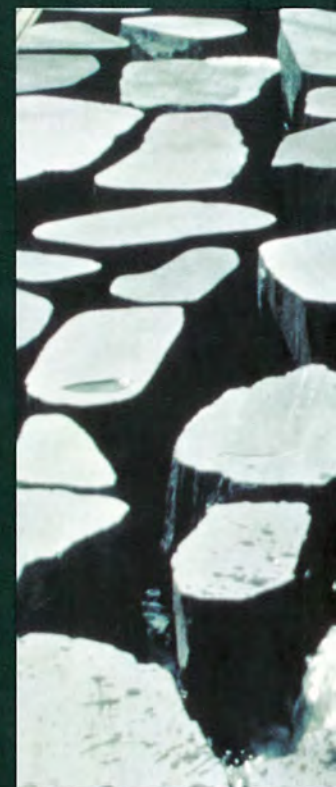


constructing

the

contemporary landscape

# GROUNDSWELL



Michel Desvigne  
**DESVIGNE & DALNOKY**  
Paris, France

## GREENWICH PENINSULA

London, England 1997–2000 (partially realized)

Greenwich Peninsula on the Thames River in London, well known for Richard Rogers Partnership's landmark Millennium Dome, was previously the site of the largest gasworks in Europe. English Partnerships acquired the contaminated three-hundred-acre area in 1997 and took on the task of its regeneration for future development. Radical decontamination measures were required, and polluted earth was removed in some places to a level of six-and-a-half feet below the existing ground, leaving a kind of tabula rasa.

Landscape architect Michel Desvigne was charged with providing a plan for the peninsula. The absence of an existing landscape with historical traces and no comprehensive development program for much of the site to succeed the millennium celebrations presented a challenge. Desvigne rejected the idea of constructing a large urban park with stereotypical features such as thematic gardens, monuments, or ponds as unfeasible, uneconomical, and premature. Rather he sought to introduce what he calls an "intermediate landscape"—to give texture and density to the formless site in a manner that is sufficiently flexible to be incorporated into future development once a program is determined. Given the scope of the site, Desvigne considered the geographical and ecological scale of an alluvial forest—a kind of Ur-landscape—that might have existed on the peninsula in another era. He drew inspiration from aerial views of mature sites, such as a poplar tree plantation in Oxfordshire, where the relationship between groves of trees and clearings is evident.

Desvigne's ambitious plan for Greenwich Peninsula was only partially realized on a portion of the site. In this initial phase, more than twelve thousand native hornbeam trees (a species better suited than poplars to the Thames site) and over one hundred thousand shrubs were densely planted, with clearings indicated for various park activities. Over time, these fast-growing trees will be thinned out and replaced by species that will grow into more mature woods, such as birch, alder, and oak, giving the project a temporal dimension. Clearings could be made according to future demands. Desvigne's work at Greenwich Peninsula also included riverfront plantings as part of the Thames Walk and an ecology park that sits on a piece of reclaimed marshland adjacent to a residential village.

A sequence of drawings, in plan and section, portrays a typical detail of Desvigne's intermediate landscape at intervals of ten, twenty-five, and fifty years. Though the new terrain is entirely constructed it appears as if nature itself had colonized the site. Desvigne's long-term approach has successfully restored a parcel of derelict land and has created a new landscape with the potential to serve as a catalyst for future development.

