



The custom steel structure (donated to the park) overlooks the marsh and offers views of Mt. Tamalpais (elevation 2,571-ft.). The overlook has a surface of permeable unit pavers. The western red cedar fencing has custom cut-steel panels representing Manzanitas found on site, with galvanized wire mesh for the deck railings.



Marshlands Park

Hal Brown Park at Creekside, Marin County Parks

In 1974, the Marin County, Calif. community of Kentfield felt so strongly about preserving a 26-acre parcel of land that contained a salt marsh and upland areas that they voted to tax themselves! Their tax dollars went toward acquisition of the property, preservation of the salt marsh and construction of a community park on the upland portion of the site. The park became known as Creekside, for its proximity to the adjacent Corte Madera Creek. The original layout, designed by local landscape architects Royston Hanamoto Beck and Abey, won awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects, weaving the natural setting with park development.



Above & Right: Clapper rails (*Rallus longirostris*), an endangered species, have nested in the adjacent marsh. The toddler play area includes shotcrete replicas of two clapper rail nests (Cemrock), and a custom precast concrete duck family floating on the rubberized surface. Ducks were frequent visitors to the construction site from the adjacent marsh.

In May 2008, Marin County Parks began work on creating a new master plan for the park, now known as Hal Brown Park at Creekside, named for a popular member of the Marin County Board of Supervisors. Marin County Parks representatives Steve Petterle, principal park planner, and Nancy Peake, park planner, together with master plan consultant Moore Iacofano Goltsman (MIG), conducted focus group sessions with residents, local environmental organizations and representatives of nearby schools to get a sense of the needs and desires of the community. In addition, the parks department held a “Family Discovery Day” at the park, with several checkpoints, asking park users about what they liked and disliked about the facility. Not surprisingly, the community loved the park and hoped the new master plan would follow the ideals established in the original design. This sentiment was borne out in two public workshops held to receive public input.

The new master plan, approved by the Marin Board of Supervisors in March 2009, maintained much of the existing facility’s character and charm, while pursuing more sustainability goals. Design development and construction drawings prepared by MIG immediately followed, and the renovation project was put out to bid April 2010. Improvements to the park included the following elements:

- Relocating the children’s play areas with separated play for toddlers and elementary school-aged children.
- Renovating the restroom to meet accessibility standards.
- Renovating the amphitheater.
- Creating a health and meditation grove parallel to Bon Air Road, across the street from Marin General Hospital.





Above: An informal petanque area under existing oaks has decomposed granite without the binder for the playing surface. The tables (Dumor) are made from recycled plastic.

Top Left: A curving Sonoma fieldstone wall forms raised beds in the healing garden. During the renovation of the park, contractors recycled 300 large Sonoma field stone boulders. The planter wall was donated to the park. The bench is made of steel (Dumor). All the plantings but the turf play areas are irrigated with Netafim drip irrigation. All shrubs, perennials and grasses are low-water usage plants. A state-of-the-art weather-based central control system ('Eagle', Rainmaster) metes out water needs. Sheet mulch and arbor chips in planting areas keep weeds down.

Bottom Left: Sonoma fieldstone walls with precast concrete caps (Quick Crete) spruce up the look of the amphitheater, which is used for outdoor education classes. Shade is provided by the existing oaks.

- Constructing a Mt. Tamalpais and Creekside Marsh overlook.
- Expanding picnic areas and picnicking opportunities.
- Increasing environmental education and interpretive opportunities.
- Restoring upland transition habitat adjacent to the marsh.
- Creating pathway improvements to ensure each park element is accessible to all persons.
- Constructing an informal game area for pétanque.

Michael Paul Company of Petaluma, Calif. was the successful bidder for the project. Nancy Peake, park planner, served as Marin County Parks project manager during construction. Construction costs were \$1.6 million, with funds available in reserves from the county service area formed in 1974 as a taxing mechanism to acquire, build and maintain the park. Two donors provided \$72,000 toward development of the Mt. Tamalpais and Creekside Marsh Overlook, and planters in the health and meditation area.

