

Chicago Riverwalk

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Client: Chicago Department of Transportation

Size: 1.25 miles

Cost: \$122,000,000

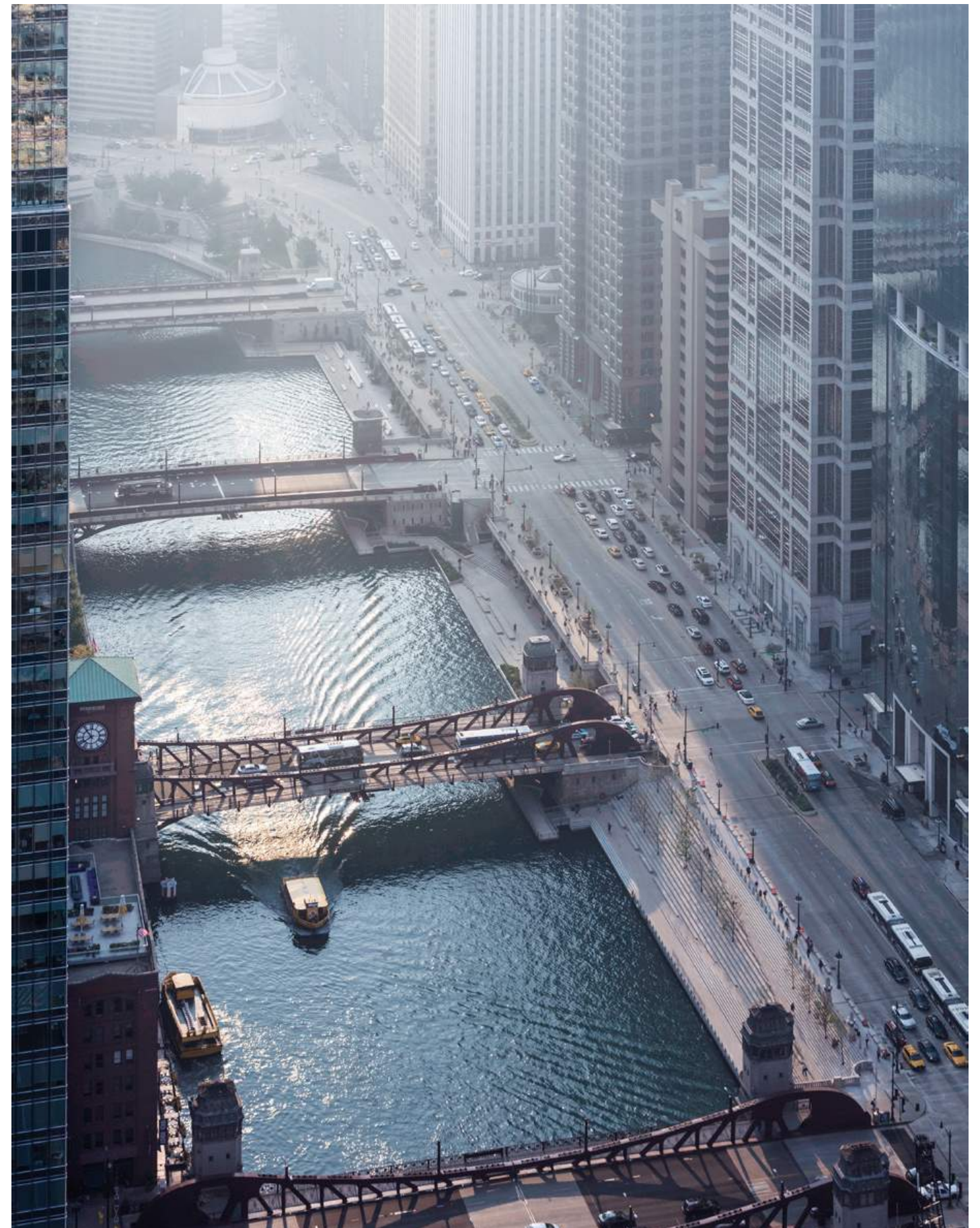
Status: Completed, 2016

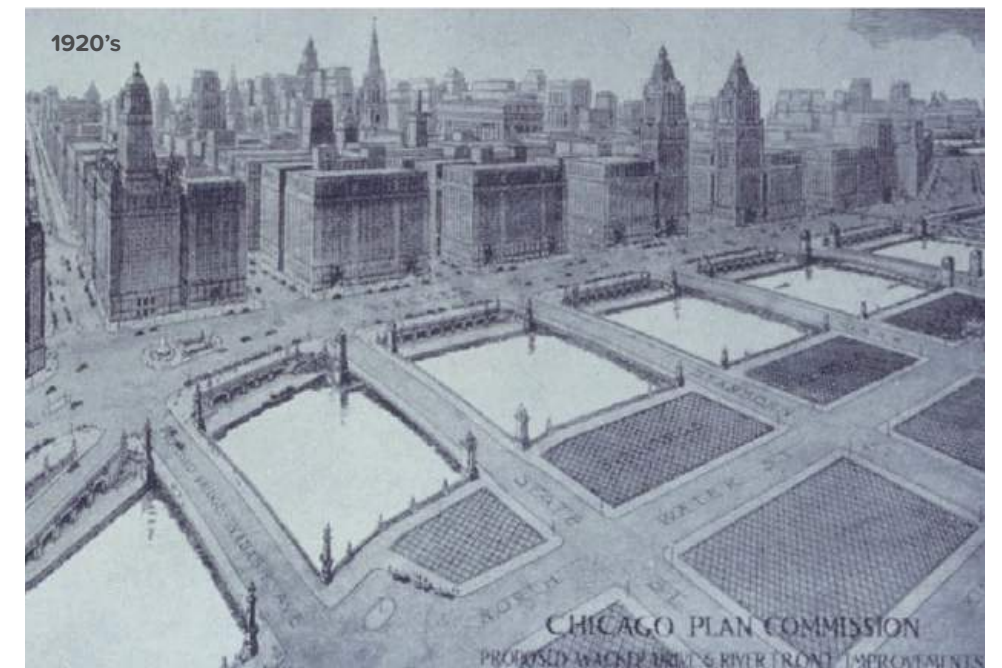
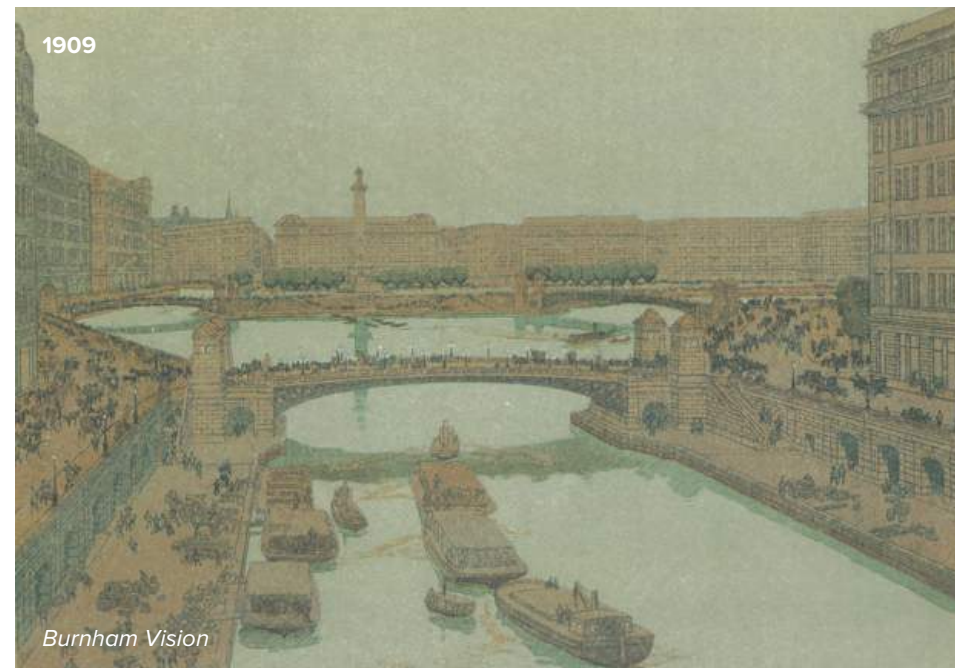
Program: Linear Urban Park

The New York Times

Reed Kroloff

The Chicago Riverwalk “may be the most viscerally satisfying new project of the season... We see collections of tall buildings, the streets between them, and people, all presented episodically and in high relief. We are in a living museum - one with no roof and no limits.”





History

The City of Chicago was founded on its rivers. Straightened, edges hardened, and famously redirected, the Chicago River has figuratively and literally been bent to serve the city in various capacities.

As early as Burnham and Bennett's 1909 "Plan of Chicago," the Main Branch of the river was envisioned as a place for both leisure and commerce. Nearly a century later the Chicago Riverwalk has realized this vision.