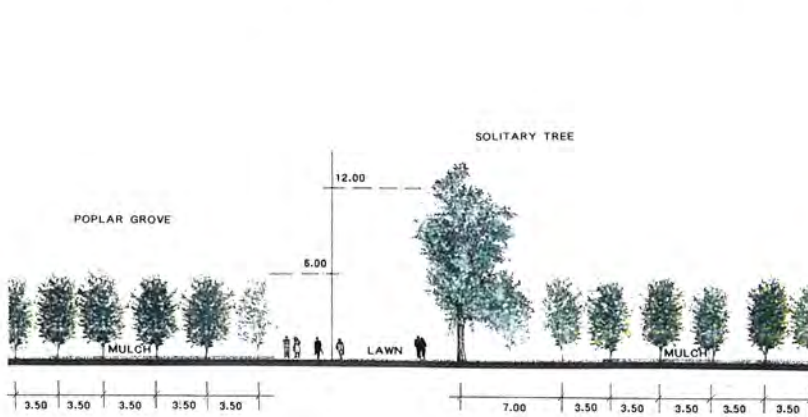
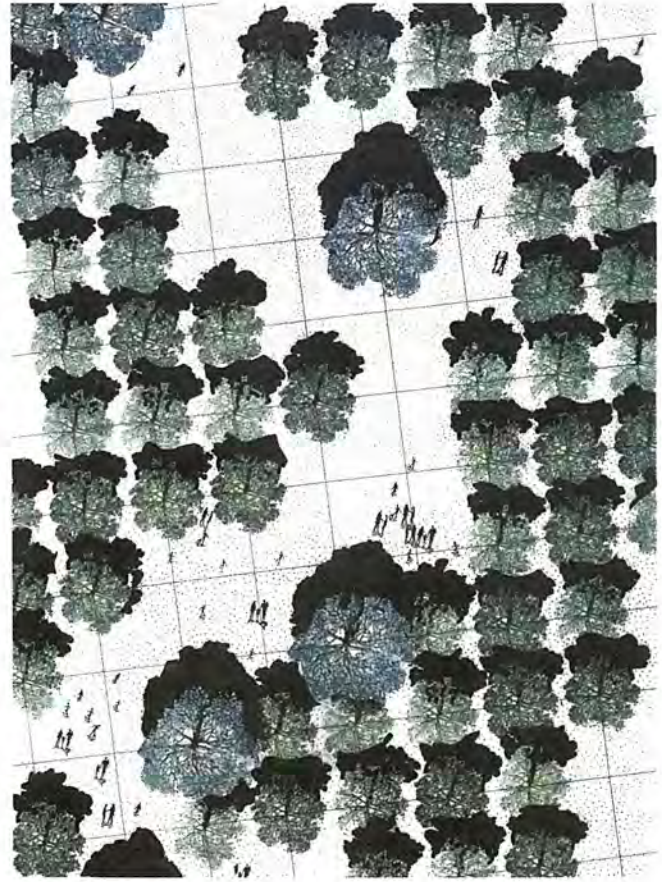
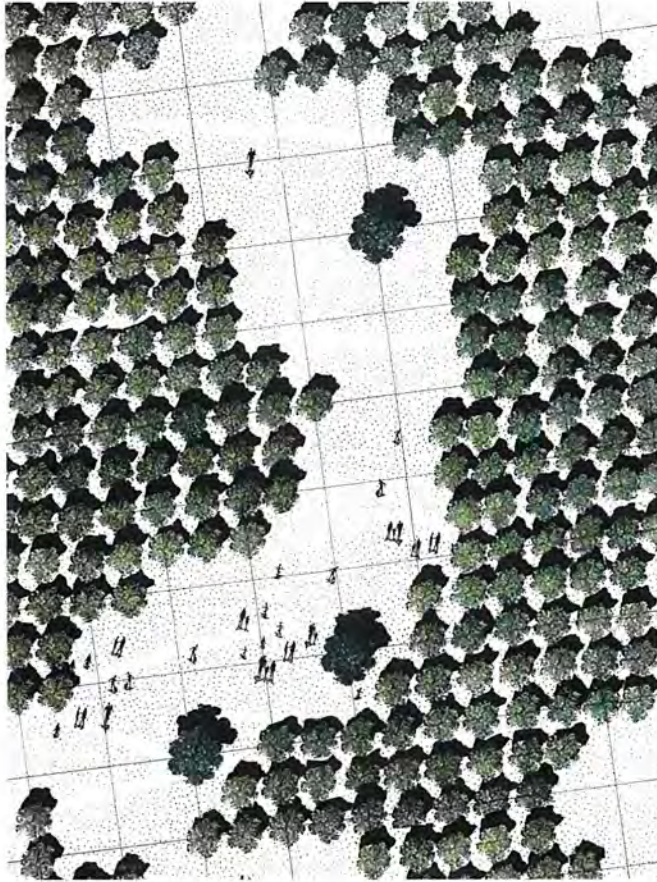
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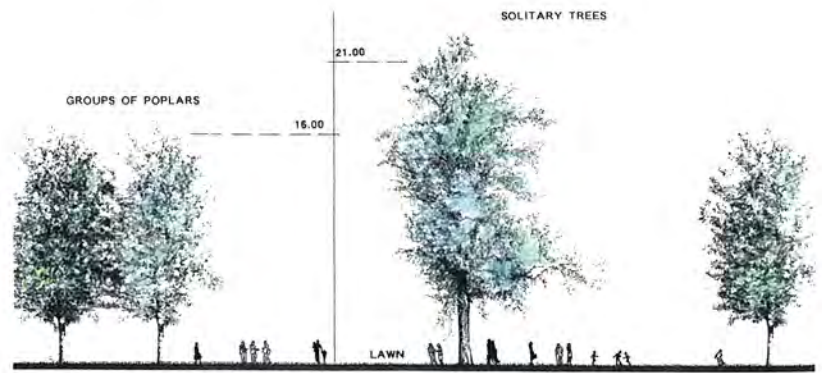
AERIAL VIEW OF A POPLAR TREE PLANTATION,  
WITNEY, OXFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND



