A WALK THROUGH PERTH AMBOY'S INDUSTRIAL MEMORY

Ву

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Walk Through Industrial Memory

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Perth Amboy is located in Middlesex County, New Jersey and has historically been a trading port and home to large industry. Gerdau Ameristeel, is a company who owns property located on the Southern end of Perth Amboy's waterfront, which houses a steel minimill. Historic industrial activity has taken place at the property, but it is now transitioning out of industrial use and into commercial warehouses. Prior histories of the site included harmful pollution and the use of dangerous machinery, making access for the public completely impossible. Along with the warehouses, two portions of the site are being fashioned as open space for the public, with connecting paths that will join two sides of the current waterfront pathways to the East and West of the site. This essay explores prior postindustrial landscapes, the history of Perth Amboy, and potential design and planning solutions.

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1. Introduction

My exploration of postindustrial landscapes developed during a stay in Germany in the summer of 2016. Along with professors and classmates I was able to spend a week in Germany's Ruhr Region. The Ruhr is a postindustrial area of Germany that has been dramatically changed with industry, and changed again with the transition away from the dirtier industrial practices.

The Emschergenossenschaft is one of the organizations that are responsible for ushering the Ruhr into the postindustrial era.¹ The organization handles water management in urban areas and is most importantly tasked in the restoration of the Emscher River. With a budget of 5 billion euros, they are responsible for the construction of new waste water treatment facilities, the mitigation of pollutants in the river for cleaner water, improving the ecological biodiversity, developing 123 km of walking paths, and modifying old industrial areas into public spaces.² Two of these mitigated areas are Berne Park which was a former water treatment plant, and Phoenixsee which was a former steel works.

Berne Park is now a small park with portions of the industrial remains available for people to walk through, along with a garden planting by Piet Oudolf.³ Phoenixsee is now a recreational lake, surrounded by housing and a viewing hill, where much of the waste rests.⁴ The experience of these landscapes left me convinced that there is a successful blueprint for areas outside of Germany that are postindustrial. Places where no one ever wanted to go to or see, can become retrofit for public use.

I wondered what made the postindustrial so beautiful. I did not understand what provoked my emotional response to the landscapes. It was self-evident that Landschaft Park Duisburg Nord, a post industrial steel mill with a lush surrounding park was

beautiful, but quantifying why proved to be more difficult. My question of beauty did not come from the organic elements of the landscape, which have been represented in human art and literature since the beginning or recorded history, but from the industrial ruins. Why was industry in the post-active moment in it's lifecycle more beautiful than during? Maybe I was reacting to the removal of the dirty stigma of active industry. Maybe I saw time expressed in the weathered materials. Maybe I thought the subverted programming to be so ridiculous that it made sense. The one thing I did know was that I was overwhelmed by the experience.

While walking through Duisburg Nord, the structures acted as an inseparable relation to a prior time. The planted vegetation was much younger, accenting time as a process. The use of such powerful elements gives reuse to a place, sparking imagination.

Irony is a powerful tool, especially to the millennial generation who use it is a second language to. Seeing a facility that was designed to forge steel, planted with a modern bosque of trees and beautiful designed gathering spaces seemed satirical. It was funny to see families laughing and smiling as they climbed the side of a once dangerous steel mill. I kept thinking about what the architects of the steel mills would think being told their structures would eventually be used for play. I bet they would laugh. The idea of a industrial facility turning into a park is not an intuitive one, yet when watching the people I found myself questioning if there there could even be a more successful evolution.

I was struck by how this project could actually be sustainable. Reuse is a huge part of sustainability, and landscapes that can be converted without extreme waste, keep a lower carbon footprint. Finding ways to quarantine pollutants on site, while keeping the landscape is an interesting form of mitigation. Allowing these landscapes to be part of

sustainability rather than just wiping the slate clean, requires less energy than newly crafted traditional parkland. Sustainability will continue to be an important element in the anthropocene, as humanity deals with climate change and the subsequent consequences. Maybe some of the bad actors can be a healing part of the industrial scarring.

Industrial heritage has came from blood, sweat, and tears. In the landscape, industrial heritage can be saved as physical connections to history. The Industrial Age offered change to the world, dramatically changing technology and the quality of life. The sacrifice from the workers and the environment were significant and the progress is worth acknowledging with the proper respect to its success and failures.

2. Understanding Post-Industrial Parks

The development of prior industrial landscapes into new functioning landscapes is not a new premise.

