

The Philadelphia Flower Show: A PPR Tradition

Since the 1930s, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (via the former Fairmount Park Commission) has participated in the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's annual [Flower Show](#) as an exhibitor. For the 2014 show's "ARTiculture" theme, PPR decided to build a replica of Matthias Baldwin Park, a unique



environmental sculpture park in the Fairmount neighborhood (19th & Hamilton Streets).

The planning process for a PPR exhibit typically begins in November or December. This year, PPR tapped the talent of GIS Technician Vanessa Miller, who is also a fifth-year landscape architecture student at Philadelphia University, for the design and construction of its display. Vanessa worked closely with Assistant Director of Operations Charlie Dougherty, Landscape Project Technicians Danny O'Brien and James Mako and Special Projects Manager John Pillar to design and construct the exhibit.

Building a replica of the sculptural park (formerly Franklin Town Park), designed by [Athena Tacha](#), took a bit of work as well as space. Basing herself at the Horticulture Center, Vanessa began constructing the massive rocks found in Matthias Baldwin Park in the beginning of January and finished at the end of February. Around nine of the faux rocks, ranging in height from four to seven-feet tall, were constructed with wire, concrete and between 100 and 150 cans of spray foam.

At the same time Vanessa was creating rocks, Danny O'Brien was foresting the plants for the PPR exhibit. He and James Mako continued to maintain the plants throughout the duration of the Flower Show.

Prior to this assignment, Miller had never been to Matthias Baldwin Park. As part of the planning process, she visited the site to sketch and observe its use by the public, and researched both Baldwin and Tacha.

Although Vanessa is leaving PPR for a landscape architecture job at AKRF, Inc., she says she would design and build a Flower Show display again "in a heartbeat." Despite the fact that it was a stressful process at times, it was also a lot of fun for Miller. She explains, "This was my first time doing a design/build, so it meant a lot to me. I didn't want to let anybody down. I thought about it all the time and had dreams about it."

"It is an honor that Fairmount Park / Parks & Recreation has been a major exhibitor at the Flower Show for over four decades," said First Deputy Commissioner of Parks & Facilities Mark Focht. "This year's exhibit fit perfectly with the Show's theme of ARTiculture and highlighted 'Connections', our amazing environmental art piece in Baldwin Park."

[View photos of Matthias Baldwin Park in all its forms](#) (as a model, a Flower Show display and the actual park)

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PHILADELPHIA
PARKS & RECREATION

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Philadelphia Parks & Recreation 2014 Flower Show Committee

Logistics and Build

Charles Dougherty, Co-chair

Vanessa Miller

John Piller, Co-chair

Jim Mako

Al Figlestahler

Designer

Dan O'Brien

Vanessa Miller

Bill Braxton

George McNally

with Horticulture Center staff support

About Matthias W. Baldwin

In 1832, Matthias Baldwin (1795-1866) built America's first great locomotive, "Old Ironsides." Following this success, Baldwin Locomotive Works became the nation's leading locomotive manufacturer. It exported products worldwide, and helped establish America's early railroad system. At its peak, the Baldwin Locomotive Works covered 19 acres from Broad to 18th Streets along Spring Garden Street. The company employed 19,000 workers before moving to Eddystone, PA in 1928. Baldwin produced a total of 70,500 engines by the time it closed in 1956.

Baldwin devoted himself to social causes as well. While young, he fought for the abolition of slavery and voting rights for blacks. Later in life, he built churches and raised money to care for wounded Civil War veterans. A supporter of the arts and sciences, he was also an early member of the Franklin Institute.

About Connections

In 1981, the park known as Franklin Town Park was conceived into a work of art from Athena Tacha's artistic concept known as "Connections." This two-acre sculptured landscape aims to serve and connect the nearby neighborhoods. The curvaceous terraced gardens and meandering paths flow through the park and converge at nine pyramidal granite foundations meant to inspire those that linger.

This environmental design offers a relaxing atmosphere that connects people with nature within a bustling metropolitan area. Not limited to ground level, the view from above invites occupants of the surrounding high-rise buildings to gaze down upon a stylish and soothing visual where art meets public space.

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The park was officially renamed Matthias Baldwin Park on December 16, 2010.