hillside and an adjacent ball field to add the illusion of greater space. Glancing down, one discovers tire tracks in the pavement that lead the stroller into the park, passing the restrooms and community room which line up behind the curving wall like train stations along a rail line. The lawn to the right ripples in giant waves suggestive of the wake of a boat, and the tire tracks take a leap over the sound wall to join the flowing traffic on the other side. The sound wall itself is used as part of the transportation theme, supporting an arbor that begins at the entry with a plumb post and supported beam at a thirteen degree angle above horizontal. Sequentially each arbor beam drops lower as the posts themselves swing out, reversing at the eighth position where the post is now at thirteen degrees off vertical and the beam is now level. A series of pulley wheels ornament the post and beams adding to the impression that the arbor itself is in motion.



As you walk along the arbor and begin to enter the large open lawn area, you will notice a variety of activities located around the perimeter. These include a large sand play area with a whimsical feature waiting to be uncovered by adventurous children. Hidden under a thin cover of sand is a 16' by 22' matchbox car scale model of the freeway interchange adjacent to the site including underpasses and on ramps to the 2 and 210 freeway and Foothill Blvd. The lawn berms on the north side accommodate seating and create a crawl/roll space for toddlers. The arbor and grove of pine trees provide shade for picnic tables which double as surface space for board games and crafts available from the community room. A dominant feature and focal point for the terminus of the entry walk is a water channel fountain. It serves to both disguise the hum of traffic, and adds a hands-on transportation play theme in the form of a waterway for children to float boats and follow them on their journey through the park. This fountain uses gravity feed to send a cascade of water through a variety of forms, dancing its way from the source, some 75 linear feet to the catchment area at the base. The waterway is enlivened by hundreds of hand crafted ceramic pieces donated by Jean Taylor and over

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20 artists at the La Canada Roger Barkley Community Center. The ceramic pieces are arranged as a mosaic evoking the fauna of a bubbling mountain spring in its course via streams and eddies, marshlands, around islands and through tidal pools as it cascades down to the sea.



Everywhere in the park we are conscious of the contrast between transportation and the natural environment on which it is imposed. Just as the stark manmade concrete forms of the water channel are contrasted by the artistic and colorful ceramics invoking nature, so is the rest of the park's high tech machinery contrasted with natural elements such as trees, lawn and vines which will eventually blanket the stainless steel cabled arbor and bare concrete walls. The theme of the park itself is repeated and enhanced by structural and whimsical design elements. The color scheme mirrors those of traffic lights and signs – reds, yellows and greens are part of the structures and contained in the flowering plants. The construction materials of concrete and steel are the building blocks of roads and highways.

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Finally, the park strives to make the most use of all of its small area. Even the parking lot has a loop path for bikes and pedestrians. It is lined with native California plants which will be maintained and someday be labeled for educational use.

Funding for the park was provided by the City of La Canada Flintridge and by grants from Caltrans for development of a rest stop for cyclists and by the Land and Water Conservation grant to reclaim land for park use.



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Botanical name: *Arctostaphylos edmundsii* 'Carmel Sur'  
Common name: Carmel Sur Manzanita  
Height by width: 1-2' H x 6'W  
Sun exposure: Coast: full sun; Inland: part sun  
Flower season: Winter/Spring  
Flower color: Light pink  
Water requirements: Infrequent to moderate



Botanical name: *Artemisia californica* 'Powis Castle'  
Common name: California Wormwood  
Height by width: 3-4' H x 4'W  
Sun exposure: Full to part sun  
Flower season: Summer  
Flower color: Grey-Green  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to moderate



Botanical name: *Baccharis pilularis* 'Pigeon Point'  
Common name: Pigeon Point Dwarf Coyote Bush  
Height by width: 2' H x 6-8'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun  
Flower season: Fall  
Flower color: Cream  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to moderate



Botanical name: *Ceanothus thyrs.* 'Yankee Point'  
Common name: Yankee Point California Lilac  
Height by width: 3-4' H x 6-10'W  
Sun exposure: Full to part sun  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: Light blue  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to moderate



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Botanical name: *Cercis occidentalis*  
Common name: Western Redbud  
Height by width: 15' H x 10'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun to part shade  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: Hot pink  
Water requirements: Moderate to regular



Botanical name: *Clematis lasiantha*  
Common name: Pipestems  
Height by width: 10-15' long  
Sun exposure: Part sun to shade  
Flower season: Jan- June  
Flower color: Cream  
Water requirements: Occasional to moderate