To keep the project "green," construction recycled 300 large Sonoma field stone boulders from the "old" park. These were used as retaining walls and accents throughout the renovated facility. Also, aggregate from old pathways was used as base rock for new asphalt paths. Wherever possible, decomposed granite was used along paths, in picnic areas and in the informal pétanque area to provide a porous surface.

Plant materials were selected for their low-water usage. Everything but the turf play areas was irrigated with Netafim drip irrigation. The new controller is a state-of-the-art weather-based





Above & Right: Play equipment includes a turbo twister tunnel slide with a mini-overlook, toddler swings, a 17-foot 'Macro Spacenet' and an 8-foot climbing wall. Rubber mulch, poured-in-place rubberized safety surfacing and engineered wood fiber (Fibar) add safety on the playground.

central system to further curb water use. Sheet mulch was used together with arbor chips in planting areas to keep weeds down. Marin County Parks employs Integrated Pest Management (IPM) throughout its parks, and Hal Brown Park continues to be a shining example of IPM success.

Five local schools are within walking distance of the park, and although the construction site was entirely fenced, nursery schoolers from Ross Valley Nursery School adopted the park as a pet project. They visited the park almost daily, peering in from outside the chain link fence, offering cookies and lemonade to construction workers. Two weeks prior to opening, the Marin Parks Department invited the nursery school class to participate in a "playground preview," enjoying all the features of the new playground. One student was overheard to say, "I just want to live here!" The event was popular in the local press.

On February 14, 2011, following an aggressive eight-month construction schedule, the park reopened to the community. Visitors to the renovated facility now find a large, expansive turf area for informal play and relaxation; a remodeled bathroom; several new benches and picnic tables scattered throughout the park; an area for pétanque; a health and wellness grove landscaped with plants that have healing and medicinal attributes; a redesigned amphitheater that provides the ideal location for children's outdoor educational classes and community theatrical presentations; and a new overlook that offers stunning views of Corte Madera Creek and Creekside Marsh, as well as arguably the most outstanding view of Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County.

The heart of the park remains the playground. Honoring the local community's wishes for a modern, interactive and engaging place to play,





Above: The toddler makes a break for it! The renovated park includes expanded picnic areas with new recycled plastic picnic tables and steel trash receptacles (both from Dumor Site Furnishings). The surfacing is decomposed granite with a resin binder to create an accessible surface.



Left: A custom shotcrete play creek lets future dam builders explore water retention/flow engineering.

parents and children discover a park with something for all ages and a place that pays tribute to the surrounding environment, both natural and built. The preschool area (for ages 2-5) includes a sand and water play feature; spinning bowls; kid-sized sitting ducks; clapper rail and salt marsh harvest mouse nests that echo the importance of the neighboring marshland and its wild residents; swings; a tricycle track; and shade structures. The elementary area (for ages 5-12) includes a sand and water play feature that's creek-like; a 17-foot climbing net; an 8-foot climbing wall; and a turbo slide with a mini-overlook.

Hal Brown Park at Creekside is an amazing success story, from its grass roots beginning and its innovative designs, up to and through its recent renovation. Visitation has increased and is more diversified. It's not unusual to come into work and find praise from a parent or a child. It's projects like these that remind landscape architects about the significant impact community parks have on residents' lives.

Project Team

Landscape Architects

Stephen Petterle, ASLA and Nancy Peake, Marin County Parks: Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc.: Laurel Kelley (no longer at MIG), Tod Hara, Kirsten Negus and Jose Leal

Architect: Kappe+Du—Ron Kappe

Contractor: Michael Paul Co.: Michael Paul, Julia Carlyle, Al Halseth, John Hansen

Ecological Consultants: H.T. Harvey and Associates, Joe Howard

Engineering

Civil/Surveyor: BKF Engineers

Structural: Cornerstone Structural Engineering Group

Geotechnical: Miller Pacific Engineering Group—Eric Dabanion

Cost Estimator: Mack5, Danielle Leyva

Vendors

Cemrock

Davis Colors

Dumor Site Furnishings

Febco

Fibar

Ground for Play

Hunter Industries

King Bros.

McNear Brick and Block

Most Dependable Fountains

Netafim

Quick Crete

Rainbird

Rainmaster

Stabilizer Solutions, Inc.

Trex

Watts