

# YONGSAN PARK

2012 ongoing, Seoul, Korea









The new Master Plan for Yongsan National Park proposed by West 8 + IROJE has been developed through an interactive process that has consistently returned to the fundamental concept of healing. The act of healing is a process that transforms the existing site through an awareness of its history into a world-class park that inspires illusions of nature, ecological restoration and a wide ranging urban park culture.

The act of healing is developed on three fundamental levels in the transformation of the site:

## Healing nature: "Sam Cheon Li Geum Su Gang San"

In Korean culture, the Korean peninsula is described with the phrase "Sam Cheon Li Geum Su Gang San"; which means '1,200 km of mountain and river linked all together is embroidered in silk'. This has been the way Korean people see, meet, and interact with beautiful mountains and rivers. It is part of the collective perception towards the physical world. It describes the Korean mental DNA. As such, we not only recover the forgotten landscape in the military base but also recover the illusion of Korean landscape mentally, visually and ecologically. This central part of the site will be excavated for a lake. The spoils will be used to create a more dramatic topography, to build an illusion of naturalistic Korean landscape. From this topography a new restructured water system with streams, ponds, marshland and lotus basins will be introduced. Natural woodland and undulating meadows will be organized around the lake.

## Healing history: confrontation and exposure

The location of Yongsan Park symbolizes an extremely turbulent history of war and occupation. However sad and sorrowful this history may be, it is still part of Korea's history. The approach for the park design on the site is to uncover the traces and layers of the history by reusing many of the existing buildings and roadways. The architectural approach is respectful towards the military buildings on the site and ranges from 100% restoration (such as the Japanese Garrison) to the construction of new buildings on the footprint of demolished ones. Also, new additions are added to existing buildings to make them fit for their new use. Where buildings disappear, their footprint re-emerges as a trace of history. These places, we named 'Madang'. The Madang is the ancient Korean word describing an open plaza that can hold various programs. The Madangs are simple granite stone platforms in the undulating park landscape. They are considered new, informal meeting point for social activity.

## Healing culture: "park-metropolis interface"

For over 100 years the Yongsan site has been cut off from the city by a secured wall. The departure of the US army gives the city a unique opportunity to reclaim the excavation and to colonize it. The new Yongsan Park will transform the adjacent urban fabric and works as a magnetic field for urban growth. The interface between the park and the city is diverse and versatile. Within and around the park at least 10 different types of relationships are identified: walled gardens, river links, night life districts, new residential neighborhood etc. Heavy traffic corridors appear to obstruct the connection to the city. Therefore a dozen of pedestrian bridges will create iconic gateways to the park. These ritualize the entering to the park. North-South a robust green-blue ecological Spine will restore the connection between Nam San and the River Han. Programmatic diversity, food, bicycle culture and social media are prominent in the master plan strategy. For the realization of the park public participation and soil remediation is the key. This will be an open process of healing, seeding and growing.

## Landscape narrative

The essence of the design is the restoration and dramatization of the original topographic ridgeline connecting Yongsan Park northward to Namsan, and beyond to the distant Buk-ak Mountain. This conceptually ties the park into the continuous North-South ridgeline that defines the landscape of the

Korean peninsula - the "Baek-du-dae-gan." Along this newly established topography, West 8 has created diverse biotopes that give illusions of the many beautiful landscape types that make up Korea. From open meadows to deep forests, from rocky cascades to cleansing wetlands, Yongsan Park provides visitors with an ever-changing landscape experience for all seasons.

Hidden within these landscapes are traces of the site's contentious history. The foundations of old army buildings are repurposed and embellished to provide flexible platforms for social activity. These are based on the ancient concept of "Madang," which are stone platforms found in the courtyards of traditional Korean homes and palaces. Placed in forest clearings, alongside some of these madang, are fanciful 'boy meets girl' themed sculptures. The heart of the park is Yongsan Lake which is crossed by the Skipping Stone Bridge, a bridge of arches that appears to skip across the lake along a historic North-South connection. From the bridge visitors get views across the lake to the forest peak, and beyond to Namsan Tower.

#### client

Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the Republic of Korea

#### partners

IROJE architects & planners, DONG IL Engineering Consultants, Prof. Kim, Bong-ryol (Korea National University of Arts) and Prof. Kim, Nam-choon (botanist and professor of Dankook University)

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