Concept

The Chicago Riverwalk is a one-and-a-quarter-mile-long civic space between Lake Michigan and the confluence of the main, north, and south branches of the Chicago River.

Through changes in its shape and form, the **path drives a series of new programmatic connections to the river.** Each block takes on the form and program of a different river-based typology.



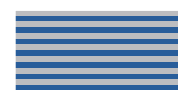
Riverbank



Jetty



Water Plaza



River Theater



Cove



Marina



Wabash Plaza



Bridgehouse
Museum Plaza



Michigan Plaza

Economic



Recreational



Cultural



Ecological



Implemented Values

Values

Using the analysis framework - Economy, Recreation, Culture and Ecology - as a guide, the design team developed forward looking opportunities and potential to achieve balance and increase diversity of users and experience on the River's main branch.

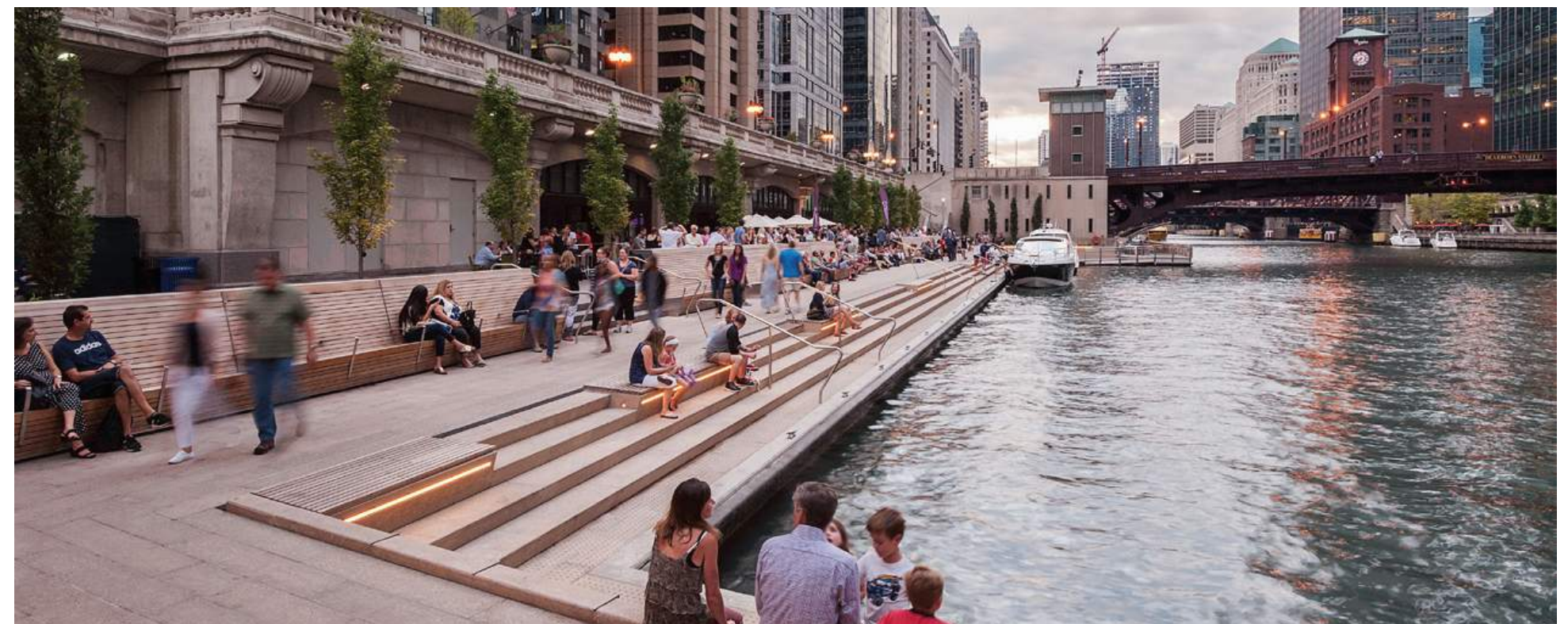
Above all, the **Riverwalk honors the iconic quality of the existing urban context** by embracing and interpreting Chicago's layered history.



Existing Conditions

A technically challenging task— the design team worked within a **tight congressionally approved 25-foot-wide build-out area** to expand the pedestrian program spaces and negotiate a series of under-bridge connections between blocks.

In addition to the limited built out dimensions, the Riverwalk included a shallow arcade - which would later become leasable retail space.

