Imagine a city re-imagined and constructed out of the memory of weapons manufacturing and war. Factory makes way for community. The MFO Park is part of a massive redevelopment of one of Zurich’s most industrial zones. New Orlikon represents Zurich’s new vision of city living, with thought out residential blocks, schools, mixed neighborhoods, and green spaces. Spaces are filling in here, as are the new trees and foliage that define much of the area’s new identity. One goal for the MFO Park was to create a public space for the neighborhood that could also serve as an event hall. The division between inside and outside is blurred, as well as the definition between park and building.

“What used to be the ‘Forbidden City’, an industrial district that only those working there were allowed to enter: A public hall as big as the biggest industrial halls; a park as a walk-on sculpture; the green opera!... Here I am...where flourishing, scented, vital vegetation will make the filigree skeleton grow into an organic body over time. Here, you can joyfully and lightly take Zwingli’s sentence seriously: ‘For God’s sake, do something brave!’”

-Jurg Altherr, artist, from a letter to the designers of the MFO Park

Rendering, spatial qualities of the ‘great hall.’
Image: Raderschall Landscape Architects.
While the project may not dramatically alter the purpose of an urban park, its design elevates what a park can be in an urban context: vertical and spatial, architectural and green. archidose.org

City Historical Context
The north section of Zurich (highlighted in the city map below) is known as Neu Oerlikon. The entire area was once a weapons production and testing complex, which was understandably heavily guarded. The factory was dismantled in 1999.

Oerlikon has now been redeveloped; with 5,000 new inhabitants, an estimated 12,000 new jobs, and 3 new parks. Oerliker park, MFO park and Wahlenpark, along with the rest of the city, have been designed with geometry and scale reminiscent of the industrial history of this area.

The city redevelopment was estimated to take ten years. Construction was completed in only 5.
Within the Park

The illusion of a building is re-created at the MFO Park without structural walls. More of a three-dimensional plaza than a park, the green building is highly visible in this still re-developing area. The structure references the industrial history of the area. The frame is galvanized steel construction, woven with steel cables, and wrapped in a diverse selection of scented, deciduous climbing vines. The MFO Park landscape is most interesting in its vertical scale. On the ground plane, there is minimal vegetation, most is covered by pervious paving surfaces. One area is covered with recycled glass and slightly sunken. Within it, seating in the form of large lounging benches invites visitors to the outdoor living room. A lily pad shaped pond, fabricated in steel, is filled with water and plants.

Some clipped shrubs connect the interior/exterior spaces, and vines climb from the ground on steel cables both inside and along the invisible walls. The use of cables creates the illusion that the vines climb on the structure, without actually interfering in the frame's integrity. Planting boxes are located on upper floors, continuing the climbing green surfaces that define this structure.

Open frame stairs lead upward to walkways inside the frame. Cantilevered balconies extend the inside/outside space, and provide more seating options. The open top offers a view of the surrounding district. At night, the park is lit internally, and remains open to the public.

Architecture and landscape architecture together can create unique outdoor spaces. And walking on grating can be a bit unnerving several stories above the ground.  greeninfrastructurewiki.com/page/MFO+Park

Techtonic Machine
The superstructure to the park reminds one of the factories that once dominated this landscape. Large-span trusses define the box-like space, but the delicate floral bouquets that break up the central space are non-structural tension cables.
In the detail below, the integration of above and below ground structure is shown as well as an intricate drainage and water capture system. The radial armatures for vine growth extend out and up, leaving open circulation at the human level, and creating a rich canopy above.
Only the non-structural cables are permitted direct contact with vine.

Detail: cable connectors at base of the central ‘bouquets’. These cables are not load bearing, structural and vines are trained directly onto the cables.

Catwalk/Periphery Structure
This image and corresponding diagram show the outer layer of structure that is built for human use. This is the vertical park. The view shown here is a gap inside the outside ‘wall’ structural system that creates smaller ‘rooms’ for the park users to inhabit. Sometimes they park-goer is ‘outside’ and sometimes ‘inside.’

Images this page: Living Systems
Vegetation

Walls of vegetation define the interior and exterior perimeters of this park. Multiple species of vines have been planted to grow up the steel cables. On the ground, vines are planed in radial patterns around cables. On the second level, trenches are planted with a second tier of vines, directed towards a thinner network of cables. Plant selection was based on height and foliage specifications. A total of 104 varieties of perennial woody vines and creepers were chosen, including: wisteria, clematis, climbing rose, jasmine, honeysuckle, hops, knotweed, Virginia creeper, silver lace vine. Each of these vertical plantings is designated to a separate cable. This allows each vine to show its individual character.

Irrigation for the vegetation uses the site’s internal watershed. On the ground, water is directed to the planting pits. Excess water is collected in a cistern and pumped as needed to the upper level of plants.

The created walls of vines that define this steel frame’s mass change through seasons, and over time. Spring and summer flowers add splashes of color to the green “walls.” As the vines are deciduous, autumn brings additional foliage color to the structure, and winter shows the frame most visibly. The growth and added bulk of the woody vines will have to be monitored over time to ensure that the structural strength is not compromised.
“I have never seen anything like this before, it was huge yet totally in proportion with the surrounding buildings, and very much in sympathy with the industrial surroundings whilst retaining a sense of green and peaceful open space.” Ken Woolfenden, I.Cl.S.

Resources

Archidose. www.archidose.org/Aug07/13/dose.html


Green Infrastructure Wiki. www.greeninfrastructurewiki.com/page/MFO+Park

Home Portal City of Zurich. www.stadt-zuerich.ch

International Clematis Society. www.clematisinternational.com/swiss200901.html


Multi-Tiered Vine Park


MFO Park Structure

• Three-dimensional plaza of green
• Visually acknowledges the industrial past of the area
• Six-stories of open steel construction
• Steel cables run between supports
• Each cable hosts several varieties of vines
• 104 different vines provide range of growth and color
• Vegetation is intended to fill in “walls” of structure
• Seating available near interior pond, on cantilevered upper balconies
• Stairways and walkways provide access to and across upper levels
• Open for day and evening use.
• Program for park and community hall_movies and events.