"The romance of ruins is no innovation: from the garden follies at Stourhead in Wilshire England, to Gas Works Park in Seattle and more contemporary examples, landscape architecture has long drawn on ruins as a means of connecting people to history and to place".5

While the reuse of landscape is not new, the availability and type of reused landscape is. Postindustrial landscapes are and will continue to be available in many modern countries. Due to the variety of industry, scale, and place, postindustrial parks do not fit neatly into one box. I decided to create a framework to understand some of the similarities and differences between these parks. While it is undeniable the designers of the parks would likely be in strong disagreement with the categorizations, this framework allowed me to break down and understand some of the reoccurring thematic elements of these spaces.

Figure 1. Types of Postindustrial Parks 6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19



The four categories that I have classified postindustrial into are reimagine, memorialize, craft, and layer (Figure 1). Reimagine is a category for post-industrial landscapes that use much of the original form of the site, with new programming to create a completely new narrative for the landscape. Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord is an example of this due to the reuse of the steel mill in an interactive way. Memorialize is for landscapes that promote historical architecture. The use of architecture in these situations is more of an accent piece or art installation into the otherwise changed landscape. Craft landscapes use elements of the past architecture in new artistic and imaginative ways. For Craft, the landscape and architecture have been significantly changed, with just some relics remaining. Layered landscapes are landscapes that have elements of the prior categories, but do not have one element of the other three

categories pronounced strongly enough to be merit prior categorization. These landscapes have their own unique twists and features that give them a unique presence.

A memorial park with particular importance is Gas Works Park in Seattle

Washington. Designed by Richard Haag, the park was once a coal gasification plant that
transformed into public space with many of the original industrial structures. The
surrounding newly constructed landscape was transformed into graceful hills.

Completed in 1975, the park was the first of its kind.²⁰

"Haag and others, notably Peter Latz at Duisburg-Nord Landscape Park (completed in 1991), evidence a twentieth century "industry sublime" aesthetic, engaging the vastness, the awe, and the horror of abandoned factories and rail yards."²¹

One element of Gas Works Park's design gave evidence of the success for adaptive use. Cities keep de-industrializing, and Gas Works Park's success has been one example of how to to handle a changing landscape for wealthy cities, in an artistic and economically prosperous way. The design has a candid message through the spatial layout. The coal gasification structures are used as a quarantined monument to industry in the landscape, surrounded by smooth picturesque hills. The industry shows the past as an element of humanity's progress and power over nature, but does not dilute the pollution on the site, showing humanity's inability to control itself.

Memorialization was not the initial design intention. Gas Works Park attempted to create a new dialogue between the dynamic elements of the industrial and urban landscapes.²² Richard Haag had a reimagined vision for the park. He wanted to give people the ability to interact with the park, but due to contamination issues, the structures had to be quarantined. The solution became a success of a park, creating the dialogue between people and the landscape, but did not a form a union between the urban and industrial fabrics.

In the Ruhr Region of Germany, there has been a push by the government to unite the urban and industrial. The Emschergenosenschaft has worked with the IBA program in the Ruhr Region where Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord is located. The program has three central aspects which include industrial nature, industrial heritage, and industrial art.²³ Germany has come to develop postindustrial landscapes at a greater scale through investments, and fully acknowledging industrial history as heritage. America has not fully embraced the idea of industrial heritage, at least to the point of significant investment, even though Gas Works Park is successful and was the first of its kind. Postindustrial landscapes of the region have benefitted from the IBA program's motto of change without growth to reduce cost.²⁴ One way to save money is instead of removing the old and replacing it with new is to reuse the current. Reuse allows for the continuation of the narrative of the landscape.

Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, was designed by Peter Latz years after Gas Works Park. Unlike Gas Works Park, Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord was able to provide a considerable amount of access for the population, while still keeping most of the industrial parts. This park is the best example of a reimagined postindustrial landscape. While traversing the park I was able to climb many stories of the steel production plant, walk through fields of more traditionally designed parkland, and watch rock climbing along some of the left over concrete walls. The park offered a variety of moments by repurposing the reality of the past, with functional future usage. The design allows for play where there was once danger, sections off contamination under beautiful plantings, and embraces the past.