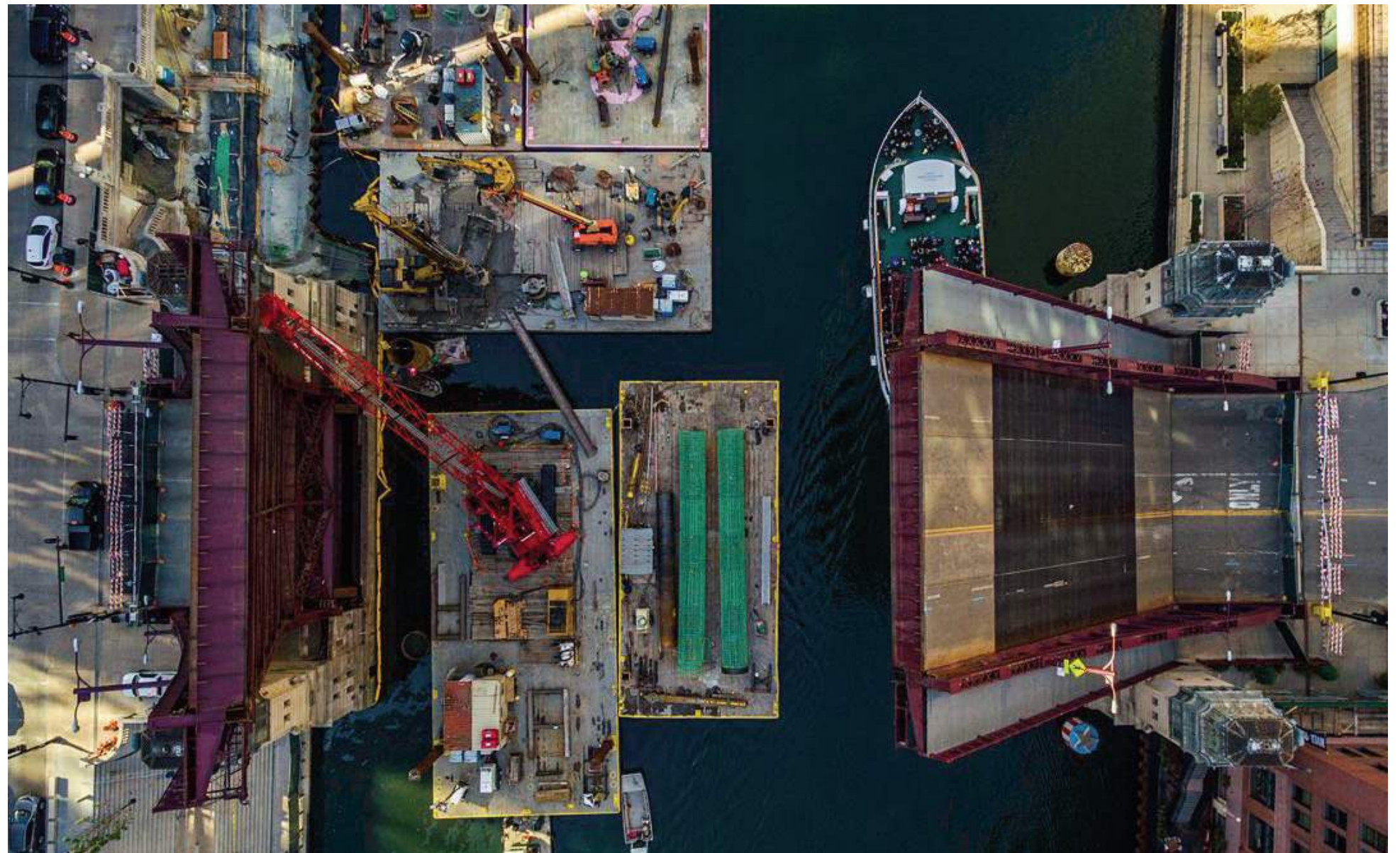


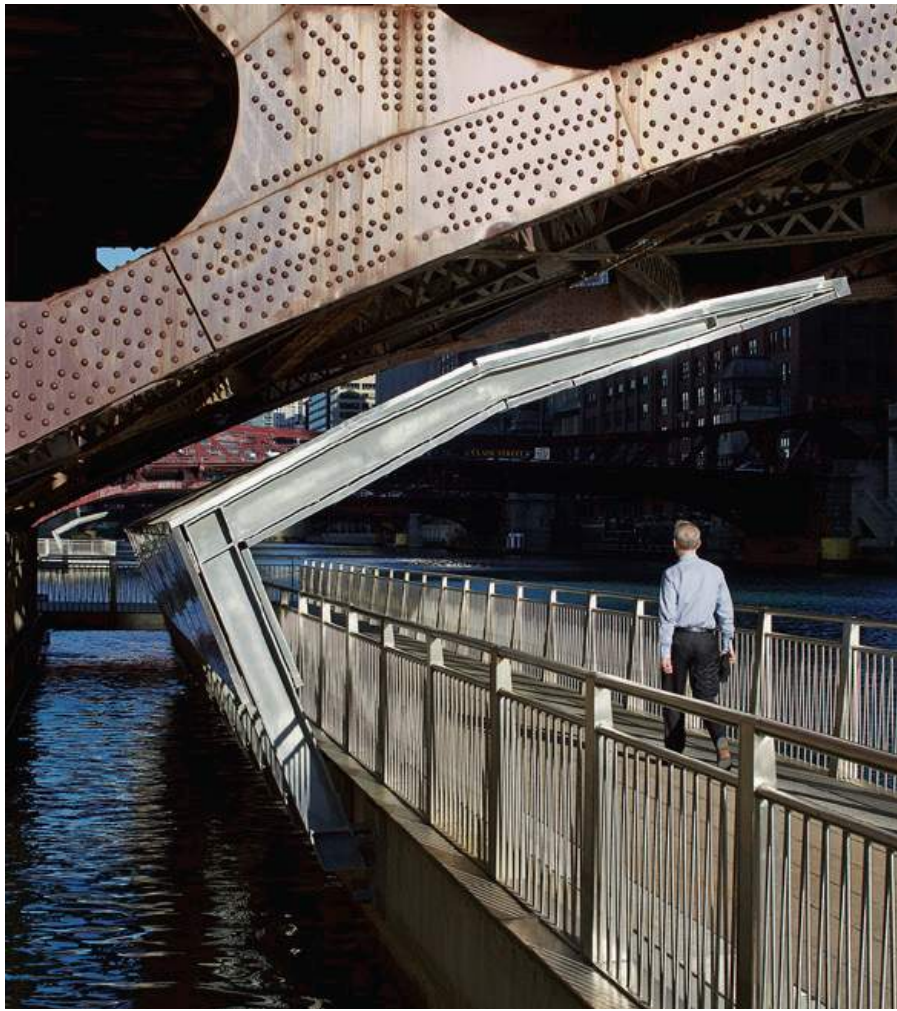
Building the Vision

A series of unusual **construction challenges** resulted from the creation of new land, including the **limited space in which to work.**

With Lower Wacker Drive active, construction staging took place on adjacent barges, which pulled up to active areas with materials and equipment.

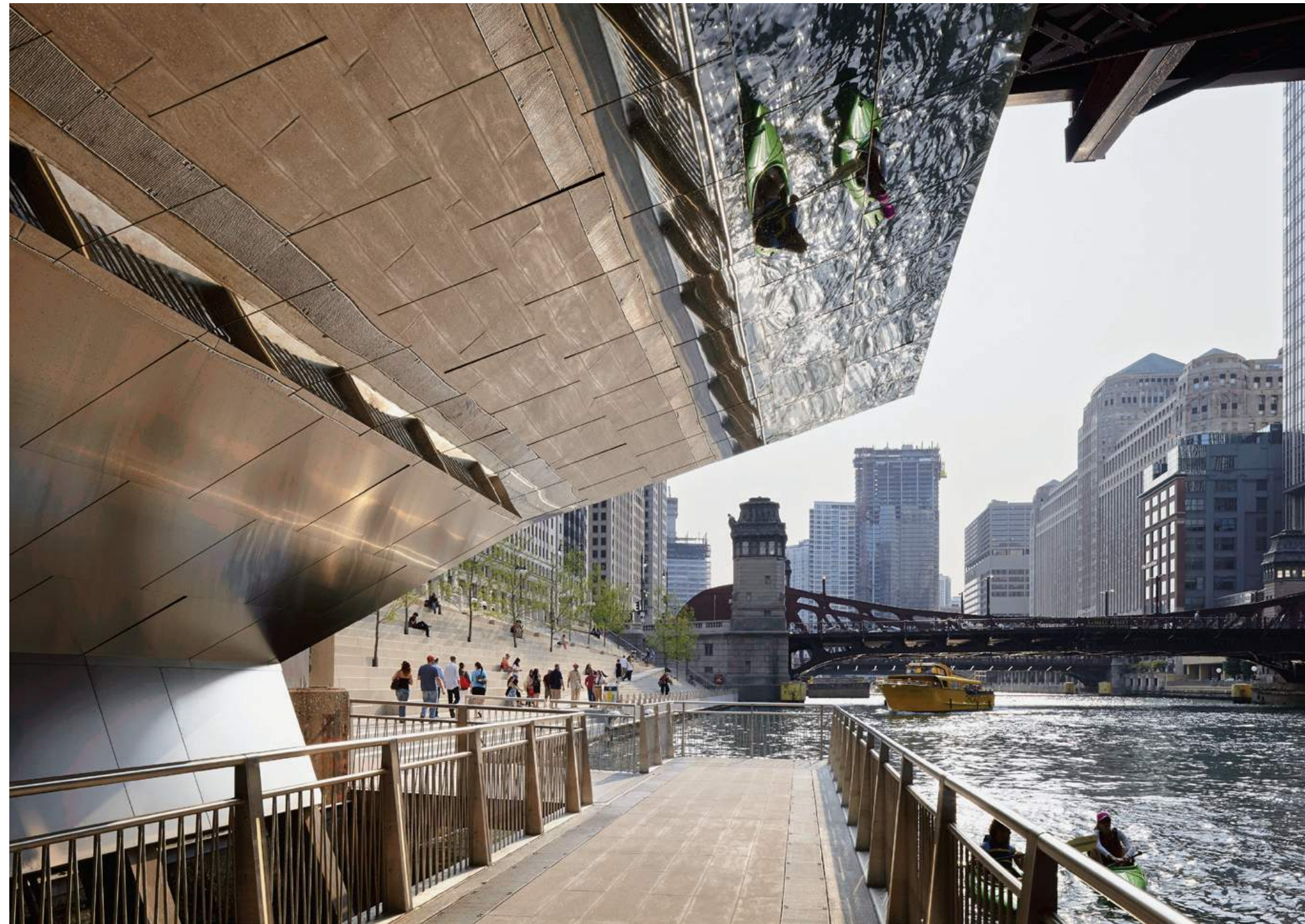
Constructing a new dock wall came with its own series of complexities, including the need for a team of underwater divers. Interruption of street traffic was occasionally necessary to lift the bridges for work on connections underneath.





Connectivity: Under Bridges

To create the continuous path at river level, stitching the series of rooms together, **underbridge connections** were designed to carry pedestrians below Chicago's iconic bascule bridges. These structurally independent elements shield passers-by from the open roadways above and envelope the space with light and movement.





Phase 01: Michigan Plaza

The first phase of the Chicago Riverwalk is comprised of a path connecting Michigan Avenue to State Street and a plaza commemorating Chicago's Vietnam Veterans. Along the eastern end, **a more natural edge is created to inform and inspire visitors to imagine what the Chicago River once was.**





