

FOREGROUND / **NOW**



DEPAVE
THE WAY

**A DELICATE REDESIGN
OF A PUBLIC SPACE
IN NORTH CAROLINA
PUTS EMPHASIS
ON REPAIR.**

BY RENEE LAGUE

“It was an area that had become lifeless, hard, an area that people walked through quickly,” Jason Thiel, the president of the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership, says of Passageway Park, a block-long shortcut that connects downtown Winston-Salem, North Carolina, with the city’s arts district.

Passageway Park was built in 1974 as part of an urban renewal project. The western half of the space is a stained concrete canyon. The eastern half is sandwiched between a parking lot and a blank building wall. A sharp jog in the middle means there is no visibility from one end to the other. By 2015, the city-owned space had become a safety concern given its attractiveness to drug users and sellers. The Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership began speaking with people in the area and raising money to make improvements. The site was in bad shape. “A lot of people said we needed to replace all of the brick and start over,” he says.

Two local designers, Kate Ancaya, ASLA, and Kristen Haaf, ASLA, the founders and partners

of Roots First Design, which has offices in Winston-Salem and Asheville, North Carolina, had grown frustrated looking for a design “unicorn project” with a big budget and an ecologically minded client. Instead, they decided to view every project, no matter how small or ordinary, through a lens of ecological repair—as a “repairscape.” When the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership asked them to submit a proposal for Passageway Park, they were intrigued and invited Osgood Landscape Architecture, of Asheville, to collaborate.



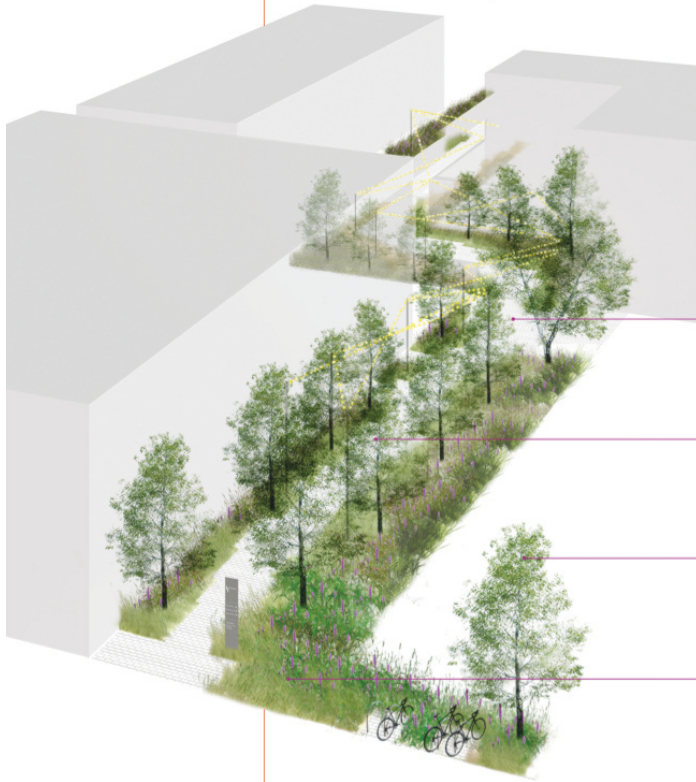
ROOTS FIRST DESIGN

ABOVE
Rich and colorful plantings were partially paid for by savings from selective depaving.

RIGHT
The eastern end of Passageway Park before the redesign.

FOREGROUND / **NOW**

REPAIR ECOLOGY IN THE PASSAGEWAY



-  BRING NATURE INTO DAILY LIFE
-  RESTORE HABITAT
-  REUSE BUILDING MATERIALS
-  PLANT SHADE TREES
-  USE PLANTS TO IMPROVE AIR QUALITY
-  DEPAVE AND INFILTRATE

On site, Ancaya and Haaf noticed that the gray brick was most degraded at the edges where water was pooling. They developed a strategy of thoughtful deconstruction, artistically depaving the edges and repairing the rest. The \$250,000 budget could have been spent entirely on new paving, Haaf says, “but they wouldn’t have had any plantings, they wouldn’t have improved the lighting conditions.”

Depaving freed up space and budget for an injection of ecological richness on the site: four species of new trees and an understory layer of what the designers call “deliberate messiness.” Plug-sized perennials and grasses, most of them native, were specified to achieve good plant coverage and to maximize the height of trees at installation. Ancaya and Haaf met with maintenance staff early

and designed the ground plane so it could be easily cut back, although that hasn’t been necessary.

Since the park’s completion in the fall of 2018, challenges have included graffiti, wear and tear from foot traffic, and damage to one tree, a hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus* ‘Fastigiata’), from hurricane winds. The existing pavement has settled and will require maintenance, but as Thiel points out, “You can design a place where no maintenance is required, but no one may want to go to it.”

Ancaya and Haaf say that small interventions can add up, and that landscape architects have a responsibility to pitch in to perform a “collective act of repair.” To that end, they have launched an Instagram account for these types of projects, @repairscares, and hope to feature work by other designers. (Readers can submit projects for consideration to repair@rootsfirst.com.) “As designers, it’s nice to have a clean slate to start over,” Ancaya says. “Although deconstruction is interesting as a concept, in reality it’s really challenging. [But] I think that this is a successful example.” ●

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