Peter Latz believed similarly to Bernard Lassus, a garden artist, that that every intervention in the landscape should first come from an understanding of what already exists. Anyone who replaces one landscape another must consider what is being lost,

and what is being gained.²⁵ The need for defensible design is especially relevant for places holding large materials that show visual time. Peter Latz favors minimal intervention in design, where change of place does not happen.²⁶ Latz's disdain for spontaneous design is clear in his work where history is fundamental. Landscape architectural design is a multilayered process that cannot be sustained in its entirety by artistic-intuitive courses of action.

Peter Latz envisaged that "in time, the greenery will dominate the technical constructions of the gateways. So bit by bit another history, another understanding of the contaminated site and of the idea of the 'garden' is developing." ²⁷

The industrial era removed all the vegetation of the area. The park was redeveloped with new planting. In the 1970s, the term industrial nature was coined by botanists, which loosely brought forward the idea of a fourth nature.²⁸ When looking at the process over time it is pretty clear that if history is to look at semi-recent past, industry was the wilderness, and the planting the new designed nature. Photographers that were involved in recording the conditions of the site commented that they were "impressed especially by the power of nature and the frailness of human production" and that this motif gave them "hope for the future."²⁹

Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord does something that Gas Works Park does not. It shows time through transition. Because this transition is going to take hundreds, maybe thousands of years to complete, every time people go to the place they will see something new. Human geographer Tim Edensor asserts that society has become so overwhelmingly organized that people are trapped in the predictable; in this context, the ruins offer a rare place of disorder and openness for interpretation.³⁰ Wilderness in a city may not need vegetation, just a lack of programming. In a typical city a lack of

vegetation is commonplace, but the buildings are defined. The lack of control over what is normally static can be cathartic.

The desire for the return of the natural, the value of authenticity and environmentalism, is so important, that many designers have attempted different approaches to create it. The Barangaroo Reserve in Sydney Australia designed by Peter Walker Associates, "transformed 14 acres of a flat concrete shipping terminal into an approximate vision of Sydney's Botany Bay circa 1788."31 The project was designed to reclaim the waterfront for the people of Sydney, and the ecological design back for nature. The waterfront was designed to match the exact shape of the waterfront of 1788.

Peter Walker is quoted saying "You're not copying nature; you're representing it."32 The overall design ended up being much less of a return to nature, rather an ecologically minded park, in the shape of it's prior ecological form. There was a focus on returning to the picturesque and removing the modern lines of the industrial past. This final park is ironically not authentic to the reality of its place, because it isn't reclaiming the past. It is a layered postindustrial park, which acts as a throwback to a prior romanticized landscape.

The want for the past to be displayed in new design is reasonable because of the profound connection it can create between people and their environment. It is important to remember that in the search for authenticity in the landscape that visible time cannot be sped up and created by man. Sometimes paying homage to an idea is better addressed through minimal intervention, rather than grand recreation.

3. History of Perth Amboy

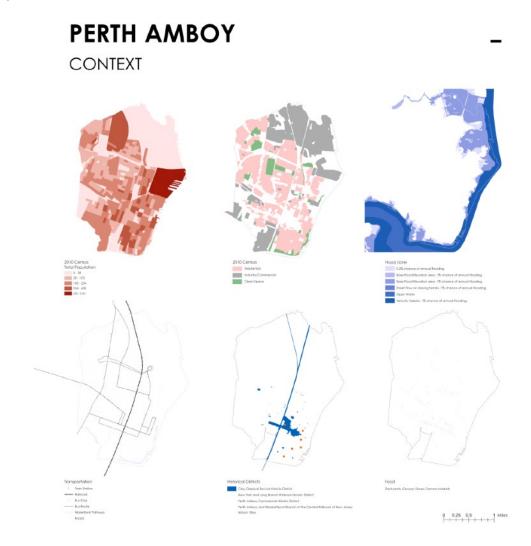
Figure 2. Perth Amboy Location



I was introduced to members of Perth Amboy's Planning Department, who discussed with me an interesting postindustrial landscape that was going to be redeveloped. The question purposed was how the site could be developed most appropriately for the future. The city of Perth Amboy is located in Middlesex County, New Jersey (Figure 2). It is considered central New Jersey and is surrounded by the Arthur Kill to the East and the Raritan Bay to the South. East of Perth Amboy is Staten Island, New York. Perth Amboy's land was purchased from the Lenni Lenape, Native Americans

in 1651.33 The City of Perth Amboy was founded in 1683 and became the first capital of New Jersey.34

Figure 3. Perth Amboy Context Maps



Perth Amboy being surrounded by water, and in close proximity to other major cities, made it a perfect location for industry and especially trade with New York. The earliest industry in Perth Amboy was oyster farming in the 1700s. The 1800s gave way to the industrial age, as Raritan Steel, Chevron Oil, and Hess Oil used the Raritan Bay as a means of transporting their goods.³⁵ One of Perth Amboy's significant industries

was Terra Cotta due to the large clay deposits in the area, which flourished until the 1930s.