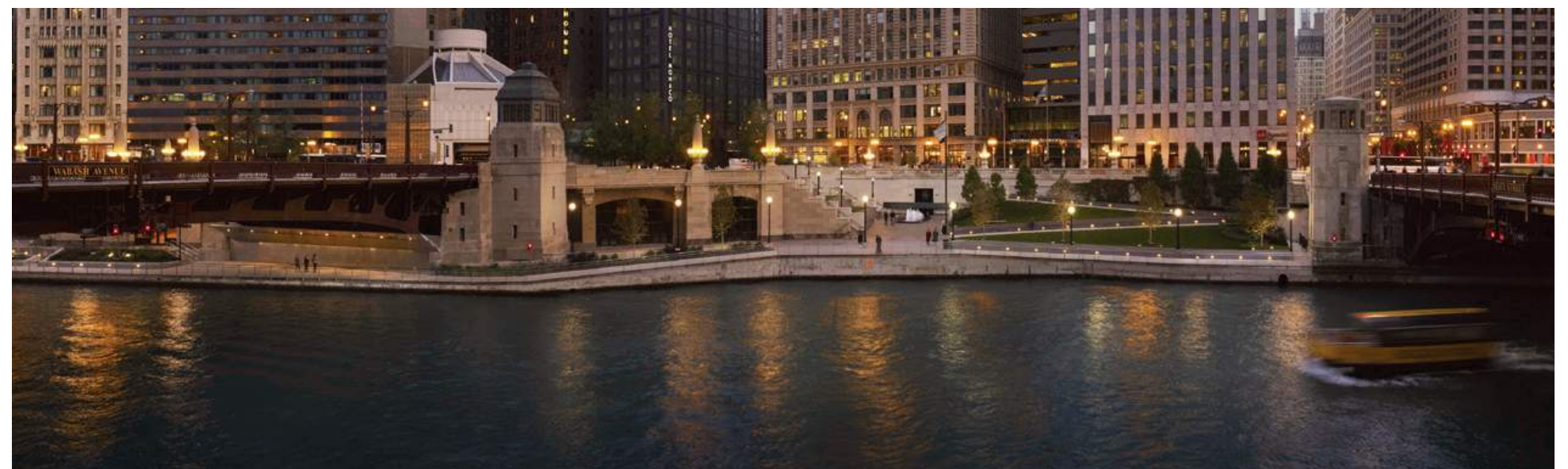
Chicago Tribune
Blair Kamin

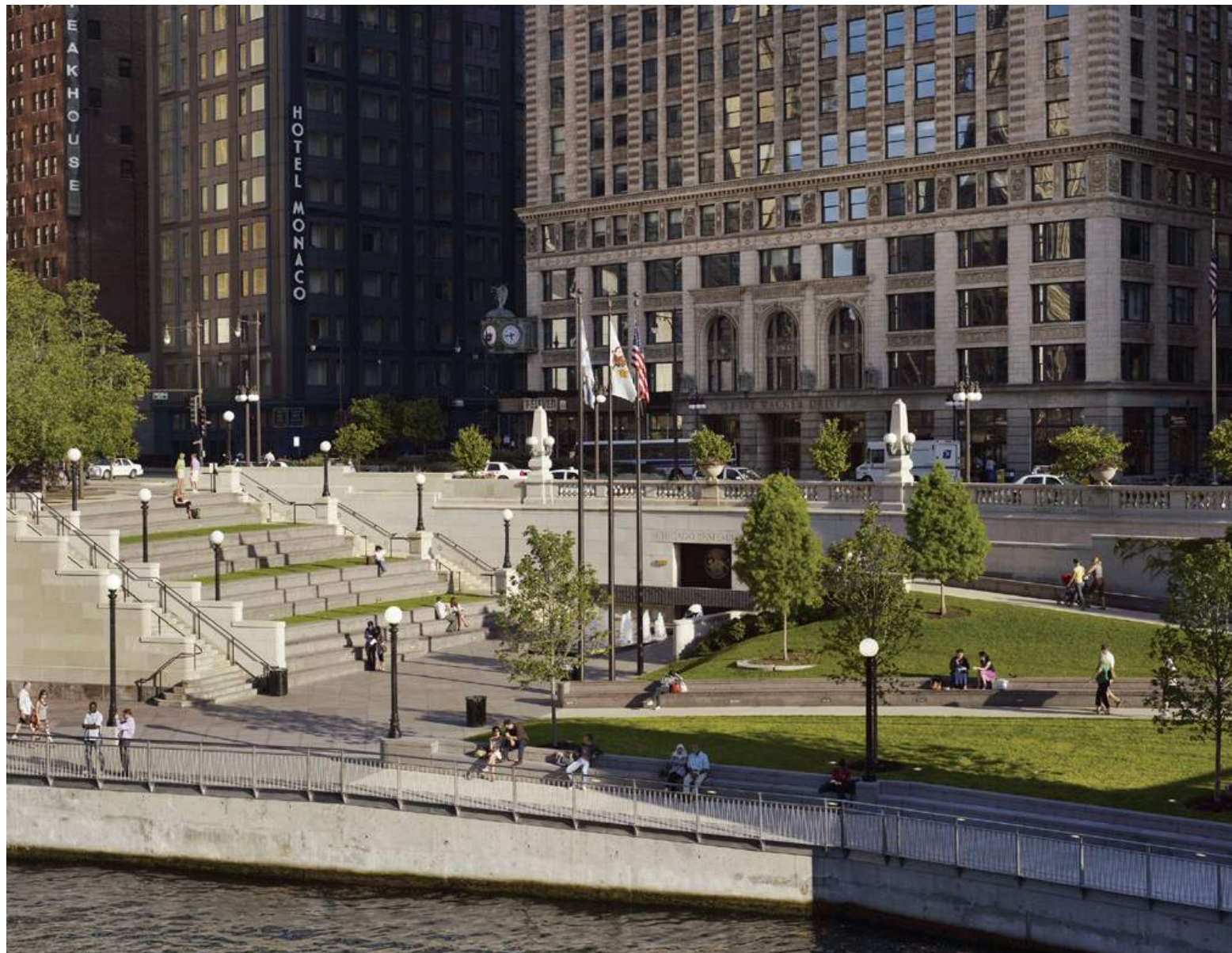
“The Riverwalk marks a significant step forward, transforming the once-neglected downtown riverfront into a showcase public space. Here, in bold strokes worthy of Daniel Burnham, Chicago is confirming and renewing its identity as a civilized metropolis.”

Wabash Plaza

Designed with terraces and bench lined ramps, the space provides a moment of refuge from the busy city street.

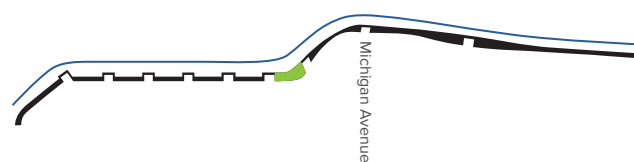
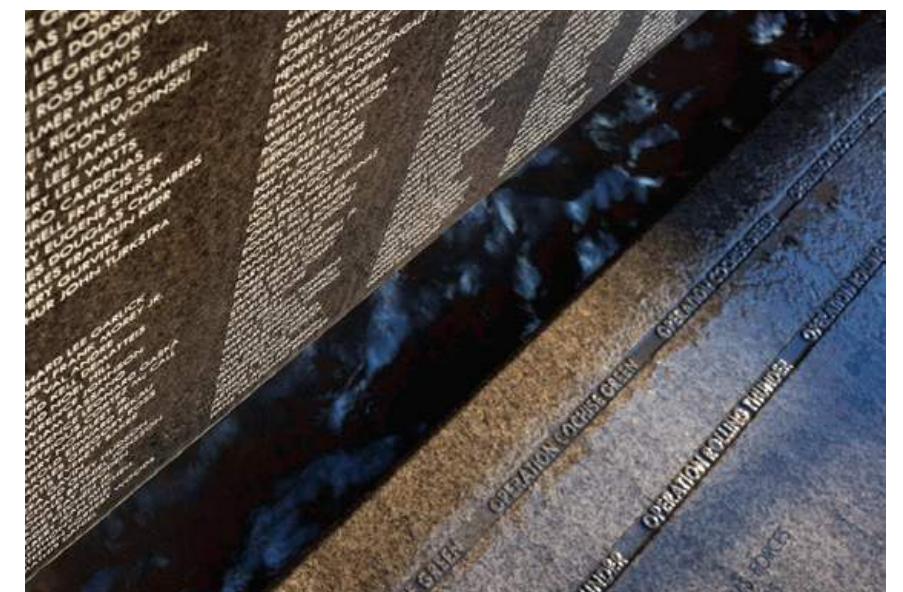
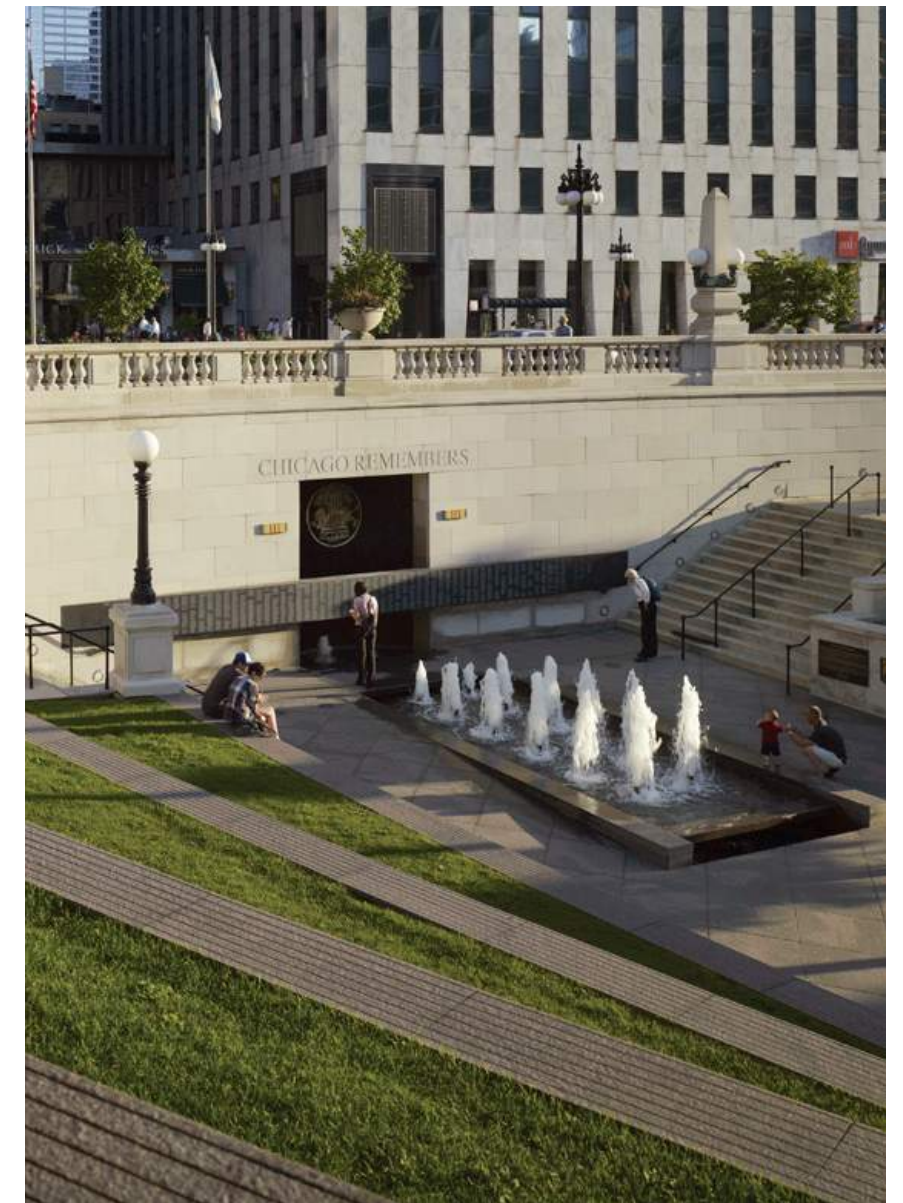
The integrated memorial is dedicated to the Vietnam War and provides space for reflection and education.