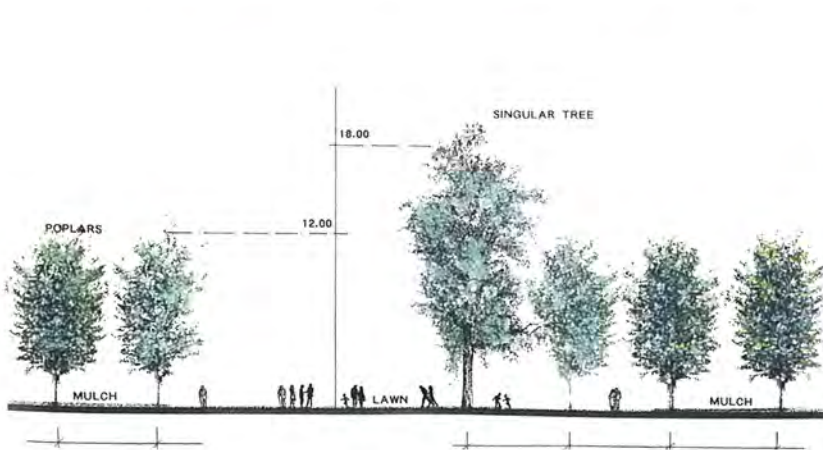
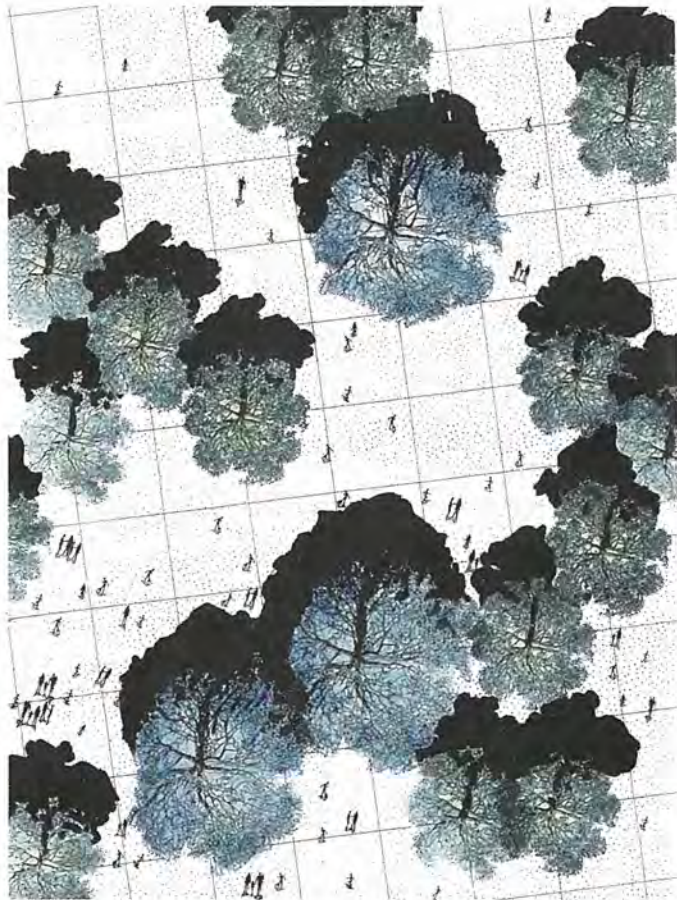
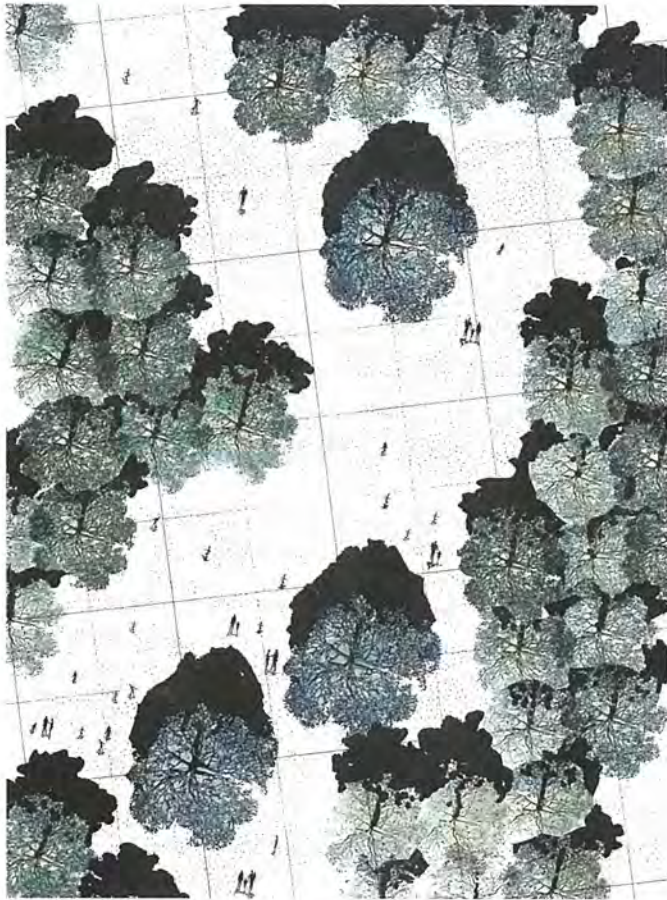
AERIAL VIEW OF PENINSULA BEFORE REDEVELOPMENT