"Most recently, the largest company to come to Perth Amboy was the Raritan River Steel Company (subsidiary of Co-Steel International Ltd.) It took over the 39 acres formally owned by the Raritan Copper Works." 36

Perth Amboy has always been a mixed city of industry and culture. There are over 40 different synagogues and religious institutions in Perth Amboy.³⁷ Perth Amboy is also home to the Raritan Yacht Club that is located directly on the Arthur Kill, and is one of America's oldest yacht clubs, established in 1865.³⁸ Residential land uses account for approximately one-quarter of the City's total land use where industrial land occupies nearly a third (Figure 3).³⁹

An important cultural and financial center for Perth Amboy has always been Smith Street, which has developed with the changes in industry.⁴⁰ The cafe Karini II which is located close to Smith Street, still has the copper ceiling that was installed during the late 1800s.⁴¹ Perth Amboy's waterfront has been a place for industry, but has developed to become an area for culture and entertainment. Caledonia Park was created in 1930 and was one of the first parks along or near Perth Amboy's Waterfront. The park was known for the "cherries, shuffleboard, and great old trees" (Figure 4).⁴² Connected public access to open space has continued to expand, subsequently leading to cultural activity along the waterfront. Along the waterfront walk is maritime history displayed through a series of 13 historic exhibits.⁴³ There are many events that use the waterfront including the Dominican Festival, and Perth Amboy Waterfront Festival. These events have helped add new culture and memory to the waterfront, while connecting the public.

4. History of Southern Perth Amboy

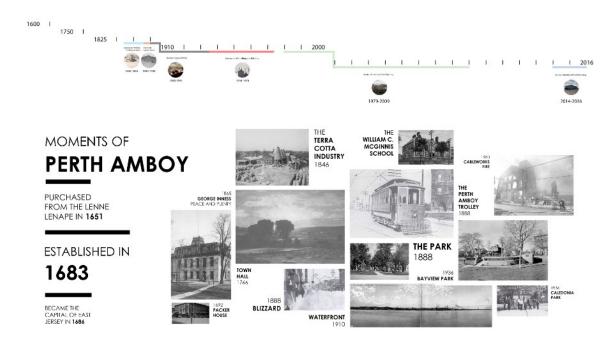


Figure 4. Moments of Perth Amboy^{44,45}

In 1854 Marcus Spring bought 268 acres of the Southwest of Perth Amboy. He brought some of the best people including landscape visionary Fredrick Law Olmstead and Alexander Jackson Davis to create designs for the new community on the site.⁴⁶ The result was the 268 acre Eagleswood Military Academy and Estate, which was built in 1860 and lasted until 1888.⁴⁷ After the Academy left, the Eagleswood mansion remained until 1993 when it was demolished.

Famous Landscape painter George Inness lived in Southern Perth Amboy where he painted one of his most notable works "Peace and Plenty."

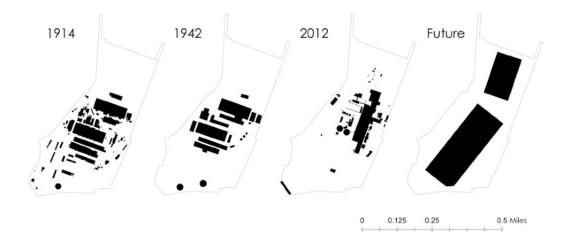
"George Inness's idyllic landscape of 1865 shows several farmers harvesting grain. The foreground is bounded by dark trees, a road, a low bridge, and a small stream. At the left on a distant hillside, a shepherd gathers his flock, and on the right a hay wagon crosses a field bordering the bank of a placid, winding river. Bathed in glowing light, the valley stretches back between low-lying hills, where a number of buildings can be seen."

Peace and plenty was a utopian hope for the post civil war era. Inness was a stark abolitionist and yearned for a united America. Pease and Plenty used the power of

nature as a hopeful look towards the future. Inness's vision may have been about the abolition of slavery, but it used the Raritan Bay as the catalyst for the message. The vision made me think of the photographers vision with the photography of the industrial nature of Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord. The photographers also used the environment to display a hope for a better future.