Chicago Vietnam Veterans Memorial

A wall with names of those fallen is listed chronologically and references to key events that are etched on the pavement, connecting the gravity and tension of the war.





Phase 02: Marina Plaza

The Marina Plaza offers a connected and well-proportioned series of people spaces—from the broad granite dining terrace to the intimate seating steps at the river’s edge. Its custom-designed, high-backed teak benches offer a **comfortable and elegant place to view the life of the river** and the majestic architecture that lines the Main Branch.





Marina Plaza

Mayor of Chicago
Rahm Emanuel

“The Riverwalk creates a profound intimacy between our citizens and their river. It’s our Yellowstone. It’s our Grand Canyon. The Natural Park that defines our city.”

Cove

The Cove, inspired by beach landscapes and the growing use of human-powered crafts on the Chicago River, provides physical connections to the water through recreation.





Cove

An open and sunny beach-like space, **the Cove is a place to pause** for those walking the Riverwalk and those paddling along the river. Custom precast seating elements capitalize on the shallow grade changes and create sunny places for sitting near the river's edge.





River Theater

The River Theater provides a link to the city above. A block-wide set of steps bends the city down to the river, **creating a graceful, border-less transition from street to water.** A fully accessible path is geometrically woven in, becoming a central circulation feature with seating for both staged events and watching the “theater” of the river and city.

