



FORM Magazine, May/June 2011 “Workbook: Bay Area Bount, Artistic Designs in Northern California, 50 United Nations Plaza,” 20.

## 50 United Nations Plaza

Location: San Francisco, CA  
Designer: Cliff Garten Studio  
Website: [cliffgartenstudio.com](http://cliffgartenstudio.com)

With the renovation of San Francisco’s historic 50 United Nations Plaza building, the General Services Administration (GSA) Art in Architecture program brought in sculptor Cliff Garten to reimagine the 10,000-square-foot inner courtyard. Arthur Brown Jr.—the architect responsible for San Francisco’s City Hall building—designed the 1932 Beaux-Arts structure around a rectangular courtyard anchored by two fountains. Garten took his cues from the classical lines of the architecture and symmetrical placement of the fountains, and is transforming those references into a modern and inviting destination.

Working with the GSA’s Pacific Rim Region 9, Garten was given the mission “to create something that was sculptural and that had a sustainable aspect to it, both in terms of its materials and how the landscape operated,” says Garten, who, collaborating with HKS Architects and Cliff Lowe Associates, accomplished both goals with his design. Pathways of decomposed granite and existing concrete will guide people through the courtyard, and a grove of 32 white birch trees planted in a grid will offer a vertical presence. Wrapping around the courtyard, ribbon-like benches of recycled concrete will rise and twist up from the ground plane before twisting and lowering back down. Other ribbon-like benches will form semi-circular sitting areas around two fountains, which Garten will carve from granite.

“I’m interested in a democratic space,” says Garten. “I’m interested in putting art out where people can see it, touch it and interact with it everyday.”

Renderings courtesy of Cliff Garten Studio