5. Site Context

Gerdau Ameristeel sits on the Raritan Bay at the Southern most part of Perth Amboy. On the site is a steel mini-mill, which is in the process of being demolished. The intention for the remaining site is for the addition of two large commercial warehouses. The site was initially a copper production factory. Raritan Copperworks was the original owner. The International Smelting & Refining Company took control in 1934 and company left in 1976.⁴⁹ Gerdau Ameristeel Steel Melting Company took over the location from 1979 putting in place a steel mini-mill.⁵⁰ In 2006 the melt shop and wire Figure 5. Historic Figure Grounds



rod mill closed, but left the rolling mill still open for production. Starting in 2014 and

completed in 2016, a 60 x 150 square foot building was placed on the Eastern most part of the site in order to fabricate and bend steel (Figure 5).

Elements of the area have been deemed to hold historical importance by the municipality and state. Raritan Copper Works which was formerly Anaconda Works and Elm and Market Streets are considered Historical preservation sites under the NJDEP - Historic Preservation Office. Raritan Copper Works was mostly removed when the factory shut down, and is only survived by three remaining buildings that are located to the West of the site.

The owners and town have reached an agreement to delegate areas of the site as open space in the Northwest and Southeast of the site. Currently Gerdau Ameristeel disconnects the waterfront pathway that begins at Plowshare Point along the Arthur Kill to Second Street, and Riverview Drive to Convery Boulevard along the Raritan Bay.

The walking system connects pieces of parks, paths to the beach, and fields. The only properties that are not connected to the waterfront and walkways are the Gerdau Ameristeel property, and the Cornucopia Cruise, which is the adjacent property to the West. Connecting this pathway will be instrumental in creating a connected waterfront for the people of the neighborhood. There is residential housing to the North, East, and West of the property that are currently being disconnected from the waterfront due to these properties. Perth Amboy's Master Plan sets goals to increase the quality of life and health of the community.⁵¹ Increasing the waterfront connectivity helps accomplish both goals, all while increasing small businesses's economic footprints.

Walking connectivity should be considered throughout the town. Nearby to the Gerdau Ameristeel is Smith Street, which is home to the highest density of small consumer businesses. There should be better access by foot to the waterfront, from this area. Along the Eastern side of the site runs the train track which works its way up

through the center of Perth Amboy. Using a Rail-with-Trail path, the track could act as a physical footpath that runs through the center of the city (Figure 3). There are also a series of parks scattered throughout the city, some of which could be attached to the waterfront park system, with green streets and bike paths.

Figure 6. Perth Amboy Connections



CONNECTING

PERTH AMBOY

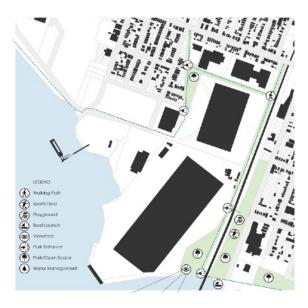
6. Programming

To determine what the future public open space needs, it was important to inventory the waterfront to better understand what is currently available in regards to ball fields, walking paths, fishing, and schools (Figure 7). I determined the potential of circulation throughout the site to be very important. Ideally the waterfront path would connect along the waterfront of Gerdau Ameristeel, but due to the continued shipping ferry's usage of Gerdau's Waterfront, the ability to fully connect the two paths along is impossible.

Figure 7: Programming



SITE: FUTURE PROGRAMMING



7. Designing the Site

Lining the entire East of the site are the active train tracks, and running parallel to them is a property bought by the City of Perth Amboy. This property is in the process of being developed into Second Street Park. The connection between Second Street Park and Gerdau Ameristeel is important in the expansion of the circulation of the city (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Project Site 52,53