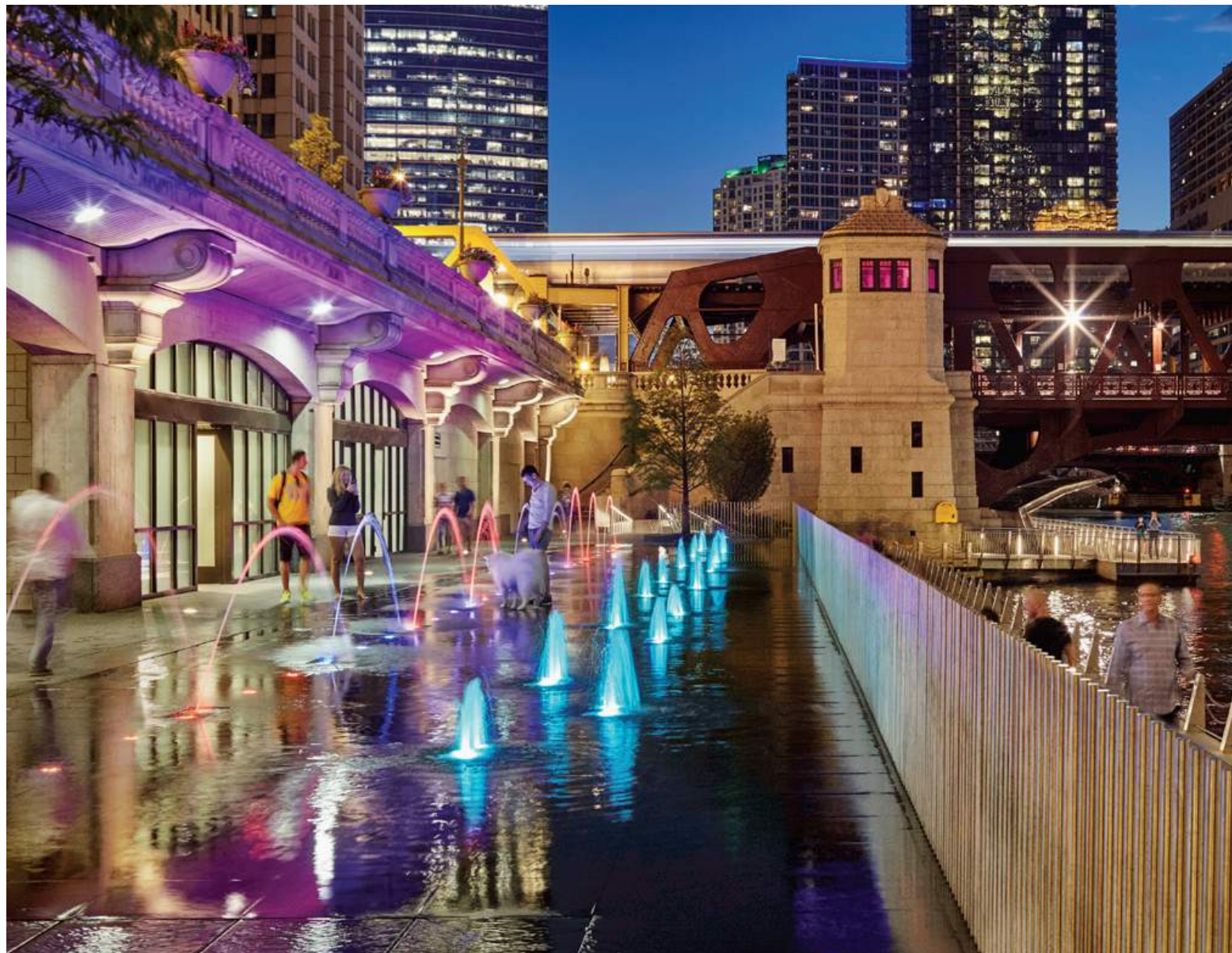




River Theater

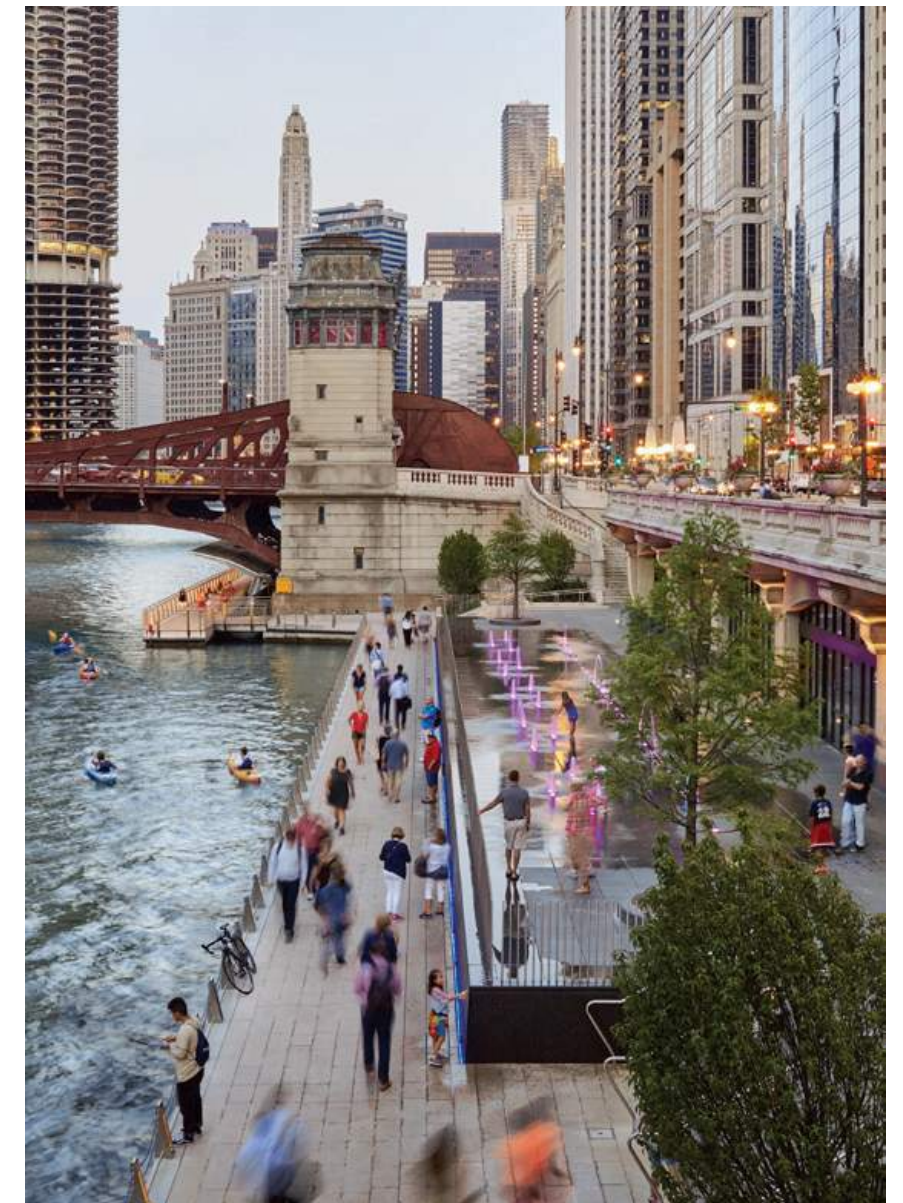


River Theater



Phase 03: Water Plaza

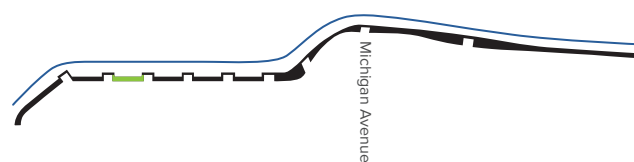
The Water Plaza provides an interactive feature for engagement with water at the river's edge. The water creates a shallow pool that flows over the edge, delighting pedestrians along the Riverwalk path and providing year-round animation. **The fountain's effects can be minimized to enable flexible use of the plaza or a low-flow cold weather feature.**



Financial Times

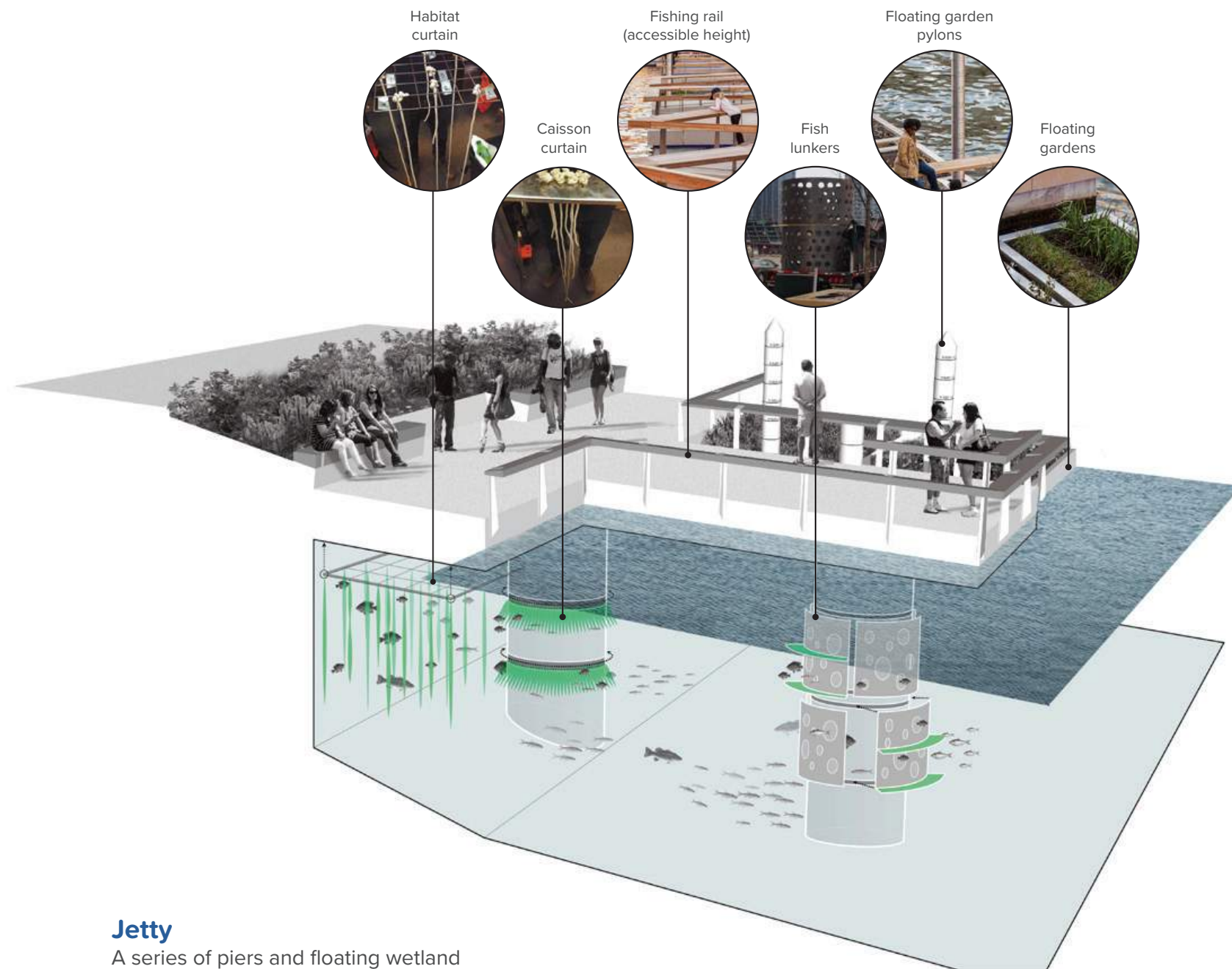
Edwin Heathcote

“Chicago’s Riverwalk: complex, urbane, and intriguing... in what is perhaps the most architecturally aware city on earth.”





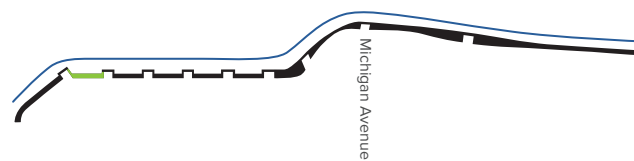
Water Plaza



Jetty

A series of piers and floating wetland gardens, offers an interactive learning environment about the ecology of the river, including opportunities for fishing and identifying native plants.

The Jetty incorporates several innovative features—lunkers, hulas, and curtains—that **provide a healthy habitat for the Chicago River's diverse native fish population.**



