

HOME & GARDEN

Grove at the Battery Is Ready to Reopen

By ANNE RAVER JUNE 2, 2005

THE Battery Bosque, a once neglected grove of 140 London plane trees with broken benches and a hard floor of uneven Belgian blocks, is the latest scene of transformation at the Battery, the 23-acre park at the tip of Manhattan.

The park's \$50 million renovation, scheduled for completion in 2007, began eight years ago with the rebuilding of a sea wall. A year later a promenade opened along the waterfront. The restored grove, with four acres of gardens designed by Piet Oudolf, the Dutch garden designer, opens today.

"We're looking out on 11,000 acres of open space," Warrie Price, the president of the private Battery Conservancy, said last week, referring to a panorama of water and sky that includes the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and the Statue of Liberty.

The plane trees have been limbed up -- pruned of their lower branches -- to let in light and allow their tall trunks to frame the harbor views. The effect is of standing in a series of garden rooms with lovely mottled columns, a ceiling of leafy branches and a carpet of many-patterned plants. Those Belgian blocks, so heavy on the tree roots, have been replaced with paths of crushed gravel, as soft to the feet as sand. As they wind through curving beds packed with shade-loving perennials, the buff gravel echoes the tan and cream bark of the trees and the pale orange leaves of a heuchera called Caramel.

Though the plants are still young, the contrasting shapes, sizes, textures and colors of their leaves are evident. In fact, now is the time for gardeners to drop by, to note the generous spacing between plants and the way specimens of one species or cultivar have been combined with a different set of plants so that each enhances the others. (The conservancy has a plant list, with Latin names, at thebattery.org.)

For instance, *Rodgersia pinnata superba*, with quilted bronze leaves and tall red stems of foamy pink flowers that bloom in July, has been paired with *Jeffersonia diphylla*, or twinleaf, the low-growing American wildflower whose dark green leaves ramble along the ground, covered with little white flowers in spring. The fleshy leaves of *Euphorbia griffithii* Fireglow contrast with an airy grass, *Deschampsia cespitosa*. Clematis vines flower over peonies.

"In a larger area, it's harder to get unity," Mr. Oudolf said. "You have to create a kind of rhythm by repeating patterns through the whole garden. It enhances the scale, as your eye moves from one group to another. I like to work in a public space, so that a lot of people can meet a different kind of planting style. But the plants have to be sustainable. They have to stand some shade and stress."

The overall landscape, including the engineering of the paths and the striking edging made of Cortens steel -- the same material used by Richard Serra, the sculptor -- is the work of Laura Starr and Jeffrey Poor of Saratoga Associates, the landscape architecture firm. Claire Weisz and Mark Yoes designed benches and food kiosks.

The conservancy, working with the city's Department of Parks and Recreation, is driving a master plan that includes a bikeway and a carousel with marine animals. Linnaea Tillett, a lighting designer, created bronze "firefly lights," to tuck among the plants, illuminating the grove for evening strolls.