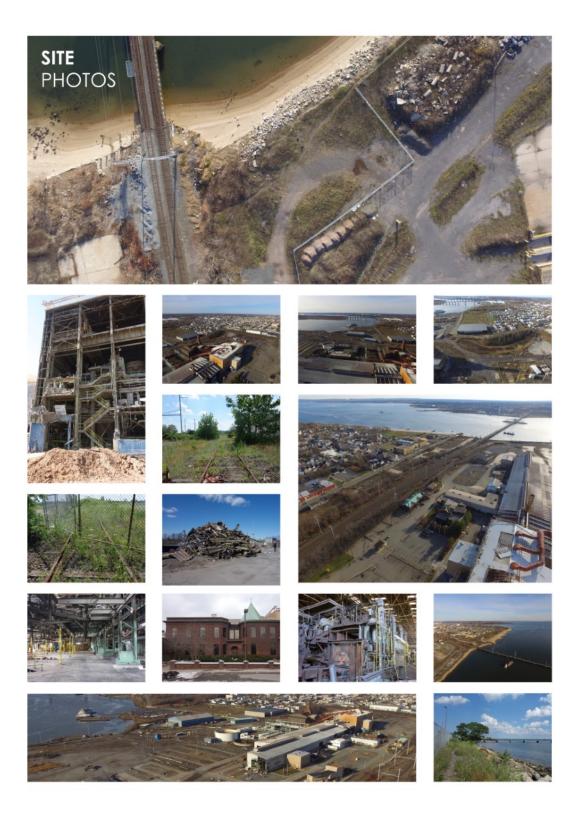


PROJECT SITE: GERDAU AMERISTEEL





Figure 9. Site Photos



The site does not have the same compelling historical significance that would make memorialization compelling in the same way as Gas Works Park. "As the "last operational oil gas plant in the United States and one of the few in the world still standing" in the early 1970s. 54 Seattle's Gas Works seemed perfectly poised for the kind of gentrified preservation and adaptive reuse Smith describes. 55 Gerdau Ameristeel was not the last standing steel mini-mill in the world, but it was the last grand industrial production site of Perth Amboy. Due to the site's historical value, location, and economic value, it did not merit the treatment of a landscape monument, or a reimagined landscape. I determined that the most logical framework for the park should be between the craft and layer categories. This classification is the appropriate usage of the opportunity presented. The town needs jobs, the people need a connection, and the landscape history needs to be presented in a way that joins the industrial heritage with the maritime history of the waterfront pathway.

8. Industrial Remains

The steel mini-mill began the process of being demolished in early 2017. As this process happens, the preservation of the remains is important. Elements of the Steel Mill are already aesthetically beautiful industrial relics and are worth preservation. From the industrial metal hooks, to the massive cauldrons for metal ore, the site is rich with materials that have embedded time and aesthetic beauty. CoLab Arts, a non profit which has been involved in connecting artists with community partners, is responsible for the claiming of industrial ruins that will be left over (Figure 9).⁵⁶

9. Park Design

Figure 10. Industrial Salvage

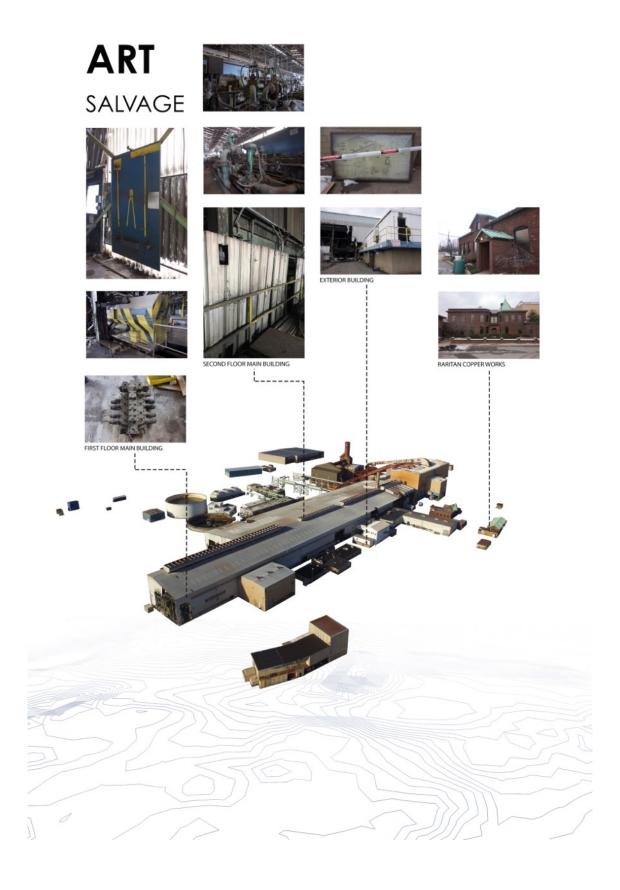
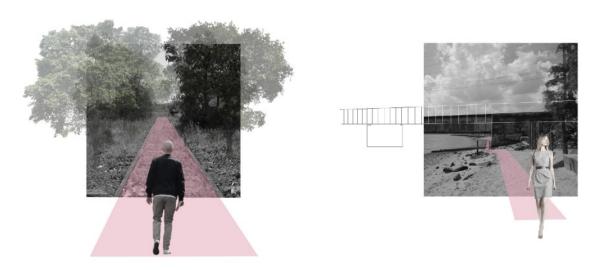