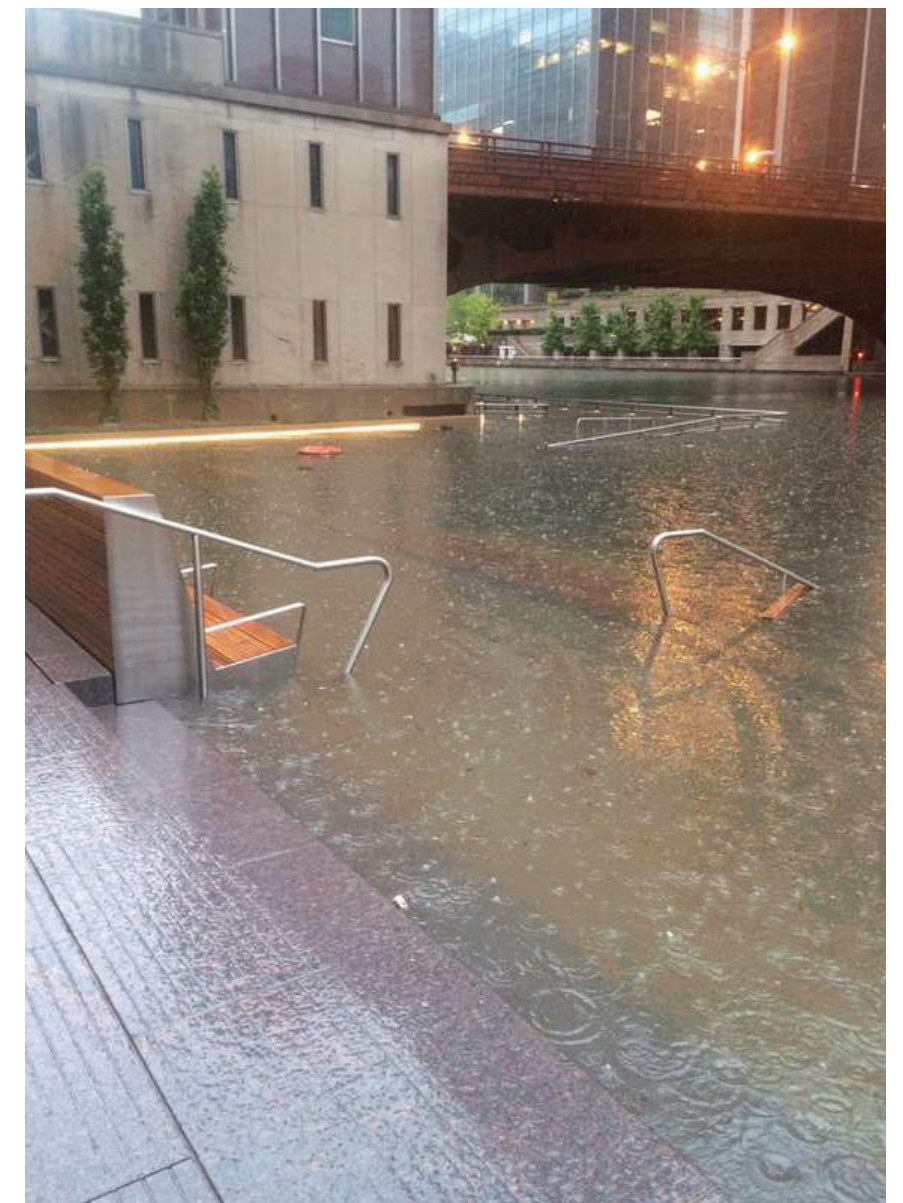
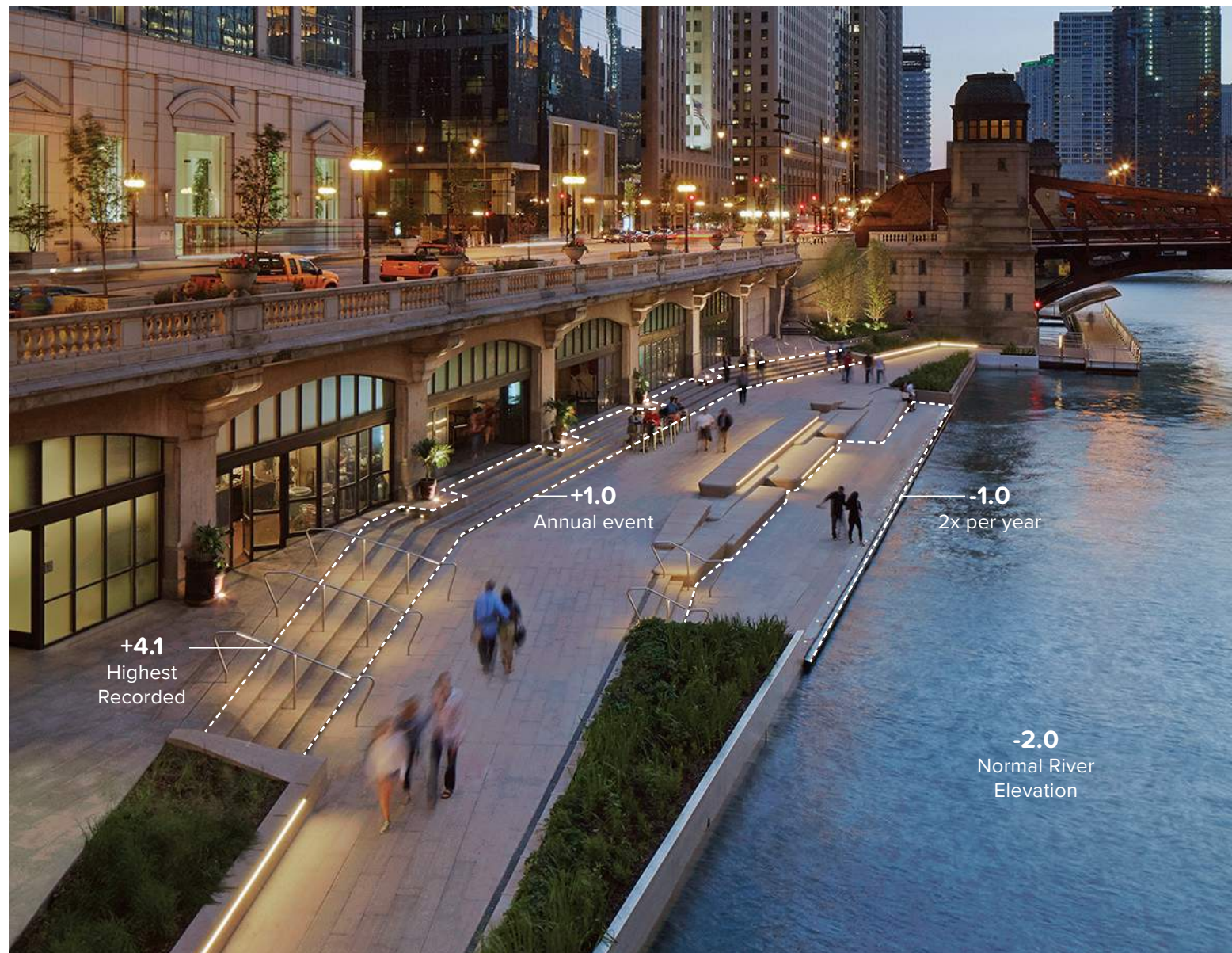




Environment: Habitat

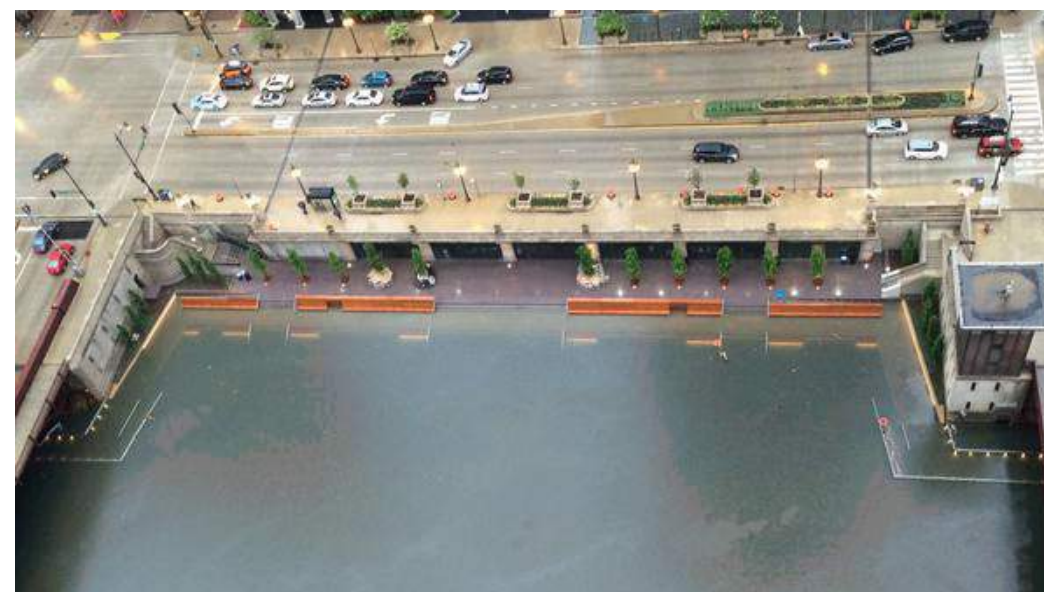
Integrated throughout are a series of **design approaches to both hardscape and landscape.** Native plants and trees, nearly 100 different species, thrive along the water's edge while providing subtle moments of education and insight into the history of the small winding stream that is now the Chicago River.

