



Scottsdale Tribune, February 27, 2001 "Blending Art with Industry, Designers aim to infuse Scottsdale Airpark area with spirit of desert," by Joe Kullman, A1, A14.

Scottsdale Tribune

Blending art with industry

Designers aim to infuse Scottsdale Airpark area with spirit of desert

BY JOE KULLMAN
TRIBUNE

It's no mystery to Aaron Parker why Frank Lloyd Wright was enchanted by Arizona's upper Sonoran Desert.

Wright was one of the great "geomancers," meaning "one who reads the earth," Parker explained.

The famous architect's mastery at building in harmony with the natural environment is what made Wright's work extraordinary. Thus he found the East Valley's striking terrain an inspiring palette.

It's that tradition of "concretizing the spirit of a place" that architect Parker and partner Cliff Garten, artist and Harvard-trained landscape architect, hope to follow in their Scottsdale endeavor.

In a \$35,000 joint project with the Scottsdale Cultural Council and city planning department, they will devise a master plan to infuse an artistic ambiance into development in the city's industrial core.

Their canvas will be 10 square miles encompassing the Scottsdale Airpark and an area north of there that city planners call the Sonoran Regional Core.

Already the site of a large concentration of business and industrial activity, the area is expected to become one of the Valley's key employment centers. A work force of more than 50,000 will be based there within the next two decades, planners said.

"It's the geographical center of the north East Valley," said senior planner Don Hadder.

Please see **AIRPARK**, Page **A14**



Form meets function: Above, the Cultural Garden along the Mississippi River banks in St. Paul, Minn., is an example of the work done by architects Aaron Parker and Cliff Garten. The architects cite artwork along Loop 101 at right as an example of "blending utility with art and architecture."



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IF YOU GO

What: Workshop on public art project for Scottsdale Airpark area
When: 1 to 5 p.m. March 9
Where: Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, 7515 E. Butherus Drive, south of Scottsdale Airport terminal
Information: (480) 312-7705. (RSVP is requested)



AIRPARK: Art to be part of design

From Page A1

And with the McDowell Mountains as a scenic backdrop, it's a location Scottsdale leaders think should reflect the city's artistic image.

Aesthetics is often treated by urban planners as mere decoration to spruce up developed areas. But the airpark region offers a chance to weave artistic elements into the fabric of an overall development concept, said Valerie Vadala Homer, director of Scottsdale's public art program.

Parker and Garten's mission is essentially to humanize what could otherwise be a typically bland, uninviting urban industrial complex.

"One goal is to create a sense of unity—to prevent the environs from feeling fragmented and walled off," Vadala Homer said.

That might mean entryways, green spaces, botanical gardens, sculpture courts, whimsically adorned walkways or architectural features to create public gathering places and contemplative surroundings.

It will also likely involve using basic functional objects to reflect a sense of style. Parker points to sculpted surfaces and paintings on the barrier walls along Loop 101 in north Scottsdale as an



JENNIFER LAFORGE/FOR THE TRIBUNE



Design team:

Aaron Parker, above, and Cliff Garten, left, will work with city planners to enhance Scottsdale's industrial area.

example of "blending utility with art and architecture."

Parker and Garten have teamed up on a few similar projects in the past several years, notably the highly acclaimed Cultural Garden along the Mississippi River banks in St. Paul, Minn. But this will be their largest and most formidable.

"There's a powerful sense of place here," Parker said. "The

desert has a very sublime character and a timeless presence. Our challenge is how do you enhance that experience in the built environment."

The task will be a shared undertaking with local residents.

"The idea is not for the two of us to put our personal stamp on the area, it's to engage the community," Parker said.

The job is to help people articulate their visions of an urbanized desert community and then "let the choreography happen" within the public arena, he said.

The process gets started March 9 at a public meeting with Parker, Garten and city planners at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, 7515 E. Butherus Drive.

"Strong people skills" led the Cultural Council to choose the Parker-Garten team, Vadala Homer said.

For the St. Paul Cultural Garden project, they dealt with local political issues and strong community opinion. What's more, they organized and led a strong-willed group of diverse writers, painters and sculptors.

"They are great collaborative artists," she said. "We expect this to be a very cutting-edge experiment."

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