Figure 11. Site Design





The final design I decided upon was not what I initially imagined. I fully expected to design a reimagined postindustrial landscape. This theoretical and idealistic design would have used the mini-mill as an interactive element within the landscape. Active industrial use would have been transformed into passive recreational use. And while this prospect was a very idealistic and quite unrealistic, the plans for demolition had not been fully settled, so my proposal at that time was based on creating the most radical expression of what could be.

In early February a wrench was thrown into my theoretical design plans as I was informed that the demolishing of the mini-mill had begun. At this point I had no choice but to change the framework of my design. The resulting design moved from reimagining to a mix of craft and layer. The site's 100 acres of potential open space was dramatically altered to open spaces in the Northwest and Southeast of the site, a buffer around and including the Copper Works facilities, and connecting pathways. This change is dramatic from the original concept site design, but it still gave the ability to connect the waterfront pathways, and give access to portions of the site for the public (Figure 10).

The two large warehouses that replace the mini-mill are significantly shorter in height than the mini mill. On the other hand, the buildings footprints are over double.

There are 565 car spaces and 576 truck spaces that have been allocated as warehouse parking. This site is a massive commercial project that will provide an estimated 1000 jobs.

One of the challenges and opportunities of the site is that while the open public space is a postindustrial landscape, it is surrounded by active commercial businesses. This is not a return to nature, rather a deal between the public and business to mitigate some of the worst elements of the prior situation. Determining what elements to chose when working on the park was difficult. As the steel minimill is being demolished,

massive amounts of debris are being created. This debris is heavy and expensive for the transportation off site. Instead of looking at this as waste, I viewed it as an opportunity. Similar to Central Park and Governor's Island, I am proposing the use of the leftover debris from the buildings to create scenic topography. In and around the hills will be pieces of the industrial leftovers, sculpted into art from metal artists of the community. The art pieces will also act as a way-finding system to the train station to the North, and as a connection for the people to the landform that they are walking in and on. This park area will also be used to connect to the bottom of Second Street Park, which will always be open park space. The two areas are not currently connected. The train tracks will be raised as new ones are put in, adding the ability for a boardwalk to connect the two parks under the bridge.

An elevated viewing deck will create a view-shed of the current ferry drop off at the Southern tip of the bulkhead. This port is and will still be active, giving the park observer a connection with an element of the current active businesses. Adjacent to the active rail track are historic train tracks that will be used as part of the walking path from the North of the Southeast park, up towards the Copper Works buildings (Figure 12).

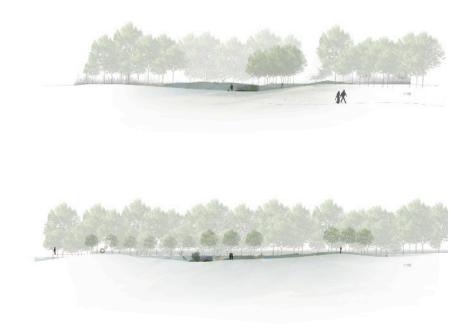


Figure 12. Site Design Axonometric

The Copper Works buildings have been retrofit on the inside which will allow for the smaller building to be used for facilities, and the larger building to be rented out for parties and events. Past the Copper Works to the North, part of the trail will use the embankment of the train tracks. This Rail-with-Trail with give pedestrians a visual connection to the active transportation system. The walk will continue up and along the Northwest of the site, where the path will move through the elevated berm. The pathway will continue down and along Riverview Drive, until it reaches a crosswalk where it will meet with the Riverview Drive walkway.

Having a partnership between the town, commercial industry, and history is a wonderful synergy that I believe fits the true nature of Perth Amboy. This postindustrial landscape can be a mitigating force for the physical connectivity of the town. The path can also bring people into the town's history from the train stop, leading them down to the waterfront. Being partners with business rather than fully succeeding them can introduce a pilot for future multi-use postindustrial sites. Maybe a union between and the environment is not ridiculous. Maybe the future can come with history of the past.

Figure 13. Site Design Sections



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