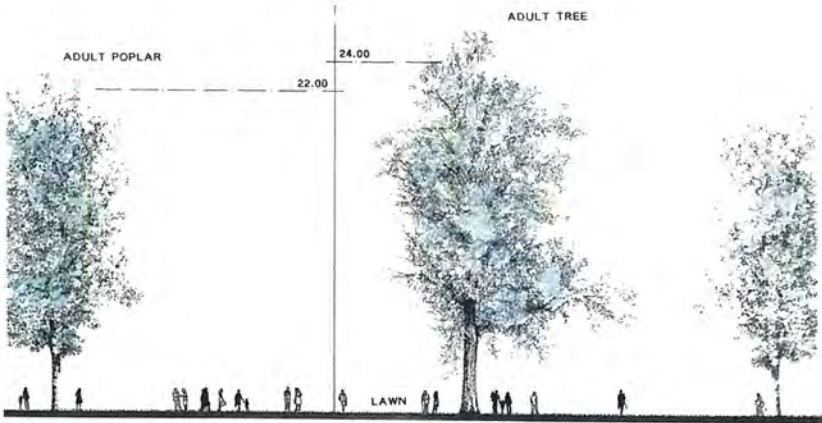
PHASE 1: YOUNG POPLAR GROVES



PHASE 2: POPLAR GROVES AND SOLITARY TREES AFTER TEN YEARS OF GROWTH



PHASE 3: GROUPS OF POPLARS AND SOLITARY TREES AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF GROWTH



FINAL PHASE: MATURE TREES AFTER FIFTY YEARS OF GROWTH

**MICHEL DESVIGNE**

Paris, France

## **GARONNE RIVERFRONT MASTER PLAN**

Bordeaux, France 2003–04; projected completion, 2034

The city of Bordeaux initially engaged Michel Desvigne to study its public spaces and to prepare a master plan that would coordinate future development in an organized and meaningful way. This exercise led to Desvigne's proposal for a new urban park along the Garonne River, which seeks to restore an industrial landscape that is ripe for transformation. The swath of land, measuring about 330 acres along a five-mile stretch of the river's right bank, lies directly opposite the city's historic center on the left bank. Also on the right bank is Catherine Mosbach's recent Bordeaux Botanical Garden (see pp. 84–89), constructed on another former industrial riverfront parcel.