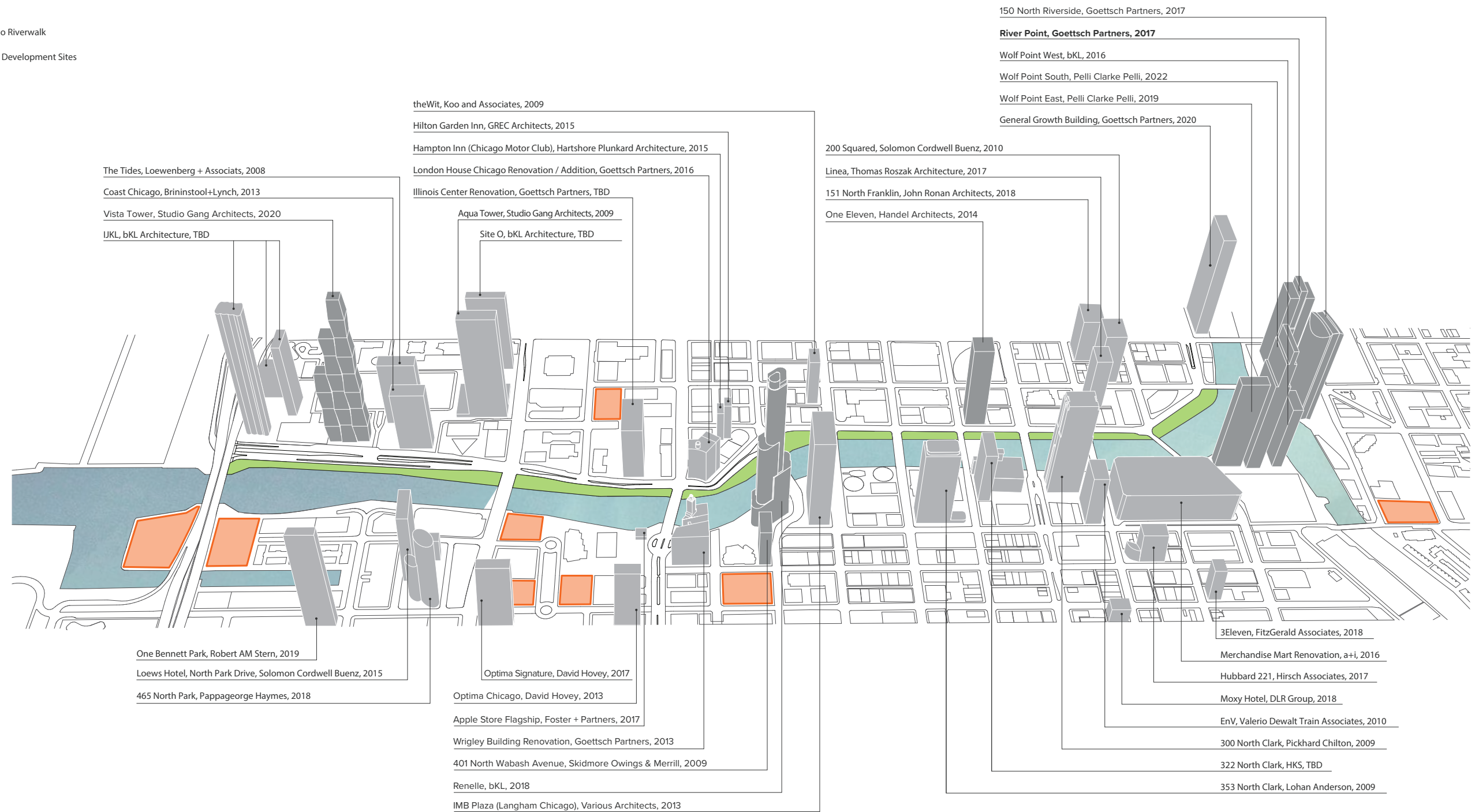




Resiliency

With planting, lighting, and paving systems designed to flood, the **Riverwalk demonstrated its resilience just weeks after opening when it flooded**, and was cleaned and reopened within 12 hours of the waters subsiding.





Economics

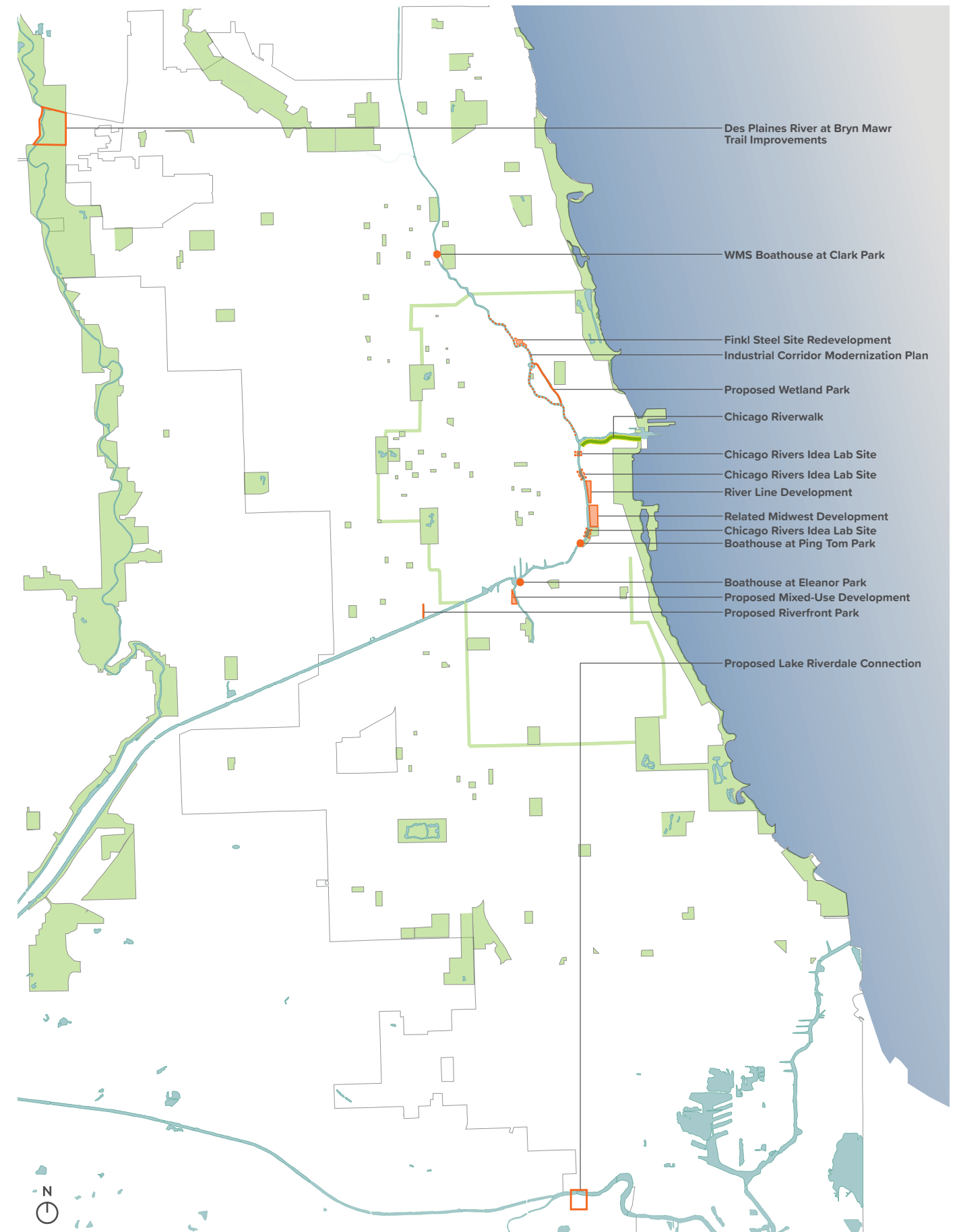
The Riverwalk's success can be gauged in many ways, one of them being the **influx of new development** since the completion of Phase 01. A number of high profile projects have been built near the river, using this newfound amenity as a major selling point and generating nearly **\$7 billion in construction value**.

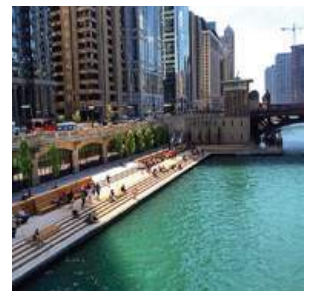
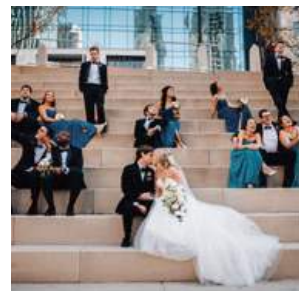
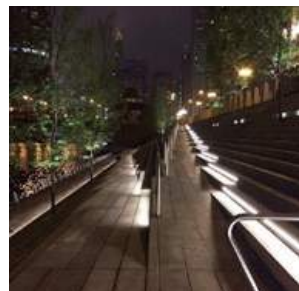
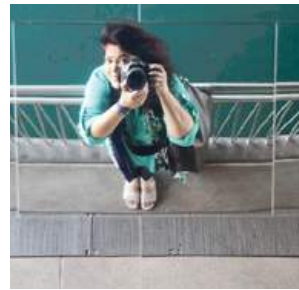


Regional Impact

The Riverwalk has sparked the beginning of a new regional interest in reinvigorating our rivers. **Since opening, a series of boat houses and new developments further afield have worked to make the river more accessible.**

Large projects such as Our Great Rivers and the Urban River Edges Ideas Lab strive to address and raise awareness for the future of our waterways.





Reception

What might have been unimaginable years ago has been achieved; an **activated riverfront in the heart of a booming urban core**. The Riverwalk has **transformed Chicago** and in turn has become a beloved park for residents, visitors, and people of all backgrounds.

