

A Bridge as Sculpture

Opening in October 2012, the sculptural bridge design officially marked the improved entry point into the Baldwin Hills Parkland.

Los Angeles-based sculptor Cliff Garten unveiled a major sculptural bridge design in October 2012 as part of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area (KHSRA) Bridge Enhancement Project. The landmark gateway improvements were funded through a grant from the Baldwin Hills Conservancy to the nonprofit organization, Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative (LANI). LANI then selected Garten through a creative competition, procured the fabricator, and oversaw the project from design to construction.

Marking the entry into the Baldwin Hills Parklands, the last two-square miles of open spaces in the Los Angeles basin, the 150-ft long bridge rail is a

nearly eight-ft high undulating screen perforated with a pattern inspired by Garten's idea of surveying the 1,200-acre parkland at its smallest and largest scales.

The result is a pattern that ripples across the bridge, simultaneously refer-

encing the sedge ecology of Baldwin Hills and the broader patterns of disturbance created by the site's oil infrastructure. The intricacy of the screen, fabricated of 1/4-in. water jet cut and rolled anodized aluminum, belies the structure's durable function and low-maintenance construction.

The openness of the screen surface allows light to penetrate the patterns. The silver screen's luminosity in the sunlight is one attractive feature,



Photo credit: Berg & Associates



calmed by the material's matte surface. Unique shadows will be generated during the day providing scalloped images on the bridge's surface.

The Bridge Enhancement Project heralds the dramatic transformation that the surrounding landscape will undergo over the next 30 years as part of Mia Lehrer + Associate's One Big Park plan for Baldwin Hills. The project incorporates new native landscaping along the egress and ingress ramps to Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area. It is also the latest example of Garten's ability to realize the expressive potential of infrastructure to mediate everyday activities within urban and natural surroundings.

Garten, who has served as lead artist on many infrastructure projects across the country and in Canada, has worked with teams to enhance infrastructure by integrating sculpture to exist seamlessly in the total environment of landscape, architecture, and engineering. He not only visually and programmatically connects the infrastructure to the activities and communities surrounding it, but he transforms the infrastructure into a distinctive experience at a personal and community level for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists alike.

"Working collaboratively with the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, Mia Lehrer + Associates, and LANI allowed for a coming together of aesthetic, social, political, and ecological forces in the name of design," states Garten. "The result is a sculpture that renders a memorable and iconic statement for the bridge and which uses the bridge's func-

tional form to create a powerful gateway for One Big Park. Rather than simply being a means of getting from one side of the road to the other, the bridge will act as a true gateway for the Baldwin Hills Parkland, as well as unique experience along La Cienega."

In addition to increasing awareness of the parklands and restoring habitat across the site, the bridge improvements symbolize a new beginning for this region of Los Angeles County. The gateway will be a featured portion of the Park to Playa Trail that connects the eastern and western ridgelines of the Baldwin Hills and continues for seven miles to the Ballona Creek wetlands and Santa Monica Bay. Over time, these examples of renewed infrastructure will help define the character of the territory and attract more quality improvements that reshape Southern California's urban outdoors.

Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative (LANI) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to community-driven neighborhood revitalization. LANI facilitates stakeholder participation and decision-making, and promotes public/private partnerships resulting in catalytic community improvement projects.

The Baldwin Hills Conservancy's mission is to acquire open space and manage public lands within the Baldwin Hills area and to provide recreation, restoration, and protection of wildlife habitat within the territory for the public's enjoyment and educational experience.

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