Botanical name: *Eriogonum fasc. 'Dana Point'*  
Common name: Dana Point Buckwheat  
Height by width: 3' H x 3'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun  
Flower season: Summer  
Flower color: White  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to moderate



Botanical name: *Eriogonum giganteum*  
Common name: St. Catherine's Lace  
Height by width: 6' H x 6'W  
Sun exposure: Full to partial sun  
Flower season: Summer  
Flower color: White  
Water requirements: Drought tolerant to occasional



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Botanical name: *Galvezia speciosa*  
Common name: Island Snapdragon  
Height by width: 3' H x 5'W  
Sun exposure: Partial sun or shade  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: Red  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to moderate



Botanical name: *Heteromeles arbutifolia*  
Common name: Toyon  
Height by width: 8-15' H x 10-15'W  
Sun exposure: Full to part sun  
Flower season: Summer  
Flower color: White  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to moderate



Botanical name: *Iris douglasiana* 'Canyon Snow'  
Common name: Canyon Snow Douglas Iris  
Height by width: 1' H x 2'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun to part shade  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: White  
Water requirements: Occasional to moderate



Botanical name: *Juncus patens*  
Common name: California Grey Rush  
Height by width: 2' H x spreading  
Sun exposure: Full sun to shade  
Flower season: Summer  
Flower color: Brown  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to regular



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Botanical name: *Lyonothamnus floribundus* ssp. *asp.*  
Common name: Santa Cruz Island Ironwood  
Height by width: 15-35' H x 15'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun  
Flower season: Summer  
Flower color: White  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to occasional



Botanical name: *Mahonia aquifolium* 'Golden Abundance'  
Common name: Golden Abundance Oregon Grape  
Height by width: 5-8' H x 6'W  
Sun exposure: Part sun to shade  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: Yellow  
Water requirements: Occasional to moderate



Botanical name: *Muhlenbergia rigens*  
Common name: Deergrass  
Height by width: 2-4' H x 4'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun to part shade  
Flower season: Summer  
Flower color: Seedhead  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to regular



Botanical name: *Quercus agrifolia*  
Common name: Coast Live Oak  
Height by width: 20-75' H x 30-60'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: Acorns  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to occasional



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Botanical name: *Quercus engelmannii*  
Common name: Engelmann Oak  
Height by width: 40' H x 10'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: Acorn  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to occasional



Botanical name: *Rhamnus californica*  
Common name: California Coffeeberry  
Height by width: 8-12' H x 4-8'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun to part shade  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: Yellowish  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to moderate



Botanical name: *Rhus integrifolia*  
Common name: Lemonadeberry  
Height by width: 10' H x 10-30'W  
Sun exposure: Sun to partial sun  
Flower season: Spring  
Flower color: Pink  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to moderate



Botanical name: *Romneya coulteri*  
Common name: Matilija Poppy  
Height by width: 8' H x spreading  
Sun exposure: Full sun  
Flower season: May-July  
Flower color: White  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to occasional



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Botanical name: *Salvia clevelandii* 'Winnifred Gilman'  
Common name: Winnifred Gilman Cleveland Sage  
Height by width: 5' H x 5'W  
Sun exposure: Full to part sun  
Flower season: Spring/Summer  
Flower color: Purple/Blue  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to occasional



Botanical name: *Salvia* 'Dara's Choice'  
Common name: Dara's Choice Creeping Sage  
Height by width: 1-2' H x 3'W  
Sun exposure: Full to part sun  
Flower season: Spring/Summer  
Flower color: Lavender  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant



Botanical name: *Salvia greggii*  
Common name: Texas Sage  
Height by width: 2-4' H x 2-3'W  
Sun exposure: Full sun  
Flower season: Spring/Fall  
Flower color: Red  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to occasional



Botanical name: *Salvia mellifera* 'Terra Seca'  
Common name: Terra Seca Black Sage  
Height by width: 1-2' H x 6'W  
Sun exposure: Full to part sun  
Flower season: Spring/Summer  
Flower color: White  
Water requirements: Drought-tolerant to occasional



# REFERENCES & RESOURCES

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## Plant Information Credits

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WUCOLS- Water Use Classification of Landscape Species:

<http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/filelibrary/1726/15359.pdf>

## Other Resources

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