In his plan for the Garonne Riverfront, Desvigne envisions a new urban park composed of large, simple spaces: long riverbanks, wide meadows, and ample woods. Promenades for pedestrians and cyclists hug the

riverfront, and further inland a new parkway for motorized traffic threads through the wooded area. The detailed plan illustrates two principal phases for the growth and development of the park and its immediate surrounding industrial neighborhood. While the park loosely conforms to the riverfront, the new landscape also makes inroads perpendicular to the riverbank along the traces of former industrial lots, the existing road system, and other infrastructure elements. Some buildings remain for adaptive reuse, others are to be removed, and sites are designated for future redevelopment.

Like his Greenwich Peninsula project (see pp. 148–51), Desvigne's plan for Bordeaux is based on his idea of introducing an "intermediate landscape" of geomorphological features (encompassing natural riverbanks, marshes, meadows, and woodland environments) in order to create a landscape texture not found in the relatively barren existing conditions. Rather than mimic the traditional geometric order of the historic city's open spaces on the left bank, the organic form of the right bank will evoke a landscape that presumably existed centuries before. This approach is intended to create a naturalist landscape that will remain legible and viable and will seem as though it had always existed, long before the city was built. As a catalyst for development, Desvigne believes the aesthetic transformation of Bordeaux's right bank landscape on such a vast scale has the potential to shift the city from its traditional focus on the left bank toward a greater balance between both sides of the Garonne River.

—PR



PHOTO-COLLAGE SHOWING EXISTING CONDITIONS  
OF BORDEAUX'S RIGHT BANK



AERIAL VIEW OF BORDEAUX



**LEGENDE:**

<b>PARC</b>	
	LIMITE DU PARC PHASE 2
	LIMITE DU PARC PHASE 1
	PARC: ZONE INCONSTRUCTIBLE PHASE 2
	PARC: ZONE INCONSTRUCTIBLE PHASE 1
	BENDE: ZONE NATURELLE A REDUALIFIER OU A PROTEGER
	RIVE ECOLOGIQUE: ESPACE NATUREL A CREER
	ESPACE NATUREL A CREER
	RAMIFICATION DU PARC: EQUIPEMENT DE QUARTIER / SOUS-SECTEUR / JARDIN
<b>BOISEMENT</b>	
	BOISEMENT A CREER
	PLANTATION A COMPORTER
<b>BATI</b>	
	ZONE CONSTRUCTIBLE
	EQUIPEMENT EXCEPTIONNEL DANS LE PARC
	BATI EXISTANT
<b>VOIE</b>	
	VOIE A CREER
	VOIE SECONDAIRE (PARKWAY) GABARI: 23 M. 2x1 VOIE + STATIONNEMENT + P.C.G. PLANTE
	VOIE TERTIAIRE (CONCRETE AU PARKWAY) GABARI: 19-18 M. 2x1 VOIE
	VOIE QUATERNAIRE (DESSERTE LOCALE) GABARI: 8 M. 2x1 VOIE
	VOIE EXISTANTE

DETAIL PLAN OF RIGHT BANK





EXISTING CONDITION



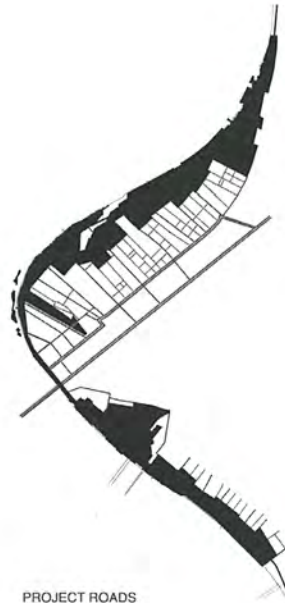
PHASE 1



PHASE 2



PROJECT PARCELS



PROJECT ROADS



PROJECT BUILDING MASS



TOP: PLANS OF BORDEAUX SHOWING GREEN OPEN SPACE

MIDDLE: SITE ANALYSIS

BOTTOM: SECTIONS OF QUAI BRAZZA, BEFORE RECONSTRUCTION (ABOVE)  
AND PROPOSED (BELOW)